



When Jack Meets Jill: A Backstory to the Nursery Rhyme

Anthony Shang

Alejandra Rafalovich, Illustrator

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The classic nursery rhyme gets a twenty-first-century makeover as Jack and Jill work together to save the day.

Parents, teachers, and kids have often repeated the well-known verse, “Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water,” but how exactly did the two end up there? Author and parent Anthony Shang wrote *When Jack Meets Jill: A Backstory to the Nursery Rhyme* to offer some context. The end result, supplemented by illustrations by Alejandra Rafalovich, is a technology-heavy, good-versus-evil tale.

Shang’s story begins with the residents of Happyville, who are, as one might expect, the happiest in the world ... that is, until evil Mayor Rich, a materialistic dictator, takes over. As his first order of business, he calls a town meeting to make sure there will be “no smiles or jokes or friendly chit-chats” and no “kind deeds.” After a young girl yells in protest, Mayor Rich punishes her father by laying claim to the majority of his farm’s crop.

As there’s no electricity or running water on the now-destitute farm, the farmer’s son Jack must fetch water. One day, pails in hand, he encounters the mayor’s daughter, Jill, as she tries to avoid her evil father. As Shang writes, “Rather than giving Jill the warmth of a loving parent, Mayor Rich chose to show his affection by buying things non-stop for her.” Shang repeatedly uses the relationship to remind readers that money can’t buy love.

Friendship slowly buds between Jack and Jill, who work together to save the town from Mayor Rich with the help of Jill’s Nanny Dob—Shang’s nod to the Dame Dob character in the classic nursery rhyme. Shang also uses the nursery rhyme’s main action—fetching pails of water—as the climax of the book as Jack battles the Mayor’s evil cohorts.

Despite these familiar elements, *When Jack Meets Jill* is more a modernized retelling of Jack and Jill rather than its backstory. The timeline is confused, as the characters have an awareness of the nursery rhyme from the start; the first time they meet, Jack says, “I’m Jack. Guess that makes us a nursery rhyme.” Also, no falling or breaking of crowns by Jack or tumbling after of Jill occurs in the book.

Shang further modernizes the story by making ample references to gadgets and technology from Wi-Fi, apps, and tablets to specific devices like iPads.

Rafalovich’s illustrations, which appear on about every other page, sufficiently portray key events, but would stand out more if they were rendered in color.

Young readers will enjoy seeing classic characters like Jack and Jill in an updated setting and working well together to overcome obstacles.

AMANDA MCCORQUODALE (October 15, 2014)

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