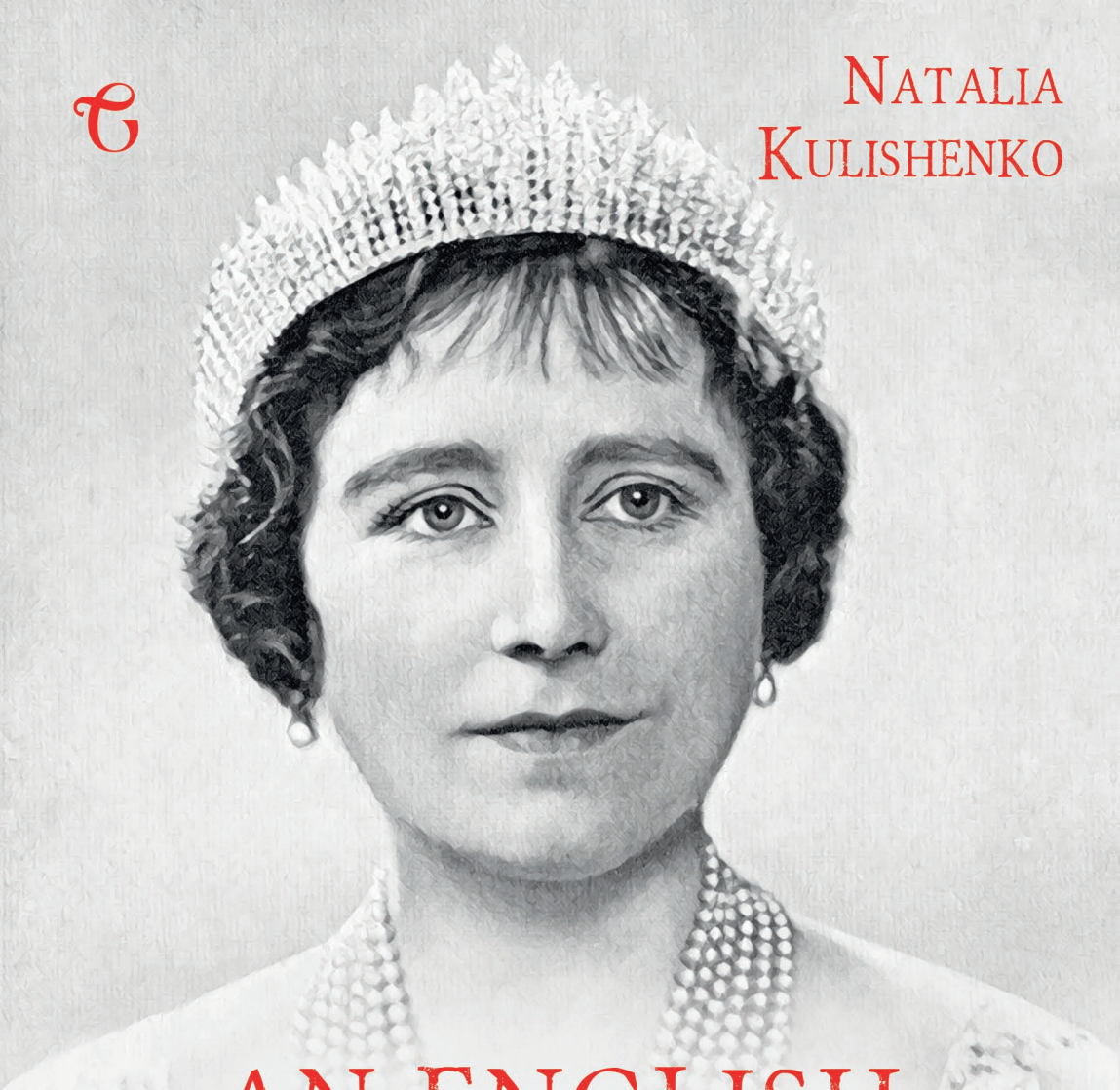
Natalia Kulishenko



AN ENGLISH QUEEN AND STALINGRAD

THE STORY OF ELIZABETH ANGELA MARGUERITE BOWES-LYON (1900–2002)

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ИНСТИТУТ ПЕРЕВОДА

AD VERBUM

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the Institute for Literary Translation, Russia

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Translated from the Russian by Christopher Culver

Proofreading by Emma Lockley

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GLAGOSLAV PUBLICATIONS

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Foreword by Alexander Kramarenko

There could hardly be a better time to reissue Natalia Kulishenko's book *An English Queen and Stalingrad* than now, when the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad is being observed. I know that analogous events are being held in Coventry. But the main import perhaps lies in the fact that during those years when Britain and Russia jointly fought against fascism, the best of our people's national characters shone forth. These are largely features that we have in common, such as a readiness to bear any hardships and fight for our freedom, to rely mainly on our own efforts, to appreciate the simple joys of life and sincere relationships among human beings. Perhaps it comes as no surprise, inasmuch as Britain and Russia, situated at opposite ends of the European continent, bear a special responsibility for Europe's fate, which is convincingly shown by our alliances during World War I and World War II.

