

***HUGH
LOFTING***

***DOCTOR
DOLITTLE'S
CIRCUS***

Hugh Lofting

Doctor Dolittle's Circus

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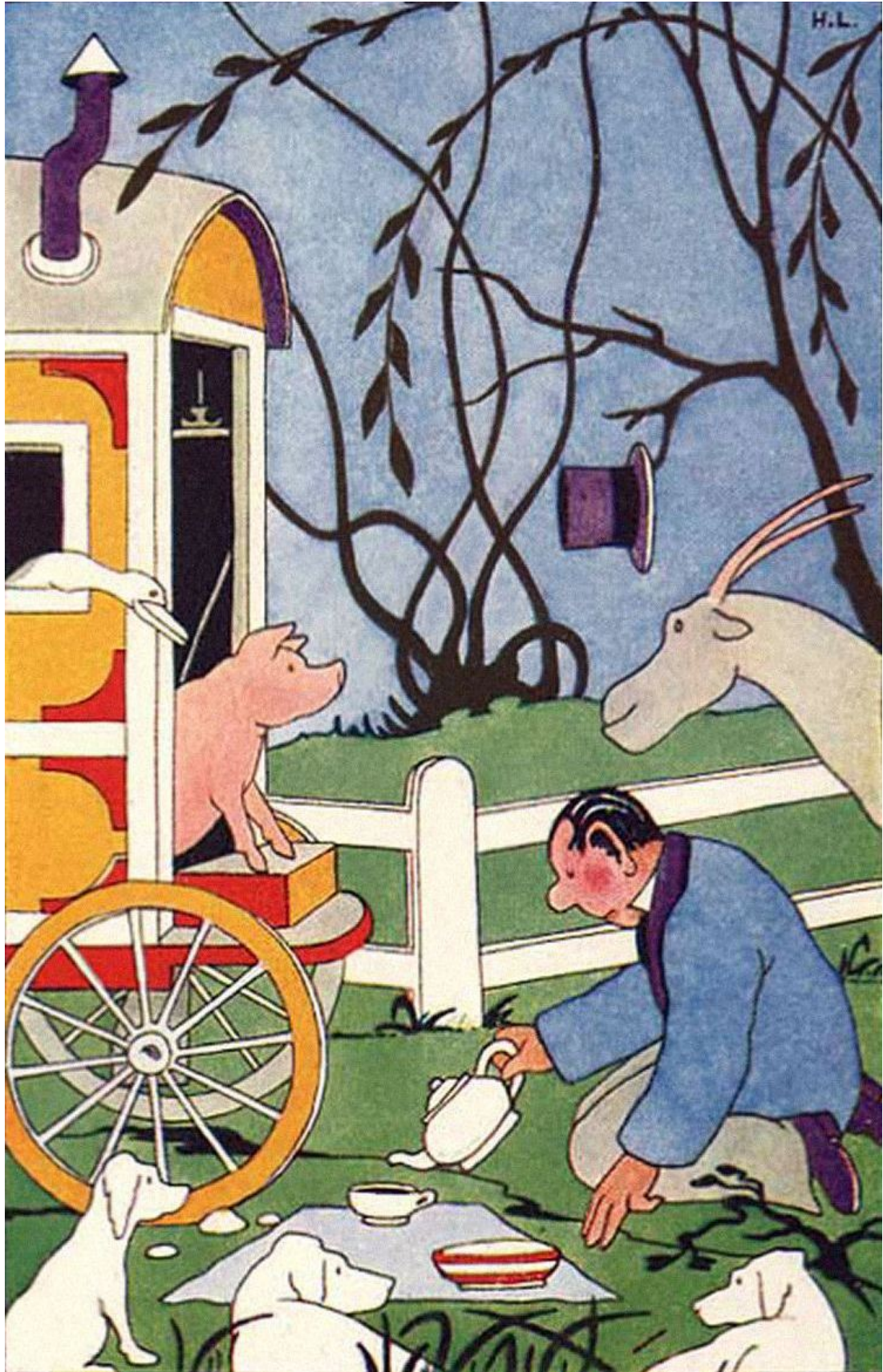
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PART ONE

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Chapter 1

The Fireside Circle

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This is the story of that part of Doctor Dolittle's adventures which came about through his joining and travelling with a circus. He had not planned in the beginning to follow this life for any considerable time. His intention had only been to take the pushmi-pullyu out on show long enough to make sufficient money to pay the sailor back for the boat which had been borrowed and wrecked.

But a remark Too-Too had made was true; it was not so hard for John Dolittle to become rich – for indeed he was easily satisfied where money was concerned – but it was a very different matter for him to *remain* rich. Dab-Dab used to say that during the years she had known him he had, to her knowledge, been quite well off five or six times; but that the more money he had, the sooner you could expect him to be poor again.

Dab-Dab's idea of a fortune was not, of course, very large. But certainly during his experience with the circus the Doctor repeatedly had enough money in his pockets to be considered well to do; and, as regular as clockwork, by the end of the week or the month he would be penniless again.

