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Dramatic Publishing

HUGH LOFTING'S

Doctor Dolittle

DRAMATIZED BY OLGA FRICKER

HUGH LOFTING



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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DOCTOR DOLITTLE

Hugh Lofting's gentle and eccentric doctor loves animals so much he learns how to have conversations with them! Already a modern classic, this imaginative book has been put into play form by Olga Fricker who is Hugh Lofting's sister. With her close understanding of her brother's creation, the dramatist has perfectly captured its special quality in this play.

10 ISBN: 0-87129-390-0

13 ISBN: 978-0-87129-390-9



www.dramaticpublishing.com

Code: D-18



printed on recycled paper

A Full-Length Play

Hugh Lofting's

Doctor Dolittle

Dramatized by Olga Fricker



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DOCTOR DOLITTLE

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(DOCTOR DOLITTLE)

ISBN 0-87129-390-0

DOCTOR DOLITTLE
A Full-Length Play
For Twenty-Four Characters
plus small parts and extras

C H A R A C T E R S

DOCTOR DOLITTLE *friend of the animals*
SARAH *his sister*
MRS. MUMFORD *a patient*
MATTHEW *a good friend*
BLOSSOM *owner of a circus*
FAT LADY *of the circus*
BROWN *a con man*

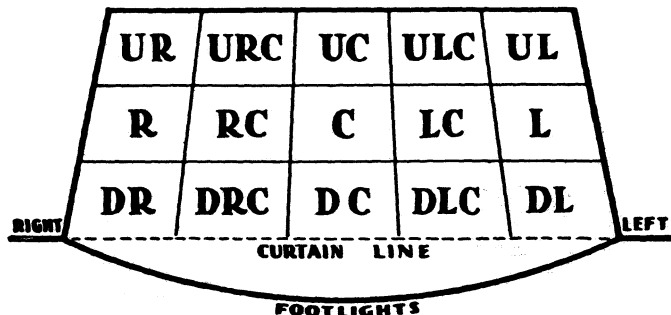
ANIMALS (may be played by either male or female):

POLYNESIA *a parrot*
JIP *a dog*
GUB-GUB *a pig*
DAB-DAB *a duck*
TOO-TOO *an owl*
BEPPPO *a horse*
CHEE-CHEE *a monkey*
SWALLOW
CROCODILE
LION
LIONESS
CUB
MONKEYS #1, #2, #3 and #4
PUSHMI-PULLYU *a rare animal*

SMALL PARTS and EXTRAS:

Hedgehog, rabbits, monkeys, townspeople (both adults and children), vendors, dancing girls, snake charmer, ticket seller.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

ACT ONE

SCENE: Interior of Doctor Dolittle's parlor. Back-drop should be the interior of an old-fashioned English cottage. A window /curtained and with flower pots on sill/ would be desirable but not necessary. Many knick-knacks on the walls and furniture will add character to the scene. LC is a large winged-back chair; DR a table about tea-table size with chairs around it; against the L wall is a sideboard with drawers standing open with evidence that small animals are living in some of them. An optician's reading chart stands near the sideboard. If available, a grandfather clock stands in a corner with the door open and an old blanket inside it on which any of the animals in the scene can retreat when confusion begins. Against the upstage wall is an old-fashioned settee or sofa. The exit is UR through the kitchen.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: The time is day. **DOCTOR DOLITTLE** is seated in a chair LC, spectacles on, a large book in his lap, reading. **POLYNESIA** is seated on the back of the chair looking over the Doctor's shoulder. **JIP** is lying at his feet. A hedgehog is curled up on the sofa UC. Two rabbits or more are scrambling over a carrot and scattering bits around as they fight for possession. Bits of rubbish are scattered on the floor near the sideboard. **SARAH**, broom in hand, enters from UR and

goes to stand over DOCTOR DOLITTLE.
Rabbits stop romping and hide under sofa UC.
JIP moves away from the Doctor's feet, and
POLYNESIA, with a loud parrot squawk, jumps
off the chair and peeks from under it at
SARAH.)

SARAH. John Dolittle! Just look at this mess!
How can you expect sick people to come to see
you when you keep all these animals in the house.
. . . (She starts to sweep with vigor and the
animals scamper about in more confusion.) It's
a fine doctor would have his parlor full of
hedgehogs, rabbits and mice. (DOCTOR
DOLITTLE puts his glasses on the book, gets
up and transfers book to chair.)

DOCTOR DOLITTLE. Now, sister dear, that's no
way to treat our animal friends.

SARAH. Don't you call them my friends! They're
your friends! I don't need carrot and cracker
crumbs all over my floors! (She continues to
sweep angrily. DOCTOR goes to SARAH and
gently stops her sweeping.)