All of these qualities were most clearly revealed during the Arctic convoys which delivered arms, matériel, and rations to the Red Army through the ports of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk. Over three thousand British veterans of the convoys, some of whom were a mere sixteen or seventeen years old at the time, are alive today and still look back on those marine operations which were unprecedented in the severity and dangers involved. Unfortunately, only fairly recently and in connection with the end of the Cold War were these men's services justly recognized by their own government. In March 2015 Vladimir Putin, with the consent of his British counterparts, issued a decree that these men would be awarded the Ushakov Medal. As shown by a number of ceremonies carried out by the Russian embassy across the UK, in which official British representatives and veterans' families participated; no political disputes or ideological prejudices can efface the memory of the hardships and sacrifices we suffered together for the sake of saving Europe. Veterans'

clasping hands, their reminiscences, and the gratitude of several generations of family members left no doubt that life itself has sifted out all that was superficial or insignificant, leaving in people's hearts that which is most central: true brotherhood. Perhaps that is the true significance of the trials which the people of the Soviet Union and Great Britain endured during the war years, and, as we all know, they were proven worthy.

One brilliant page of this brotherhood-in-arms, which will forever remain among the highest spiritual values of our countries' relationship, was written by the consort of King George VI and then Queen Mother, who throughout her long life enjoyed nothing but love and popularity among the British people. This is the tale that the present book has to tell.

A. M. Kramarenko
Ambassador Extraordinary
and Plenipotentiary

Foreword: The Queen Mother (traces of a portrait)

During my time as Russian ambassador (1997–2000) in London, I personally met the Queen Mother on several occasions, and I also witnessed her from the side-lines.

Let me say straightaway that, with few exceptions, the Queen Mother enjoyed perennial esteem among British society, and some of her work was admirable indeed.

The British people remember well how during the war the Queen Mother refused to leave her country, she declined all official recommendations and unofficial exhortations that she seek shelter in Canada. The British people were inspired by the Queen Mother's decision to visit, after the German bombings of London, the places which had seen destruction. This represented a considerable amount of moral support for Londoners. She gave a great deal of attention to the British military, and by the end of her life she held honorary positions in over twenty military divisions in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries.

Allow me to mention just one or two aspects of the Queen Mother's work for society that I witnessed.

Firstly, during World War II the Queen Mother focused greatly on the treatment of wounded British soldiers and their comfort (for example, she had a facility built at her ancestral Glamis Castle where the wounded could recuperate), then during peacetime and until the end of her life she dealt with the problems British veterans faced, she took part in veterans' organizations, and assisted in resolving matters that might have seemed personal but which were important for veterans. When our embassy was ordered to award anniversary medals marking the victory in World War II to a large group of British veterans, we were challenged by the official position in which the British are not permitted to accept

foreign decorations, the Queen Mother, in tandem with the leadership of the largest organizations who brought together veterans of the Arctic convoys, fought for an exception to this rule and she personally blessed the veterans' participation in the ceremony at our embassy, which was a matter of great satisfaction to the veterans and their families. The Queen Mother agreed to take part, together with the Russian ambassador, in the veterans' events held in St Paul's Cathedral. Moreover, she asked that her gratitude be conveyed to Moscow for this "noble gesture" made to the war veterans. Matters of military burials within the royal family are traditionally the province of the Duke of Kent, who has visited the graves of British servicemen buried in Normandy and other sites in Europe, but the Queen Mother, judging from some of her remarks, was aware of these matters and received "reports" from the Duke following his inspections of British cemeteries.

Work of this kind lent weight to the authority of the Queen Mother and the royal family as a whole, and to a notable degree it softened society's reaction to the various scandals which the younger royals were sometimes involved in.

Secondly, when the decision was made to place at the Imperial War Museum, London, a memorial to the twenty-seven million Russians who perished in World War II – primarily through funds raised by British veterans – the Queen Mother gave her support to this undertaking, which also saw the participation, on the British side, of the Duke of Kent and Secretary of State for Defence, George Robertson. It must be noted that official consent had to be obtained to set aside a portion of land for this monument in this prestigious location. In connection with this need, the Russian embassy asked the Queen Mother for her consent to present her with the *Queen* statuette made by the creator of the monument, a native of Volgograd.

The Queen Mother thanked him and complimented the artist's talent. In separate remarks, the Queen Mother readily supported my comment that the unveiling of this site was also of great importance for Russian citizens, who got an opportunity to bow their heads before the memorial to the Russians who perished in the war and to place wreaths and flowers there. I should note that, according to the Russian embassy, this memorial has never lacked flowers and for Russians it has become a place of pilgrimage during visits to London.