Well, the point from which we are beginning, then, is where the Dolittle party (Jip the dog, Dab-Dab the duck, Too-Too the owl, Gub-Gub the pig, the pushmi-pullyu and the white mouse) had returned at last to the little house in Puddleby-on-the-Marsh after their long journey from Africa. It was a large family to find food for. And the Doctor, without a penny in his pockets, had been a good deal worried over

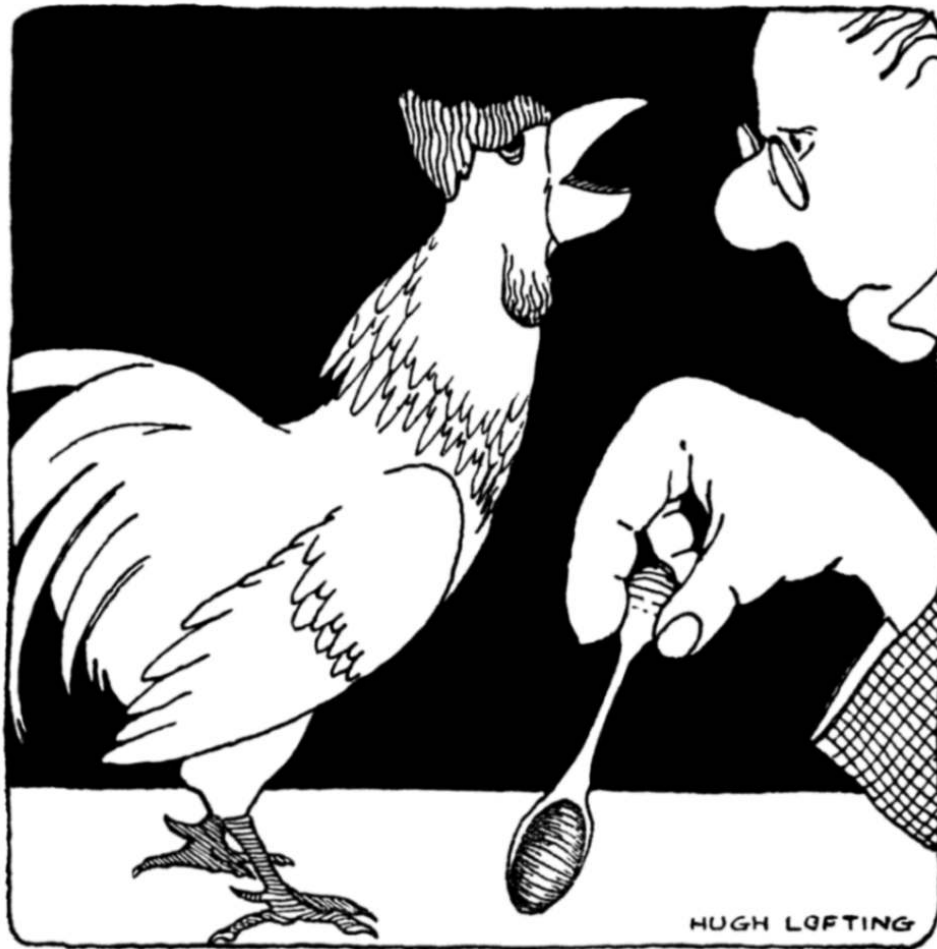
how he was going to feed it, even during the short time they would be here before arrangements were made to join a circus. However, the thoughtful Dab-Dab had made them carry up from the pirates' ship such supplies as remained in the larder after the voyage was done. These, she said, should last the household - with economy - for a day or two at least.

The animals' delight had at first, on getting back home, banished every care or thought of the morrow from the minds of all - except Dab-Dab. That good housekeeper had gone straight to the kitchen and set about the cleaning of pots and the cooking of food. The rest of them, the Doctor included, had gone out into the garden to re-explore all the well-known spots. And they were still roaming and poking around every nook and corner of their beloved home when they were suddenly summoned to luncheon by Dab-Dab's dinner-bell - a frying pan beaten with a spoon. At this there was a grand rush for the back door. And they all came trundling in from the garden, gabbling with delight at the prospect of taking a meal again in the dear old kitchen where they had in times past spent so many jolly hours together.

"It will be cold enough for a fire tonight," said Jip as they took their places at the table. "This September wind has a chilly snap in it. Will you tell us a story after supper, Doctor? It's a long time since we sat around the hearth in a ring."

"Or read to us out of your animal story books," said Gub-Gub, "the one about the Fox who tried to steal the King's goose."

"Well, maybe," said the Doctor. "We'll see. We'll see. What delicious sardines these are that the pirates had! From Bordeaux, by the taste of them. There's no mistaking real French sardines."



He could only crow in a whisper

At this moment the Doctor was called away to see a patient in the surgery - a weasel who had broken a claw. And he was no sooner done with that when a rooster with a sore throat turned up from a neighbouring farm. He was so hoarse, he said, he could only crow in a whisper, and nobody on his farm woke up in the morning. Then two pheasants arrived to show him a scrawny chick which had never been able to peck properly since it was born.

For, although the people in Puddleby had not yet learned of the Doctor's arrival, news of his coming had already spread among the animals, and the birds. And all that afternoon he was kept busy bandaging, advising and

physicking, while a huge motley crowd of creatures waited patiently outside the surgery door.

“Ah me! - just like old times,” sighed Dab-Dab. “No peace. Patients clamouring to see him morning, noon and night.”

Jip had been right: by the time darkness came that night it was very chilly. Wood enough was found in the cellar to start a jolly fire in the big chimney. Round this the animals gathered after supper and pestered the Doctor for a story or a chapter from one of his books.

