



A Game Of Hide And Seek

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During summer games of hide-and-seek Harriet falls in love with Vesey and his elusive, teasing ways. When he goes to Oxford she cherishes his photograph and waits for the letter that never comes. Then Charles enters her life, and Harriet stifles her imaginings. With a husband and daughter, she excels at respectability: ornaments on the mantelpiece, remembered birthdays and jars of lilac. But when Vesey reappears, her marriage seems to melt away. Harriet is older, it is much too late, but she is still in love with him.

A Game Of Hide And Seek Details

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From Reader Review A Game Of Hide And Seek for online ebook

Mary Ronan Drew says

Elizabeth Taylor is best known for her novel *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont*, which in 2005 was made into a fine movie starring Joan Plowright. And if you have seen that film or read that book you have experienced the mix of laughter, tears, indignation, and sympathy that Taylor's stories evoke.

In *A Game of Hide and Seek* we meet Harriet and Vesey when they are 18, he casually cruel to hide his insecurity, she shy and fearful. They are in love but they dare not express their feelings. The closest they come to outward expression of the intensity they feel is when playing hide and seek with two young friends. They always hide in the hay loft together and they never say a word to one another about their love. It is quintessentially Elizabeth Taylor.

In the second part of the book it is some years later and Harriett is married with a 15-year old daughter. Vesey, who has become an actor, reappears in her life but time has not treated him gently. They discover they are still in love but of course they are, in about 1957, in a difficult situation.

The book is not as grim as it sounds. Other characters who range from amusingly confused to hilariously vain. As Anita Brookner has said, "All her writings could be described as coming into the category of comedy. Comedy is the best vehicle for truths that are too fierce to be borne."

2012 No 34

Anna says

"Are we perhaps practically strangers? I suppose at some point my idea of you must have diverged from you yourself."

--Elizabeth Taylor, *A Game of Hide and Seek*

This is one of those stories that sneaks up on you. I didn't feel I was making any progress, then suddenly realized I was finished with Part 1. I can't say that I enjoyed the actual story, but the writing itself grabbed me from the start. The language is engrossing with illuminating observations and some brilliantly subtle phrasing.

You begin with an ordinary, almost mundane, scene then you get some of the undercurrents from the characters' thoughts. Then you are given some extra information which throws the interaction kilter. Throughout, there are some conversations but they are just the surface and the real action is going on inside the characters' minds.

It's a great example of post-WW2 writing.

I was originally intrigued by the author's name and decided to check out this book. Now I know I need to find more of her stories.

Anastasia Hobbet says

I can now see why the 'other' Elizabeth Taylor is sometimes compared to Barbara Pym, though she's more cynical, more akin to another contemporary, Graham Green, and this book is much darker than the Taylor book recently made into a sappy movie, *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont*. It's the tale, set in drab postwar England, of a dull, stifled suburban housewife and her childhood love, who meet again in adulthood and find themselves drawn inexorably together. There are no admirable characters in this book--it looks like Taylor tried hard to keep them unlovable--but that's not to say you don't come to care about them. Taylor's very subtle in handling this, and that takes real art.

Beth Bonini says

“When you are hurt, you lay waste all around you,” Harriet said quietly. ‘No one is safe.’ She was dismayed at loving someone imperfect.”

I wrote down this quotation in a notebook I keep for such things. Harriet, I want to say: We've all been there. How many young girls, on the cusp of life at age 18, have felt the disturbing notion that infatuated love and devotion has been rather wasted on an inferior object (or should I say subject?).

Harriet's mother and Vesey's uncle's wife have been lifelong best friends - and furthermore, suffragettes together. When Harriet and Vesey are thrown together during a summer in their teenage years, Harriet develops an inexplicable (and mostly pained) passion for the awkward and unpleasant Vesey. Sixteen years later, after Harriet has married Charles and is a mother to teenage Betsy, Vesey reappears in her life. The reader is asked to believe that her childhood passion, which has been given absolutely no oxygen over nearly two decades, is suddenly lit again - with Vesey, this time, being a more enthusiastic participant.

The pleasure of Elizabeth Taylor's writing made this a worthwhile reading experience, but rarely have I endured three less interesting or sympathetic characters. Harriet - I suppose we should designate her the protagonist - is a rather colourless, drippy, unknowable character. When I think of my daughters and their friends, much the same age as Harriet in this book, I think that there just aren't women like Harriet anymore. And thank goodness for that.

Susann says

I don't need to like the characters in a novel to like a book. But when it's a book about marital infidelity, it really helps to like (or at least empathize with) someone - either the cheater or the cheatee...or the child or the friend or anyone. But these characters were not worth any emotions that I tried to muster up. I just kept thinking, "that's who you're in love with? really?"

That said, I can't argue that Taylor lacked talent. She deftly drew each character and setting, so that I was entirely in each scene. I think this is just one of those that comes down to personal taste.

Although this is not a Persephone book, it falls in the Persephone milieu of early 20th century English domestic setting. Not to mention Nicola Beauman's biography of Taylor. I bought this gorgeous Virago Modern Classic at Foyle's in London. Cover design is very smart (and I mean that in both the English and

American sense of 'smart').

