

Dash and Victoria Find True Love

Vicki Tashman

Susan Krawitz, Editor

Wendy All, Illustrator

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Dash and Victoria Find True Love is a charming early reader that brings warmth to common fears and jealousies through the historical story of a beloved queen and her cherished dog.

Vicki Tashman's historical chapter book *Dash and Victoria Find True Love* fuses British royal history with a love for pets.

The text introduces young readers to Queen Victoria and her spaniel, Dash, who is worried about his place in the household. He fears competition from Lory, a parrot, and Islay, a terrier. When Prince Albert comes courting and invites the queen out for a horse ride, Dash's anxiety increases. Through mild hardship, though, he learns to appreciate the prince.

The clear conflict parallels welcoming new siblings and similar situations that involve sharing a loved one's time, and the story unfolds at a gentle pace. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert are personable leads, and their conversations are accessible. Their concern for Dash is proportionate. A lesson on accepting that it's possible to care for more than one person—and animal—at a time is elevated by the historical framework.

The book's design evokes the opulence of the setting. It features floral decorations around chapter numbers and full-bleed spreads in jewel tones that amplify the velvety, cozy interiors. Wendy All's illustrations portray the queen wearing gowns and the prince as a courteous suitor. Dash's outdoor scenes stand out for their autumnal palette and expressiveness. Back matter includes piquing information about Queen Victoria's story.

Asides to the text are denoted by asterisks and are distracting. Some are too explanatory, pronouncing meaning that could be discerned from the text, as with a comment that “wishes’ means ‘wants’.” Others impart extra information—noting, for example, that British English renders certain words differently. These tidbits are not as vital to the main plot as those that round out historical characters' backgrounds, like that of the Baroness Lehzen, or that contextualize places like Coburg, where Prince Albert is from.

A light, romantic backdrop risks painting Queen Victoria into a fairy tale corner, but biographical details, including her interest in drawing, highlight her as active and creative. One of the queen's real drawings is reproduced near the end alongside an 1833 painting by Sir George Hayter of the young queen and Dash; it enriches the story and links it to art history.

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KAREN RIGBY (June 12, 2019)

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