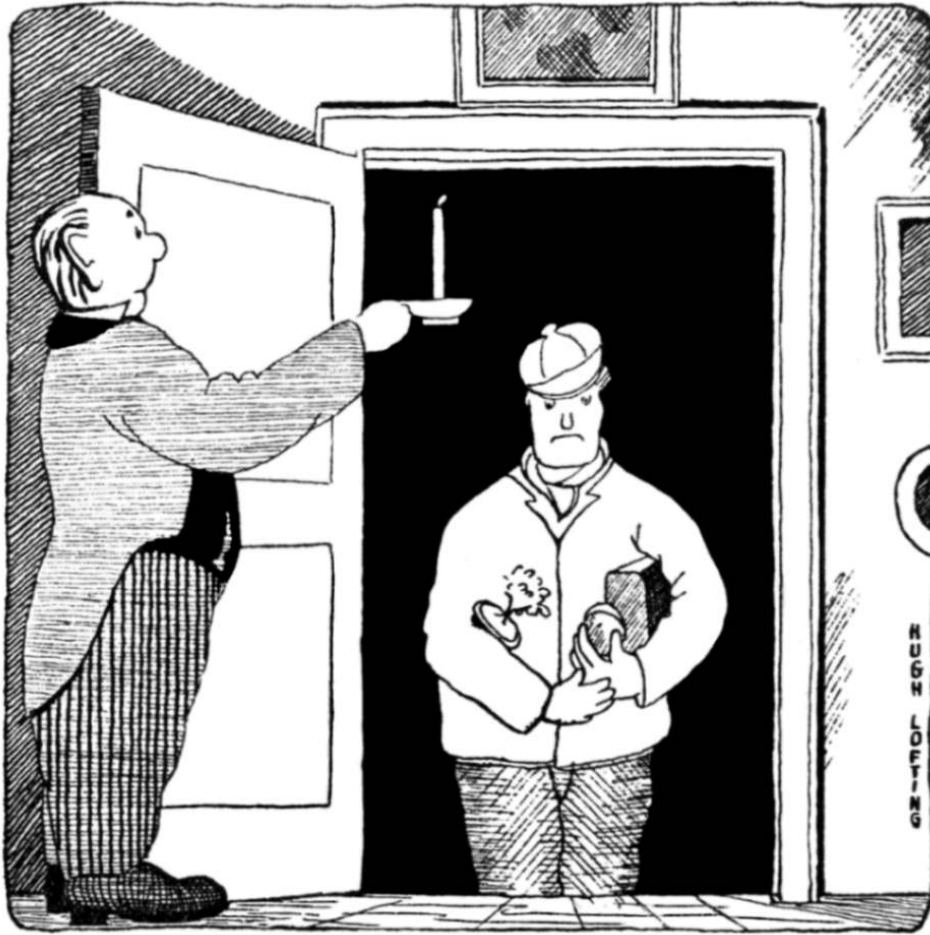
“But look here,” said he. “What about the circus? If we’re going to make money to pay the sailor back we’ve got to be thinking of that. We haven’t even found a circus to go with yet. I wonder what’s the best way to set about it. They travel all over the place, you know. Let me see: who could I ask?”

“Sh!” said Too-Too. “Wasn’t that the front door bell ringing?”

“Strange!” said the Doctor, getting up from his chair “Callers already?”

“Perhaps it’s the old lady with rheumatism,” said the white mouse as the Doctor walked out into the hall. “Maybe she didn’t find her Oxenthorpe doctor was so very good after all.”

When John Dolittle had lit the candles in the hall he opened the front door. And there standing on the threshold was the Cat’s-Meat-Man.



“Why, it’s Matthew Mugg!”

“Why, it’s Matthew Mugg, as I’m alive!” he cried. “Come in Matthew, come in. But how did you know I was here?”

“I felt it in my bones, Doctor,” said the Cat’s-Meat-Man, stumping into the hall. “Only this morning I says to my wife, ‘Theodosia,’ I says, ‘something tells me the Doctor’s got back. And I’m going up to his house tonight to take a look.’”

“Well, I’m glad to see you,” said John Dolittle. “Let’s go into the kitchen where it’s warm.”

Although he said he had only come on the chance of finding the Doctor, the Cat’s-Meat-Man had brought presents with him: a knuckle bone off a shoulder of mutton for Jip; a piece of cheese for the white mouse; a turnip for

Gub-Gub and a pot of flowering geraniums for the Doctor. When the visitor was comfortably settled in the armchair before the fire John Dolittle handed him the tobacco-jar from the mantelpiece and told him to fill his pipe.

“I got your letter about the sparrow,” said Matthew. “He found you all right, I s’pose.”

“Yes, and he was very useful to me. He left the ship when we were off the Devon coast. He was anxious to get back to London.”

“Are you home for a long stay now?”

“Well - yes and no,” said the Doctor. “I’d like nothing better than to enjoy a few quiet months here and get my garden to rights. It’s in a shocking mess. But unfortunately I’ve got to make some money first.”

“Humph,” said Matthew, puffing at his pipe. “Meself, I’ve bin trying to do that all my life - Never was very good at it. But I’ve got twenty-five shillings saved up, if that would help you.”

“It’s very kind of you, Matthew, very. The fact is I - er - I need a whole lot of money. I’ve got to pay back some debts. But listen: I have a strange kind of new animal - a pushmi-pullyu. He has two heads. The monkeys in Africa presented him to me after I had cured an epidemic for them. Their idea was that I should travel with him in a circus - on show, you know. Would you like to see him?”

“I surely would,” said the Cat’s-Meat-Man. “Sounds like something very new.”

