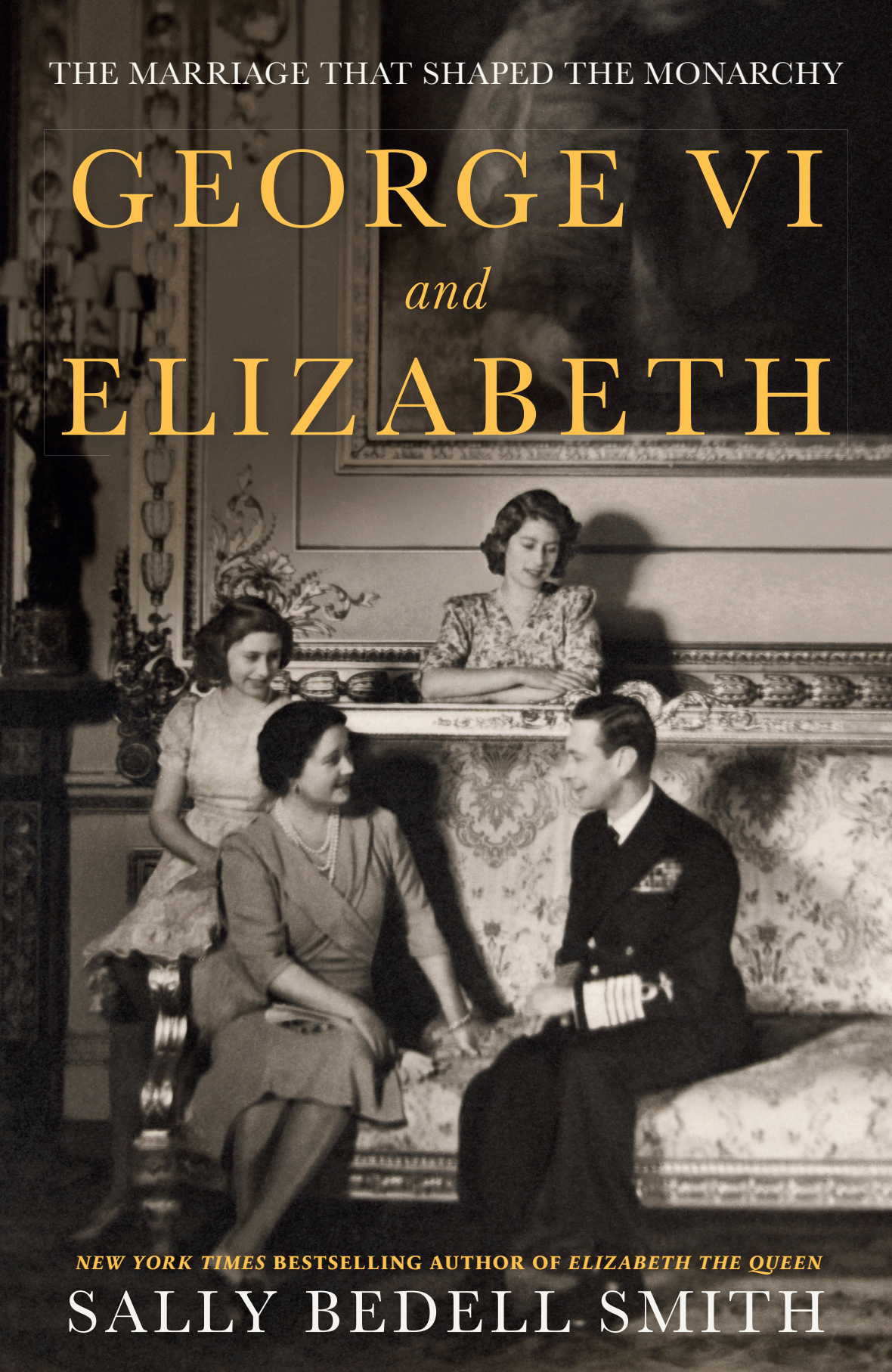
THE MARRIAGE THAT SHAPED THE MONARCHY

GEORGE VI *and* ELIZABETH



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *ELIZABETH THE QUEEN*

SALLY BEDELL SMITH

GEORGE VI *and* ELIZABETH

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By Sally Bedell Smith

George VI and Elizabeth

Prince Charles

Elizabeth the Queen

For Love of Politics

Grace and Power

Diana in Search of Herself

Reflected Glory

In All His Glory

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King George VI and Queen Elizabeth with Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret in coronation robes and crowns.

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GEORGE VI *and* ELIZABETH



The Marriage That Shaped the Monarchy

SALLY BEDELL SMITH

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Penguin Random House UK

First published in the United States of America by Random House,
an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC 2023
First published in Great Britain by Penguin Michael Joseph 2023
001

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Book design by Susan Turner
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

HARDBACK ISBN: 978–0–241–63821–7
TRADE PAPERBACK ISBN: 978–0–241–63822–4

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A NOTE ON ROYAL NAMES



Names in the royal family are inconsistent and often puzzling, partly due to habitual nicknaming, but more because of the inevitable changes that come with the progression of titles, especially among those first in line to the throne.

For the purposes of this book, King George VI will be variously known as Prince Albert (his given name); Albert; Bertie, his nickname in the family throughout his life; the Duke of York—the title his father gave him in 1920; George VI, the name he chose from among his four Christian names when he ascended the throne in 1936; and the King.

Queen Elizabeth will be referred to as Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon; Elizabeth; the Duchess of York—her title on marrying Albert, the Duke of York, in 1923; Queen Elizabeth, the title she took on her husband's accession in 1936; the Queen; and the Queen Mother after the death of her husband in 1952.

Princess Elizabeth, the future Queen Elizabeth II, will be referred to as Princess Elizabeth, her name from birth; Lilibet, the nickname from childhood she gave herself; Queen Elizabeth II on taking the throne in February 1952; and the Queen.

Princess Margaret, the younger daughter of George VI and Queen Elizabeth, will be called Princess Margaret, her birth name, and Margaret.

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King George V will be called first Prince George, then George V.

Queen Mary will be referred to initially as Princess May, as she was known from the time of her birth, and Queen Mary after her husband, George V, took the throne in 1910.

King Edward VIII, the older brother of King George VI, will be called Prince Edward or Edward, as well as David, his name within the family; the Prince of Wales—his title from 1910 until he became king in January 1936 on the death of George V; and the Duke of Windsor—the title his brother gave him after the abdication in December 1936.

Wallis Warfield Simpson, the Duke of Windsor's wife, will be called Mrs. Simpson, Wallis, and the Duchess of Windsor following her marriage to the duke in 1937.

Prince Henry, a younger brother of George VI, will be called Henry rather than Harry, his family nickname (to avoid confusion with his sister Mary's husband, also nicknamed Harry), and the Duke of Gloucester, the title given him in 1928 by his father, George V.

Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, will be called the Duchess of Gloucester and Alice. (It was not until the death of her husband in 1974 that Queen Elizabeth II designated her aunt as a princess.)

Prince George, another younger brother of George VI, will be called Prince George, but also Georgie, his family nickname; he will also be referred to as the Duke of Kent, the title given him by King George V in 1934.

Princess Marina, the wife of Prince George, will be called Princess Marina, the Duchess of Kent, and Marina.

Princess Mary, the younger sister of George VI, will be called Princess Mary.

Henry Lascelles, the sixth Earl of Harewood (pronounced "Hahrwood"), Princess Mary's husband, will be called Harry Lascelles and later Harry Harewood, when he inherited the earldom in 1929 on his father's death.

Prince John, the youngest brother of George VI, will be called

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Prince John and Johnnie, as he was known in the family until his death at age thirteen in 1919 from a major epileptic seizure.

Other historical and collateral members of the royal family will be known by their given titles: for example, King Edward VII or Edward VII and Queen Alexandra or Alexandra, the grandparents of King George VI.

In the interests of simplicity, the terms His or Her Royal Highness and His or Her Majesty will be avoided except in specific circumstances or when mentioned in a direct quotation.

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"They were more resilient and strong-minded than they appeared to be."



King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, April 26, 1948.

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PROLOGUE



It is a big claim to say that a single royal couple saved the centuries-old British monarchy. But King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, later known as the Queen Mother (or "Queen Mum" in affectionate slang), did exactly that, by an accident of history and through personal qualities that earned the admiration and support of the British public. They imparted their values and sense of duty to their daughter Elizabeth, who succeeded her father in 1952. As Queen Elizabeth II, she became the longest-reigning monarch in British history and arguably the most popular.

The accident of history was the constitutional crisis provoked by George VI's older brother, King Edward VIII, who abdicated in 1936 because of religious, official, and popular opposition to his intended marriage to the American socialite Wallis Simpson. She had already divorced one husband and was divorcing her second. Because the monarch is the nominal head of the Church of England, which forbade divorced people to remarry in the church, she was considered an untenable choice to be queen. When Edward defied the advice of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin and insisted on Queen Wallis,

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Baldwin and his cabinet threatened to resign en masse. In the end, Edward VIII chose Mrs. Simpson over the Crown.

Shocked by his older brother's decision, George VI nevertheless embraced his destiny. He transformed himself into an exceptional leader, through grit and determination. During his fifteen-year reign, his wife, Queen Elizabeth, was at his side every step of the way, providing support, encouragement, and wise counsel.

Their remarkable partnership lasted until George VI's death at age fifty-six. Elizabeth was just fifty-one and would live to be nearly 102. Her fifty years as a widow—the merry Queen Mum beloved by the British people and throughout the world—have overshadowed the nearly three decades of a successful and happy marriage that is the scope of this book. The British actor Colin Firth said he had no idea that the Queen Mother had been George VI's wife until he made the Oscar-winning film *The King's Speech,* about the monarch's struggle to overcome a crippling stammer.

Crucial to the marriage of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth were the qualities of duty and service they exemplified, especially during Britain's ordeal in World War II. From the earliest days of the war, Adolf Hitler targeted the King and Queen. His bombers hit Buckingham Palace nine times. On one occasion they nearly succeeded in killing the monarch and his queen consort.

As I began my research into the lives of George and Elizabeth, I soon realized that her life was more deeply entwined with that of the King than is generally known. Not only is theirs a touching love story—with surprising dramatic twists—it is a story of inspiration in the most challenging circumstances: repeated personal tragedies and ailments, the ravages of two world wars, and a terminal illness. It's equally a story of resilience and shared joy.

With the centenary of the marriage of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth being celebrated in 2023, it seems a good time to reflect on who they were, what accounted for their strong marriage, and how they made a difference in the world. How did he grow into his job? How did this inherently withdrawn man gain confidence in his judg-

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ments and his interactions with others? How did she mature from a fundamentally unserious aristocrat into a public-spirited source of strength for her husband, her family, and her nation? How did she balance her work as consort with her role as a mother?

Their indelible legacy was their daughter Queen Elizabeth II, who would be widely admired not only for her unflagging service but also for her wisdom and her modesty. Their second daughter, Margaret, caused heartache for both her mother and her sister, starting in the years after her father's death. Insecure and spoiled, she never found an appropriate role despite her many advantages.

With the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, I was able to spend three months in the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle and several days at Glamis Castle, the ancestral home of her mother's Bowes Lyon family—the earldom of Strathmore. The extent of this access was noteworthy for someone who was not designated an official biographer.

Reaching the archives at Windsor posed a challenge each day. It required climbing with a backpack up a staircase of more than one hundred medieval stone steps—the equivalent of ten stories—with my lunch in tow so I wouldn't have to climb them again. The reward was a research room atop the Round Tower that is cozy, hushed, and efficient. Getting to Glamis (pronounced Glahms) involved a flight from London to Edinburgh, a ninety-minute drive, and a comparable climb to the top of a tower. This aerie was cluttered and minimally heated, but it offered an illuminating trove of letters and other documents, mostly handwritten.

