Chapter 18: A Triumph of Surgery

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Exercise 18.1 — Read and Find Out (Page 1)

Q1 Why is Mrs Pumphrey worried about Tricki?

SOLUTION

Mrs Pumphrey is worried because Tricki has become listless and seems to have no energy.

She fears he is suffering from malnutrition, and she is anxious about his poor condition. In reality, Tricki has become "hugely fat, like a bloated sausage with a leg at each corner", with bloodshot, rheumy eyes and his tongue lolling from his jaws.

His unhealthy state is the result of overfeeding and lack of exercise, which worries his loving mistress.

Answer: She is worried because Tricki is listless, has no energy, and she thinks he is suffering from malnutrition.

Q2 What does she do to help him? Is she wise in this?

SOLUTION

To help Tricki, Mrs Pumphrey gives him extra food between meals — "some malt and cod-liver oil and a bowl of Horlicks at night to make him sleep" — and she continues to feed him cream cakes and chocolates because she cannot bear to refuse him.

No, she is not wise. Tricki's problem is overfeeding and lack of exercise, so giving him even more rich food makes his condition worse.

Instead of following Mr Herriot's advice to cut down his food and give him more exercise, she overindulges him out of misplaced love.

Answer: She overfeeds him with extras like malt, cod-liver oil, Horlicks and sweets — which is not wise, as overfeeding is the real cause of his illness.

Q3 Who does 'I' refer to in this story?

SOLUTION

'I' refers to Mr James Herriot, the narrator of the story.

He is the veterinary surgeon whom Mrs Pumphrey consults about Tricki. He treats the dog by taking him to his surgery and curing him through a strict regime of no rich food and plenty of exercise.

Answer: 'I' refers to Mr James Herriot, the veterinary surgeon who narrates the story.

Exercise 18.2 — Read and Find Out (Page 3)

Q1 Is the narrator as rich as Tricki's mistress?

SOLUTION

No, the narrator is not as rich as Tricki's mistress.

Mrs Pumphrey is very wealthy — she owns "about thirty feet of gleaming black metal" (a large car) with a chauffeur, keeps a staff of maids and a gardener, and has a whole wardrobe of coats for her dog.

The narrator, Mr Herriot, is a modest veterinary surgeon. He and his partners are so delighted by the fresh eggs, wine and brandy Mrs Pumphrey sends that these become special luxuries for them, showing they are not rich.

Answer: No, the narrator is a modest vet, not nearly as rich as the wealthy Mrs Pumphrey.

Q2 How does he treat the dog?

SOLUTION

He treats Tricki with firmness and good sense rather than medicine.

For the first two days he gives Tricki no food but plenty of water. He lets the dog run about and play with the other dogs, join in their scrimmages and hunt rats at night.

Tricki gets an extra bowl at feeding time and has to fight like a tiger for his share. Through this strict diet and plenty of exercise — with "no medicinal treatment of any kind" — Tricki is cured and becomes a lithe, hard-muscled animal.

Answer: He gives Tricki no medicine — only a strict diet at first and plenty of exercise with the other dogs, which cures him.

Q3 Why is he tempted to keep Tricki on as a permanent guest?

SOLUTION

He is tempted to keep Tricki because of the constant supply of good food and drink that Mrs Pumphrey sends to build up the dog's strength.

She sends fresh eggs (two dozen at a time), bottles of wine "to enrich Tricki's blood", and finally brandy to "put a final edge on Tricki's constitution".

The narrator and his partners enjoy these luxuries greatly — the days become "days of deep content", starting with an extra egg, sustained by midday wine and finishing with brandy round the fire. That is why keeping Tricki on "was a temptation".

Answer: Because Mrs Pumphrey keeps sending eggs, wine and brandy for Tricki, which the narrator and his partners enjoy as luxuries.

Q4 Why does Mrs Pumphrey think the dog's recovery is "a triumph of surgery"?

SOLUTION

Mrs Pumphrey believes some remarkable surgery has saved Tricki because she was told he was very ill and needed to be hospitalised.

She does not know that no operation or medicine was involved — Tricki was cured simply by a proper diet and plenty of exercise.

When she sees him transformed into a lithe, healthy dog leaping into her lap, she is overwhelmed and, believing the vet's skill worked wonders, exclaims, "how can I ever thank you? This is a triumph of surgery!"

Answer: Because she wrongly believes the vet's medical skill cured her very ill dog, unaware that only diet and exercise were used.

Exercise 18.3 — Think about it

Q1 What kind of a person do you think the narrator, a veterinary surgeon, is? Would you say he is tactful as well as full of common sense?

SOLUTION

The narrator is a sensible, kind and practical veterinary surgeon who genuinely cares for animals.

He is tactful. He does not directly blame or scold Mrs Pumphrey; instead he gently advises her to cut down Tricki's food and give more exercise, and later takes the dog away firmly but without hurting her feelings. He even avoids her anxious questions about cushions and coats and reassures her that Tricki is "out of danger and convalescing rapidly".

He is full of common sense. He correctly diagnoses that Tricki's only fault is greed and that overfeeding is the cause. He cures the dog with a simple, sensible remedy — a strict diet and exercise — using no medicine at all.

So yes, he is both tactful and full of common sense.

Answer: He is a kind, sensible vet who is both tactful with Mrs Pumphrey and full of common sense in curing Tricki with diet and exercise.

Q2 Do you think Tricki was happy to go home? What do you think will happen now?

SOLUTION

Tricki did seem happy to see Mrs Pumphrey again — when he saw his mistress he "took off from my arms in a tremendous leap and sailed into Mrs Pumphrey's lap", licking her face and barking with excitement.

However, he had also thoroughly enjoyed his time at the surgery, running with the other dogs, and he was surely leaving behind that carefree life.

As for what will happen now: Mrs Pumphrey is likely to pamper and overfeed him again out of love, so Tricki may soon become fat and ill once more and end up back at the surgery — unless she has learned her lesson.

Answer: He was happy to see his mistress, but Mrs Pumphrey will probably pamper and overfeed him again, so he may fall ill once more.

Q3 Do you think this is a real-life episode, or mere fiction? Or is it a mixture of both?

SOLUTION

It appears to be a mixture of both real life and fiction.

James Herriot was a real veterinary surgeon who wrote stories based on his own experiences with animals and their owners, so the events feel authentic and believable — the pampered dog, the anxious rich mistress, and the simple cure could easily happen in real life.

At the same time, the humorous exaggeration — such as the flood of eggs, wine and brandy and Mrs Pumphrey's dramatic behaviour — suggests the author has added fictional colour for entertainment.

So it is best described as a real-life episode enriched with fictional touches.

Answer: It seems to be a mixture of both — based on the author's real experiences as a vet but embellished with humorous, fictional exaggeration.