I was greatly impressed that the Queen Mother's venerable age (at the time she was already ninety-nine years old) did not stop her from looking magnificent in a dress that demonstrated her outstanding taste,

as well as her usual elegant broad-brimmed hat. She insisted on accompanying the ambassador on the way out of the castle, and she paid no mind to my firm entreaties (for I knew that the Queen Mother had had operations on both of her legs) that she not do that. Later, Queen Elizabeth II, during a summer reception on the Buckingham Palace grounds, mentioned what an impression this Russian gift had made on the Queen Mother, moreover as one made in Stalingrad itself. Clearly it was no accident that the Queen Mother responded favourably when the Volgograd authorities wished to award her the title of honorary citizen in recognition of her actions "arranging aid from the people of Great Britain to Stalingrad during World War II and developing friendly ties with Russia".

Thirdly, the Queen Mother contributed significantly to the work of the National Trusts of England, Scotland and Wales, national charities for environmental conservation and the development of an integral landscape policy across the country. I should note that the creation in Russia of an analogous non-governmental organization – the National Centre for Heritage Trusteeship – drew on the experience of the UK national trusts, as well as a number of other organizations in such countries as Norway, Germany and Japan, with the goal of protecting the environment and natural and historical sites.

Of course, the Queen Mother did not delve into the details of the decisions made in this context, but her name and the image of a monarch concerned with ecological problems, played a significant role in the UK National Trusts' success in their efforts. Moreover, these British organizations – with the help of the Queen Mother – gained the proud legal status of trusts, including matters connected with property, as well as in ensuring the whole nation's access to ecological sites. Also of great interest is the UK's experience in creating economic infrastructure, that is, visitors' centres and shops whose income could be used for making these efforts even better, thanks to the growing numbers of tourists. The Queen Mother, by all accounts, was not only interested in protecting the natural landscape and the historical and cultural heritage of the British Isles, but she also found time to visit various such centres, which had an impact both on bodies tasked with environmental affairs and on ordinary people in the UK.

One might claim that each year the Queen Mother's birthday, especially during her one-hundredth-year jubilee in 2000, took on the quality of a national holiday. Until the very end of her life, the Queen Mother remained at the centre of UK society, she was well informed about life

in the country and the problems that it faced, and she did a considerable amount to maintain the monarchy as an essential part of the UK's state structure.

Yury Fokin
Ambassador of Russia
to the United Kingdom
(1997–2000)

Preface: Tracing the facts

On 12 April 2000, the world's leading television networks announced that Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother of the United Kingdom had been awarded the title of Honorary Citizen of Volgograd in gratitude for the aid which she and the British people gave to Stalingrad during World War II. This matter intrigued me greatly and for me it marked the beginning of an English queen's Stalingrad story. This book was, from the beginning, written not only for a Russian readership but for a British one as well.

If we look back in history, we see that during the most severe trials, Russia and the UK were always on the same side of the barricades: both in World War I, and World War II.

The main difference in this Russian biography of the Queen Mother, compared to its many analogues written in English, is that this Stalingrad story of the English queen touches on the ties between members of the UK royal family and Russia during World War II, as well as in our own time. Especial attention is paid to the period of the Battle of Stalingrad and the unique affinity between the cities of Volgograd and Coventry. Both the political and personal sides of this English queen's life are examined.

History teaches us to draw lessons, and biographies of extraordinary individuals – through the examples of their lives – help us to get our bearings and find the path to a worthy goal. They teach us to take the initiative, act more effectively and, in spite of all obstacles and disappointments, forge on ahead.

The tensions in global politics in recent years are alarming. Through joint efforts that actively promote harmony, we can achieve a synergistic effort and contribute to a firmer peace.

I hope that this book, as a little piece of history, will be translated into English and serve as an additional impetus to developing ties of partnership between Russia and the UK.

Finally, I would like to invite you, dear readers, to visit the city on the Volga, in order to walk the sacred ground of Stalingrad and see

with your own eyes one of Russia's marvels: the monument *The Motherland Calls*.

Thank you for your interest in what I present herein.

Sincerely,
Natalia Kulishenko
Moscow, February 2018

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who supported me during the research for this book, especially Yury Fokin, Russian ambassador to the United Kingdom in the period 1997–2000, for his invaluable guidance during my work; Her Royal Highness Princess Anne, who gave me her portrait; Jack Harrison, the Lord Mayor of Coventry, for providing me with some important materials; Mrs Elsie and Mr Shaun Kearney, my friends from the UK, for their gift of a valuable English book about Her Majesty during my research; the Battle of Stalingrad Museum and its erstwhile director Boris Usik; and many other people. I am grateful to you all! I must also acknowledge that the publisher Mezhdunarodnye Otnoshenyia has been highly esteemed in my family since my childhood. In my younger days when I would read Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya's books in my father's enormous library (for example, *Charles Maurice de Talleyrand*) I never imagined that a time would come when a book of mine, too, found a place among the other volumes of this beloved publisher!