Cecily says

A teenage near-romance has the chance of being rekindled twenty years later. Twenty years too late? (This review gives away no more than is in the book's blurb, though the quotes section at the end is a little less subtle.)

It is poignant and painful, occasionally funny, but never sentimental or saccharine. Beautifully written, and it doesn't take the easy options. However, Taylor often introduces new characters or situations as if the reader knows all about them, only filling in the gaps later. Also, there are a few sections that are rather different in tone from the rest of the book, making it feel a little unfinished.

Harriet and Vesey have known each other since childhood, but the book starts between the wars, when they are around 18 and spend much of the summer at the house of his aunt, where Harriet is helping with the children. There is plenty of frisson, but Harriet in particular is naive, and the reader is somewhat in the dark as well. As she remembers a tryst, she reinvents it, whereas Vesey dismisses it because "we are children." He did not know that at his age most youths believe that they are men."

This summer makes up the first third of the novel, and teenage awkwardness and doubt is painfully authentic, though it's harder to see why Harriet is so attracted to Vesey when he's oafish, self-centred and lacking in empathy. There is also some pop-psychology about them both being only children, Vesey's mother being a poor parent, and Harriet's suffragette mother being disappointed in her daughter's lack of academic success and ambition. It feels a little out of place, though it does deliver some wonderful insights: Vesey's mother "drew attention to him as if he were a beloved marmoset on a chain, somehow enhancing her own originality, decorating her" so he had "no close friends, for he had too much to hide."

They drift apart. Harriet finally shows a smidgen of initiative and gets a job in a shop (a very comical section, but more caricatured than the rest of the book). She then marries a pleasant enough man and has a daughter, Betsy. When Betsy is in her teens, Vesey comes back into Harriet's life. Their feelings are clearer, but their course of action less so. This takes its toll on her marriage, and this is the finest section of the book (see some of the quotes). Time drags on, with increasing tension, longing, and doubt all round.

The tragic passages are balanced by comedy: in the shop, and then with Harriet's incompetent au pair, "the Dutch girl". In the latter case, the humour is based on misunderstanding, exacerbated by the housekeeper using twee British idioms that she doesn't understand. When wondering why she came, Charles suggests "it's a cheap way of learning how to speak American".

Overall, despite its inconsistent style, this is a beautiful book.

Miscellaneous quotes

* Suffragettes wondering, years later, if it was all worth it or whether "time would not despite them have floated down to them casually what they had almost drowned in struggling to reach." Nearly a wonderful sentence, but actually horribly mangled.

* An adult's irritation at young Vesey "was in reality impatience with another person's youth heightened by nostalgia for his own."

* A bucolic bus journey: "In those days, trees laced together above many a road; buses took perilous journeys, with twigs scratching at either side; cars, meeting them, backed up into gateways. The bus conductor was like the conductor of an orchestra. He guided the conversation, drew out the shy or bored or tired, linked the passengers together... and made a whole thing out of an assortment."

* When lovers walk, "Time's winged chariot was not a thing that they could hear."

* "Departure in the afternoon is depressing to those who are left. The day is so dominated by the one who has gone and, although only half-done, must be got through with that particular shadow lying over it."

* "The days shortened, but only technically. The time it took to live them seemed endless."

* Virginity a mixed blessing: "She was left with only her self-respect, which did not seem to mean as much to her as she had been led to believe."

* "What she had dreaded in suspense and embarrassment, she now fastened to. She embraced him with an erratic but extortionate passion. He was profoundly moved, though shocked, by her desperation... But to her, life seemed all at once simplified."

* "The lady of the Manor who looked as if she had been bred in her own stables."

* "Far from fearing middle age, one took refuge in it." I'm not sure about that!

* Being tormented by a cue for jealousy: "It was as if an unkind hand raked up dead leaves in his heart."

* When tension is highest between Harriet and her husband: " Marriage doesn't solve mysteries... It creates and deepens then. The two of them being shut up physically in this dark space, yet locked away for ever from one another, was oppressive."

* "Looking back on her married life, it seemed a frayed, tangled thing made by two strangers."

* "Beyond their familiarity and nakedness they could now sense their true isolation and were more perfectly strange to one another than people passing in the street."

* "Betsy had not so much grown up as unrolled - as if she were all there at the beginning, but that each birthday unrolled more of her, made more visible, though suggesting more."

* A lady's companion "had nothing to sell but her own company, which most people would have paid to avoid"!

* More teen angst: "Nothing was explicable, even to herself. When she wept, it was from confusion. Her ravelled emotions fatigued her. She was overwrought from uncertainty, more than from any specific cause."

* "Dusk, like a sediment, sifted down through bluish sky."

TheSkepticalReader says

I almost died of boredom.

