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Vets Might Fly
James Herriot
DH Audio
978-0-88646-562-9
(March 31, 2000)

The late James Herriot captured the world's attention with his quick, self-deprecating wit in his books about life as a country vet in the Yorkshire dales of England. One of his stories in this collection starts with the voice of Christopher Timothy, the actor who portrayed Herriot in the television series All Creatures Great and Small, calmly talking about how traveling the steep hills of the dales wouldn't have been such a fright if he'd only had brakes on his car.

Timothy expertly leads the listener through a hodgepodge of memories, beginning with service in the British military during World War II and adroitly returning to Herriot's beloved dales as an escape from wartime bleakness. His voice conjures Herriot's senior partner Siegfried to life as Siegfried determinedly lectures the young vet on the "proper" way to handle clients, gaseous bulls, and failed brakes. The comical counterpoint of Siegfried's brother Tristan is not as evident throughout these stories, but Tristan makes a memorable appearance for several weeks as he cooks "bangers and mash" (sausage and potatoes) for every meal while the housekeeper is away. He also blows up the kitchen when he tries to light the stove using a hefty dose of highly flammable ether as an accelerant.

Meanwhile, Herriot goes about his rounds, rescuing a blind man's guide dog from a malicious dose of strychnine poisoning after losing seven other dogs to the still unknown assailant, crashing the brakeless car into a retaining wall to avoid a flock of sheep crossing the road, staring in shock at the tatters of his mackintosh after a draft horse kicks and misses Herriot by a hair. He relates the heartwarming story of a club of local dalesmen who pitch in to pay for an operation on an old sheep dog's damaged eyes which his elderly owner can't afford, and through all of his stories runs a thread of love and concern for the welfare of his patients that can't be faked.

Despite breaks between stories that are too short to denote a proper change of story, Timothy's reading captures the various accents of the Yorkshire region and Herriot's occasional inability to understand exactly what his clients say in a manner equally as captivating as the original books.

Melanie C. Duncan