“He’s out in the garden,” said the Doctor. “Don’t stare at him too hard. He isn’t used to it yet. Gets frightfully embarrassed. Let’s take a bucket of water with us and just pretend we’ve brought him a drink.”

When Matthew came back into the kitchen with the Doctor he was all smiles and enthusiasm.

“Why, John Dolittle,” said he, “you’ll make your fortune – sure as you’re alive! There’s never bin anything seen like that since the world began. And anyway, I always thought you ought to go into the circus business – you, the only man living that knows animal language. When are you going to start?”

“That’s just the point. Perhaps you can help me. I’d want to be sure it was a nice circus I was going with – people I would like, you understand.”

Matthew Mugg bent forward and tapped the Doctor on the knee with the stem of his pipe.

“I know the very concern you want,” said he. “Right now over at Grimbleton there’s the nicest little circus you ever saw. Grimbleton Fair’s on this week and they’ll be there till Saturday. Me and Theodosia saw ’em the first day they was on. It isn’t a large circus but it’s a good one – select like. What do you say if I take you over there tomorrow and you have a chat with the ringmaster?”

“Why, that would be splendid,” said the Doctor. “But in the meantime don’t say anything to anyone about the idea at all. We must keep the pushmi-pullyu a secret till he is actually put on show before the public.”

Chapter 2

The Doctor Meets a Friend - and a Relative

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Now, Matthew Mugg was a peculiar man. He loved trying new jobs - which was one reason, perhaps, that he never made much money. But his attempts to get into some new kind of work usually ended in his coming back to selling cat's meat and rat-catching for farmers and millers around Puddleby.

Matthew had already at Grimbleton Fair tried to get a job with the circus and been refused. But now that he found the Doctor was going into the business - and with such a wonderful exhibition as a pushmi-pullyu - his hopes rose again. And as he went home that night he already in imagination saw himself in partnership with his beloved Doctor, running the biggest circus on earth.

Next day he called at the little house early. After Dab-Dab had made them up some sardine sandwiches to take with them for lunch, they set out.

It was a long walk from Puddleby to Grimbleton. But after the Doctor and the Cat's-Meat-Man had been trudging down the road a while they heard a sound of hoofs behind them. They turned round; and there was a farmer coming toward them in a trap. Seeing the two travellers upon the road, the farmer was going to offer them a ride. But his wife did not like the ragged looks of the Cat's-Meat-Man, and she forbade her husband to stop for them.

“What d’yer think of that for Christian charity?” said the Cat’s-Meat-Man as the cart went spinning by them. “Sit comfortable in their seats and leave us to walk! That’s Isidore Stiles, the biggest potato-grower in these parts. I often catches rats for him. And his wife, the snobby old scarecrow! Did yer see that look she gives me? A rat-catcher ain’t good enough company for her!”

“But look,” said the Doctor. “They’re stopping and turning the trap around.”

Now this farmer’s horse knew the Doctor very well both by sight and reputation. And as he had trotted by he had recognized the little man tramping along the road as none other than the famous John Dolittle. Delighted to find that his friend had returned to these parts, the horse had then turned around of his own accord, and was now trotting back – in spite of his driver’s pulling – to greet the Doctor and inquire for his health.

“Where are you going?” asked the horse as he came up.

“We’re going to Grimbledon Fair,” said the Doctor.

“So are we,” said the horse. “Why don’t you get into the back of the trap beside the old woman?”

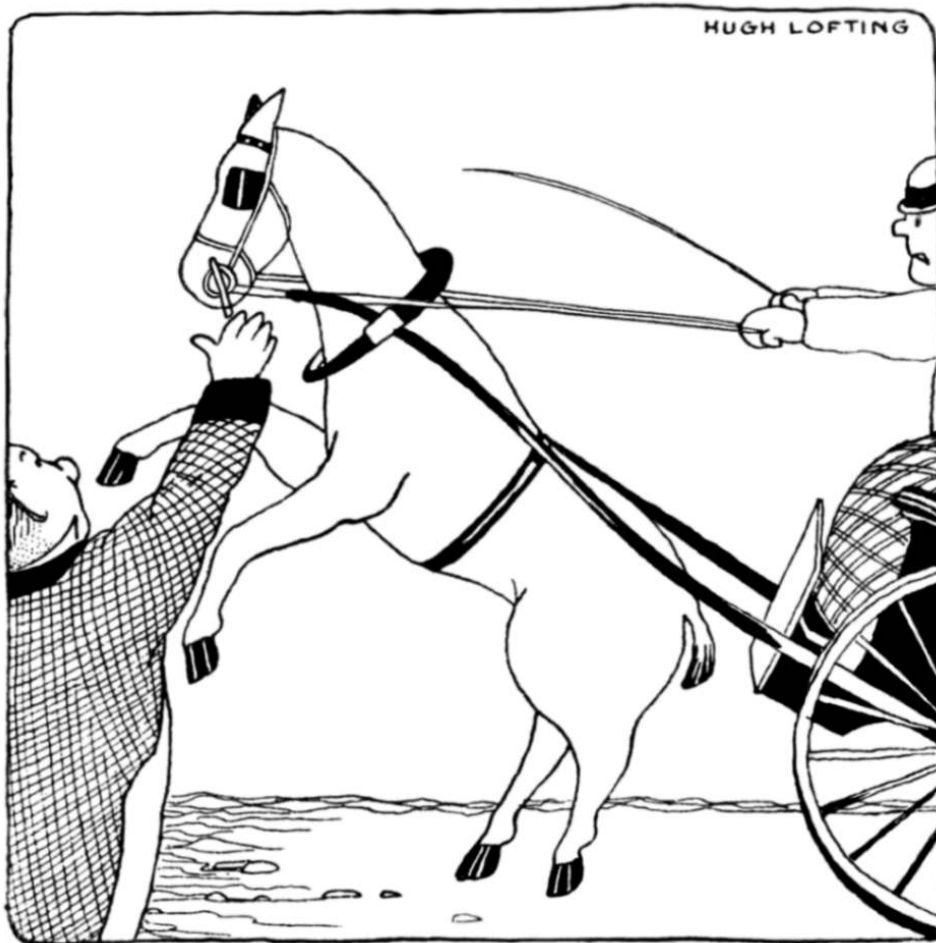
“They haven’t invited me,” said the Doctor. “See, your farmer is trying to turn you around again toward Grimbledon. Better not anger him. Run along. Don’t bother about us. We’ll be all right.”

