

# Footprints Without Feet

## (Class X – NCERT)

### Chapter 1: A Triumph of Surgery – James Herriot

#### Detailed Summary (Expanded, Exam-Oriented)

The story "A Triumph of Surgery" is a humorous yet meaningful narrative written by James Herriot, a veterinary surgeon. It revolves around Mrs. Pumphrey, a wealthy and overly affectionate dog owner, and her small dog, Tricki. The chapter highlights the consequences of excessive pampering and the importance of discipline, moderation, and professional wisdom.

Mrs. Pumphrey owns Tricki, a small dog whom she loves excessively. Her love, however, is expressed through material indulgence rather than sensible care. She constantly feeds Tricki rich and unhealthy foods such as cream cakes, chocolates, malt, cod-liver oil, Horlicks, and even wine. She also avoids giving him adequate exercise because she fears he might get tired. As a result, Tricki becomes enormously fat, lethargic, and unhealthy. He loses his energy, stops playing, refuses food, and spends most of his time lying on a rug, panting and listless.

Concerned about Tricki's deteriorating health, Mrs. Pumphrey calls James Herriot. On examining Tricki, Herriot immediately understands that the dog is suffering not from any serious disease, but from overfeeding and lack of exercise. He warns Mrs. Pumphrey that Tricki must be put on a strict diet and exercise routine. However, he realises that Mrs. Pumphrey is incapable of denying her dog anything. Therefore, he decides that the only way to save Tricki is to remove him from her care.

Herriot takes Tricki to his surgery, telling Mrs. Pumphrey that the dog needs special treatment. Mrs. Pumphrey is deeply distressed and believes that Tricki is seriously ill. She sends eggs, wine, and brandy for his "recovery," unaware that these luxuries are exactly what caused his illness in the first place.

At the surgery, Tricki is not given any medicine. Instead, Herriot puts him on a strict diet, initially starving him for two days. Tricki is allowed to mingle with other dogs, which encourages him to exercise naturally. Gradually, Tricki regains his appetite, energy, and enthusiasm. He starts running, playing, and competing with other dogs for food. Within a fortnight, Tricki is transformed into a healthy and active dog.

When Mrs. Pumphrey comes to take Tricki back, she is astonished to see his recovery. She believes it to be a medical miracle and calls it "a triumph of surgery." Herriot, however, knows that the real cure was discipline, exercise, and the absence of excessive pampering. The story ends humorously, exposing the irony between perception and reality.

## Central Themes

### 1. Excessive Love and Its Harmful Effects

The story shows that excessive affection, when expressed through indulgence and lack of discipline, can be harmful. Mrs. Pumphrey's love for Tricki nearly kills him.

### 2. Importance of Discipline and Moderation

Tricki's recovery proves that discipline, routine, and moderation are essential for health—whether for animals or humans.

### 3. Appearance vs Reality

Mrs. Pumphrey believes Tricki's cure is a miracle of surgery, while in reality, no medical treatment was involved. This contrast creates humour and conveys a deeper message.

### 4. Role of Professional Wisdom

Herriot represents practical intelligence and professional ethics. He understands the real problem and applies a simple but effective solution.

### 5. Satire on Upper-Class Lifestyle

The story subtly mocks the wealthy class that equates care with luxury and excess rather than responsibility.

## Character Sketches

### 1. Mrs. Pumphrey

Mrs. Pumphrey is a rich, emotional, and overprotective woman. She adores her dog and spares no expense in pampering him. However, she lacks practical wisdom and common sense. Her actions are driven by sentiment rather than logic. She represents misplaced affection and blind love. Despite her flaws, she is kind-hearted and genuinely concerned about Tricki's wellbeing.

### 2. Tricki

Tricki is a small dog who becomes a victim of overindulgence. Initially, he is obese, lazy, and unhealthy. Under proper care, he transforms into an energetic and playful dog. Tricki symbolises how environment and discipline shape behaviour and health.

### 3. James Herriot (Narrator)

James Herriot is a practical, intelligent, and compassionate veterinary surgeon. He understands animal psychology and health better than emotional owners. His calm confidence, humour, and professional ethics make him an ideal problem-solver. He represents rational thinking and experience.

## Important Vocabulary (With Meanings)

- **Listless** – lacking energy or enthusiasm
- **Lethargy** – extreme tiredness or lack of energy

- **Pamper** – to indulge with excessive care or luxury
- **Convalescence** – period of recovery after illness
- **Regimen** – a planned course of diet or exercise
- **Indignant** – feeling anger at unfair treatment
- **Exuberance** – lively energy and excitement
- **Affectionate** – showing love or care
- **Stout** – fat or overweight
- **Triumph** – a great success or victory

### Exam-Ready Key Points

- Tricky's illness was caused by overfeeding, not disease
- No medicine was used in his treatment
- Exercise and controlled diet cured Tricky
- The title is ironic and humorous
- The story teaches moderation and responsibility