

The Story of Doctor Doolittle  
by Hugh Loftings  
adapted by Jules de Jongh  
Season 2 Episode 8

[opening theme music and strapline]

Nanny Bea: Hello and welcome! I've just prepared my cup of tea and am waiting for my neighbour Jules who will be bringing us a story any...

[knock sfx]

Nanny Bea: minute now.

Nanny Bea: Hello? Who is it?

Jules: Hello Nanny Bea, it's your neighbour Jules with a story.

Nanny Bea: What perfect timing! Hello, come in, I was just telling our friends all about you.

Jules: All about me?

Nanny Bea: Well that was a gross exaggeration my dear. I merely mentioned your name and your story but I did it with great enthusiasm. Much like today's caller. Acacia has the most delightful message for us and a Wonder Word.

[Wonder Word jingle]

Acacia: Hi Nanny Bea I'm Acacia and I've a wonder word for you, it's kerplunk.

[Drum roll]

Kerplunk is the sound of a loud thud when something hits the ground. It means what it sounds like, keeper plunk!

Bye Nanny Bea.

[piano out]

Nanny Bea: Thank you Acacia, yes kerplunk is one of those words that sounds like it is, an onomatopoeia! I love that word. Try saying that fast three times in a row.

Jules: Onomatopoeia, onomatopoeia, onomatopoeial..almost. I think I'll have to practice that one. But first we've got today's story. It's about words, words spoken by animals and a man who can understand them. Are you ready for a story?

Nanny Bea: Oh, yes please

Jules: Okay then, Doctor Dolittle, adapted for radio

There once was a doctor; a doctor of people he was.

Dr Dolittle lived in a little town called, Puddleby-on-the-Marsh with his sister Sarah.

He was very fond of animals; he had rabbits in the pantry, white mice in his piano, a squirrel in the linen closet and a hedgehog in the cellar. Not to mention his favorite pets Dab-Dab the duck, Jip the dog, Gub-Gub the pig, Too-Too the owl and his parrot Polynesia.

One day his sister came to him and said, "How can you expect sick people to come and see you when you keep all these animals in this house? Everyday more patients are refusing to return and every day we are getting poorer!"

"But I like the worst animals better than the 'best people'," said the Doctor.

It was suggested by a visitor that he gave up being a people doctor, and became an animal doctor instead. Polynesia the parrot agreed as most animal doctors are of little help, they can't even talk to their patients.

Well neither could the Doctor but with Polynesia as his teacher, he could.

After a while, the Doctor could talk to the animals and understand everything they said even when they said nothing at all. That's when he gave up being a people doctor altogether.

Word soon got out that the clever doctor was now a clever animal doctor. People brought him animals from far and wide.

And the birds who flew to other countries in the winter told the animals in foreign lands of the wonderful doctor of Puddleby-on-the-Marsh. In this way he became famous amongst animals—all around the world.

And the Doctor had such a kind heart, he took in every stray or unhappy animal. When the circus came to Puddleby, a crocodile with a toothache escaped at night and came into the Doctor's garden. But when the crocodile saw what a nice house it was with all the other animals, he too wanted to live there. He asked if he could sleep in the fish-pond at the bottom of the garden, and promised not to eat the fish. He was always as gentle as a kitten.

That reassurance wasn't enough for the owners of his patients, they were too frightened so stayed away. Sarah Dolittle once again gave her brother a good talking to, "John, you must send that creature away. We were beginning to be well off. Now we shall be poor again. This is the last straw. I will no longer be housekeeper for you if you don't send away that alligator."

"It's a crocodile," said the Doctor.

"I don't care what you call it," said his sister. "It's a nasty thing to find under the bed. Either he goes or I go"

"All right," said the Doctor, "you'd better pack your things." Sarah left at once.

With all these mouths to fill, and no money coming in to pay the butcher's bill, things began to look very difficult. The Doctor didn't worry, but the animals did. Between them they started to take care of the house, cook and clean. They sold radishes and roses to the people that passed by along the road. In the middle of it all a swallow brought a message begging the Doctor to come to Africa as a terrible sickness was killing hundreds of monkeys.

Without two shillings to rub together (that's old money) The Doctor couldn't fly to Africa but still he didn't worry. "Perhaps if I go down to the seaside I shall be able to borrow a boat that will take us to Africa." And that's just what he did. The crocodile and the monkey and the parrot were very glad and began to sing, because they were going with him to Africa, their real home. Of the others he could only take Jip the dog, Dab-Dab the duck, Gub-Gub the pig and the owl, Too-Too.