Prologue

Studying the life of an English queen might seem like the task of British authors. And indeed British authors have written about her. In Queen Mother Elizabeth's own country, dozens of books have been written about her. Even my modest collection of books in English contains several tomes about this monarch. In Russian however, books that are personally about her are lacking so far, she is mentioned only in the background in stories of other members of the royal family. Yet even the innumerable British biographies about the Queen Mother show a significant lacuna. With the exception of a few words in one British reference on the Queen Mother, they all fail to explore that part of Elizabeth's life that links her to the city once known as Stalingrad. It is this gap that I, as someone from Volgograd, wish to fill in with my Russian study of the monarchess' life.

Nevertheless, this book covers the period from this long-lived woman's birth all the way to 2002 when she (like in a fairy tale) passed away in her sleep at the age of one hundred and one, attended by her caring daughter Elizabeth II. In that same year I began to gather, study and translate materials and documents that shed light on this monarchess' life.

The Russian ambassador to the UK in the 1930s and early war years, Ivan Maisky, has claimed that everyone to a greater or lesser degree is a reflection of their era. The more interesting that era and the more enterprising the person, the more valuable the study of his or her life is. Elizabeth's life encompassed both world wars, the changing of several monarchs on the British throne, personal drama, and even a breach of the rules of royal succession.

Her life was also unusual in that, due to her non-royal background, she was originally not meant to wear the British crown. But from her earliest years she dreamed of the rule and authority which royalty could bring, and in 1936 her childhood dream came true when she ascended to the British throne with her husband George VI.

Sometimes people who are not initiated into the subtleties of the British court, mistakenly refer to the Queen Mother as Elizabeth I, assuming that if the present queen (her daughter) is Elizabeth II, then that must mean that the Queen Mother was Elizabeth I. In fact, she was simply Elizabeth. The name with a number was borne by another English queen, who reigned from 1558 to 1603. (Do you remember from school the defeat of the supposedly unbeatable Spanish Armada? She ruled Britain at precisely that time.) It was that queen who we count as Elizabeth I.

Why is Queen Mother Elizabeth not considered Elizabeth I, or given any number at all? It is because Her Majesty did not inherit the throne, but rather she became the spouse of the British king. This status is known in Britain as Queen Consort. Yet one might have assumed that not even this lofty title would be given to her, the daughter of a Scottish earl.

Since the 17th century, brides for English kings have been sought among the princesses of neighbouring states, often Germany. It was considered unseemly for heirs to the British throne to intermix with their subjects, the representatives of the local English aristocracy. The aristocracy itself was loathe to bow in reverence to those of a similar background. Thus in order to make their authority firmer, royal families only married those of equal origin.

Long ago, in 1772, King George II issued a decree that children of the royal dynasty could only marry with the consent of the monarch. A later decree of his established that marriages could only be concluded with people of royal blood. However, this did not stop one of the heirs from breaking the age-old tradition in 1993, by taking as his wife Elizabeth, the daughter of a lord. How could such a thing happen?

Let us go back several years.

Late 1999, Clarence House, the Queen Mother's official residence

"Your Majesty, we have received correspondence from Russia," the Queen Mother's private secretary tells her. "The Volgograd authorities ask that you permit them to award you the title of Honorary Citizen of Volgograd."

"Is this their gift for my upcoming one-hundred-birthday?" the honoured lady asks with her natural joviality.

"Your Majesty, this is a token of their gratitude for the assistance which you provided to the city during the Second World War. But journalists will probably present it indeed as a gesture in honour of Your Majesty's birthday."

"Don't they know that it is impolite to point a lady's age out?" The Queen Mother smiles. She has traditionally been kindly disposed to journalists, and journalists in turn adored her. "Let the whole world know, then, that I shall be one hundred years old."

The Queen Mother stares defiantly at her reflection in the mirror above the fireplace and fixes a curl of grey hair that has gone astray from her hairdo.

"Your Majesty looks magnificent at one hundred."

Elizabeth was well aware of this even without her secretary pointing it out. After all, was it not already clear from the entire floor of Clarence House dedicated entirely to her elegant attire? Dresses, hats – no, hundreds of dresses and hats were amassed there. Her collection of inimitable clothes, selected by a designer with a sense for her individual style in lemon, light blue, lilac and other gentle shades, grew constantly and proved an embarrassment for the queen's accountants. Due to the elderly lady's fondness for dresses and horses her cost overruns according to the UK civil list amounted to one to two million pounds sterling, but what could one say to the most beloved woman in Britain?

"Alastair, leave the letter on the table. I shall read it later and decide whether it would be fitting for me to become an honorary citizen of Volgograd."

"The Hero City of Volgograd, as the letter calls it, Your Majesty," her secretary notes.

Oh, yes, Volgograd is heroic indeed!

Private secretary to a monarch is one of the most important positions in the court hierarchy. The private secretary is tasked with – to name only some of his sphere of influence – the royal's schedule of visits and audiences, keeping the royal fully informed about all important matters, organizing royal meetings, and overseeing the archives and the chancellery. George V had said about his own private secretary, "Stamfordham taught me to be king."

The secretary left and the Queen Mother sunk into reminiscences. What else could she do, when the story of Cinderella was so long ago now, when, as if by the wave of a magic wand, she – the daughter of a Scottish aristocrat – had become queen? When her husband the king had left this world half a century ago. When she had outlived all of her old friends and foes.