My research also included reminiscences from elderly friends and family who shared helpful insights. But King George VI and Queen Elizabeth revealed themselves most fully in their diaries and letters. Elizabeth's correspondence was vivid and often entertaining, but thoughtful—and even poignant—when the moment demanded. Her adult diaries, kept intermittently during her twenties, were less mature than her husband's detailed chronicle from 1939 to 1947, but similarly telling.

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The story that unfolded in leather-bound books and on monogram-

engraved writing paper showed their strengths as well as their frailties, their complicated family dynamics, and the crosscurrents of intrigue and secrets within the royal court. Amid the wartime terrors of air raids and invasion threats came unexpected pleasures: shooting weekends, movies, plays, golf, bicycle and horse riding, and dances. These papers also revealed the perspective of the King and Queen on their relationship with Winston Churchill, who became prime minister in May 1940. Their dealings encompassed lunches, dinners, and other occasions that went far beyond the typical weekly formal audiences of a monarch and the first minister.

Supplementing these documents, additional previously unexplored archives shed light on the royal couple's relationships with an array of political and military leaders, and show how others saw them working as a mutually supportive duo. George VI's and Elizabeth's "special relationship" with key Americans, from President Franklin D. Roosevelt on down, emerges from these documents in surprising ways, revealing both admiration and annoyance.

The British royal family is by definition insular and wrapped in mythology, much of it self-created. It wasn't until the late twentieth century that the press dropped its deference, and the tabloids filled their pages with a mixture of fact and speculation. In the twenty-first century, the Netflix series *The Crown* upped the ante by presenting a beautifully produced but largely fictitious account of the monarchy that most viewers believed to be factual. It was a long leap from the time of George VI and Queen Elizabeth, when Buckingham Palace tightly managed all information about the royal family.

The men in control were the top-echelon advisers to the King and Queen, the "courtiers." Aristocratic and well-educated, they held military rank, and many fought heroically in the First World War. They had impressive connections throughout British society and in Parliament and at Whitehall. They had the inside track, and through their letters and diaries, combined with those of royal family members, a modern biographer can better understand the story of George VI and Elizabeth and their family.

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First among these courtiers was Sir Alan Lascelles, an erudite and commanding figure who worked for the royal family for twenty-seven years. During eighteen of those years, he served as private secretary to King George V, King Edward VIII, King George VI, and Queen Elizabeth II. He was the most influential of royal insiders—and the most problematic.

When he was a boy, his father likened his large head and skinny body to "Tommy Tadpole." Everyone thereafter called him "Tommy" except Winston Churchill, who always referred to him as Alan. Over the decades, Tommy Lascelles melded into the blur of the "grey men" (as Diana, Princess of Wales, derisively called them) in the royal court. But his razor-sharp depiction by the actor Pip Torrens in *The Crown* made him an unforgettable figure—something of a twenty-first-century star with his intense dark eyes, basso profundo voice, bristling mustache, punctilious manner, and severe opinions. His words may have been invented for the television show, but his personality was true to life.

Lascelles embodied rectitude and stern moral judgment. He scrupulously kept government and royal secrets, but behind his puritanical demeanor he hid the biggest secret of all: a clandestine life concealed from the royal family he served. Tommy was bisexual, a fact known only to a select few close friends. This private side of Lascelles is not raised casually, but rather because it is germane to a more nuanced understanding of his role as a trusted counselor and confidant to both George VI and Elizabeth as well as their nemesis, the Duke of Windsor.

During Tommy's days in Buckingham Palace, male homosexuality was a crime in Britain. Prominent people such as the actor John Gielgud and the mathematician and wartime code breaker Alan Turing were prosecuted for being gay. For a high-level courtier like Alan Lascelles, the potential for scandal or blackmail was real.

Equally important was his unique position as the guiding force behind the official biographies of King George VI and of his parents, King George V and Queen Mary, written by John Wheeler-Bennett,

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Harold Nicolson, and James Pope-Hennessy, respectively. Published in the 1950s, these books shaped the public perception of two monarchs and a queen consort.

Working closely with all three biographers, Tommy nudged angles to pursue, shared indiscreet views and vignettes, applied his "sharpest blue-pencil" to their words, and smoothed the way with royal family members who accepted his judgment without question and gave their approval. He deftly coaxed the authors to obfuscate when he deemed necessary; at other times he loosened traditional restraints and permitted language close to mockery. His influence was as impressive as it had been for his sixteen years as a senior adviser to King George VI. What complicated Tommy's role was that two of the royal biographers, Harold Nicolson and James Pope-Hennessy, were at various times his lovers.

George VI and Elizabeth were each tested in their formative years. Her life as the second youngest of the Earl and Countess of Strathmore's ten children has been portrayed as sunlit and carefree—having the run of beautiful estates, playing games, singing, and dancing reels. Glamis Castle in Scotland had the magical aura of Brigadoon. Until 1929, the castle was illuminated only by candles and gas lighting.

In many ways it was an idyllic upbringing, devoid of stuffiness and cushioned by wealth, but Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon and her family stoically endured great suffering, too. Her parents' firstborn, a daughter named Violet Hyacinth, died of diphtheria at age eleven, seven years before the birth of Elizabeth in 1900. When Elizabeth was eleven, an older brother named Alec died from a brain tumor. He was just twenty-four.

During World War I, Elizabeth lost her brother Fergus, who died at age twenty-six at the Battle of Loos in 1915. Two other brothers, Patrick and Michael, were damaged psychologically in the trenches. Michael went missing in 1917 and was feared dead. After three weeks of agonizing, the family learned he was alive but imprisoned by the

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Germans. He finally came home in early 1919, two months after the armistice. Although he maintained a veneer of bonhomie, his wartime traumas permanently scarred him. Yet another brother, Jock, was wounded and had a finger amputated.

Both Glamis and the family's home at St. Paul's Walden Bury in Hertfordshire, some thirty miles from London, served as convalescent hospitals for wounded soldiers throughout the war. Day after day at Glamis, Elizabeth and her mother comforted men with severe mental and physical injuries (crushed chests, shattered spines, and punctured lungs, among them). The teenager showed compassion and understanding, amplified by unrelenting cheerfulness—qualities that would help buoy her future husband. She also learned to avert her eyes from trouble, and to bury gloomy thoughts beneath her effervescent exterior.

Elizabeth's world revolved around her parents and her siblings. Her letters to "my darling sweetest Mother" overflowed with adoration and solicitude, often masking anxiety over illnesses and surgeries that kept her mother bedridden for weeks on end. Elizabeth saw her as "an angel of goodness and fun."

When she was well, Lady Strathmore presided at Glamis as a sparkling chatelaine who played Scottish ballads on the piano after dinner, and instilled a deep Christian faith in her children. She also taught Elizabeth to favor the bright side of life. "Now darling, you must look at these two houses," she said, pointing to an ugly one and a beautiful one. "This is the beautiful one, you see, and bypass the ugly one."

Elizabeth's father, Lord Strathmore, was more distant—and decidedly eccentric. He thought eggs were poisonous, ate plum pudding every day for lunch, and diluted his wine with water. He was known for quoting at length from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Marked by formality and severe emotional restraint, the childhood of King George VI was 180 degrees removed from that of Elizabeth, but no less touched by adversity. Born as Prince Albert in 1895 during the waning days of the Victorian era, he was the second son and second child of Prince George and Princess May—the future King George

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V and Queen Mary. He seldom saw his formidable great-grandmother Queen Victoria, who died in 1901 when he was five. Despite his tender age, he was pressed into solemn duty, joining the mourners on a frigid February day for his "Gangan's" funeral at St. George's Chapel in Windsor Castle, and burial at nearby Frogmore.

His father, King George V, dominated everything and everyone, with his demands for proper comportment and his sharp criticisms, brusque manner, and hair-trigger temper. When he wasn't shooting pheasant, duck, or partridge, he retreated to his small and dark corner library on the ground floor of York Cottage, the royal family's home on the Sandringham estate in Norfolk for thirty-three years. There he would read his official papers and work on his vast stamp collection. A summons to the library invariably meant a tongue-lashing.

Queen Mary was inherently shy, yet spirited in her own way. But she lived to obey her husband, and above all to revere him, suppressing emotion and maintaining a starchy façade. She could defend her children from her husband's barbs and rebukes only up to a point. George and Mary were tenderly dependent, and they loved their children. But they felt most comfortable expressing those feelings in writing.

As the "spare" to Prince Edward, the eldest son and heir, young Albert (known as "Bertie" among family and friends) was diffident and often ill. Subjected to ceaseless comparisons with his cosseted older brother (who went by "David" within the family), Albert lacked confidence and was prone to dark moods as well as angry eruptions.

Worst of all, this sensitive boy developed a stutter around the age of eight. "Get it out!" his father demanded, making the stammer worse. Albert often withdrew into silence, which allowed him to observe and absorb. He noticed more than anyone realized, and he became a good listener—traits that would serve him well as king.

That he would become king was something that neither Bertie nor his family imagined. He never aspired to be monarch, nor was he groomed for the role. When it was thrust upon him, he wept on his mother's shoulder.

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Prince Albert fell in love with Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon when they first danced at the Royal Air Force Ball in the Ritz hotel on July 8, 1920. She was vivacious and pretty, the "it girl" of her aristocratic set. She had already rebuffed proposals of marriage, some of them rash, some more serious. Albert joined the queue. That September, he invited himself to Glamis for a boisterous weekend with Elizabeth and her friends. He was drawn as much to her family as he was to her, exhilarated by their informality and open affection.

For more than two years, Albert courted Elizabeth. She turned down his marriage proposals twice, kindly offering instead to be "good friends." It took the intervention of nearly a half dozen people to embolden him to try a third time.

The thought that he would one day become king never occurred to Elizabeth and certainly didn't affect how she regarded Bertie as a prospective husband. Whatever their personal chemistry, the best she could expect was life as a hardworking member of the royal family, dutifully carrying out countless public engagements that required strong legs and a constant smile.

After numerous maneuvers by friends and family members, including the timely removal of a rival to a job in America, Elizabeth accepted Bertie's hand in January 1923. They were married four months later, to the immense pleasure of both families and their many friends, and she came to love him unreservedly. "Such a sweet little couple and so fond of one another," Duff Cooper, a diplomat and politician, wrote to his wife, Lady Diana. He had watched them at the theater "having private jokes . . . standing together in a dark corner of the passage talking happily."

Her mischievous and teasing manner was infectious. She loved to laugh, and her high spirits bubbled through her letters to family and friends, which she sprinkled with expressions like "tinkety-tonk" and "what ho" from P. G. Wodehouse, one of her favorite authors. "I write to the accompaniment of the squeaking of rats, melodious and

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soothing to a degree," she told her brother Jock from St. Paul's Walden Bury, "and the patter of their little feet in the walls calm my troubled brain—the little darlings. Bless them."

Albert was as timid as Elizabeth was exuberant, as awkward and doubting as she was effortlessly confident, as formal as she was spontaneous and relaxed. Yet they turned out to be ideally matched. They both had what the British call "bottom": integrity, honesty, and loyalty, bound up in an ingrained sense of duty.

Elizabeth's parents, the Earl and Countess of Strathmore, may have been technically "commoners," a category that included anyone not from a European royal family, but they lived near the pinnacle of the British aristocracy just below the monarchy: the hierarchy, in descending order, of dukes and duchesses, marquesses and marchionesses, earls and countesses, viscounts and viscountesses, and barons and baronesses. The Strathmores' traditions and trappings—the shooting parties, elegant entertaining with liveried servants, even bagpipers circling the table after dinner at Glamis—matched those of the royal family. Elizabeth easily adjusted to the constraints of the court, blending into it rather than being grafted onto it. Decades later, Princess Margaret confided to a friend that having come "from a home where nobody quarreled," her mother "was appalled by the family storms that swept over York Cottage—and did much to relieve the tension of those cramped rooms."

