

The
LIZ
TAYLOR
RING

A NOVEL

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The Liz Taylor Ring

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FINDING ELIZABETH TAYLOR IN *THE LIZ TAYLOR RING*

The life of Elizabeth Taylor is an endless source of inspiration. Like my character Lizzie Morgan, I have long been fascinated with the star—her beauty, her talent, her love life, her philanthropy, and of course, her vast jewelry collection. There's so much richness in the life of this one incredible woman.

While *The Liz Taylor Ring* is a story about a fictional family, I took inspiration from every part of Elizabeth Taylor's remarkable life. There's a lot about Elizabeth Taylor mentioned in the text itself, but there are also some more subtle references that you might have missed. I hope you'll enjoy this list of a few such references.

CHAPTER 1

The family name Schneider is our first homage to Elizabeth Taylor. *Schneider* is German for the word *tailor*.

CHAPTER 2

When Lizzie's mother calls the 33.19-carat Krupp Diamond (now known as the Elizabeth Taylor Diamond) *vulgar*, this references

when Princess Margaret said the same thing to Elizabeth Taylor at a dinner party. Elizabeth invited Princess Margaret to try it on, and when the princess admired the ring on her own finger, Elizabeth remarked that the princess didn't seem to think the diamond was quite so vulgar when *she* was wearing it.

Lizzie's sister, Maggie, takes her name from one of Elizabeth Taylor's defining roles: Maggie the Cat in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. If there is anything sexier than Elizabeth Taylor in that white slip, then I haven't seen it. (Except for Elizabeth Taylor in the white bathing suit from *Suddenly, Last Summer*, which is referenced in Chapter 40.)

Lizzie's mother, Katharine, takes her name from Katharine Hepburn, who played Elizabeth Taylor's controlling and manipulative aunt in *Suddenly, Last Summer*.

CHAPTER 3

Addy's business acumen reflects that of Elizabeth Taylor. Taylor was the first woman to negotiate and receive one million dollars for a film, for her role in *Cleopatra*. When she launched her first fragrance in 1987, it was the start of a billion-dollar perfume business.

CHAPTER 4

Elizabeth Taylor had a number of close relationships with gay men throughout her life. Montgomery Clift was one of her best friends, and her friendship with Rock Hudson inspired her AIDS activism, including a founding role in the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amFAR) and the establishment of The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation.

The love letters that Nathan reads like a good luck charm reference the love letters Richard Burton used to write to Elizabeth Taylor. (Swoon!)

CHAPTER 5

Elizabeth Taylor knew her fair share of gamblers: her first hus-

band, Conrad “Nicky” Hilton, was known for his gambling, and her third husband, Mike Todd, was known to be a gambler as well. Additionally, Elizabeth Taylor’s film *The Only Game in Town* was about a Vegas showgirl who has an affair with a compulsive gambler, played by Warren Beatty.

CHAPTER 8

Sy offers Courtney use of his private jet. Elizabeth Taylor’s third husband, Mike Todd, died when his private plane, the *Liz*, tragically crashed. Elizabeth would have been on the plane, too, but had stayed home because she was sick.

CHAPTER 11

Lizzie and Ritchie dance to Fleetwood Mac, recalling the relationship between Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham, which was often compared to that of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

CHAPTER 12

When Addy objects to *sexually suggestive photographs* of her children, it reminds us that Elizabeth Taylor was a child star, whose first role was at age ten. In her iconic *Life* magazine photo shoot at age seventeen, the images are undeniably sexual.

CHAPTER 13

Nathan and Diego met when they were both trying to make it on Broadway. Elizabeth Taylor was no stranger to the Broadway stage—she made her Broadway debut in “The Little Foxes” in 1981, and starred opposite Richard Burton in “Private Lives” in 1983. Richard Burton’s Broadway experience was far more extensive, and he was a highly respected stage actor before making his mark on the silver screen.

Diego’s father, Pedro Garcia Flores, was born in Mexico. Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton lived in Mexico when Burton filmed *The Night of the Iguana*. They loved it there so much that

Burton purchased their Puerto Vallarta home, Casa Kimberley, as a birthday present for Taylor.

CHAPTER 16

Maggie's abusive marriage refers to Elizabeth Taylor's marriage to Nicky Hilton.

The mention of Maggie riding is a reference to *National Velvet*, one of Elizabeth Taylor's earliest roles.

Lizzie's gold halter dress at the club is meant to evoke the stunning gold ensemble Elizabeth Taylor wears on her entrance to Rome in *Cleopatra*. (Google *Elizabeth Taylor entrance to Rome* to watch this iconic scene.)

CHAPTER 17

The pool party scene references the first time Richard Burton saw Elizabeth Taylor. According to Burton's diaries, he saw her from across the pool, at a party, while she was still married to her second husband, Michael Wilding. She put down her book, lowered her sunglasses, and looked at him. (Elizabeth would recall their first meeting a bit differently, instead taking place at her and Wilding's home.)