The inquiry from Volgograd about awarding the Queen Mother honorary citizenship came as no surprise to her. Yury Fokin, the Russian ambassador to the United Kingdom, had already broached this

subject with his characteristic diplomacy. The matter had begun to be discussed after a Soviet memorial, the work of Volgograd sculptor Sergei Shcherbakov, had been placed on a London square. This was something her subjects had wished, to pay their tribute to the twenty-seven million citizens of the former USSR who had perished in World War II. She had acquiesced to the will of the British people and assisted in erecting this Soviet memorial by removing various obstacles at the highest levels. Elizabeth sighed. Her memory brought back pictures yellowed by time and her mind journeyed a whole century into the past. Her gaze fell on her childhood portrait that hung to the right of the fireplace. It is actually with the mystery shrouding her birth that the story of her extraordinary life begins.

The Prince and Cinderella

(1900–1936)

Cinderella's birth

On 4 August 1900, the Bowes-Lyon family welcomed its ninth child, a girl. Her father Claude Bowes-Lyon, presumably due to being distracted, registered the birth of his new daughter with some delay, and for this he paid a fine of seven shillings and sixpence. Moreover, he misrepresented the real place of birth and instead of London he put down St Paul's Walden Bury, Hertfordshire, something which, decades later, would confound historians, biographers and journalists who researched Elizabeth's life. According to the laws of that time, since 1861 misrepresenting the date and place of a child's birth could lead to lengthy imprisonment with hard labour. The father however did not even suspect that he was registering the birth of a future queen.

The newborn girl was given the name Elizabeth Angela Marguerite. The people of Britain love long names, each of which means something. Thus the child was named Elizabeth, for example, in honour of the queen who reigned in the time of Shakespeare. The Bard had mentioned her families abode Glamis Castle in his play *Macbeth*; it was there that he set the murder of Duncan. "Angela" was chosen by her father, for the girl struck him as a little angel. Finally, "Marguerite" was proposed by her mother due to the latter's fondness for the marguerite daisy.

If we look to Elizabeth's family tree, her roots go back to Robert the Bruce, an ancient king of the Scots. In this way, she even turns out to have been related to George Washington.

The family had previously born the surname Lyon, and indeed the image of the lion corresponded to their fearless spirit. However, in 1767 the 9th Lord of Strathmore, John Lyon, made a dynastic marriage with Mary Eleanor Bowes, a lady from a wealthy aristocratic family that had no male descendant to carry the name on. The bride's father asked that John add to his surname Lyon also the name Bowes, and he sweetened the deal with a generous dowry. Thus two renowned families were joined, and from that time forth its members bore the surname Bowes-Lyon.

Glamis Castle is considered to be one of the most ancient buildings in Great Britain. In ages past its lords had their own armies and even their own executioner, to which the Bowes-Lyon coat-of-arms testifies: two lions rampant and archers' bows. Since ancient times a room, one completely white and bare of furniture, had been kept that was known as the "Executioner's Abode". It is claimed that the castle is haunted by certain ghosts: the Grey Lady, the Vampire Servant, and the phantoms of family foes that had been immured in its walls. Was it from this that Elizabeth drew one of her innate traits, namely to not forget or forgive insult? The infamous Wallis Simpson, she who failed to become queen, would see this quality first-hand.

Elizabeth's father, who became the 14th Earl of Strathmore upon the death of his father in 1904, was not especially wealthy by the standards of that time. Since his father had spent a portion of the family fortune on building Episcopal churches across Scotland, he was forced on several occasions to cover debts by selling off some of his enormous property holdings. In spite of his lofty title, the Earl led quite a modest life, and visitors to Glamis Castle who had never seen the Earl before sometimes mistook him for a farmer and even offered him a shot of whisky.

The heart and soul of the family was the Countess, Cecilia Bowes-Lyon *née* Cavendish-Bentinck. As the daughter of a clergyman, she devoted especial attention to her children's Christian upbringing. Both her own children and the servants adored Cecilia, who called her astute, wise and kind hearted. She had great musical talent. She held the view, typical of that time, that for girls – who would eventually become wives and mothers – it was much more important to have a knowledge of art and culture than the hard sciences. The Countess never had to resort to harsh measures when bringing up her children, for her disapproval calmly expressed was already enough to make her children heed her.

In bringing up her children, she emphasized the formation of a firm character and the shrugging off of any despondency or weakness. Elizabeth excelled in this regard, and all the way to the age of one hundred and one she maintained a cheery mood and did not have to think too much about her health.

Cecilia had her own ideas about how to bring up children. For example, she believed that children should be surrounded by fine things, as this would influence their aesthetic development. She had landscapes hung on the walls of the nursery, and the interior was decorated with the finest furniture. Cecilia believed that this would help her children become better, more generous and happier. In time, this would bear fruit.