DOCTOR. Now, now, Sarah. You mustn't frighten
them like that. They have feelings, too.
(SARAH bursts into tears, throws her apron
over her head and runs toward exit UR.)

SARAH. You think more of those animals than you
do of your own sister. (Exits sobbing.)

DOCTOR (turning toward POLYNESIA). Dear me!
Polynesia, now I've hurt her feelings. I do
wish she weren't so sensitive.

POLYNESIA. Squawk! Squawk! (She waddles
toward the sideboard and begins picking up the
crumbs. DOCTOR follows her movements and
shakes his head.)

DOCTOR (mumbling to himself). Sometimes I think

that parrot understands every word we say.

(DOCTOR picks up his book and begins to sit down. There is a loud squeal as GUB-GUB comes stumbling into the room, turnip in hand and Sarah's broom swinging from the wing where it propelled GUB-GUB into the room.)

SARAH (offstage). And keep that pig out of my kitchen!
DOCTOR. Gub-Gub, have you been stealing Sarah's turnips again?

(GUB-GUB moves DR, looks at the DOCTOR and begins to munch on turnip. There is a knock at the door. The DOCTOR goes to answer. If no door, knock may come from off stage R and DOCTOR moves forward to greet his visitor from the same entrance Sarah used. A large woman, MRS. MUMFORD, in street clothes, limping on a cane, hobbles into the room.)

DOCTOR. Good morning, Mrs. Mumford. How are you today?

MRS. MUMFORD (mournfully). Terrible! Terrible, Doctor Dolittle. My rheumatism is killing me. (She moves into place with her back to the sofa where the hedgehog is asleep, while the DOCTOR moves toward the sideboard.) You must give me some liniment to rub on my poor knees. (Leans down and rubs her knees with one hand while continuing to lean on the cane.)

DOCTOR. Do sit down, Mrs. Mumford. I must take your blood pressure. (He has reached the sideboard, opened a door and is peering into it. Meanwhile, MRS. MUMFORD has shuffled backward without turning her head and has eased herself toward a sitting position on the sofa. As

she is about to sit, the hedgehog lets out a squeal and jumps up under her bottom, giving her a push which sends her sprawling on her face. She scrambles to her feet, straightens her hat, picks up her cane and makes a running circle around the room, swinging her cane at the hedgehog, who keeps just ahead of her while all the other animals scramble to safety. The hedgehog exits UR with MRS. MUMFORD in pursuit. DOCTOR has watched the scene from the moment the hedgehog squealed. Unable to do anything, he stands, liniment and stethoscope in hands, shaking his head.) That was mighty good medicine -- better than this, I suspect. (He puts down the bottle and his stethoscope and turns to the direction of his chair.) Well, well, so much for Mrs. Mumford's rheumatism. (Another knock is heard.)

(MATTHEW sticks his head in the entrance. He carries a basket.)

MATTHEW. Anybody home?

DOCTOR. Hello, Matthew. Come in. (DOCTOR goes to shake hands with MATTHEW. At that moment, DAB-DAB comes waddling through Matthew's legs, almost tripping him.

MATTHEW laughs and looks down at the duck.)

MATTHEW (one hand still in Doctor's and the basket in the other). Why, Dab-Dab, old friend. Why aren't you out on the pond? It's a great day for swimming -- if you're a duck. (DAB-DAB gives MATTHEW a non-committal glance and waddles down toward GUB-GUB and gives him a peck. GUB-GUB squeals and gets up and moves toward DOCTOR for protection.) What was that cyclone that just flew out of 'ere? Looked like yer little 'edgehog friend in the lead.

DOCTOR. He can take care of himself. I'm sure Mrs. Mumford will be out of breath before they get very far.

MATTHEW. What's the trouble, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Nothing really. Just another patient lost. I fear I'm not a very good people's doctor, Matthew.

MATTHEW. Well, why don't you give up being a people's doctor and be an animal doctor?

DOCTOR (scratching his head). Well, Matthew, I do a lot of veterinarian work now. Perhaps you're right.

POLYNESIA (stops picking up crumbs). Squa-a-wk! Squa-a-awk! (All the other animals in the scene stop what they are doing and give MATTHEW all their attention. They turn to one another with much wagging of tails, nodding of heads and scratching of noses. JIP barks merrily and runs around chasing his tail. DOCTOR moves to table DR and motions MATTHEW to sit.)

DOCTOR. We're just going to have tea, Matthew. Won't you join us? (MATTHEW puts basket on floor beside him and sits down opposite DOCTOR with his back to R wall. All the animals are grouped around MATTHEW and DOCTOR.)