When Ritchie says "Can't you see that I'm drowning in you?" this is a reference to how Richard Burton called Elizabeth Taylor *Ocean* because he felt he was drowning in her.

CHAPTER 24

Addy's dog, Duke, reminds us of two of Elizabeth Taylor's earliest roles, *Lassie Come Home* and *Courage of Lassie*. Elizabeth Taylor was a lifelong animal lover and always surrounded herself with pets.

CHAPTER 25

"When they kissed, Lizzie never wanted it to end." Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton famously continued kissing long after

director Joe Mankiewicz called *Cut!* at the end of love scenes on the set of *Cleopatra*.

CHAPTER 26

Pulchritudinous was one of the words that Richard Burton used to describe Elizabeth Taylor. (Dreamy, right?)

CHAPTER 34

Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton bought a yacht in 1967, which they called *Kalizma*, named after their children Kate, Liza, and Maria. They lived on the *Kalizma* for years, with their family, a full staff, and a menagerie of pets.

Ritchie remarks that everyone at the wedding on the yacht is staring at them, talking about them. During the filming of *Cleopatra*, studio publicists tried to downplay the affair between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. But everywhere the couple went, tons of photographers followed. Federico Fellini, who was in Rome at the time, called the reporters, who buzzed around endlessly, *paparazzo*, meaning *buzzing insect*. With that, the term *paparazzi* was invented.

When Lizzie asks Ritchie “Who do you love?” this references the famous moment when Richard Burton asked Elizabeth Taylor the same thing. At a dinner in Rome, during the filming of *Cleopatra*, Burton drunkenly asked Taylor, “Who do you love?” right in front of her husband, Eddie Fisher. She replied: “You.” This moment is immortalized in the Lindsay Lohan made-for-TV movie, *Liz & Dick*. (You should immediately Google *Liz and Dick who do you love* and go watch that clip. I’ll wait.)

CHAPTER 37

When Nathan says all humans have scars, it brings to mind the emergency tracheotomy Elizabeth Taylor had, while filming *Cleopatra*. She was self-conscious about her scar, and turned the 69.42-carat Cartier Diamond (a pear shaped stone later known as the Taylor-Burton Diamond) that Richard Burton bought for

her into a necklace to hide it. (Fans of *The Grace Kelly Dress*: the first time Elizabeth wore this necklace was at Princess Grace's fortieth birthday party, the Scorpio Ball. Rude to try to upstage the birthday girl, or impossible to upstage your friend who is a literal princess? Discuss amongst yourselves.)

CHAPTER 38

Maggie's walk-by-them-in-a-swimsuit trick is reminiscent of the beach scene in *Suddenly, Last Summer*. (Please note that no actual cousins were cannibalized in the writing of this chapter.)

CHAPTER 39

Maggie's daughter, Holly, takes her name from Elizabeth Taylor's *Suddenly, Last Summer* character, Catherine Holly.

CHAPTER 46

Courtney's friend, Rebecca, insists on VIP treatment for Addy. Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton starred in *The V.I.P.s* in 1963, a film that capitalized on the public's desire to see Taylor and Burton together. They would make a total of eleven films together: *Cleopatra*, *The V.I.P.s*, *The Sandpiper*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Comedians*, *Boom!*, *Under Milk Wood*, *Hammersmith Is Out*, and *Divorce His—Divorce Hers* (made-for-TV movie). Elizabeth Taylor also did an uncredited cameo in Richard Burton's *Anne of the Thousand Days*.

CHAPTER 49

The style of Ritchie's diaries is an homage to the style of the Richard Burton diaries, in which he would often only use a sentence or two to describe each day.

CHAPTER 62

Elizabeth Taylor was the first celebrity to openly check herself

into the Betty Ford Center for treatment for addiction. Betty Ford, herself, served as Elizabeth's sponsor.

CHAPTER 65

Lizzie throws herself onto the bed when she discovers the Liz Taylor Ring is gone. When Elizabeth Taylor temporarily lost La Peregrina, a 55.95 carat pearl once owned by Spanish royalty, she went into the bedroom of her hotel suite, threw herself onto the bed, and screamed into a pillow.

When Ritchie gets up off the bed, and kneels down before Lizzie, this references the famous scene from *Cleopatra* where Cleopatra tells Antony: "You will kneel!" (Google *Cleopatra you will kneel*. Go watch that sexy scene and hurry back. I'll wait.)

CHAPTER 69

It was at a hotel suite at Caesars in Las Vegas that Elizabeth Taylor famously lost La Peregrina, though it was later found in her puppy's mouth.

CHAPTER 72

The line "She was alive" references two of my favorite Elizabeth Taylor moments. Of course, it's a reference to the famous Maggie the Cat line in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*: "Maggie the Cat is alive! I'm alive!" (Google *Maggie the Cat is alive*. Go watch this brief clip now. Warning: watching this scene may cause you to want to watch the entire movie immediately.)

But also, in an interview with Hedda Hopper, Elizabeth Taylor would defend her affair with Eddie Fisher, while she was still grieving the tragic death of her third husband, Mike Todd. She famously said: "Mike is dead and I'm alive." (Oh, dear.)