Very unwillingly the horse finally obeyed the driver, turned about and set off once more for the fair. But he hadn’t gone more than half a mile before he said to himself, “It’s a shame the great man should have to walk, while these bumpkins ride. I’m hanged if I’ll leave him behind!”

Then he pretended to shy at something in the road, swung the trap around again suddenly and raced back toward the Doctor at full gallop. The farmer’s wife screamed

and her husband threw all his weight on the reins. But the horse took not the slightest notice. Reaching the Doctor he started rearing and bucking and carrying on like a wild colt.

“Get into the trap, Doctor,” he whispered. “Get in, or I’ll spill these boobies into the ditch.”



The Doctor took hold of the bridle

The Doctor, fearing an accident, took hold of the horse’s bridle and patted him on the nose. Instantly he became as calm and gentle as a lamb.

“Your horse is a little restive, sir,” said the Doctor to the farmer. “Would you let me drive him for a spell? I am a veterinary surgeon.”

“Why, certainly,” said the farmer. “I thought I knew something about horses meself. But I can’t do a thing with him this morning.”

Then, as the Doctor climbed up and took the reins, the Cat’s-Meat-Man got in behind and, chuckling with delight, sat beside the indignant wife.

“Nice day, Mrs. Stiles,” said Matthew Mugg. “How are the rats in the barn?”

They reached the Grimbledon about the middle of the morning. The town was very full and busy and holidayfied. In the cattle-market fine beeves, prize pigs, fat sheep and pedigreed draught horses with ribbons in their manes filled the pens.

Through the good-natured crowds that thronged the streets the Doctor and Matthew made their way patiently toward the enclosure where the circus was. The Doctor began to get worried that he might be asked to pay to go in, because he hadn’t a single penny in his pockets. But at the entrance to the circus they found a high platform erected, with some curtains at the back. It was like a small outdoor theatre. On this platform a man with an enormous black moustache was standing. From time to time various showily-dressed persons made their appearance through the curtains; and the big man introduced them to the gaping crowd and told of the wonders they could perform. Whatever they were, clowns, acrobats or snake-charmers, he always said they were the greatest in the world. The crowd was tremendously impressed; and every once in a while people in ones and twos would make their way through the throng, pay their money at the little gate and pass into the circus enclosure.

“There you are,” the Cat’s-Meat-Man whispered in the Doctor’s ear. “Didn’t I tell yer it was a good show? Look!

People going in by hundreds.”

“Is that big man the manager?” asked the Doctor.

“Yes, that’s him. That’s Blossom himself - Alexander Blossom. He’s the man we’ve come to see.”

The Doctor began to squirm his way forward through the people, with Matthew following behind. Finally he reached the front and started making signs to the big man on the platform above to show that he wanted to speak to him. But Mr. Blossom was so busy bellowing about the wonders of his show that the Doctor - a small man in a big crowd - could not attract his attention.

“Get up on the platform,” said Matthew. “Climb up and talk to him.”

So the Doctor clambered up one corner of the stage and then suddenly got frightfully embarrassed to find himself facing so large a gathering of people. However, once there, he plucked up his courage and, tapping the shouting showman on the arm, he said:

“Excuse me.”

Mr. Blossom stopped roaring about the “greatest show on earth” and gazed down at the little round man who had suddenly appeared beside him.

“Er - er—” the Doctor began.

Then there was a silence. The people began to titter.

Blossom, like most showmen, was never at a loss for words and seldom missed an opportunity of being funny at somebody else’s expense. And while John Dolittle was still wondering how to begin, the manager suddenly turned to the crowd again and, waving his arm towards the Doctor, shouted:

“And this, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the original Humpty-Dumpty - the one what gave the king’s men so much

trouble. Pay your money and come in! Walk up and see 'im fall off the wall!"

At that the crowd roared with laughter and the poor Doctor got more embarrassed than ever.

"Talk to him, Doctor, *talk* to him!" called the Cat's-Meat-Man from down below.

Soon, when the laughter had subsided, the Doctor made another attempt. He had just opened his mouth when a single piercing cry rang from amidst the crowd - "*John!*"

The Doctor turned and gazed over the heads of the people to see who was calling him by name. And there on the outskirts of the throng he saw a woman waving violently to him with a green parasol.

"Who is it?" said the Cat's-Meat-Man.

