



0. BERTIE and ELIZABETH - Story Preface

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Prince Albert (at the time known as the Duke of York) and Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon were engaged in January of 1923. This image depicts their engagement photograph. The original photograph is part of the Royal Collection Trust.

Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon was a pretty Scottish girl with whom Prince Albert ("Bertie") was smitten when they met (as adults) at a dance in the spring of 1920. Then twenty years old, Elizabeth (the ninth of ten children) was not interested in marriage.

For more than two years, Bertie tried his best to fulfill what had become one of his life's major goals. Wanting to marry Elizabeth, he was afraid to ask her himself.

It wouldn't do, under any conditions, to have someone refuse a royal. Given Elizabeth's attitude toward marriage, would she say "yes" if he asked her?

Bertie thought he couldn't risk a negative answer, so he had intermediaries broach the issue. Elizabeth didn't approve of round-about methods.

On the 3rd of January, 1923, the Prince must have put the question directly, because Elizabeth wrote him a letter the next day. It says, in part:

It is so angelic of you to allow me plenty of time to think it over - I really do need it, as it takes so long to ponder these things, & this is so very important for us both. If in the end I come to the conclusion that it will be alright, well & 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 feel there are only those two alternatives - either it will all come right, which I hope it will, or the other. I do hope you understand my feelings - I am more than grateful to you for not hurrying me, and I am determined not to spoil your life by just drifting on like this. You are so thoughtful for me always - oh I do want to do what is right for you. I have thought of nothing else all day - last night seems like a dream. Was it? It seems so now. (The Queen Mother: The Official Biography, by William Shawcross, page 147 of the hardcover edition.)

Hoping for a positive response, Bertie told his mother (Queen Mary) about the unfolding events. He worked-out a prearranged telegram message, if Elizabeth agreed to become his wife:

I am sending this by messenger if I know I am going down to her family & 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. So I do hope you will wish me luck. I am very very excited about it all. Best love to you darling Mama, I remain Ever Your very devoted boy Bertie. (Shawcross, quoting Prince Albert, at page 150 of the hardcover edition.)

For two more weeks, Elizabeth pondered her future. On the 14th of January, she and the Prince skipped church so they could keep talking in private. Still, Elizabeth did not give Bertie her answer:

On Sunday morning after breakfast she sat and talked with the Prince until 12:30 "& then went for a walk in the enchanted wood. Long walk after lunch & long talks after tea & dinner." She did not record it in her diary, but late that evening she did finally accept his proposal of marriage. Lady Strathmore's account [in other words, the tale as told by Elizabeth's mother], written to her daughter May [Elizabeth's sister], put it like this: "He came down to St. P.W. [St Paul's Walden, in Hertfordshire, where Elizabeth's family had a home, north of London, known as St. Paul's Walden Bury] suddenly on Friday, & proposed continuously until Sunday night, when she said Yes at 11.30!!"

Was her final decision a relief for Elizabeth? Lady Strathmore continues:

My head is completely bewildered, as all those days E was hesitating & miserable, but now she is absolutely happy - & he is radiant." (Shawcross, quoting Lady Strathmore, at pages 150-51.)

Maybe part of E's hesitancy included worries about her future, once she married into the royal family. As she wrote in her diary, after the announcement was released:

The telephone rang the whole evening - hundreds of reporters clamouring! Last day of peace I suppose! Bed 11. (Shawcross, quoting the diary of Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, at page 151.)

A few months later, Bertie and Elizabeth were married at Westminster Abbey. It was the first time—since the 13th century—that a royal wedding took place at that location.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/BERTIE-and-ELIZABETH-The-King-s-Speech>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/BERTIE-and-ELIZABETH-The-King-s-Speech>

Media Stream



Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon - Childhood Photo

Childhood photo of Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the Queen Mother, online courtesy Royal Monarchy.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Elizabeth-Bowes-Lyon-Childhood-Photo>



Elizabeth and David Bowes-Lyon

Childhood photo of Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, later the Queen Mother, and her younger brother David. Online courtesy Royal Monarchy.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Elizabeth-and-David-Bowes-Lyon>



His Royal Highness, Albert Duke of York

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/His-Royal-Highness-Albert-Duke-of-York>



Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon

Photo online, courtesy U.K. National Archives.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Elizabeth-Bowes-Lyon>



St. Paul's Walden Bury - Bowes-Lyon Family Home

Image of St Paul's Walden Bury, online courtesy the [St Paul's Walden Bury web site](#).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/St.-Paul-s-Walden-Bury-Bowes-Lyon-Family-Home>



Bertie and Elizabeth Engagement Photo

Photo online, courtesy U.K. National Archives.

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Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon on Her Wedding Day

Image online, courtesy U.K. National Archives

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Elizabeth-Bowes-Lyon-on-Her-Wedding-Day>



Westminster Abbey - Scene of Royal Events

Image of Westminster Abbey, from 2006, was taken by Ellochcharlie and placed online via Wikimedia Commons. No license or restrictions apply, as the image has been released into the public domain.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Westminster-Abbey-Scene-of-Royal-Events>

Bertie and Elizabeth - Meeting

Clip from "Bertie & Elizabeth - The Story of King George VI & Queen Elizabeth," a 2002 television production. Online, courtesy PBS and YouTube.

Director:

Giles Foster

Writer:

Nigel Williams

Starring:

James Wilby - Bertie/Duke of York/George VI

Juliet Aubrey - Elizabeth

Alan Bates - George V

Eileen Atkins - Queen Mary

Charles Edwards - Edward VIII

Production Co:

Carlton Television and Whitehall Films

Also aired, on PBS, in 2002 and 2005 (WGBH)

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Bertie-and-Elizabeth-Meeting>