Unusually for that time and social class, Cecilia wished to avoid using wet nurses and she breast-fed her own children. Until the age of eighteen months her babies slept in her bed and not with a nanny as was customary. Thanks to this closeness established between mother and baby girl, her daughter always maintained a sense of security and sympathy for the world around her.

Although Cecilia's health worsened significantly after she lost one of her sons in the war, she lived to an advanced age. A grieving Elizabeth, who was then queen, wrote to a friend after her mother's death:

> I have been dreading this moment ever since I was a little child and now that it has come, one can hardly believe it. She was a true "Rock of Defence" for us, her children, & Thank God, her influence and wonderful example will remain with us all our lives. She had a good perspective of life – everything was given its true importance. She had a young spirit, great courage and unending sympathy whenever or wherever it was needed, & such a heavenly sense of humour. We all used to laugh together and have such fun.[1]

Such was the remarkable character of the woman who had the greatest impact on Elizabeth's own personality.

Elizabeth's elder sister Violetta had died in childhood (long before Elizabeth was born) from diphtheria. Another sister, Mary, was already seventeen years old when Elizabeth came into the world. After Mary, the next youngest was Patrick, who would eventually become the 15th Earl of Strathmore. Then followed John, Alexander, Fergus, Rose and Michael. Elizabeth was not the last child, however. When she was about a year and a half old, her brother and playmate, David, was born.

Here one must mention the tragic death in 1991 of one of Elizabeth's elder brothers, Alexander.

Let us return to Elizabeth. When she was a month old, a woman named Clara Cooper was hired as a nanny or governess for her. Clara was the daughter of a tenant farmer (everyone called her "Alla" and years later Elizabeth, convinced of her devotion, would task this woman with caring for her own daughters). According to Alla's account, Elizabeth was a lively and outgoing child, she began to crawl early, she took

1 Sarah Bradford, *Elizabeth: A Biography of Britain's Queen* (New York: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), p. 77.

her first steps at thirteen months, and she also began to speak at a very young age. Nevertheless, the small children could be fidgety, and the countess had to calm them down.

Elizabeth and David, as children of about the same age, were fast friends. If this brother had not come along, then the little girl would probably have felt quite lonely in the family castle due to the large gap in age between her and her older brothers and sisters. They would hardly be interested in joining her in the games that she and David, both raised in an environment that was not too strict, were able to play.

One of their favourite pastimes was defending the castle from imagined invaders. They knew a tried and tested way of doing this: hot oil had to be poured onto the heads of those assailing the castle. Instead of hot oil, they used cold water. Visitors to their home were in for a shock as the icy water came down on them.

At the age of five or six, Elizabeth and David would often be truant from their morning lessons. However, they would hide in the attic, where they had discovered a secret store of apples and chocolate. They could spend as much time there as they wished, for the wooden stairs leading up were so rotted that they could not support the weight of adults. Thus the children were able to escape the pursuit of their tutors.

Yet in spite of such mischief, Elizabeth received a fine education at home. By the age of seven she already had a good knowledge of the Bible and the history of Britain, she could write and write well, and she played the piano. By ten years old, the girl was fluent in French. After Elizabeth had already become part of the royal family, she always looked fondly back on her childhood.

Each of the Bowes-Lyon family's residences was meant to be used during a particular season of the year. Usually the family resided in Hertfordshire, where Elizabeth grew up. In late summer or early autumn they would head for Glamis Castle. For social events and sessions of Parliament the family stayed in London at their luxurious home on St James's Square.

The future royal couple first met when Elizabeth was around five years old and the future king was ten. They met at a children's party. Unlike the outgoing and mischievous Elizabeth, Albert looked very sad. She felt sorry for him and offered him the cherries from her cake.

Though the daughter of a Scottish aristocrat had no chances of becoming queen, even as a girl Elizabeth seemed to be acting out the role destined for her in life, she loved to pretend she was queen. When asked what her name was, she would modestly reply, "I call myself the Princess

Elizabeth." Her childhood idyll came to an end when David, her brother and constant playmate, was sent to a boarding school at the age of ten. This separation hit both of them hard. Elizabeth missed her brother greatly and sought consolation in writing to him.

It was during this period that an attempt was made to send Elizabeth to a school in London. Though she received a commendation for her knowledge of literature, she could never get used to the strict discipline. Her family decided to take her out of the school and have her continue her education at home. It was only natural that a child used to a free life in the countryside in a loving atmosphere, would prefer staying in a family environment over the stiff regimen of a school.

Elizabeth learned of the outbreak of World War I on her fourteenth birthday, 4 August 1914, when she and her mother were in a London theatre. Suddenly they heard the crowd outside in the street enthusiastically shouting. This was how the English greeted the beginning of hostilities. Her elder brothers Patrick, John, Fergus and Michael were sent off to the front and Glamis Castle was temporarily turned into a hospital.