Elizabeth's gentle and encouraging manner helped soothe Albert's temper and allay his frustrations. It was at her urging that he enlisted Lionel Logue, the Australian speech therapist who raised his self-esteem and tamed his stammer. Twenty-five years on, in a letter urging her older daughter to make the most of married life on the island of Malta with Prince Philip, Elizabeth wrote: "Papa & I were so lucky, because we have tried so many different ways of life—We did night club life madly for a few years, but also mixed with dinners & country house visits, & big game shooting in Africa, & visits to Paris & Oslo & Belgrade & Rome and Brussels & Australia and MALTA, and out of the welter, one gradually found one's feet & head. You are so young, & you are also 'finding out.'"

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Albert and Elizabeth were—in different ways—more resilient and strong-minded than they appeared to be. When dealing with her husband's adversaries, Elizabeth could be steely: "a marshmallow made on a welding machine," in the words of photographer Cecil Beaton.

Toughness was essential in dealing with Albert's bête noire, the pampered and careless Edward, Prince of Wales. The two brothers had enjoyed a reasonably congenial relationship growing up and had socialized during the fizzy 1920s. Elizabeth initially took pleasure in Edward's company and wrote him breezy and affectionate letters. But his carousing and womanizing, and his deficiencies of character—selfishness, narcissism, duplicity, and disloyalty among them—pulled Albert and Elizabeth away from him.

The Prince of Wales knew how to turn on the charm and carry out his duties. Behind the smiles, he was bored and bitter about his fate, emotionally stunted and self-absorbed. In letters to his married lover Freda Dudley Ward he poured out his self-loathing and complained about his advisers and the people he met, not to mention those who entertained him. He expressed contempt for his family, especially his father, George V, whom he considered outdated and narrow-minded. At times he said he wished the monarchy would be overturned, calling himself a "bolshie." Frequently depressed, he even spoke of suicide.

The public knew none of this, but over time Edward's family and members of the court became aware of his flaws. Their biggest concern was his poor choice of women. While there were many flings, his main attraction was to married women: first Freda, then Thelma Furness, and, beginning in January 1933, Wallis Warfield Simpson.

Edward was obsessive and submissive with all three women—once writing to Freda that he was "the kind of man who needs a certain amount of cruelty"—but especially so with Wallis, whose dominance disturbed those who witnessed it. Once when he was on all fours releasing the hem of her dress from the leg of a chair, she berated him mercilessly.

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On December 28, 1935, King George V and Queen Mary invited some friends who lived on their Sandringham estate, Sir John and

Lady Maffey and their daughter Penelope, to dinner. As they walked into the entrance hall, the Maffeys witnessed an altercation between the King and his eldest son, standing on the staircase as his father shouted from below: "You've got to get rid of that woman!"

Three weeks later, George V was dead, and the prince took the throne as King Edward VIII at age forty-one. He was a terrible monarch, inattentive and cavalier; his behavior and attitudes corroded the very center of the monarchy. He was determined to marry "that woman" once she had divorced her second husband. During the complicated and painful abdication crisis of December 1936, Edward marginalized his brother Albert as well as his own advisers. When the British government rejected his effort to make Wallis his queen and he renounced the throne, Albert became the king, and he honored his late father by calling himself George VI. He was three days shy of his forty-first birthday. The new queen, his wife Elizabeth, was thirty-six. Edward VIII became the Duke of Windsor and Wallis his duchess.

The day of his accession, one of his cousins asked George VI what he was going to do. "I don't know," he replied. "But I am going to do my best." And so he did, despite a rocky beginning amid concerns that his stammer would prevent him from carrying out his duties effectively. With the support of Elizabeth and unrelenting practice with Lionel Logue, the new king mastered his coronation oath and muscled through crucial speeches, delivered slowly and sometimes haltingly.

George VI applied himself diligently to his job as a constitutional monarch. As head of state, he represented his government at home and overseas, studied the official documents delivered daily in red leather boxes—memos from the Foreign Office, the Treasury, and other departments; secret intelligence reports; laws, regulations, and appointments requiring his signature—and received his prime minister and a stream of other functionaries in confidential audiences.

The fundamental nature of his role had been defined by the nineteenth-century constitutional expert Walter Bagehot: "the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn." The monarch was expected to remain apart from party politics and to serve as a

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unifying force. Together, Bertie and Elizabeth also symbolized the "domestic virtues" essential for a successful king and queen. They exercised positive influence rather than actual power.

George VI and Elizabeth found their footing during the jittery prewar years between 1937 and 1939. They made triumphal visits to France, Canada, and the United States, winning hearts and minds everywhere. Over hot dogs at Franklin D. Roosevelt's home in Hyde Park, the royal couple famously bonded with the president and first lady. Their mutual respect for one another's character and temperament proved vital in the war years ahead.

When Britain declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, George VI began keeping the diary that he would continue for more than seven years. The privilege of reading these pages in their entirety at the Royal Archives gave me an extraordinary lens on the momentous events of World War II and the leaders of the military and the coalition government. I could also appreciate in full the King's intellect and common sense that were all too often underestimated.

George VI's daily jottings show his trusting and friendly relationship with Winston Churchill, his wartime prime minister. He understood Churchill's overpowering personality and could detect his shifting moods. When the prime minister made a decision, the King observed, "personal feelings are nothing to him, though he has a very sentimental side."

The King's diary pages reveal an inquisitive mind keen to absorb every detail. He could be unexpectedly assertive (telling Labourite minister of supply Herbert Morrison in 1940 that his party was "partly to blame" for armament shortages), and was often farsighted. From the war's earliest days, for example, he urged government officials to begin postwar planning "to keep the spirit of the class mixing going." He also perceptively read character: Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov, he noted, "looks a small quiet man with a feeble voice but is really a tyrant."

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To an unusual degree, George VI shared his wartime responsibilities with Elizabeth. An "unprecedented" feature of the lunches

Winston Churchill had with the King at Buckingham Palace each Tuesday "was the presence of the Queen at these private conversations," according to Elizabeth's official biographer, William Shawcross. The mutually supportive trio met at Buckingham Palace in a dimly lit dining room with boarded-up windows, or in the "immense catacomb" of the Palace air raid shelter. George VI described many of these encounters in his diary. Elizabeth, who considered herself "very much a part of the team with the King," said virtually nothing about them.

The King traveled more than fifty thousand miles around Britain during the war, often straining his fragile constitution. The Queen accompanied him on most of these journeys in their heavily armored train and automobiles. They were constantly moving targets. Visiting bombed-out neighborhoods in London, they frequently defied air raid warnings. They spent nights on the train adjacent to tunnels where they could find protection if danger arose.

When they weren't out inspecting military bases, factories, hospitals, ships, and damaged cities and towns, they risked their lives by spending their working days at Buckingham Palace. For three of the nine Palace bombings, they were present. In September 1940, government officials advised them to sleep at Windsor Castle, either in an underground shelter or in reinforced ground-floor bedrooms. There they endured regular air raid "Red Warnings" and heard the drone of enemy aircraft, the explosions of bombs landing nearby, and booming antiaircraft weapons.

George VI and Queen Elizabeth were effective during World War II not only because of their sympathy and thoughtfulness but also because of their innate feel for the soul of Britain. The King noted in his diary that "one of my main jobs in life" was "to help others when I can be useful to them." That job took a terrible toll on his health, aggravated by his two-packs-a-day smoking habit and constant anxiety over making speeches.

Winston Churchill sensibly dispatched King George VI's brother, the Duke of Windsor, to Nassau from 1940 to 1945. His job as governor was a "war expediency" to remove him from Europe. Edward VIII

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would have been a disastrous wartime leader, because of both his temperament and his well-known admiration for Germany and its Nazi leadership.

George VI and Queen Elizabeth redoubled their discipline to navigate the bleak postwar terrain after the election defeat of Winston Churchill and his Conservative Party. They knew most of the Labour leaders from their wartime jobs, and they worried about the pace and consequences of the new government's radical policy to nationalize industries. George VI spoke in private to Churchill and other prominent Conservatives while being scrupulously correct with his Labour ministers. Elizabeth regarded Clement Attlee, the Labour leader who became prime minister in 1945, as a "practical little man." To the King, he was "shriveled & small" as well as reticent. "I find I have to tell him things," George VI recorded a week after Attlee took office, although in time the two men developed a mutually respectful relationship.

The King and Queen found happiness in the marriage of their eldest daughter—their "Lilibet"—to Prince Philip, followed by the birth of their grandson, Prince Charles, and granddaughter, Princess Anne. They restored Royal Lodge, their war-damaged country house in Windsor, and they enjoyed meals in the gardens there when they needed to escape the formality of the castle. They entertained more, with dinner parties and dances for their friends. They had months-long holidays at Sandringham and in the Scottish Highlands at the monarch's Balmoral estate.

But their life couldn't return to normal. During the last three years of his reign, George VI was frequently bedridden with cardiovascular disease and lung cancer. It was customary then for doctors to withhold a cancer diagnosis to spare the patient needless anxiety. Neither the King nor the Queen discussed the disease, even after his malignant left lung was removed. The doctors said the surgery was done to address "structural changes" in the lung.

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George VI and Elizabeth took comfort in the illusion that he was getting stronger, even when his weakness was all too evident. Yet on

his last day, he was out in the Norfolk countryside shooting rabbits—the sport he enjoyed after the pheasant season had ended—with neighbors, tenant farmers, and estate workers, and in the evening, he dined quietly with his family. In his tribute following the King's death, Winston Churchill marveled that he had remained "cheerful and undaunted—stricken in body but quite undisturbed and even unaffected in spirit."

For a highly conventional couple, George VI and Elizabeth's twenty-eight years together were filled with unanticipated and unwanted drama. First came the fraternal betrayal by his brother the Duke of Windsor. The immense ordeals of World War II strained the King to the breaking point and drew deeply from his wife's reserves of strength. They rose again to the challenges of postwar deprivations and jarring social change, adjusting to a socialist government that cut against much that they stood for. In her five decades of widowhood, Elizabeth solidified the late king's legacy. She spanned the twentieth century and deservedly earned the love of the people as Britain's grandmother.

Their fifteen years as king and queen began with trepidation and uncertainty and ended with stoic suffering and premature death. They rescued and rebuilt a monarchy battered by the abdication crisis. In their wartime leadership, they showed the world their personal courage and capacity to inspire. And through example and instruction, they prepared their elder daughter for her eventual succession to the throne, setting the stage for a new Elizabethan age that would secure the foundation of the monarchy through the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first.

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The Duke and Duchess of York with their dog, Glen, at Glamis Castle in 1925.

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PART ONE

Loss and Love



"It was a great thing to be loved."

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"Decided to wait a little. . . . I hope I am not behaving badly."



Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon and Prince Albert in the garden at St. Paul's Walden Bury in Hertfordshire.

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ONE



Twelve Days

Prince Albert's quest for the hand of Elizabeth Bowes Lyon was less a courtship than a campaign. He conducted it for thirty months. He used spontaneous charges, tactical retreats, and evidently well-considered feints. From time to time he called in reinforcements. He often despaired, but he persisted with single-minded determination, taking even the most ambivalent responses as signs of encouragement.

If Elizabeth had been as enamored as Bertie was, they would have had a textbook romance. Within months of his first flash of interest in the summer of 1920, she would have accepted his inevitable proposal. But her heart was with another man, James Stuart, the third son of the seventeenth Earl of Moray, and, as irony would have it, Bertie's equerry, an aide-de-camp who arranged his logistics and assisted him at events.

Stuart was a tall, fine-featured, and mustachioed Scotsman with a lady-killer reputation. He and Elizabeth had met at a house party hosted by her family at Glamis Castle in September 1919, when James was twenty-two and she was nineteen. Something must have clicked because Bertie knew he had a formidable rival. Lured by the prospect of a

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financial windfall, Stuart left Bertie's employ and went to the United States—a move rumored to have been arranged by Bertie's mother, Queen Mary. In any event, the field had been cleared for Bertie.