The rest of the animals had to go back and live in the fields where they were born till they come home again. Many of them sleep through the Winter, so they wouldn't notice.

NOW for six whole weeks they went sailing following the swallow who flew before the ship to show them the way and at night she carried a tiny lantern.

When the journey was nearly ended, a great storm came up, and the waves got so high they splashed right over the boat. Until there was a big KERPLUNK! They had struck a rock and started sinking fast.

"We must all swim to land," the Doctor shouted.

They got safely to the shore, some swimming, some flying; and they took shelter in a cave till the storm was over.

The next morning they went down to the sandy beach. The monkey, Chee-Chee, suddenly told them to shhhh, he heard footsteps in the jungle. A local man came down out of the woods and asked them what they were doing there.

"My name is John Dolittle, M.D.," said the Doctor. "I have been asked to come to Africa to cure the monkeys who are sick."

The man insisted they come before the king.

The doctor tried to explain to the king that he was there to save the monkeys but the king didn't believe him and he placed them all in a dungeon. Thanks to Polynesia who snuck through the bars and got the key, they managed to run away.

It wasn't long before they stumbled upon some healthy monkeys to guide them to the Land of the Monkeys. But the king's army was chasing them to the edge of a cliff. They thought they were trapped but hanging across the river, was a bridge of living monkeys linked together by holding hands and feet. They shouted to the Doctor to hurry over. Once safely across, the bridge dismantled.

Thousands of ill monkeys were waiting for the doctor on the other side. And for three days and three nights the Doctor sat vaccinating monkeys around the clock.

Finally when his work was done; and he was so tired he went to bed and slept for three days without even turning.

After he had woken up he told them that they have to go back to Puddleby and pay off his debts. The monkeys didn't know what money was but still they decided to thank the doctor by giving him the ever so rare, pushmi-pullyu. This animal had no tail, but a head at each end. They were very shy and terribly hard to catch. They only slept with one head at a time so the other was always awake and watching out.

"I notice," said the duck to their new companion, "that you only talk with one of your mouths. Can the other head talk as well?"

"Oh, yes," said the pushmi-pullyu. "But I keep the other mouth for eating, mostly. In that way I can talk while I am eating without being rude."

The time came for the Doctor and his pets to leave, the monkeys went with him as far as the edge of their country, carrying his trunk and bags, to see him off.

The Doctor and his pets walked off quietly so as not to arouse the King's soldiers who chased them at the start. The Doctor began to wonder how they would find a boat to carry them home.

One day, Chee-Chee went ahead of them to look for coconuts but the Doctor and the rest of the animals got lost in the jungle.

At last, after blundering about for many days, getting their clothes torn and their faces covered in mud, they walked right into the King's back-garden by mistake. The King's men came running up at once and caught them. All except Polynesia who flew out of reach and hid herself until Chee-Chee arrived swinging through the trees still looking for them all.

"The Doctor and all the animals have been caught by the King's men and locked up again," whispered Polynesia.

Just then the little Prince began reading a story nearby of a fairy who could grant wishes.

Polynesia was inspired, "Oh little Prince!" she called out trying to be as sweet as a fairy. "It is I good fairy queen Tripsitinka!" She carried on. "I am locked in your father's prison, find the key and release myself and my friends for a fairy queen must obey a locked door."

The boy waited until the guard fell asleep and ever so gently lifted the key from its hook on the wall and opened the gate.

The Doctor and his pets smiled as they tip toed away. "But where is the fairy queen?" the boy asked. The Doctor looked into his eager eyes and whispered, "She'll always be here with you, making you brave when you are scared, being your friend when you are lonely. You may not hear her because her voice is very small when she isn't in danger but you'll know she's always with you."

With that they left and followed Chee Chee in constant view, they soon made their way to the beach where their ship went KERPLUNK against the rocks. It had found its own way back to shore when the tide came in. With a tap, tap here and a bang, bang there they managed to make it sea worthy once again.

The Doctor and the animals boarded except for Chee-Chee, Polynesia and the crocodile because Africa was the land where they were born. They cried and waved goodbye until they were well out of sight.

Doctor Doolittle began to wonder how they would make their way to Puddleby without a guide then he heard a strange whispering noise, high in the air, coming through the night. The noise grew louder and nearer.

They looked up to see swallows, millions of them. The swallows told the Doctor to follow them home. On their way they encountered pirates who chased them and were catching up quickly.

When the swallows saw this, they all came down on to the Doctor's ship; and they told him to unravel some pieces of long rope and make them into a lot of thin strings as quickly as they could. Then the ends of these strings were tied on to the front of the ship; and the swallows took hold of the strings with their feet and flew off, pulling the boat along.