MATTHEW. Thank you, Doctor. I could do with a spot of tea. (He leans down and brings his basket to his knees.) But first let me give our fine feathered and furred friends their treat. (He brings out scraps of food suitable for each bird or animal and they eagerly snatch it from him.)

(With a flutter, TOO-TOO comes flying into the room from UR.)

MATTHEW. Well, Too-Too, I wondered when you'd show up. (He hands TOO-TOO a treat.)

DOCTOR. That's very thoughtful of you, Matthew. We all thank you. (The animals make appropriate animal noises and proceed to munch the treats.)

MATTHEW (returning basket to floor). Not a'tall, Doctor, not a'tall. Ther' my friends, too, I hope. Now, about that being an animal doctor. You see, you know all about animals -- much more than these vets do. That book you wrote about cats, why, it's wonderful. I can't read or write myself, or maybe I'd write some books. But my wife, Theodosia, she's a scholar, she is. And she reads your books to me. Well, it's wonderful, that's all I can say, wonderful. You might have been a cat yourself. You know the way they think. And, listen, you can make more money doctoring animals. Do you know that? And if they don't get sick enough, I could put a little something in the meat I sell 'em to make 'em sick, see? (DOCTOR and the animals react to this.)

DOCTOR. Oh, no, Matthew. You mustn't do that. That wouldn't be right.

MATTHEW. Oh, I don't mean really sick -- just a little something to make them droopy-like, was what I 'ad reference to. But, as you say, maybe it ain't right or fair to the animals. But they'll get sick anyway because old women always give 'em too much to eat. And look at all the farmers around about who have lame horses and weak lambs -- they'd come. Be an animal doctor.

(SARAH enters with tea tray, which she places on the table between DOCTOR and MATTHEW. Animals react to her entrance by scurrying behind the

Doctor's and Matthew's chairs.)

SARAH. Hello, Matthew Mugg. (She leans down and looks at Matthew's basket, turns crossly back to him.) I suppose you've been feeding the animals in the parlor again!

MATTHEW. Well . . . aw, Miss Sarah. They're 'ungry little creatures. I only gave 'em each a bite.

SARAH. Matthew Mugg, if you must feed them, do it outside.

DOCTOR. Now, Sarah. Don't scold Matthew. A few crumbs here and there won't matter.

SARAH. A few crumbs? (She flings her arms out.) This room looks worse than the floor of a barn! (SARAH stops, turns back to DOCTOR.) What happened to Mrs. Mumford? I let her in a few moments ago.

DOCTOR. She left . . . feeling just fine. Her rheumatism had disappeared.

SARAH (starting to exit in a huff). A likely story! (She flings out of the room. All the animals move back into place. DOCTOR pours tea and MATTHEW reaches over and takes a cookie.)

MATTHEW (his mouth full, pointing ULC). What 'appened to your piano -- used to be sittin' right over there?

DOCTOR (pouring tea). I sold it, Matthew. We were getting a little short of funds.

MATTHEW. Now, Doctor, you mustn't do that. I'm not a rich man but I 'ave a little put by. It's yours if you want it.

DOCTOR. Thank you, Matthew. You're a good friend. But we're not destitute yet. (Goes to sideboard and brings small pot back to table. He turns it over and a few coins drop into his hand.) There, you see. We still have a few coins.

MATTHEW (looking at the coins, shaking his head).
Not very much money for all these hungry
animals. (He gets up, tea cup in hand, and
walks around the room peeking into corners
and shelves.) What happened to the white
mice that lived in the piano?

DOCTOR. They're over there in the sideboard --
bottom drawer. Mice have a way of finding a
home wherever they are.

MATTHEW (with his head in the drawer). Well,
bless my soul! There's quite a few more of 'em
since the last time I saw 'em.

DOCTOR. That's the trouble with mice -- they
multiply so fast -- but then, they eat very
little, Matthew.

MATTHEW. They look mighty healthy, too. (He
moves back to the table, picks up his basket
and brings out a long package. He hands it to
DOCTOR.) I brought you a fish for your dinner--
cod it is. You can give the 'eads and tails to
the animals.

DOCTOR. Now, Matthew, you mustn't give away
your produce. That's your living and I can't
have you feeding us.

MATTHEW. Doctor Dolittle! You're my best friend.
And you never charge me for your doctoring.
This is one little way I can pay you back. Please
take it. (He thrusts the package into the Doctor's
hands.)

DOCTOR. Well, thank you, Matthew. It's very kind
of you. I'm sure Sarah will be grateful. We'll
have a feast tonight. (He smells the package.)
Mmmm, right out of the Bristol Channel. I can
smell the sea water. (MATTHEW, basket on
arm, animals around him lovingly, DOCTOR
following him, moves to the exit UR.)

