

# A jewel in “The Crown” A portrait of the Queen as a young woman

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Netflix have produced a visually stunning depiction of Queen Elizabeth II's formative years

## **This review contains plot details of the first season of “The Crown”**

THERE is a scene in “The Crown” where Princess Elizabeth, still a girl, visits Eton College. The future Queen has a private lesson with the vice-provost, but as she enters the school's courtyard the bell rings and dozens of boys stream forth, striding purposefully across her path. The shot cuts to a bird's-eye view of Elizabeth as she hesitates, spinning around: a small girl in a bright blue dress adrift in a sea of top hats.

Queen Elizabeth II was just 25 when her father, George VI, died in 1952. Her ascension to the throne and the early years of her reign is the subject of the first series of “The Crown”, an ambitious and expensive production released on Netflix on November 4th. The first episodes trace post-war British history from Winston Churchill's re-election and the Great Smog of 1952 to the beginning of Anthony Eden's tenure and the Suez Canal crisis.

But “The Crown” is not merely a work of social and political history. The broader focus is on the personal struggles of the royal family, not least those of Elizabeth (Claire Foy) as she feels her way into queenship. Nobody expected her to succeed to the throne so young; beyond a few hurried lessons from her father before he died, Elizabeth is ill prepared for the practicalities of the task ahead. In her first audience with Churchill (John Lithgow), the new Queen offers him a seat and some tea. “Oh dear, did no one explain?” Churchill says. The sovereign never offers a prime minister refreshment, he explains, nor a chair. To waste time on such niceties is a “grievous sin”. [...]

What ultimately transfixes is the subtle transformation of Elizabeth Windsor into Elizabeth Regina, a symbol of something that is more than mortal (or, as the Duke of Windsor puts it, “a strange hybrid creature, like a sphinx”). During her lessons at Eton, Elizabeth learns that there are two elements of the constitution, according to Walter Bagehot: the efficient and the dignified. The efficient has the power to make and execute policy and is answerable to the electorate. The monarch, the dignified, gives significance and legitimacy to the efficient and is answerable to God. In 2016 it is fair to question the value of the monarchy. But in post-Brexit Britain, as political parties squabble and splinter, economic uncertainty looms and social divisions run deep, there is appeal in this portrait of a leader who is dignified and steadfast, a leader who puts the needs of her country above all else.