



0. HAPPINESS TURNS to TRAGEDY - Story Preface

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Beatrix Potter was devastated when her fiancé, Norman Warne, unexpectedly died in 1905. This photo, by Charles G.Y. King, depicts Beatrix as she appeared in May of 1913. The work is maintained at the National Portrait Gallery, in London, and is [online via the Victorian Web](#).

Falling in love with this writer of tales and drawer of pictures, Norman asked Beatrix to meet his family. The youngest of six children, Norman lived with his widowed mother and unmarried sister - [Millie](#) - at the Warne home in [Bedford Square](#). Without female friends most of her life, Beatrix instantly liked Millie.

In the summer of 1905, after his company had published Beatrix's first three books, Norman sent Beatrix a special letter. It was a marriage proposal and Beatrix, overjoyed, accepted immediately. Her parents, however, had a different reaction.

Although she was a grown woman, Beatrix needed her parents' permission to marry. For the same reason they would not allow the editor in their home, the Potters said no. Norman - they thought - was from a socially inferior family.

Undeterred, Beatrix tried to reason with her parents. They finally reached a compromise: The Potters would permit the engagement, but [the happy couple](#) could tell no one outside their immediate families.

The situation was akin to her brother's dilemma. Although [Bertram](#) - pictured here [with his smiling sister](#) - had married in November of 1902, a decade would pass before he finally had the courage to tell the Potters about his wife, the daughter of a wine merchant.

Beatrix, ahead of her time, had many ideas about merchandising her characters. Calling them "[sideshow](#)," she created wallpaper, developed "painting books" for children and made a [Peter Rabbit doll](#).

Sending the doll to Norman, she requested that he find a manufacturer for it. Such an item, she said, "would be in demand at [Harrods](#)."

Soon after the engagement matter was resolved, Beatrix left London - and her many projects - to spend time with her Uncle in Wales. She rang Norman (played by [Ewan McGregor](#) in the film, *Miss Potter*) before she departed but was unable to talk with him. He had taken ill.

Not knowing that anything was seriously wrong with her fiancé, Beatrix kept her plans. She was in Wales when she received devastating news: Norman had died on the 25th of August. He had pernicious anemia, today a treatable blood disorder. (Some accounts say that Norman had undiagnosed leukemia.)

Returning to London, Beatrix tried to assuage her grief by spending time with Norman's sister, Millie. Talking about the man both women had deeply loved, they also visited his grave at Highgate Cemetery.

Earlier in the year, Beatrix had found a farm called Hill Top in the Lake District village of [Near Sawrey](#). After Norman's death, she closed on the property.

Staying there, at least for a little while, would help her avoid the inevitable situation at the Potter family home. How could her parents, who'd opposed marriage to Norman, hide their relief that the matter was no longer an

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Media Stream



Beatrix Potter in 1913

National Portrait Gallery, London — P1825; Charles G. Y. King, photographer.

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Millie Warne

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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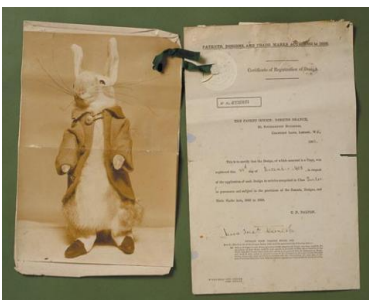
Bertram and Beatrix Potter - Brother and Sister

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Beatrix Potter - Peter Rabbit Doll

Image, courtesy Living on Earth.

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Harrods Department Store

Photo of Harrods, in London, by Ideru; online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Miss Potter - Trailer

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