MATTHEW. Good-bye, Doctor. I'll see you in a

couple of days. Think about what I said about being an animal doctor. You'd be much happier -- and richer, too, I'm sure.

DOCTOR. All right, Matthew. I'll think about it. Good-bye. (He closes door, returns to the tea table and puts the package on the tray. He sits at the table, picks up the coins and returns them to the pot. POLYNESIA has moved over to sit on the corner of the table.)

POLYNESIA. Squawk! Squ-a-wk! Be an animal doctor. Be an animal doctor.

DOCTOR (not surprised and patiently). Yes, Polynesia.

JIP. Woof! Woof! (Chases his tail in circle, with glee.)

GUB-GUB. Oink! Oink! (DAB-DAB hustles around to stand near the DOCTOR and makes great show of shaking her tail, flapping her wings and crying.)

DAB-DAB. Quack! Quack! (DOCTOR turns his head from one to the other as they make their own sounds. At this moment, TOO-TOO comes flying across the room.)

TOO-TOO. Whoo! Whoo! (He, too, flaps his wings and seems to be trying to communicate. DOCTOR gets up and walks around, confused by the chatter from the animals, which he senses is different from their usual happy animal noises.)

DOCTOR. Well, now. What's the matter? You're especially restless.

POLYNESIA. Matthew's got sense! Matthew's got sense! Squa-a-wk! Squa-a-wk! Be an animal doctor. (The animals continue their noises and body language but more quietly so that POLYNESIA can get on with her talking to DOCTOR. They gather more closely, waiting eagerly for POLYNESIA to go on. DOCTOR is more and

more confused by their antics.)

DOCTOR (peering at POLYNESIA). You've never talked to me like this before. It was always something I thought I had taught you, like:

"It's raining outside" or "Have a cup of tea."

POLYNESIA. Or: "Polly wants a cracker."

DOCTOR. Yes, that's right.

POLYNESIA. Oh, that chatter. We just do that to please our human friends. But we can talk in two languages -- people's language and bird language.

DOCTOR. My, you don't say. Why haven't you talked in people's language before?

POLYNESIA. I haven't needed to. But now that you're going to be a veterinarian you'll have to learn to talk with the animals.

DOCTOR. Talk with the animals? Why, Polynesia, that's impossible. Animals don't talk. Though I must say, they make themselves pretty clear sometimes.

POLYNESIA. Well, listen to this, Doctor. Ka-ka oi-ee, fee-fee?

DOCTOR. Good gracious, what does that mean?

POLYNESIA. That means: "Is the porridge hot yet?" in bird language.

DOCTOR. And do you think I could learn to talk in bird language and pig language and . . . ?

POLYNESIA. . . . and horse language.

(POLYNESIA spreads her wings out wide.) And every animal language. (DOCTOR gets up and goes among the waiting animals patting them on their heads and generally expressing his pleasure.)

DOCTOR. Do you hear that, my friends? I'm going to be able to talk to all of you. (He does a little hop and skip to the sideboard where he picks up a large pad and pencil, returns to the table and sits down. Animals are alert and more eager than

ever.) Tell me some more, Polynesia. Don't go too fast. I'll write it all down. This is interesting and exciting.

POLYNESIA. Where do you want me to begin?
(POLYNESIA sits on corner of the table. All the other animals are still gathered around, ready to listen to the lesson. Much nodding of heads and smiles of pleasure.)

DOCTOR. Give me the birds' ABC's first -- slowly now. (Suddenly an absolute chatter breaks out among the animals. Nothing coherent -- just jumping up and down and chattering unintelligible phrases. Care must be taken not to give anyone a speech in words that can be understood. Such phrases as: "dobby dunky, wobble-de-do, in the frony mite, siky tookman" -- if all said at once and repeated without trying to match one another -- will come out confusion. Much shaking of heads and tails, twisting bodies and spinning around to suggest the way animals express themselves -- a little shoving will add to the confusion. DOCTOR puts his hands over his ears.) Stop! Stop! I can't hear a word that Polynesia says.

POLYNESIA (jumping down among the animals, making them quiet down). Squ-a-awk!
Squ-a-awk! (This is a real parrot sound.) Stop it! Stop it! How can the Doctor listen to all that chatter and learn anything? (The animals quiet down and all sit again to listen. POLYNESIA goes back, sits down, smooths her ruffled feathers.) Now, where were we, Doctor?

DOCTOR (pencil poised). You were just going to give me the birds' alphabet.

POLYNESIA. Oh, yes. Quee, means A. (Pause.) Chee, means B. (Pause.) And Goo and My, mean C and D. (The animals all jump up and