The denouement of Bertie's campaign played out over twelve days in January 1923. On the evening of Wednesday, the third, Elizabeth was invited to an intimate dinner hosted by Bertie at Claridge's, the rosy-hued Victorian hotel known as "the Palace of Mayfair," a magnet for aristocrats, bright young things, and British royalty since the late nineteenth century.

Intriguingly, Francis Doune, James's older brother, came to visit Elizabeth at five-thirty that day and stayed an hour. She made no record in her diary about what they discussed. Although she was suffering from a "heavy cold," she was ready when Bertie and his equerry, Captain Giles Sebright, arrived to pick her up an hour later. They were joined by Lady Anne Cameron, Sebright's girlfriend.

After dinner, the foursome attended a performance of *The Co-Optimists,* a popular revue in the West End featuring numbers by Irving Berlin and Arthur Schwartz, among others. It was fast-paced topical entertainment, with ten performers switching from character to character as they sang and danced across the stage. One subversive song by Noël Coward, "Down with the Whole Damn Lot," poked fun at "the idle rich" and "the bloated upper classes." To Elizabeth, it was all "great fun."

Back at Claridge's, Bertie took Elizabeth to the dance floor in the stately foyer, with its crystal chandeliers and fluted columns. (They both loved dancing and were equally graceful and accomplished.) There he asked for her hand in marriage for the third and final time. On leaving Claridge's, they went to Anne Cameron's house, and Elizabeth didn't arrive home until two A.M. before falling asleep at three A.M. As Bertie recounted later in a letter to his mother, he "had a long talk with her & told her how I had always felt towards her & she told me that she looked upon me as more than an ordinary friend & asked me to give her time to think over what I had said."

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During the following eleven days, Elizabeth vacillated as she con-

fided in friends and family and sent reassuring letters to lovestruck Bertie. She alternated between giddy activity—teas, luncheons, dinners, theater, being photographed for a fashion magazine, trying on clothes, playing cards, tramping across fields on a shooting weekend, dancing all night at two country house balls—and quiet moments riven with worry: fretful, morose, confused, guilt-stricken, and exhausted.

Based on the entries in her diary, she devoted more than twenty hours to discussing the proposal with Bertie and a selection of confidantes. Over fifteen of those hours were one-on-one talks with her persistent suitor.

A century later, it is difficult to divine what was running through her mind, especially her motivations. She was drawn to Bertie's sweet and humble simplicity—a rare trait in the British royal family—and to the vulnerability betrayed by his stammer. But she was frustratingly hazy when finally, at age ninety-four, she tried to explain her thinking to her friend Eric Anderson, the head master of Eton College. He had asked whether she took advice from anyone about "the serious proposal" or "did you know at once?"

She admitted it had gone on for "a year or two," adding, "You know you are not sure about anything, and then one of my brothers said to me, 'Look here, you know, you must either say yes or no. It's not fair.' I think he was right. Because one is rather inclined to dither along if somebody's fond of you, you know. I suppose when one is young and busy and things. No, he was quite right. . . . It's a good thing, having brothers." The sibling in question was likely her older brother Michael or younger brother David, both of whom had been friendly with the prince since September 1921, when he stayed at Glamis to shoot partridges.

Others who knew Elizabeth well offered their own explanations, most hinging on her unwillingness to give up her freedom for a lifetime of duty inside the royal family. "She was so uncertain with Bertie because she had been brought up in such a closed world of a large family and small circle of close friends," her great-niece Lady Elizabeth Anson told me. "She was smart and grounded and understood

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what being a member of the royal family would mean. She was not eager to have a public life. That was the crux of it."

The twelve days in January 1923 from proposal to acceptance encompassed a drama of Elizabeth's own making, if not her explicit design. Behind the scenes, family and friends had been working for a full year to ensure that the third time would be the charm. Principal among them were Bertie's mother, Queen Mary; her trusted friend and lady-in-waiting Mabell, the Countess of Airlie; Elizabeth's mother, Cecilia Strathmore; Louis Greig, the comptroller and head of Bertie's household; even, perhaps unwittingly, Bertie's younger sister, Princess Mary. Other peripheral characters were involved as well. Neither Bertie nor Elizabeth was fully aware of stratagems that included subterfuge and misdirection plays. But well before they took to the dance floor at Claridge's, she sensed a proposal could be imminent.

Amid all her activity and emotions that January, two pivotal events nudged her toward becoming Bertie's wife: a nearly two-hour conversation with Mabell Airlie, and a false gossip item in a newspaper that embarrassed and alarmed her.

In the late afternoon of Thursday, January 4, 1923, Elizabeth sat down for tea in Lady Airlie's small flat in a Victorian-era apartment building in London's Westminster neighborhood. Elizabeth arrived in an agitated state because her mother had forbidden her to attend the popular Pytchley Hunt Ball that night in the Northampton Town Hall. She and Bertie had been invited to a house party at nearby Pitsford Hall, a grand eighteenth-century estate owned by Captain George Henry Drummond, and they had both planned to go to the hunt ball.

It had been ten days since Lady Strathmore had squelched her daughter's plans, and Elizabeth was still upset. In no uncertain terms, her mother had said she "must not go." This was a thoroughly uncharacteristic action by Cecilia Strathmore, who enjoyed an open and trusting relationship with her daughter. It turned out that her prohibition had followed an urgent letter from none other than Lady Airlie, who was acting in the belief that Elizabeth was stringing Bertie along.

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"My dearest Cecilia," Mabell had written on December 23, noting

that Elizabeth doubtless had many invitations for the winter season. "I don't suppose there is any likelihood of her accepting one to Pitsford for the Northampton Ball," she wrote, adding that she "had been asked to hint" that "perhaps you could announce" that Elizabeth "should not accept it as it is perhaps wiser for the young man [Bertie] . . . that nothing further could come of the friendship."

Although no record exists of what precisely Lady Strathmore said to her daughter, the source of the "hint" was undeniably Queen Mary. On what must have been a ruined Christmas Day, Elizabeth said as much in an overwrought letter to Bertie, who was spending the holidays with his family at their Sandringham estate. "Perhaps you know already," she wrote, that the idea of her joining him at the Drummonds' house party "is very unpopular in some quarters?" She added, "I quite understand your family's point of view," which she knew was "for the good," and they were "probably quite right."

She emphasized—as she had many times previously—that he and she were the best of friends, and she fretted that he might think she had "behaved badly" toward him. She confessed to feeling "very sad" about missing the dance. She had been "thinking deeply" about the situation all day, even during the Christmas church service.

Bertie and Elizabeth met just three days later, on December 28 at the West Norfolk Hunt Ball at Holkham Hall, the magnificent Palladian country house of the Earl and Countess of Leicester near Sandringham. Elizabeth and her brother David had been invited to stay with the Leicesters, who were friends of the Strathmores.

Accompanying Bertie to the ball were two of his brothers, Prince Edward and Prince George. With some four hundred other guests in evening dress, they proceeded through Holkham's pink Marble Hall under the coffered and gilded fifty-foot-high ceiling modeled on the Pantheon's in Rome. They climbed the wide marble staircase to the Saloon lined with ornate crimson caffoy fabric. Adorning the walls were huge paintings by Rubens and Van Dyck. The Clifford Essex Band played, but neither Bertie nor Elizabeth was interested in dancing.

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Instead, they were eager to discuss busybodies who were clucking

over Bertie's tortuous courtship, which was well known among their circle of friends. As the speculation intensified, Elizabeth had become increasingly discomfited, and she also shared her upset over Lady Strathmore's anti-Pitsford edict.

On returning to Sandringham at three-thirty A.M., Bertie picked up his pen and set out his thoughts for Elizabeth in his sturdy and precise handwriting. He spoke to some extent in code. "It is the limit the way other people mix themselves in things which do not concern them," he fumed. He urged Elizabeth to see Mabell Airlie as soon as possible "to tell her exactly what great friends we are & I will do the same."

Now it was his turn to say he hoped *she* didn't think badly of *him*. He seemed determined to brace his mother for interfering, and he announced his intention to decline the Pytchley ball.

From 17 Bruton Street, her family's London townhouse, Elizabeth replied the next day, December 30, to say she had tried to reach Lady Airlie by phone, but she had gone to the country. Elizabeth reassured Bertie that she had sent a note and asked to see the countess the following week. In the meantime, she counseled him that it would be "much wiser if you did nothing about it" until she had talked to Lady Airlie: "There is no hurry—the thing is done"—probably a reference to her forced absence from the Pytchley ball.

Mabell Airlie had been a crucial player in the romance since late 1920, offering encouragement for a match she believed was desirable. Her advantage was having known Bertie and Elizabeth since they were young children, and admiring both of them greatly. Although Bertie didn't refer to it in his December 29 letter to Elizabeth, Lady Airlie had sent him a message addressed to both of them shortly after Christmas that he later said had been an "inspiration" to him.

In her memoirs, Lady Airlie wrote that she felt her "final effort" to persuade Elizabeth to marry Bertie had failed when they had tea on January 4, 1923. She regretted that most of the conversation revolved around the early years of her own marriage to cavalry officer David

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Ogilvy, the eleventh Earl of Airlie, who had died at age forty-four in the Second Boer War. She said that her love for him had been "the cornerstone" of her life.

When Elizabeth revealed that Bertie had proposed the previous night, Mabell tried to draw a parallel between her initial "hatred" of army life and Elizabeth's reservations about life in the royal family. Mabell said she had eventually "grown to love" being married to an army officer. After Elizabeth left her flat, Mabell feared she had bored her and wished she had focused more on Bertie's merits. But her underlying message of doing one's duty was significant.

Elizabeth reported on her teatime tête-à-tête in a letter to Bertie that night. She and the countess had "talked it all over," and she believed Mabell would be discreet and keep their conversation to herself. Intriguingly, Elizabeth said Mabell had assured her that the message in the December 23 letter to her mother "did not come" from anyone in the royal family. Rather, Lady Airlie said she had been told "by a lot of people" that Elizabeth and Bertie were planning to stay at Pitsford.

Mabell said she had written preemptively to Lady Strathmore because, Elizabeth recounted to Bertie, "she thought the Queen might be very annoyed with me for going there as the Queen thinks it is all off for ever, and Lady Airlie was afraid I might get into trouble." It was, Elizabeth wrote, "a little private hint to my mother," adding "I don't think your family need know—do you?"

Lady Airlie was fibbing by laying the blame on unnamed gossips. Five days later, on January 9, Queen Mary wrote to her expressing gratitude "for yr kind help in that tiresome matter." She and King George V understood the situation. "I confess now we hope nothing will come of it as we feel ruffled at E's behaviour!" wrote the Queen.

Unaware of how acutely she had irritated the King and Queen, Elizabeth in her January 4 letter to Bertie thanked him for being "so angelic" in giving her time to seriously consider his proposal. "I really do need it," she wrote, "as it takes so long to ponder those things, & this is so very [underlined twice] important for us both."

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If she were to conclude that "it will be all right, well and good, but Prince Bertie, if I feel that I can't (& I will not marry you unless I am quite certain for your own sake) then I shall go away & try not to see you again. . . . I am determined not to spoil your life by just drifting on like this."

"I do want to do what is right for you," she wrote. And then, a hopeful intimation: "I have thought of nothing else all today—last night seems like a dream. Was it? It seems so now." Again she asked him to "not say anything just yet to anybody."

Elizabeth's peregrinations that Thursday before her meeting with Lady Airlie showed no sign of such preoccupation. Over lunch at Bruton Street, she entertained the sixth Viscount Gage, her friend since the age of fourteen. Sir Henry "George" Gage, who was five years older and very rich, had harbored a crush on her for several years.