When Lizzie puts the ring in Ritchie's casket, this references the rumor that Elizabeth Taylor supposedly left a \$100,000 diamond ring in Mike Todd's casket before he was buried. Thieves later dug up his grave and desecrated his corpse, reportedly looking for the diamond.

CHAPTER 74

Maggie running off to Texas is an homage to the setting of the film *Giant*, which Elizabeth Taylor starred in with Rock Hudson and James Dean.

EPILOGUE

(Fans of *The Grace Kelly Dress*: not only did Grace Kelly attend Elizabeth Taylor's fortieth birthday party... Princess Grace led the conga line!)



AUTHOR'S NOTE

There's just something about jewelry. The sparkle, the glamour, the way it makes you feel when you put it on. A piece of jewelry can make you feel beautiful. It can make you feel loved. It can remind you of the person who gave it to you—make you feel like they are with you, even if they are long gone.

For every piece of jewelry that I own, I can tell you who gave it to me, what occasion it marked, and where I was in my life when I got it: the delicate diamond studs, gifted to me by my husband, to mark the occasion of my first son's birth; the double strand of pearls, a twenty-first birthday gift from my parents; and the gold ring with a star, given to me by my Grandma Dorothy, after I told her it was the piece of her jewelry that I most loved. She took it off her finger and handed it to me, saying that I shouldn't have to wait for her to die to wear it. She wanted to watch me enjoy it while she was still alive.

Heirlooms, in particular, are so incredibly important to me—I wear the gold ring with the star from Grandma Dorothy all the time, and I love having a piece of her with me as I go through my day-to-day life. I also have two other rings that belonged to my grandmother that I treasure. On important days when I

need to feel her spirit with me, I wear all three at once. I've worn Grandma Dorothy's rings to family bar mitzvahs (I wouldn't want her to miss a fabulous party), and I've worn them to important meetings (her spirit fortifying me to do well). I've worn them on trips to the supermarket, and I've worn them to big, fancy weddings. When I wear them, friends and strangers alike ask me about them, and I get the chance to talk about her. When I wear them, my kids ask me about her, the woman who gave them their blue eyes.

Thinking about heirloom jewelry gave me the idea for *The Liz Taylor Ring*—what if a ring that was thought to be long lost were to be found again? As with *The Grace Kelly Dress*, I wanted to tie an heirloom item to a famous actress, channeling my other obsession: old Hollywood. Once I decided to write about jewelry, there's no other Hollywood star that comes to mind but Elizabeth Taylor.

Elizabeth Taylor's jewelry collection is legendary, but for me, it was always about the Krupp Diamond, which is now known as—what else?!—the Elizabeth Taylor Diamond. I love that Richard Burton gifted it to Elizabeth Taylor for no reason at all. I love that it belonged to Vera Krupp, of the German munitions family who supplied arms to the Nazis, and Elizabeth Taylor often quipped that it was perfect for a “nice Jewish girl” like herself to own it. I love that Elizabeth Taylor wore it every day of her life.

My seventh novel, *The Liz Taylor Ring*, pays homage to the rings passed down to me by my grandmother, as it traces a priceless family heirloom—a long-lost diamond ring inspired by the famous Krupp Diamond—that reappears, leaving three siblings to determine its fate. Just as millions of fans have been swept away by the stories of Elizabeth Taylor's astonishing life, I hope that you, too, will be swept away by this story of sibling rivalry, an all-consuming love affair, and an eleven-carat diamond.



ADDITIONAL READING

Researching this book was a joy. I relied on so many sources to create *The Liz Taylor Ring*. A few of these are listed below.

ON ELIZABETH TAYLOR AND RICHARD BURTON:

Books:

Furious Love by Sam Kashner and Nancy Schoenberger

The Richard Burton Diaries edited by Chris Williams

Elizabeth Taylor: My Love Affair with Jewelry by Elizabeth Taylor

How to Be a Movie Star: Elizabeth Taylor in Hollywood by William J. Mann

A Passion for Life: The Biography of Elizabeth Taylor by Donald Spoto

Film/Television:

Elizabeth Taylor: Auction of a Lifetime

Liz: The Elizabeth Taylor Story, based on the novel by C. David Heynmann

Liz & Dick

The Unauthorized Biography of Elizabeth Taylor

Here's Lucy, Season 3, Episode 1

Burton and Taylor

Unauthorized Biographies with Peter Graves, Episode 3

ON GAMBLING ADDICTION:

Born to Lose by Bill Lee

Hats and Eyeglasses by Martha Frankel

All Bets Are Off by Arnie and Sheila Wexler

Molly's Game by Molly Bloom (book and film adaptation)

ON ALCOHOL ADDICTION:

Blackout: Remembering the Things I Drank to Forget by Sarah Hepola

Drinking: A Love Story by Caroline Knapp

Quitter: A memoir of drinking, relapse, and recovery by Erica C. Barnett