And although swallows are not very strong when only one or two of them are by themselves, when there are thousands and thousands they can pull a large ship at great speed.

And in a moment the Doctor found himself traveling so fast he had to hold to his top hat with both hands; for he felt as though the ship itself were flying through waves that frothed and boiled with speed.

They were far ahead of the pirates but the swallows were growing weary and needed a break so they took shelter in a hidden bay on a nearby island.

Now as they were getting off, the Doctor noticed that a whole lot of rats were coming up from downstairs and leaving the ship as well. One of them said,

"Have heard dear Doctor that rats always leave a sinking ship?"

"Yes," said the Doctor "so I've been told."

“Well, we’re leaving this ship,” the rat said and bid the Doctor good-by.

The Doctor, who never seemed to spend much energy worrying, went off with all his animals, carrying pails and saucepans, to look for water on the island, while the swallows took their rest. When it was time to leave, the birds saw that the pirates had boarded the Doctor’s ship.

“They have left their own ship with nobody on it. Let us hurry and get on their ship, which is very fast, and not sinking.”

So the Doctor and the animals crept onto the pirate-ship and set off once more on their journey home in the swift ship. They explored the ship and found food and treasures from around the world. They also found a boy, locked in a room below. They freed him only to find that he was captured by the pirates along with his uncle who he now feared had drowned and all he had left of him was a handkerchief.

The Doctor asked porpoises nearby if the man, matching the description of the uncle, had drown and they said no. He asked the eagles if they could see the uncle and they said no. Finally Jip said he could smell him and they followed his nose all the way to another island.

They brought the ship as close as he could and Jip jumped out, put his nose to the ground and began to run, all over the place. Up and down he went, back and forth, zigging-zagging, twisting, doubling and turning. And everywhere he went, the Doctor ran behind him, close at his heels, till he was terribly out of breath.

At last Jip let out a great bark and sat down. And when the Doctor came running up to him, he found the dog staring into a big, deep hole in the middle of the rock.

“The boy’s uncle is down there,” said Jip quietly. “No wonder those silly eagles couldn’t see him! It takes a dog to find a man.”

So the Doctor got down into the hole, and there was the boy's uncle. They made a small diversion to return the boy and his uncle to their home . The entire village honoured them and put on a feast for the Doctor and the dog.

When the Doctor and the animals reached his own country, they travelled across the land on foot to reach Puddleby, they put on a show with the pushmi-pullyu. Spectators paid to “COME AND SEE THE MARVELOUS TWO-HEADED ANIMAL FROM THE JUNGLES OF AFRICA. Admission SIXPENCE.”

Circus-men often came and asked the Doctor to sell them the strange creature, saying they would pay a tremendous lot of money for him. But the Doctor always shook his head and said,

“No. The pushmi-pullyu shall never be shut up in a cage. He shall be free always to come and go, like you and me.”

After a few weeks they all got dreadfully tired of the circus style life and the Doctor and all of them were longing to go home.

One fine day, when the hollyhocks were in full bloom, he came back to Puddleby a rich man, to live in the little house with the big garden.

The Doctor went and saw the sailor who had lent him the boat, and he bought two new ships for him, and he paid the grocer for the food he had lent him for the journey.

Even when the Doctor had filled the old money-box on the dresser-shelf, he still had a lot of money left; and he had to get three more money-boxes, just as big, to put the rest in.

“Money,” he said, “is a terrible nuisance. But it’s nice not to have to worry.”

“Yes,” said Dab-Dab, who was toasting muffins for his tea, “it is indeed!”

The end

Nanny Bea: Thank you Jules. It’s such a comfort to know that I am not the only one who can understand animals.

Jules: Understanding them is helpful. Just imagine what it would be like to talk to them.

Nanny Bea: Oh I can do that as well but I don’t dare since a very heated boundary dispute between a hedgehog and a badger. I got involved and regretted it at once. Now I just let them sort out their own problems.

Jules: Wise choice, you don’t want to mess with an angry badger.

Nanny Bea: Indeed! But I do know that nothing soothes an angry badger like one of your stories.

Jules: Well I will bring another next week when I’m back for more tales and tea?

Thomas: Go to [NannyBea.com](http://NannyBea.com)

Jules: Go there to find out about all our episodes. Tales & Tea is written for you so please do let us know what you think. You can like or follow us on iTunes or Twitter. And get in touch if you’d like to be on the show like our lovely caller Acacia.

[Be on the Show jingle]

Mr Announcer: This has been a Toad in the Hole production for [NannyBea.com](http://NannyBea.com).