She had met Gage through her brother Michael when the two were Oxford undergraduates. Henry "Chips" Channon, a rich American-born Conservative member of Parliament who kept a diary by turns catty and astute, viewed Gage as "desperately fond" of Elizabeth, "in vain, for he is far too heavy, too Tudor and squirearchal for so rare and patrician a creature." Still, she valued Gage's friendship—and would continue to do so for the rest of his life.

The main outcome of their lunch together on January 4, 1923, was that Gage invited her to Firle Place, his family's home in Sussex, to attend the Southdown Hunt Ball in Lewes the next evening. Otherwise, Elizabeth spent the day after Bertie's proposal visiting the dentist and having a "very amusing" tea with friends, before her sit-down with the Countess of Airlie.

For the first time in her diary, Elizabeth used "mirror writing," a technique "to conceal her thoughts," according to William Shawcross—although it was easy enough to decipher on the page by reading the words backward. After a two-sentence description of her colloquy with Mabell Airlie, she wrote, "*I ma tsom dexelprep*": "*I am most perplexed.*"

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On Friday, January 5, she confided to her diary, in mirror writing: "*Am I thinking too much? I wish I knew.*" She took the train to Lewes,

where the house party at Firle was off to a jolly start until the arrival of Chips Channon.

He had in hand an evening newspaper, the *Daily Star,* with a brief item announcing that Bertie's older brother Edward, the twenty-eight-year-old Prince of Wales, was planning to marry the daughter of a "well-known Scottish peer," the owner of "castles both north and south of the Tweed." The official engagement announcement, according to the report, was "imminent." Only one "Scottish lady of noble birth" fit this description: Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon, whose family had, until recently, owned Streatlam Castle in county Durham, "south of the Tweed," as well as Glamis.

"Not mentioning my name," Elizabeth wrote in her diary, "but quite obvious enough. Too stupid & unfounded." The item provoked much merriment at Firle. "We all bowed and bobbed and teased her, calling her 'Ma'am,'" recorded Chips Channon. "I am not sure that she enjoyed it. It couldn't be true, but how delighted everyone would be! But she certainly has something on her mind. . . . I thought her unhappy and distraite."

Channon was well aware of Bertie's pursuit, which he had witnessed firsthand during a shooting party at Glamis the previous autumn. "One rainy afternoon we were sitting about," he had written in his diary, "and I pretended that I could read cards, and I told Elizabeth Lyon's fortune and predicted a great and glamorous royal future. She laughed, for it was obvious that the Duke of York was much in love with her."

The idea of Elizabeth in a romance with the dashing and promiscuous Prince of Wales was laughable. She scarcely knew Prince Edward, who had been deeply involved with Freda Dudley Ward, a married socialite, since they met in February 1918 when he was twenty-three. All of London had known of the affair almost immediately. That March, when Elizabeth was eighteen, she had danced with the Prince of Wales at a ball in London given by the future Earl of Leicester. She

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wrote to her mother that she found it "very amusing." Prince Edward probably didn't give it a second thought.

In May 1921, Elizabeth and the Prince of Wales were guests at a house party at Bicton, the home of Lord and Lady Clinton in Devon. In a letter to her former governess and trusted confidante, Beryl Poignand, Elizabeth listed her friends who were staying, along with "Our Prince" and some "old gargoyles whom I can't remember." They all played tennis and "lazed about & occasionally did a few official Prince of Wales things and had great fun."

After arriving by train, the prince had begun a packed ten-day schedule of engagements in Devon and Cornwall that included giving speeches, laying foundation stones and wreaths, inspecting ex-servicemen, calling on tenant farmers, visiting agricultural shows, meeting mayors and lord lieutenants, and chatting with patients in hospital wards.

He stopped at Bicton for two nights, squeezing in a round of golf at the Budleigh Salterton links. It's unclear which of the "official Prince of Wales things" Elizabeth witnessed, but she surely took in the atmosphere of a typical royal tour: the cheering crowds in towns and villages festooned with flags and streamers. Before the prince left Bicton for his next stop, five hundred tenants and residents on the Clinton estate watched him plant a white beam tree. As he departed, they all gathered outside the house and gave him a "great send-off."

At age twenty-one, Elizabeth had observed routine royal rounds up close for the first time. She was unimpressed. In her letter to Beryl, she noted that Edward "was away all day working hard, & only got back at tea-time—he does have a hellish life—that's the only word for it."

She and the Prince of Wales did not encounter each other again until October 1922 at Wilton House in Salisbury for a debutante ball. If they danced that evening, it was unremarkable. In a letter to "Prince Bertie," she only said that "Wilton was great fun."

So how to account for such a glaringly false report in the *Daily Star* two days after Bertie's proposal? Might it have been planted by someone close to the royal family to apply pressure on Elizabeth? Palace

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courtiers were not averse to slipping information to sympathetic and willing journalists. Whatever the means and motivation, the article hit a nerve.

Elizabeth nevertheless managed to put on a good show at the Southdown Ball that Friday night, dancing with "nice old friends" until "nearly 4." Back at Firle, she ate biscuits and drank sherry before going to bed at five a.m. Chips Channon "watched her unseen" from his window as Elizabeth left "at almost dawn" on Saturday, January 6. She spent the weekend at St. Paul's Walden Bury in Hertfordshire with her parents. Both her mother and her older brother Jock were unwell, and the weather was cold and rainy.

One can imagine her rattling around the cozy rooms of "St. Paully Walden," an eighteenth-century brick home in the Queen Anne style. It was elegant yet unpretentious, lacking the grandeur of Glamis but equaling its informality. There was "no extravagance or luxury, no attempt to be modern or up to date," wrote Cynthia Asquith, an aristocratic contemporary of Elizabeth who published two authorized books about her. In the two downstairs drawing rooms, one with red silk walls, the other paneled in green, both embellished with fine plasterwork, Elizabeth read, knitted, and played her favorite records on the gramophone.

Monday, January 8, 1923, brought yet another sheaf of newspaper articles "about my rumoured engagement to the Prince of Wales." Exasperated, she wrote in her diary: "Too silly." After a rainy morning, she escaped for an afternoon walk and cheered herself by making cocktails with her brother Jock's wife, Fenella.

That evening she anxiously wrote to Bertie asking if he had seen the Prince of Wales story that had gotten under her skin. "It's too extraordinary," she wrote. "Why can't they leave one alone? And in this case, it was so utterly absurd." She also hinted encouragement, once again saying the evening at Claridge's seemed like a dream. "I think the great thing is to be with the person, or it all seems too unreal—do

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you feel that at all?" She thanked him profusely for writing to her and ended, "God Bless you, yours Elizabeth."

They had already arranged to meet for tea at Bruton Street on Thursday, January 11. In the meantime, Elizabeth was on the move—all in a rush, as if she could feel the clock ticking. She and Lady Strathmore motored to London in the rain on Tuesday the ninth, and after lunch took a train from Paddington station to Longleat, a magnificent sixteenth-century stately home in Wiltshire owned by the Marquess of Bath. They were among some twenty guests staying in the vast Elizabethan pile, where they had dinner and a quiet evening of card games.

The next night the Marquess and Marchioness of Bath were giving a dance in honor of their youngest daughter, Lady Mary Thynne, who was one of Elizabeth's good friends. The mothers and daughters spent the morning arranging chairs while the men went out shooting on a bitterly cold day. The ladies joined the "guns" for a luncheon outdoors and followed them on their afternoon drives. Back at the house, everyone had tea and played games.

Guests dined at Longleat and a dozen other houses in Wiltshire and Somerset before the ball began in the drawing room and long saloon—the first time those rooms were used for entertaining since before World War I. Elizabeth's dance card was typically full, and the ball lasted until three-thirty A.M.

Elizabeth left early on Thursday morning the eleventh and was back in London in time for lunch with her close friend Doris Gordon-Lennox. The two young women talked until midafternoon, then diverted themselves by buying gramophone records on Bond Street. Nevertheless, Elizabeth was "feeling very ill with vaccilation [*sic*] & worried, too," as her teatime with Bertie approached.

BACK IN HIS APARTMENT AT Buckingham Palace, Bertie had been occupying himself with planning an official two-day visit to Glasgow at the end of January—a prospect that filled him with dread. He was scheduled to give two speeches, always a challenge for his untamed stutter.

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That week his name popped up several times in *The Times*' "Court Circular"—the detailed chronicle of the activities of the royal family and the aristocracy. One evening he attended a boxing tournament, and one afternoon he saw the film *Robin Hood* at the London Pavilion.

Bertie turned up promptly at Elizabeth's house for tea in the late afternoon on the eleventh. Their conversation ran until seven-thirty—more than three hours. He left without an answer to his proposal. "*I am very worried too,*" she recorded in mirror writing.

In the evening Elizabeth had dinner with Doris, Fenella, and several young men, including James Stuart's brother Francis. They all went to the West End for a performance of *The Nine O'Clock Revue,* a musical ensemble in the same vein as *The Co-Optimists.* Their spirits buoyed, the friends were treated by Francis to a late supper at the Savoy Hotel's lavish Edwardian dining room. Elizabeth arrived home at one A.M. "very tired, but enjoyed it awfully."

She was still exhausted when she awakened at eleven A.M. on Friday, January 12. Doris dropped by for a long chat, after which Elizabeth "sat before the fire in a stupor" for an hour. She "dashed off" to be photographed for *Vogue* magazine—"The pretty Strathmore girl" had already appeared in the pages of *Tatler* magazine—followed by tea with a friend.

While Elizabeth was dashing about that Friday, Bertie decided to unburden himself in a letter to "my darling Mama" to be sent by messenger to Sandringham. He began apologetically by saying he hoped she and "Papa" wouldn't think ill of him for not telling them about "my relations with Elizabeth." He knew they were both under the impression "that it was all over between us, with regard to marriage." But he assured his mother that "in the last two months a distinct change has come over Elizabeth, & I have been able to see a good deal of her in a quiet way, & she has always been very charming to me in every way."

He told Queen Mary that he had proposed nine days earlier, and that Elizabeth had encouraged him even as she postponed her reply. He had seen her the previous afternoon "& she was very nice." He

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revealed that she had invited him to St. Paul's Walden Bury for the weekend and had said "she is going to give me a definite answer one way or the other on Saturday."

In his earnest, heartfelt way, he confessed, "This is all very difficult to write to you darling Mama, but I know that you & Papa will give me your blessing if this all comes right & I shall be very very happy." He admitted that "this has all taken a very long time to adjust itself, but I am certain now that it was ever so much better to play the waiting game & give Elizabeth plenty of time to think things over, as I did not want to rush her into anything, & I know she would have said no, had I pressed her for an answer before now."

Elizabeth had refused Bertie's two previous proposals "quite steadfastly," in the words of her mother. Each time, he had withdrawn with profuse apologies. "I never really had the opportunity of seeing anything of her at a stretch," he wrote to Queen Mary, "& we were never able to have any long talks together, but lately everything has come my way & we have not missed opportunities."

Now, feeling more optimistic about his third proposal, he wrote, "I will send you a telegram at once, if her answer is as I hope it will be, in 3 words 'All right. Bertie.' Not another soul will know what has happened until I hear from you & I will let you know where I am." He asked her to wish him luck and closed by saying, "I am very very excited about it all. Best love to you darling Mama, I remain Ever Your very devoted boy Bertie."

Fifteen minutes after Elizabeth returned home at the end of her frenetic day, Bertie arrived at Bruton Street at six P.M., and they drove for an hour and a half to St. Paul's Walden Bury. He joined the Strathmore family for dinner at eight-thirty and presumably retired for the evening.

At that point, Elizabeth did something unexpected. She and Fenella (whose husband, Jock, had been laid up with a cold all week) went together to a dance hosted by some Hertfordshire neighbors. Not only did Elizabeth dance with a number of partners (her diary count stopped at four), she also stayed for supper and did not arrive at

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home until one-thirty A.M. Her behavior had the whiff of a last burst of freedom before making her decision.