Due to her youth Elizabeth could not work as a nurse, but she readily provided what help she could to the wounded, some fifteen hundred of which stayed at the castle. Soldiers thought of her as better than any medicine. These wounded men arrived at the castle crippled from the horrors of war, but Elizabeth's cheerfulness, generosity and energy had an encouraging effect on these recuperating soldiers. She would sew for them, take down letters to their families under dictation, sing with them, show off her tricks on a bicycle, make recordings of the young soldiers' voices and take photos and send them to their families.

Witnessing the sufferings of others in this way had a considerable influence on Elizabeth's character, it provided a counterweight to her innate carefree and cheery disposition, and it taught her compassion, which would come in handy in the future after she became part of the royal family. For bearers of the British crown over the last century, philanthropy and charity have become their main duties. The institution of the monarchy in the UK has been preserved only because of the good that royals have done for their subjects.

The war brought sorrows for the Bowes-Lyon family personally. In the Battle of Loos in 1915, one of Elizabeth's elder brothers, Fergus, was killed. Then the news came that another brother, Michael, had also been killed. However, because Michael's body had not been found, hope flickered in the family that he had somehow survived. Their hopes were not in vain, three months later they received word that Michael

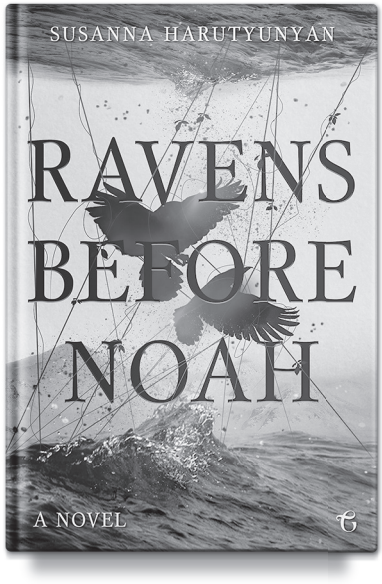
had been taken prisoner and was being held in an enemy hospital with a head wound.

In the aftermath of Fergus's death, the health of their mother began to suffer. Elizabeth's elder sisters Mary and Rose were married and David was away at Eton. The young Elizabeth had to take on ever greater responsibilities. The young lady showed herself to be especially responsible and savvy during a fire at the castle which erupted on a dark December night. While many of the adults around her panicked, she showed that she was capable of dealing with extreme situations on her own. This trait would come in handy on multiple occasions in her adult life at the royal court after she married Albert, the future King George VI.

Amazingly, the UK was rocked by a rumour that Elizabeth was not of aristocratic origin, and it was suggested – without any foundation – that Cecilia was not in fact Elizabeth's real mother. Personally, as a researcher I do not find the arguments adduced to hold water. Let me only add that it suffices to look at a photograph of the Countess of Strathmore, Elizabeth's mother, in order to be convinced, as they look so alike.

Ravens before Noah

by Susanna Harutyunyan



This novel is set in the Armenian mountains sometime in 1915-1960. An old man and a new born baby boy escape from the Hamidian massacres in Turkey in 1894 and hide themselves in the ruins of a demolished and abandoned village. The village soon becomes a shelter for many others, who flee from problems with the law, their families, or their past lives. The villagers survive in this secret shelter, cut off from the rest of the world, by selling or bartering their agricultural products in the villages beneath the mountain.

Years pass by, and the child saved by the old man grows into a young man, Harout. He falls for a beautiful girl who arrived in the village after being tortured by Turkish soldiers. She is pregnant and the old women of the village want to kill the twin baby girls as soon as they are born, to wash away the shame…

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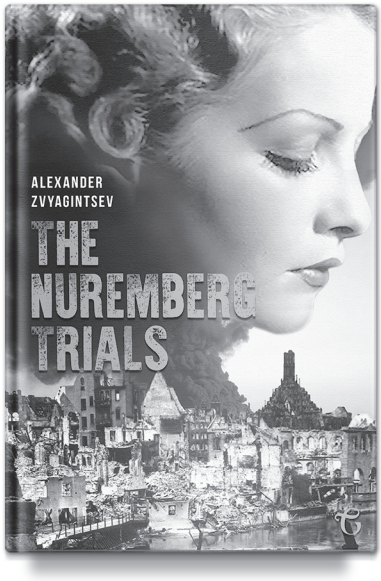
The Nuremberg Trials

by Alexander Zvyagintsev



Postwar Nuremberg is set to host a historically unprecedented trial of the leaders of the defeated Third Reich. The whole world is awaiting a just verdict, but it is here where Soviet counterintelligence must wage a secret war against forces that seek to prevent that from happening at any cost. Nuremberg, having been nearly wiped from the face of the earth during the harsh fighting, becomes an arena for ruthless struggles in both hidden and overt operations. Nazis are still operating underground, spies weave their intrigues, politicians and diplomats make bargains, and movie stars dazzle the public. The enormous efforts led by the USSR's chief prosecutor Roman Rudenko to expose the Nazi atrocities are threatened.

The Nuremberg Trials is based upon real facts that were hitherto unknown and details that the author, who spent many years studying the trials, learned from participants and witnesses.