"Heaven preserve us!" groaned the Doctor, shamefacedly climbing down off the stage. "What'll we do now? Matthew - *it's Sarah!*"

Chapter 3

Business Arrangements

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“Well, well, Sarah!” said John Dolittle when he had finally made his way to her. “My, how well and plump you’re looking!”

“I’m nothing of the sort, John,” said Sarah, severely. “Will you please tell me what you mean by gallivanting around on that platform like a clown? Wasn’t it enough for you to throw away the best practice in the West Country for the sake of pet mice and frogs and things? Have you no pride? What are you doing up there?”

“I was thinking of going into the circus business,” said the Doctor.

Sarah gasped and put her hand to her head as though about to swoon. Then a long lean man in parson’s clothes who was standing behind her came and took her by the arm.

“What is it, my dear?” said he.

“Launcelot,” said Sarah weakly, “this is my brother, John Dolittle. John, this is the Reverend Launcelot Dingle, rector of Grimbledon, my husband. But, John, you can’t be serious. Go into the circus business! How disgraceful! You must be joking – and who is this person?” she added as Matthew Mugg shuffled up and joined the party.

“This is Matthew Mugg,” said the Doctor. “You remember him, of course?”

“Ugh! – the rat-catcher,” said Sarah, closing her eyes in horror.

“Not at all. He’s a meat merchant,” said the Doctor. “Mr. Mugg, the Reverend Launcelot Dingle.” And the Doctor introduced his ragged greasy friend as if he had been a king. “He’s my most prominent patient,” he added.

“But, listen, John,” said Sarah, “if you do go into this mad business, promise me you’ll do it under some other name. Think what it would mean to our position here if it got known that the Rector’s brother-in-law was a common showman!”

The Doctor thought a moment. Then he smiled.

“All right, Sarah, I’ll use some other name. But I can’t help it if someone recognizes me, can I?”

After they had bidden farewell to Sarah, the Doctor and Matthew again sought out the manager. They found him counting money at the gate, and this time were able to talk to him at their ease.

John Dolittle described the wonderful animal that he had at home and said he wanted to join the circus with him. Alexander Blossom admitted he would like to see the creature, and told the Doctor to bring him here. But John Dolittle said it would be better and easier if the manager came to Puddleby to look at him.

This was agreed upon. And after they had explained to Blossom how to get to the little house on the Oxenthorpe Road, they set out for home again, very pleased with their success so far.

“If you do go with Blossom’s Circus,” Matthew asked, as they tramped along the road chewing sardine sandwiches, “will you take me with you, Doctor? I’d come in real handy, taking care of the caravan, feeding and cleaning and the likes o’ that.”

“You’re very welcome to come, Matthew,” said the Doctor. “But what about your own business?”

“Oh, that,” said Matthew, biting viciously into another sandwich. “There ain’t no money in that. Besides, it’s so tame, handing out bits of meat on skewers to overfed poodles! There’s no - no what d’y’ call it?” - (he waved his sandwich towards the sky) - “no adventure in it. I’m naturally venturesome - reckless like - always was, from my cradle up. Now the circus: that’s the real life! That’s a man’s job.”



He waved his sandwich towards the sky

“But how about your wife?” asked the Doctor.

“Theodosia? Oh, she’d come along. She’s venturesome, like me. She could mend the clothes and do odd jobs. What

do you think?"

"What do I think?" asked the Doctor, who was staring down at the road as he walked. "I was thinking of Sarah."

"Queer gent, that what she married, ain't he," said Matthew, "the Reverend Dangle?"

"*Dingle*," the Doctor corrected. "Yes. He's venturesome too. It's a funny world - Poor dear Sarah! - Poor old Dingle! - Well, well."

Late that night, when the Grimbleton Fair had closed, Mr. Blossom, the ringmaster, came to the Doctor's house in Puddleby.

After he had been shown by the light of a lantern the pushmi-pullyu grazing on the lawn, he came back into the library with the Doctor and said:

"How much do you want for that animal?"

"No, no, he's not for sale," said the Doctor.

"Oh, come now," said the manager. "You don't want him. Anyone could see you're not a regular showman. I'll give you twenty pounds for him."

"No," said the Doctor.

"Thirty pounds," said Blossom.

Still the Doctor refused.

"Forty pounds - fifty pounds," said the manager. Then he went up and up, offering prices that made the Cat's-Meat-Man who was listening open his eyes wider and wider with wonder.

"It's no use," said the Doctor at last. "You must either take me with the animal into your circus or leave him where he is. I have promised that I myself will see he is properly treated."

"What do you mean?" asked the showman. "Ain't he your property? Who did you promise?"

“He’s his own property,” said the Doctor. “He came here to oblige me. It was to himself, the pushmi-pullyu, that I gave my promise.”

“What! – Are you crazy?” asked the showman.

Matthew Mugg was going to explain to Blossom that the Doctor could speak animals’ language. But John Dolittle motioned to him to be silent.

“And so, you see,” he went on, “you must either take me *and* the animal, or neither.”

Then Blossom said no, he wouldn’t agree to that arrangement. And to Matthew’s great disappointment and grief he took his hat and left.

But he had expected the Doctor to change his mind and give in. And he hadn’t been gone more than ten minutes before he rang the door-bell and said that he had come back to talk it over.

Well, the upshot of it was that the showman finally consented to all the Doctor asked. The pushmi-pullyu and his party were to be provided with a new wagon all to themselves and, although travelling as part of the circus, were to be entirely free and independent. The money made was to be divided equally between the Doctor and the manager. Whenever the pushmi-pullyu wanted a day off he was to have it, and whatever kind of food he asked for was to be provided by Blossom.