The marathon discussions resumed on Saturday, January 13, when Elizabeth and Bertie had a long walk before lunch. In the afternoon the young couple sawed wood with Elizabeth's father. "Prince Bertie sawed hard!" Elizabeth noted in her diary. The quirky earl was famous for going into the woods on his estates at all hours with his valet, cutting off branches, dragging them back to the house, and chopping them up for kindling. During one visit to Glamis, Elizabeth's friend Diamond Hardinge was told "not to be disturbed if she heard a knocking or thumping through the night as it was only Lord Strathmore 'chopping wood.'"

After tea, Bertie and Elizabeth talked again "for hours." By dinnertime at eight-thirty, Fenella had left for London. The couple then talked until nearly midnight before they parted for bedtime as the promised deadline passed. She recorded in mirror writing that night: "*decided to wait a little. . . . I hope I am not behaving badly.*"

On Sunday, January 14, 1923, Elizabeth's diary entry consisted of five sentences. "Woke at 9. Breakie at 10:30. Sat and talked till 12:30 & then went for a walk in the enchanted wood ["the haunt of fairies" for Elizabeth since childhood]. Long walk after lunch & long talks after tea and dinner. Jock went up to London at 5."

It was only after their final extended nighttime conversation that Elizabeth accepted Bertie's proposal. Her failing to mention the historic moment in her diary is confounding, given the buildup. She didn't even use mirror writing to record "*dias sey.*" Nor did she mention what time she went to sleep.

We must turn to Lady Strathmore to learn what happened that night. In a letter two days later to her daughter May Elphinstone, she wrote that Bertie "came down to St. P.W. suddenly on Friday and proposed continuously until Sunday night when she said Yes at 11:30!! My head is completely bewildered, as all these days E was hesitating & miserable, but now she is absolutely happy — & he is radiant."

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What changed, after so many hours of deep conversation? Did the

"enchanted wood" work its magic? Writing to Beryl Poignand a week later, Elizabeth offered no clue: "I am so happy, & most surprised, as I never thought I'd marry him!!!"

According to Helen Hardinge, Elizabeth's friend since childhood and wife of Alexander Hardinge, an assistant private secretary to George V, Prince Albert dispatched the "ALL RIGHT—BERTIE" telegram to Sandringham as promised. "The excitement was great," she wrote, "for this was a code which he had arranged with his mother previously."

On Monday, January 15, the prince traveled to Sandringham with Louis Greig, his trusted longtime adviser, to share the details with his parents. Queen Mary—who of course had been briefed by her son the previous Friday—wrote a letter of welcome and congratulations to Elizabeth that afternoon. "Bertie has just appeared looking beaming, to inform us of his engagement to you," she said. "The news has come as a great surprise and we feel very much excited!"

Writing to his mother the following day, Bertie admitted uncertainty about Elizabeth's state of mind. "I am very very happy," he said, "& I can only hope that Elizabeth feels the same as I do. I know I am very lucky to have won her over at last." Without her actually saying it, Elizabeth seemed to believe that even if she wasn't "in love" with Bertie, she could learn to love him. Her constant use of the word "friend" underlined her conviction that love was essentially a passionate companionship. Once Elizabeth made her commitment on Sunday, January 14, 1923, she never looked at anyone else, and she remained unwaveringly devoted to the man who would be her husband for nearly three decades.

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"George V remained a distant figure inspiring reverence, reserved affection, and sometimes genuine fear."



King George V circa 1902 with four of his children. Left to right: Prince Albert, Princess Mary, Prince Edward, and Prince Henry.

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TWO



An Honorable Boy

The future King George VI was born on an inauspicious date. December 14, 1895, was the thirty-fourth anniversary of the death of his revered great-grandfather, Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert. The little boy's mother and father were known as Prince George and Princess May, and fifteen years later became King George V and Queen Mary. They sent word to seventy-six-year-old Victoria that they would honor the late prince consort's memory by naming their son Albert Frederick Arthur George. They nicknamed their son "Bertie" after his grandfather, the future King Edward VII. In a letter to "darling Georgie," Queen Victoria praised the "dear name of Albert."

Bertie had entered the world at 3:40 a.m. in his mother's claustrophobic bedroom at York Cottage on the Sandringham estate. At eighteen and a half feet by ten and a half feet, the room was uncomfortably narrow and confining, even with a bow window overlooking the adjacent pond. Its small size would have been more appropriate for a servant's quarters in nearby Sandringham House (nicknamed the "Big House"), owned by Bertie's grandparents.

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Albert's older brother, Prince Edward, had been born eighteen

months earlier in White Lodge, the home of Princess May's parents, the Duke and Duchess of Teck. Set in Richmond Park on the outskirts of southwest London, the eighteenth-century Palladian villa built by King George II was far grander than York Cottage. The twenty-seven-year-old princess had her first child in the room where she had lived from age three until her marriage. Its sweeping view of the Queen's Ride, a greensward lined with ancient oaks, seemed fitting for the future King Edward VIII.

The arrival of the heir to the throne—Edward Albert Christian George Andrew Patrick David—on June 23, 1894, had caused great celebration. His grandfather announced the news at a ball in the middle of the Ascot racing week. Congratulatory telegrams poured in from royal palaces across Europe, and thousands of members of the public flocked to a marquee on the White Lodge lawn to sign a commemorative book for the infant boy who would come to be known in his family as David.

By contrast, Bertie's birth was a quiet affair. The rest of the family was with Queen Victoria marking "Mausoleum Day" at the annual service honoring the Prince Consort in the Frogmore Mausoleum near Windsor Castle. Writing in her diary, the elderly Queen set aside any feeling of "regret" on the timing of the boy's birth, adding that "it may be a blessing for the dear little boy and may be looked upon as a gift from God."

Two months later, on February 17, 1896, Prince Albert met his great-grandmother at his christening in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Sandringham, presided over by the Bishop of Norwich. In addition to Victoria, his godparents were all relations: Victoria's daughter "Vicky," the mother of Kaiser Wilhelm II; Princess Augusta, the beloved aunt of Princess May; her aunt's husband, a German grand duke; the Crown Prince of Denmark (brother of the infant's grandmother Queen Alexandra); Prince George's uncle Arthur, the Duke of Connaught; and Princess May's brother, Prince Adolphus. As a token of her approval, Queen Victoria presented the infant with a bust of his esteemed namesake.

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In 1897, Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee year marking her sixty years on the throne, Albert's only sister arrived. George and May

pleased the Queen by naming their daughter Victoria Alexandra Alice Mary, to be known as Princess Mary. In the following years came Prince Henry in 1900, Prince George in 1902, and Prince John in 1905. All were born at York Cottage in their mother's cluttered bedroom and were destined to grow up in the eccentric atmosphere of the royal family's most unusual and uncomfortable residence.

York Cottage was a rambling house with wings and bays, mock-Tudor beams, gables, miniature balconies, and turrets. In the eyes of ordinary people, it probably looked large enough. But it was more like a home in the suburbs. While it could sleep forty, it was inadequate as a royal residence for a family with dozens of staff and servants.

The hallways were narrow and twisting, the ceilings low, the bedrooms tiny. (Princess May once compared York Cottage to a doll's house.) The smells from the basement kitchen pervaded every room. Prince George's private secretary—his most senior adviser—was forced to work out of his bedroom, lacking a suitable office. The bathrooms used by George and May had toilets with special lids that doubled as tables.

When the monarch's household traveled to the royal estate at Balmoral in Scotland and to Windsor Castle, George and May and their family trailed behind them. They spent time in London, first at York House in St. James's Palace and later Marlborough House down the street on Pall Mall. Although their London homes were substantially larger than York Cottage (seventy-five rooms at York House), there was "no proper space for growing children," according to Charlotte "Lalla" Bill, their nurse. Prince George disliked socializing and the sort of holiday travel to the Continent favored by his father, so he stayed mainly at Sandringham, living the life of a country squire.

At York Cottage, he occupied himself with shooting pheasants and partridges, and tending to his game books and his guns (displayed in a glass case along one wall of his library). Seated at the large desk in this little room where the windows were darkened by laurel leaves, and the walls were covered with the scarlet serge used for French military uniforms, he devoted hours to his enormous stamp collection or reading

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the newspaper. May engaged in self-improvement by immersing herself in books or stitching needlepoint—a passion so great, it was said, that she worked on her canvases even while dozing.

George and May professed devotion to their children, but they had little comprehension of the juvenile mind, much less the basics of child development. Alexander Hardinge, who served both George VI and his father as a loyal courtier, told royal biographer Harold Nicolson he was baffled that George V, "who was one of the most kind-hearted people in the world, could have been such a brute to his children."

John Wheeler-Bennett put his best spin on the situation. In his official biography, *King George VI,* he wrote that when his children were young, George V showed his devotion by "bathing them in turn, weighing them, playing with them on occasion," and teaching them to ride horses and shoot. At age twelve, Bertie had his first day shooting at Sandringham, bagging three rabbits. Four years later, he shot his first stag at Balmoral, and proudly recorded in his Sandringham game book, "My first woodcock." These milestones met with his father's approval, but George V "remained a distant figure inspiring reverence, reserved affection, and sometimes genuine fear."

So where did they go wrong as parents? George V had a booming voice—the result, in part, from impaired hearing in his right ear—that particularly intimidated children. He was irritable, impatient, and intolerant. Reverential toward her husband, Princess May yielded too often to his bellicose strictness. The daughter of George V's longtime private secretary, Lord Stamfordham, said that May "would never stand up to him over his shouting at the children."

His sons were his primary targets, since he doted on his only daughter, Princess Mary, and seldom scolded her. As the boys grew older, their father alternated between harshly criticizing them and mocking them with his "chaff"—leg-pulling banter that he liberally used among family and friends who could laugh it off. The children usually didn't get the joke and felt humiliated.

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Princess May also endured tirades from Prince George during meals when staff were not present. He was "foully rude to my mother,"

the Duke of Windsor told James Pope-Hennessy, his mother's biographer, adding that he had "often seen her leave the table because he was so rude to her, and we children would all follow her out."

Only when outside her husband's overbearing orbit did May unbend somewhat. When Prince George visited country estates for weeks of shooting or thoroughbred races, the children would have their mother to themselves. Before dinner at York Cottage, she would gather the children in her boudoir.

This "cozy room overflowing with personal treasures," as her son David later described it, served as a haven of sorts. During their golden hour together, Princess May would recline in a negligee on her chaise as the children sat in little chairs. She talked to them softly, sharing knowledge from her "cultivated mind" and playing card games featuring the counties of England. Since their father had neither intellectual curiosity nor interest in the arts, this was the sole source of culture for Albert and his siblings. May also taught them needlework, an unlikely skill that Bertie and David embraced to relax their restless minds. During World War I on the Western Front, Prince Edward would crochet comforters for charity "as a means of killing time." In later years, Prince Albert would embroider in petit point a dozen chair covers for his home with Elizabeth near Windsor Castle.

George made little effort to properly educate his heir and second son, who spent their days in the care of nurses, nannies, and ineffective tutors. Dressed alike in sailor suits or tartan kilts and tweed jackets, David and Bertie were chubby-cheeked towheads who could have passed for twins. But there the resemblance stopped. David was the shining star, and Bertie the fragile laggard.

They both suffered at the hands of a mentally unstable nurse who abused David—pinching his arms to make him cry before formal evening visits with his parents—and ignored Albert. She even denied Bertie food, which may have led to later stomach upsets that began plaguing him as a teenager. When he was two, Lalla Bill, then the under-nurse, reported the sadistic treatment. The head nurse was

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dismissed, and for the next four years, Lalla managed her young charges with finesse and firmness.