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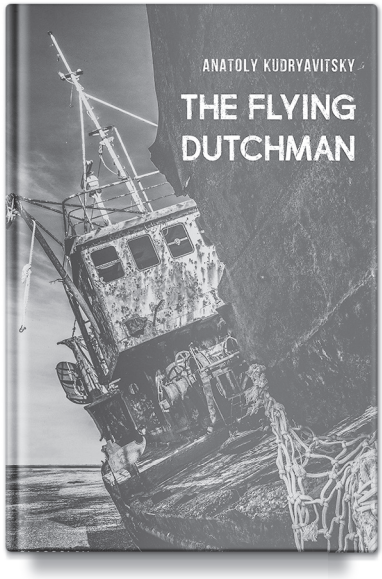
The Flying Dutchman

by Anatoly Kudryavitsky



Some time in the 1970s, Konstantin Alpheyev, a well-known Russian musicologist, finds himself in trouble with the KGB, the Russian secret police, after the death of his girlfriend, for which one of their officers may have been responsible. He has to flee from the city and to go into hiding. He rents an old house located on the bank of a big Russian river, and lives there like a recluse observing nature and working on his new book about Wagner. The house, a part of an old barge, undergoes strange metamorphoses rebuilding itself as a medieval schooner, and Alpheyev begins to identify himself with the Flying Dutchman. Meanwhile, the police locate his new whereabouts and put him under surveillance. A chain of strange events in the nearby village makes the police officer contact the KGB, and the latter figure out who the new tenant of the old house actually is.

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I Want a Baby and Other Plays

by Sergei Tretyakov

When Sergei Tretyakov's ground-breaking play, *I Want a Baby*, was banned by Stalin's censor in 1927, it was a signal that the radical and innovative theatre of the early Soviet years was to be brought to an end. A glittering, unblinking exploration of the realities of post-revolutionary Soviet life, *I Want a Baby* marks a high point in modernist experimental drama.

Tretyakov's plays are notable for their formal originality and their revolutionary content. *The World Upside Down*, which was staged by Vsevolod Meyerhold in 1923, concerns a failed agrarian revolution. *A Wise Man*, originally directed by the great film director and Tretyakov's friend, Sergei Eisenstein, is a clown show set in the Paris of the émigré White Russians. *Are You Listening, Moscow?!* and *Gas Masks* are 'agit-melodramas', fierce, fast-moving and edgy...

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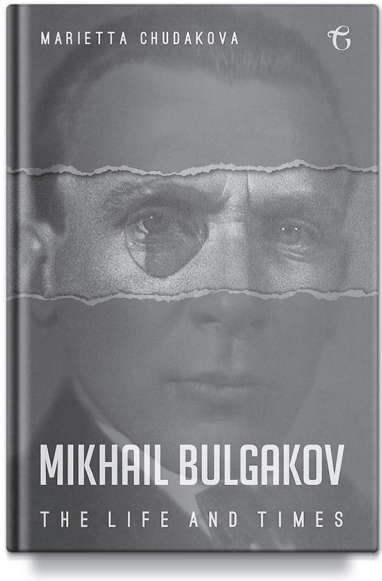
Mikhail Bulgakov: The Life and Times

by Marietta Chudakova



Marietta Chudakova's biography of Bulgakov was first published in 1988 and remains the most authoritative and comprehensive study of the writer's life ever produced. It has received acclaim for the journalistic style in which it is written: the author draws on unpublished manuscripts and early drafts of Bulgakov's novels to bring the writer to life. She also explores archive documents and memoirs written by some of Bulgakov's contemporaries so as to construct a comprehensive and nuanced portrait of the writer and his life and times. The scholar casts light on Bulgakov's life with an unrivalled eye for detail and a huge amount of affection for the writer and his works.

Mikhail Bulgakov: The Life and Times will be of particular interest to international researchers studying Mikhail Bulgakov's life and works, and is recommended to a broader audience worldwide.

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The author traces the Queen Mother's formative years, her family life in the palace environment, her growing adoration and ascension to the British throne, how she arranged aid to Stalingrad and was ultimately named an honorary citizen of that city, and other little-known details from the life of the Queen and her circle.

With a foreword by Yuri Fokin, Russia's ambassador to the UK in the period 1997–2000, who was personally acquainted with the Queen Mother, the book will undoubtedly appeal to the British public and to anyone interested in Russian-British relations and the two countries' World War II history. Illustrated with photographs from private collections and from the Battle of Stalingrad Museum, some of which readers will see for the first time.

Natalia Kulishenko holds a master's degree in international relations from the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and now works at the Russian state agency Rossotrudnichestvo. Her master's thesis was titled "On the establishment of relations in the 'Big Three' format: Russia, USA, China".

She has often participated in prominent international forums and conferences. She has been recognized for helping to develop and maintain ties between Coventry, England, and Volgograd, Russia: the two communities which started the twin-cities movement that has now been taken up worldwide.

"I am confident that this book will interest not only historians and international-relations experts, but also anyone interested in foreign affairs and diplomacy."
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