When all the arrangements had been gone into, the man said he would send the caravan here next day, and prepared to go.

“By the way,” he said, pausing at the front door. “What’s your name?”

The Doctor was just about to tell him, when he remembered Sarah’s request.

“Oh, well, call me John Smith,” said he.

“All right, Mr. Smith,” said the showman. “Have your party ready by eleven in the morning. Good night.”

“Good night,” said the Doctor.

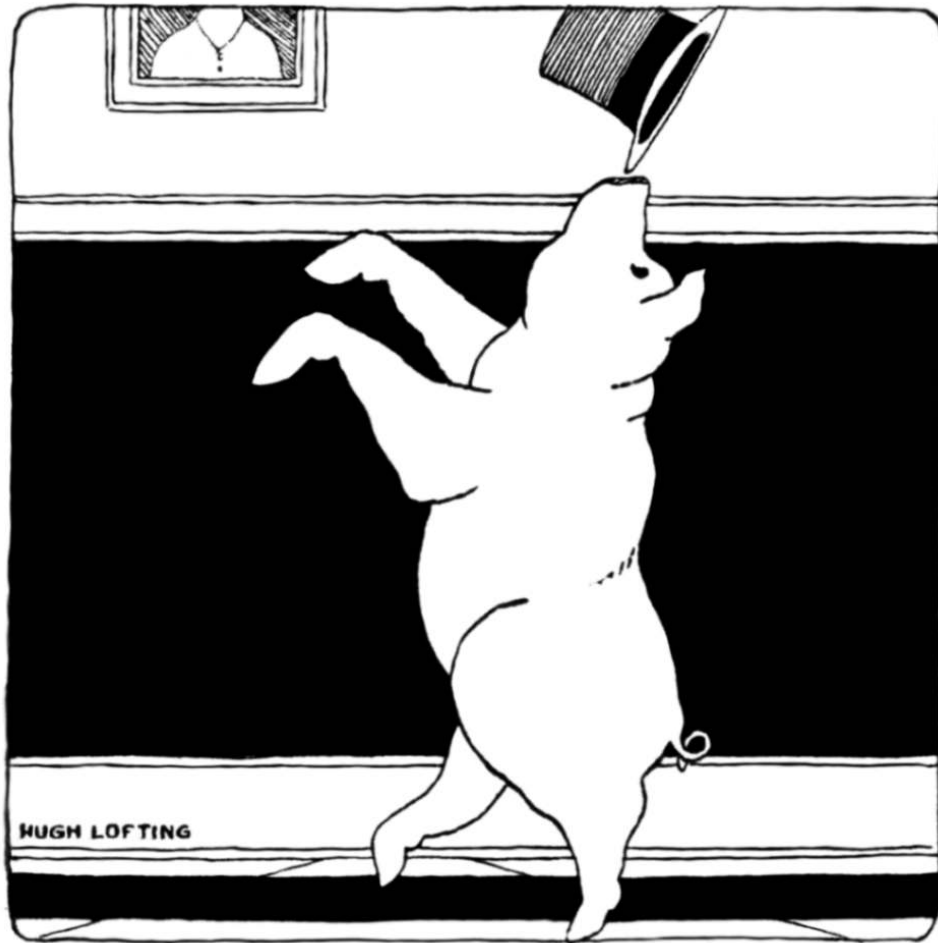
As soon as the door had closed, Dab-Dab, Gub-Gub, Jip, Too-Too and the white mouse, who had been hiding and listening in various corners of the house, all came out into the hall and started chattering at the top of their voices.

“Hooray!” grunted Gub-Gub. “Hooray for the circus!”

“My,” said Matthew to the Doctor, “you’re not such a bad business man after all! You got Blossom to give in to everything. He wasn’t going to let the chance slip. Did you see how quickly he came back when he thought the deal was off? I’ll bet he expects to make a lot of money out of us.”

“Poor old home,” sighed Dab-Dab, affectionately dusting off the hat-rack. “To leave it again so soon!”

“Hooray!” yelled Gub-Gub, trying to stand on his hind legs and balance the Doctor’s hat on his nose - “Hooray for the circus! - Tomorrow! - *Whee!*”



"Hooray for the circus!"