Despite their attachment to Lalla, their father decided the boys needed "masculine discipline." When Bertie was six, Lalla was supplanted by a thirty-year-old former royal footman named Frederick Finch, who oversaw their care for nearly a decade as an early twentieth-century version of a "manny." "Handsome, stalwart, and muscular," Finch not only supervised their hygiene and wardrobe but also nursed the princes when they were ill, listened to their morning and evening prayers, and put them to bed.

In 1902, shortly after Prince Albert's sixth birthday, Prince George hired Henry Peter Hansell as the brothers' principal tutor. The thirty-nine-year-old Oxford graduate had taught at a couple of boarding schools, but his main credential in George's eyes was his genteel Norfolk background, along with his skill as a yachtsman and golfer.

Hansell set up a mock classroom on the second floor at York Cottage with two desks, a blackboard, and bookcases. A pipe-smoking bachelor, Hansell was humorless and straitlaced, although the boys grew fond of him. He oversaw a daily schedule of classes, supplemented by other tutors who taught French, German, and mathematics. But he was a poor teacher and lax disciplinarian when faced with inattentive and often disobedient pupils. His downbeat reports on David and Bertie's lack of progress provoked furious reprimands from their father when he summoned the boys to his gloomy library.

It was in Hansell's first year of instruction, between Bertie's seventh and eighth birthdays, that the prince began to stutter—a condition aggravated by his father's anger, which reduced him to incoherence. One theory is that the stutter originated with Hansell's efforts to force left-handed Bertie to use his right hand. Whatever the cause, it soon became a crippling affliction. Bertie couldn't participate in oral lessons, either in English or in foreign languages. He fell mute amid noisy family banter, unable to muster a quick riposte. The only slender upside was his development of sharp powers of observation.

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Bertie's nightmare was a ritual on family birthdays. Each child was

commanded to recite a poem from memory in front of a glamorous gathering of guests in the Big House at Sandringham. One can only imagine Bertie's terror while struggling red-faced to recite passages from Tennyson and Shakespeare, and even worse, La Fontaine in French and Goethe in German. Two of the most troublesome words were "king" and "queen." Not surprisingly, Bertie's verbal inadequacy led his family and teachers to conclude he was slow-witted.

Bertie was also judged physically handicapped by his knock-knees. On the orders of one of the royal doctors, Bertie was fitted with splints to straighten the deformity. He was forced to wear them at night, which disrupted his sleep, and during the day, which prevented him from concentrating in the schoolroom. This inhumane treatment was as painful as it was humiliating. After more than a year, the remedy was deemed effective. Albert would eventually develop graceful athletic ability. But the psychological damage was done.

The essence of Prince Albert's character was evident by then. He was innately high-strung, easily wounded, and prone to panic attacks. He was so timid that he could not even bring himself to ask servants to light the lamps as darkness fell. Frustration often overwhelmed him in his studies, driving him to tears when he couldn't master mathematical concepts.

Most alarming were his bouts of depression and sudden eruptions of anger that intensified with the onset of his stutter. John Wheeler-Bennett, who had the same affliction, wrote compassionately about the "tragedies of the stammerer . . . infuriating inhibitions and frustrations, bitter humiliation and anguish of the spirit; the orgies of self pity; and the utter exhaustion, mental and physical; perhaps, above all the sense of being *different* from others and the shrinking from help prompted by pity."

But Bertie was also developing sterling qualities such as determination, reliability, bravery, and modesty. In its embryonic form, he was showing the trait that his daughter Queen Elizabeth II most admired in him: steadfastness. When Bertie was just six years old, Mabell Airlie saw through his moody silences and sometimes defiant naughtiness when he shyly approached her with an Easter card he had made with cut-out

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pictures of flowers pasted on cardboard. She drew him out with tact and understanding, and he spoke to her without his usual hesitations. "I found that far from being backward he was an intelligent child," she recalled, "with more force of character than anyone suspected in those days."

At York Cottage, the children were under the eyes of liveried servants and ladies-in-waiting. But on the twenty-thousand-acre Sandringham estate, Bertie and David, along with their younger sister, Mary, were free to roam the woodlands, fields, and salt marshes, and to bicycle to the seven villages scattered around the monarch's property. They caught fish in the lake in front of the cottage, where they skated in the winter.

On the sixty acres around the Big House, they could wander through the gardens, the greenhouses, carriage houses, Alexandra's carving school where master craftsmen made furniture, and kennels filled with her collection of dogs, numbering as many as fifty at one time. The children might stop by the estate's own train station at Wolferton or see thoroughbreds at the royal stud farm. The boys also picked up the game of golf, which they played on Sandringham's nine-hole course. These rambles inculcated in Albert a love of Sandringham that matched his father's.

Queen Victoria died in January 1901. Bertie and his brothers were in quarantine for measles at York Cottage when their eighty-one-year-old "Gangan" suffered a series of strokes at her Osborne House residence on the Isle of Wight. "It has come too late," said King Edward VII, Bertie's grandfather and Victoria's successor. He was already fifty-nine.

Prince George rushed to Osborne House, but also succumbed to the measles, which he had caught from his children. Unable to attend Queen Victoria's funeral on the second of February, he sent Princes Edward and Albert, aged six and five, in his stead. The mourning was intense for the queen who had reigned for nearly sixty-four years. The two boys saw their grandfather on horseback in a white-plumed helmet behind Victoria's caisson in the impressive cortege. There were thirty-three thousand soldiers and massed bands, along with one of the largest gatherings of European royalty in history. The two princes

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attended the funeral service in St. George's Chapel, followed by the Queen's burial at the Frogmore mausoleum on February 4.

In August of the following year, their grandfather, Edward VII, was crowned in Westminster Abbey. Princes Edward and Albert, wearing costumes of royal tartan kilts and dress tunics, sat in the royal box with their minders, Finch and Hansell. Then aged eight and seven, the boys "fidgeted and whispered incessantly but watched with awe their father do homage to the newly crowned king."

The world outside the bubble of royal childhood at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries was of no consequence to Prince Albert. Britain was riding a wave of industrial strength powered by a global empire that stretched across eleven million square miles and encompassed four hundred million people. In its South African colony, war broke out with rebellious Dutch settlers that ended in British victory. Otherwise, its relations were peaceful with a European continent ruled by twenty monarchs.

Whenever Bertie and his siblings joined their parents in London, he took dancing classes—with emphasis on Highland reels, waltzes, and polkas—and singing lessons at Marlborough House, where they moved in April 1903 when Edward VII and Alexandra relocated to Buckingham Palace. At the Bath Club, an elegant gentlemen's club in Mayfair, he and Prince Edward learned to swim and play racquet sports. Hansell did his best to enrich their dry curriculum with sightseeing trips to the Tower of London and museum exhibitions, as well as cricket matches at Lord's and the Oval.

Albert plodded through five years of Hansell's tedious lessons until he reached the age of thirteen in December 1908. As the second son, he was destined to follow George V's career in the Royal Navy. Was he ready for naval training? Not particularly, either by temperament or by experience. That didn't matter to his dictatorial father. In his final report on Bertie's academic achievement, Hansell vaguely pegged him as a "scatter-brain" in need of "a shove." But he was unequivocal in sizing up Bertie's character: As "a very straight and honourable boy, very kind hearted and generous," he was "sure to be popular with other boys."

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"When he felt at ease in the company of others, his stutter diminished."



Prince Albert at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, in 1911.

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THREE



Stuck in Sick Bay

Bertie showed admirable pluck when he successfully tackled the entrance examinations for the fledgling junior Royal Naval College on the grounds of Osborne House. He enrolled in January 1909, two years after his brother David, who was destined to be king, not a naval officer.

It was a shock to the system for both brothers, but less so for the confident and gregarious Prince Edward. Neither of them had competed with peers, and most of the other boys had already spent four years at boarding schools. Albert was acutely homesick. His stammer was aggravated by heightened anxiety and the inevitable taunting of the other cadets, who nicknamed him "Sardine" for his scrawny physique.

But within months, Bertie's essential goodness and "never say I'm beaten" spirit won them over, as Hansell had predicted. He compensated for his inadequacy in team sports with his speed as a cross-country runner. His royal pedigree notwithstanding, he was appealingly down-to-earth. As Mabell Airlie had discovered, when he felt at ease in the company of others, his stutter diminished.

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The cadets slept in unheated dormitories with iron beds and small chests for their belongings, and they followed a strict daily schedule that began with a plunge in a frigid pool. Albert was discomfited by living cheek by jowl in these conditions. The education was technical rather than classically academic: navigation, knot-tying, engineering, and the mathematics that had always bedeviled Bertie.

Infected with whooping cough at the end of the summer term in 1909, Albert missed the state visit of the czar of Russia, his father's first cousin. But he was fortunate to be treated by a dynamic Scottish doctor, twenty-eight-year-old Lieutenant Louis Greig, who also happened to be an international sports legend for his prowess on the rugby pitch. Bertie took instantly to Greig's cheerful encouragement. It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship in which Greig would serve for six crucial years as a mentor and father figure. Tall and rugged, Greig would not only instill confidence in the timorous young prince but also rescue him from chronic illness and play a pivotal role in Bertie's courtship of Elizabeth Bowes Lyon.

Nine months later, King Edward VII was dead at age sixty-eight from emphysema and heart failure, a victim of his chronic smoking. Alexandra smoked discreetly, as did Princess May, while Prince George inherited his father's nicotine dependence and was constantly wreathed in smoke. It's no wonder that starting as a teenager, Prince Albert would smoke one cigarette after another to tame his nerves. On his eighteenth birthday, his mother gave her blessing to his habit with a gift of a silver cigarette case. His daily intake was routinely around forty "gaspers."

Bertie and David stood at attention atop the garden wall at Marlborough House as they watched their father proclaimed King George V in Friary Court at St. James's Palace on May 9, 1910. They participated in an elaborate state funeral eleven days later. On an unusually hot day they wore their naval cadet uniforms and marched slowly behind their grandfather's coffin up the hill at Windsor Castle to St. George's Chapel. A month afterward, David, the next in line to the throne, was made Prince of Wales.

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They witnessed the coronation of their father and mother in Westminster Abbey a year later, on June 22, 1911. On the King's crowning, the Prince of Wales, who would turn seventeen the next day, lifted a coronet onto his own head and knelt before the throne to pay his homage. From the royal box, dressed in his naval cadet's uniform, Prince Albert observed this ancient ritual, followed by emotional kisses on young Edward's cheeks from George V.

The two princes were now handsome boys with delicately sculpted faces. The Prince of Wales was generally regarded as the better looking of the two. Each had an attractively turned-up nose and narrow blue eyes above high cheekbones. Albert's mouth was more generous than Edward's, with a hint of warmth that his brother lacked despite his charm. Edward's eyes were steely, while Albert's betrayed his sensitivity. Edward claimed to be five foot seven, but he was easily two inches shorter than Albert, who was five foot six at most.

Bertie had completed his studies at Osborne in December 1910, ranking sixty-eighth out of his class of sixty-eight. He was nevertheless admitted to the new Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, where David was in his final year when Bertie arrived in January 1911. Bertie's progress through Dartmouth over the following two years was no more distinguished than at Osborne. His final result after six terms was a disappointing sixty-first out of sixty-seven. George V reacted with equanimity to his second son's setbacks, and his attitude generally softened as he witnessed his progress in other ways.

Bertie was developing into a fine shot on the grouse moors at Balmoral and the fields and woodlands at Sandringham, and he showed considerable skill at tennis. He also took seriously his preparation to be confirmed in the Church of England. He asked searching questions and developed a depth of faith that would be integral to his character. He regarded his confirmation on April 18, 1912, as a day "on which I took a great step in life."