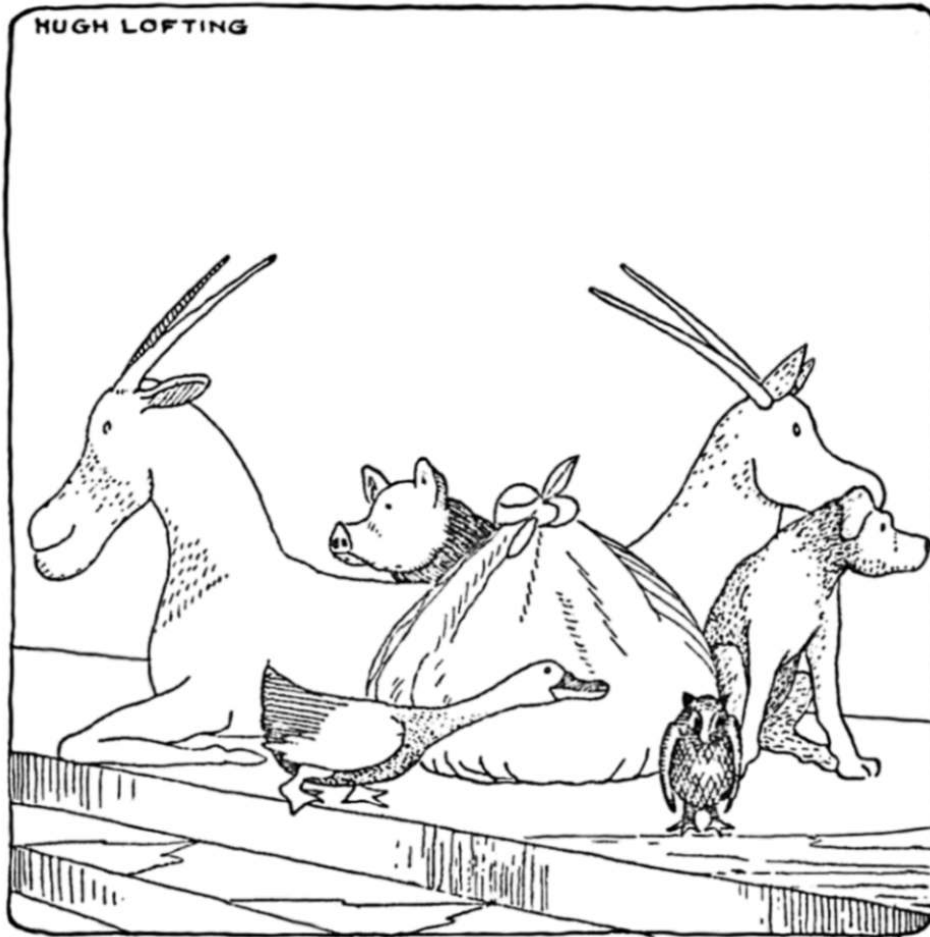
Chapter 4

The Doctor Is Discovered

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Very early the next morning Dab-Dab had the whole house astir. She said breakfast must be eaten and the table cleared before seven, if everything was to be got in readiness for their departure by eleven.

As a matter of fact, the diligent housekeeper had the house closed and everybody waiting outside on the front steps hours before the wagon arrived. But the Doctor, for one, was still kept busy. For up to the last minute animal patients were still coming in from all parts of the countryside, with various ailments to be cured.



Waiting on the front steps

At last Jip, who had been out scouting, came rushing back to the party gathered in the garden.

“The wagon’s coming,” he panted - “all red and yellow - it’s just around the bend.”

Then everybody got excited and began grabbing their parcels. Gub-Gub’s luggage was a bundle of turnips; and just as he was hurrying down the steps to the road the string broke and the round, white vegetables went rolling all over the place.

The wagon, when it finally came in sight, was certainly a thing of beauty. It was made like a gypsy caravan, with

windows and door and chimney. It was very gayly painted and quite new.

Not so the horse; he was quite old. The Doctor said that never had he seen an animal so worn out and weary. He got into conversation with him and found out that he had been working in the circus for thirty-five years. He was very sick of it he said. His name was Beppo. The Doctor decided he would tell Blossom that it was high time Beppo should be pensioned off and allowed to live in peace.

In spite of the newness of the van, Dab-Dab swept it out before she put the packages in it. She had the Doctor's bedding tied up in a sheet, like a bundle of clothes for the laundry. And she was most careful that this should not get dirty.

When the animals and the baggage were all in, the Doctor got terribly afraid that the load would be too much for the old horse to pull. And he wanted to push behind, to help. But Beppo said he could manage it all right. However, the Doctor would not add to the weight by getting in himself. And when the door was shut and the window curtains drawn, so no one should see the pushmi-pullyu on the way, they set out for Grimbleton, with the man who had brought the wagon driving and the Doctor and the Cat's-Meat-Man walking behind.

On the way through Puddleby Market-place, the driver stopped to get something at a shop. And while the caravan waited outside a crowd gathered about the wagon, wanting to know where it was going and what was inside. Matthew Mugg, his chest now swelling with pride, was dying to tell them, but the Doctor wouldn't let him make any speeches.

They reached the Grimbleton Fair-grounds about two o'clock in the afternoon and entered the circus enclosure by

a back gate. Inside they found the great Blossom himself, waiting to welcome them.

He seemed quite surprised, on the van's being opened, to find the odd collection of creatures the Doctor had brought with him – he was particularly astonished at the pig. However, he was so delighted to have the pushmi-pullyu that he didn't mind.

He at once led them to what he called their stand – which, he said, he had had built for them that very morning. This the Doctor found to be similar to the place where he had first spoken with Blossom. It was a platform raised three feet from the ground, so that the board-and-canvas room on the top of it could be seen. It had steps up to it, and a little way back from the front edge of the platform curtains covered the entrance to the room, so no one could see inside unless they paid to go in.

Across the front of it was a sign:

THE PUSHMI-PULLYU!
COME AND SEE THE MARVELOUS
TWO-HEADED ANIMAL
FROM THE JUNGLES OF AFRICA!
ADMISSION SIXPENCE

The red and yellow wagon (in which the Doctor's party, with the exception of the pushmi-pullyu, were to live) was backed behind the "stand". And Dab-Dab immediately set about making up beds and arranging the inside so it would be homelike.

Blossom wanted to have the pushmi-pullyu put on show at once, but the Doctor refused. He said any wild animal would need to rest after the journey from Puddleby. And he wished the timid beast to get used to the noisy bustle of