Prince Albert finished his naval training with a six-month cruise to the West Indies and Canada. For the first time in his life, he was on his own, without having to measure up to the magnetic and debonair

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brother who preceded him. Edward had already been sent to Magdalen College at Oxford, where he spent two years and hardly opened a book.

George V had taken a liking to Louis Greig, and he shrewdly arranged to have Bertie assigned to HMS *Cumberland,* where the Scotsman was the ship's surgeon. Bertie was chronically seasick and gripped with insecurities, but he was determined to show his father he could succeed. He passed the exams to qualify as a midshipman, and he took on whatever task was asked of him, even lugging heavy bags of coal to the engine room.

Thirty-three-year-old Greig and eighteen-year-old Bertie solidified their friendship during these months on shipboard as well as ashore, where they went riding and played tennis. Bertie toured banana, cocoa, and sugar plantations, listened to talks on the science of irrigation, and saw oil wells in Trinidad. In Toronto and Quebec, he endured mandatory social functions. He was timorous around girls, finding refuge in corners so he wouldn't be compelled to dance with strangers. He even touched down briefly in the United States for a tour of Niagara Falls. He groused that the Americans had "no manners at all and tried to take photographs all the time."

Sir Martin Charteris, one of Queen Elizabeth II's private secretaries, later likened Greig to a psychiatrist, saying, "he listened, he encouraged, he helped. He allowed Albert to help himself. He was the doctor who thought that he could set him right after a childhood with its own peculiarities. Louis was the right man in the right place to help him reach his potential."

Prince Albert optimistically embarked on his naval career aboard HMS *Collingwood* in September 1913, while Louis Greig transferred to medical duty with the Royal Marines. As one of the midshipmen, also known as "snotties," Bertie held the lowest rank on his ship. He learned to obey orders and perform all manner of menial tasks during a thirteen-thousand-mile cruise around the Mediterranean that took him to Gibraltar, Malta, Italy, Egypt, and Greece. When he came home to Sandringham at the end of December after

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his eighteenth birthday, he showed greater maturity behind his natural reserve.

Six months later, on June 28, 1914, Bertie was back on *Collingwood* off the isle of Portland in the English Channel when some disquieting news came through. The heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife, Sophie, had been killed in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia—a province of Austria-Hungary. The assassin was a fanatical member of a Serbian nationalist group that believed Bosnia actually belonged to Serbia. The Austrians had been fiercely at odds with the Serbs, who were actively trying to annex Bosnian territory on the southern border of the Austria-Hungarian empire. Franz Ferdinand was unpopular in Sarajevo, so his visit was especially ill-advised.

The assassination of his heir gave the Austrian emperor Franz Joseph the pretext to invade and dismember the small nation of Serbia, triggering a cascade of violent reactions among a complicated web of European alliances. The Germans, led by George V's first cousin, the volatile and aggressively nationalistic Kaiser Wilhelm II, sided with Austria. The Russians, led by another first cousin of George V, Czar Nicholas II, backed their ally Serbia and tumbled into war with Germany and Austria. Having significantly built up its army and navy, Germany then seized the opportunity to launch an assault on France, which was aligned by treaty with Russia. Among other motivations, Germany was eager to encroach on the French and British colonial empires.

The German invasion of France first blazed through Belgium—a meticulously premeditated plan that the high command had been preparing for years. At that point, Britain honored its treaties with Belgium and France and went to war on their behalf against Germany and Austria-Hungary on August 4. What had begun as a bilateral skirmish between Austria and Serbia exploded into a world war that would drag on for four years and claim the lives of more than nine million combatants and thirteen million civilians. As military men and materiel flooded across Europe, it was hard to imagine that only fourteen years

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earlier, Kaiser Wilhelm had held his grandmother, Queen Victoria, as she lay dying.

Britain reacted to the onset of war with giddy excitement. Crowds surged to Buckingham Palace in a show of support for King George V and Queen Mary, who came to the Palace balcony three times. The cause seemed honorable, and nearly everyone assumed the war would be short; some said it could be over by Christmas.

The men rushing to enlist included the Prince of Wales, who escaped Oxford to train with the Grenadier Guards. The army waived the minimum height of six feet in the Grenadiers' King's Company, making the prince "a pygmy among giants." In November 1914, he reported for staff duty at the headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force in France.

At first, George V failed to grasp the implications of events escalating rapidly across the Channel. Writing to Bertie a week before Britain declared war, he lamented that he had to give up the Goodwood races, and that his annual yachting at Cowes might be canceled. By August 4, the gravity of the situation had sunk in. King George V wrote in his diary, "Please God it may soon be over & that he will protect dear Bertie's life."

That month marked the onset of a more personal battle for Prince Albert that would persist throughout the war, bringing recurrent physical agony and mental anguish. His incessant seasickness was the least of it. He was now seized regularly with what were described as "gastric attacks."

Bertie described his initial illness as a "violent pain in the stomach" so severe he could scarcely breathe. After being transferred to a hospital ship on a stretcher, he was hoisted by a crane to shore in his hospital bed. Two weeks later, he underwent an appendectomy at a hospital in Aberdeen, Scotland. He returned to London in October 1914 and shuttled between Buckingham Palace and Sandringham. Waves of pain returned the following month, and his doctors judged him unfit for service at sea.

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That autumn was particularly harrowing for Britain. Its forces

suffered more than fifty thousand casualties at the First Battle of Ypres over a three-week stretch, and Turkey entered the war as Germany's ally, putting the Ottoman Empire in direct conflict with the British Empire. Feeling guilty for "not doing his bit," Bertie took a staff job at the Admiralty where Winston Churchill was First Lord.

Churchill invited Prince Albert for lunch, and over the next two months the young prince had his first opportunity to see in action the man who would serve as his prime minister some twenty-five years later. The prince was given access to the top-secret War Room, where he was responsible for charts that mapped the locations of British and enemy warships. From time to time he would proudly tip off his father about naval maneuvers before they were officially relayed to the monarch.

But Bertie was restless and despondent. "Nothing to do as usual," he often peevishly wrote in his diary. When he turned nineteen in mid-December 1914, he was keenly aware that everybody he knew was on active service, especially David. Although his older brother was safely installed thirty miles from the Western Front, he was agitating to get into the action. Louis Greig had not only seen combat but also had been captured during the fall of Antwerp, Belgium, and was a prisoner of war in Germany.

Bertie pressed to return to his ship, and the Admiralty finally granted his request. He rejoined *Collingwood* on February 12, 1915. Three months later, his illness struck again. By late June, his superior officer reported that Bertie "is sick every time he swallows any food and is very mouldy. In fact wasting away."

In mid-July 1915, his doctors fastened on what turned out to be a misdiagnosis: "the weakening of the muscular wall of the stomach and a consequent catarrhal condition." His treatment consisted of rest, "careful dieting," and nightly enemas. The confounded medical experts fell back on recommending a "change of scene and air."

That meant a month in Scotland at Abergeldie Castle, three miles down the River Dee from Balmoral Castle, which was closed

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for the duration of the war. Bertie had enjoyed eight contented childhood summers with his family in the fourteenth-century castle with a medieval stone tower. Abergeldie was a reminder of an unrestrained time when he and his siblings had been alone with their mother. They had thrived in the wildness of the surroundings—the endless pine forests, the hills dappled with wildflowers, the shimmering lochs and the gurgling burns. Bertie loved it there, but cooped up with his doctor, he took little pleasure from Abergeldie during his recuperation.

Several weeks after he returned to York Cottage that October, his father had a horrific accident while on horseback reviewing troops on the front lines in France. Startled by the sound of a military band, the king's horse reared and fell backward, pinning George V underneath in the mud. He suffered a fractured pelvis in at least two places, and he was in agonizing pain. His broken bones never properly knitted and would plague him for the rest of his life, increasing his general irritability and limiting his mobility. "He was never quite the same man again," wrote Harold Nicolson.

George V returned to Buckingham Palace, where he was confined to his bed for six weeks. A greatly distressed Bertie rushed to London and fell ill again—exacerbated by his "emotional excitement." The King's recovery was prolonged and difficult; it took four weeks before he could walk with two canes, and he "lost seriously in weight."

These weeks when father and son were convalescing together brought them closer. George V and Albert discussed political issues as well as news from the battlefields and the high seas. For Bertie, it was an invaluable opportunity to observe how a wartime monarch conducted himself—lessons he would revisit when faced with comparable challenges during World War II.

Once again, Prince Albert was assigned to the Admiralty for "light duty" that was unsatisfying. He broke the monotony of his London life with a trip to the Western Front to see David at the end of January 1916. Under tight security, the brothers visited scenes of

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fighting the previous autumn—La Bassée, Hulluch, and Loos. The two princes also witnessed a British bombardment and German counterattack.

Back in England, the high points of his dreary existence were visits to Sandringham for shooting with his father. He was in touch with Louis Greig, who had been released from German captivity in July 1915 in an exchange for a German doctor. Louis was married the following February, but Bertie was unable to leave his sickbed to attend the wedding in Norfolk. From late August 1914 to early May 1916, he was on sick leave for sixteen months and served on his ship for a mere four months.

Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon was feeling downhearted as well. She had come to London in the spring of 1916 for a respite from caring for wounded soldiers at Glamis Castle and to take examinations for a certificate of academic achievement. She had been through one of the hardest years of her young life as the horrors of the battlefield hit home.

Her older brother Patrick, the scion of the Bowes Lyon family, had been sent to Glamis from the front in February 1915 with an injured foot and such severe shell shock (now known as post-traumatic stress disorder) that he didn't recover and had to leave active service. Three months later, Michael Bowes Lyon had returned to Scotland after being hospitalized in France for a head wound as well as shell shock.

Then in early October 1915 came the crushing news that Fergus Bowes Lyon had been killed in action at the Battle of Loos. His right leg was blown off by a German bomb, and he was shot several times in the chest and shoulder. He was twenty-six years old, married for just over a year, the father of a two-month-old girl named Rosemary.

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Elizabeth and her family were devastated, especially after they learned the gruesome details of his death. Among those who consoled

Elizabeth was her good friend Lady Lavinia Spencer, who sent a letter expressing her sympathy. "It really is all so ghastly and terrible," she wrote. "It does seem wicked that the best men should all be killed." She praised Elizabeth for being "so brave."

Lavinia was the sixteen-year-old daughter of the sixth Earl Spencer, one of the foremost noblemen in Britain and the great-grandfather of Diana, Princess of Wales. She was the perfect friend for a downcast Elizabeth. The two girls exchanged letters filled with private jokes, even sending up the royal family: Lavinia addressed letters to "Mary" and signed them "George R." Elizabeth played the nom de plume game in reply as Queen Mary. They shared crushes on actors and dreams of marrying sailors.

When Elizabeth failed her exams that March and her mood turned melancholy, Lavinia wrote to invite her to tea on Sunday, April 2, 1916, to meet Prince Albert and Princess Mary. The twenty-year-old midshipman and fifteen-year-old pre-debutante met as planned at Spencer House, one of the most beautiful neoclassical homes in London.

Neither Bertie nor Elizabeth was in a particularly sociable frame of mind. Writing to her mother two days later, Elizabeth said the tea party was "rather frightening, in fact very"—although it's unclear why that was so. She described the small group Lavinia had assembled to meet the royal siblings: a duchess (Sutherland: "rather pretty"), and the daughters of two marquesses and one duke. There were several men Elizabeth hadn't previously met, including Arthur Penn, a Grenadier Guards officer she found "entrancing" and who would become a lifelong friend.

Elizabeth passed no judgment on Princess Mary, and all she could muster about Bertie, sitting at the next table, was "he's rather nice." Elizabeth gave a few additional details about Lavinia's party to her governess and confidante, Beryl Poignand. Bertie and Mary were known to be shy, but they had proved to be unexpectedly lively, "staying and staying—they played games after tea."

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If Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon made an impression on Prince Albert that Sunday afternoon, he kept it to himself. Her assessment of him