Giulia (juliareadingdiary) says

I am a bit puzzled by this book. I loved all the characters; I thought the main focus would be around the two lovers, but there actually is a complete cast of characters and each one of them is deep, recognizable and original. The countryside/domestic setting is depicted very skillfully and everything felt very near and real. Yet, I can't say that I enjoyed the main theme - Harriet and Vesey's love story. It is beautiful and true, but, personally, I wasn't particularly moved nor I sympathized with their choices.

Overall though, it is indeed a beautiful novel with a great story!

John says

My big problem here is that I don't think I understood the ending, which would make a difference, but here goes ...

I didn't find this a love story at all, but a tragedy on multiple levels. At the center are Harriet and Vesey, with their "love" thwarted by his summary dismissal from his aunt's house. It was never clear to me that he had any intention of following through with rescuing her from her situation; it later turns out he can barely take care of himself. There's a later implication that he fathered her daughter, not her husband Charles, although I could swear Taylor also makes it clear she's Charles's child after all? Both the girl *and* her mother's being infatuated with Vesey at the same time was a bit hard to take.

Others have described the book as poignant, but I'd say "grim" would be more like it. The only remotely likeable characters might be Harriet's mother, as well as "Aunt" Caroline and Uncle Hugo, but even they add to the the downer note of this trainwreck-in-the-offing story. Harriet's co-workers in the first part were a hoot, though a minor comedic sideshow. Elke, the Dutch au pair, served a similar function later, although her being "foreign" may mean more to a British reader than (a modern) American one.

Three stars because I feel two might be unfair, but I don't get the rave reviews I see. Their relationship seemed symbiotically dysfunctional to me. I'd be willing to read another Taylor story to determine whether my unhappiness is from this unpleasant offering, or whether I just don't care for her writing. However, that won't be soon.

Ali says

In A Game of Hide and Seek Elizabeth Taylor has created a heartbreakingly poignant love story. Though this is in no way a conventional girl meets boy happy ever after kind of love story. I imagine the story was

shaped largely by events in Elizabeth Taylor's own life – and this shows in the absolutely exquisite writing and what feels for the reader, as an absolute authenticity. Nicola Beauman author of The Other Elizabeth Taylor considers the character of Harriet – along with that of Julia in At Mrs Lippincote's to be the characters most like Elizabeth Taylor herself. I was also reminded strongly of a short story in The Blush – called Goodbye, Goodbye – in which a man breaks his promise to never see again the woman he had a relationship with years earlier. Maybe there was a little of Elizabeth Taylor in the character of Caroline in that story too.

At eighteen Harriet and Vesey have already known each other for years, his aunt and her mother were great friends, suffragettes once imprisoned together. Vesey is carelessly rebellious – Harriet loves him quietly and nervously. When Vesey goes to Oxford – their lives begin to diverge. Harriet waits anxiously for news of him. Following the death of her mother Harriet marries Charles, older and dependable he provides her with a lovely conventional home, and draws her into a social circle that includes Kitty and Tiny. Vesey is never forgotten by Harriet who only glimpses him only briefly thereafter – until he returns to her when they are both middle aged - he a rather down at heel actor she a mother of a fifteen year old daughter. Harriet finds herself disregarding her marriage in order to see more of Vesey, a situation that Charles and Kitty soon become aware of. The ending in many ways is the right one although inevitably sad - and one I think I will keep thinking about for many days.

Life for Harriet passes by quickly – in the narrative the years speed by – just as in life Suddenly she is middle aged with an almost grown daughter, more than once she wishes she could be young again – that she and Vesey could have their time over.

“If only we were young again!” she said in a tired voice “And might have a second chance”

The daily routines of a conventional wife and mother are brilliantly reproduced. The conversations between Harriet and her daily help Mrs Curzon, the frustrations with her mother in law, the dullness and disappointments of life. These are the preoccupations of many middle class women and Elizabeth Taylor's view of them is sharp. Even Harriet's view of foreigners seems so like Elizabeth Taylor's would have been, rather modern by the standards of the time she absolutely understood how it would feel to be cast adrift in a new country – the confusion and incomprehension of England and its ways . Children are done brilliantly as ever – their little observations and worries beautifully observed. Time and again in her writing Elizabeth Taylor shows how wonderfully well she understands children. It is often in these wonderful observations of children and childhood that we see some of the best examples of Elizabeth Taylor's wonderful wit.

“Deirdre suddenly remembered that she would get infantile paralysis if she ate ice cream that had not been made in her own home.”

Elizabeth Jane Howard considers A Game of Hide and Seek to be probably her best novel – she said as much at the Elizabeth Taylor event in Reading recently – and although there are three I have yet to read – I think I already agree. This is a wonderful novel. What more is there to say?

JacquiWine says

Having loved Elizabeth Taylor's Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont, a book that made my end of year highlights in December, I was keen to try another of her novels. A View of the Harbour was a possibility, but in the end I plumped for A Game of Hide and Seek – both of these books appear on my Classics Club list, so I know I've still got Harbour to look forward to. In the meantime, I'm very glad to have picked this one to read – it delivered on every level for me.

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First published in 1951, A Game of Hide and Seek is a very poignant story of life's disappointments, compromises and lost loves. As the novel opens, eighteen-year-old Vesey is spending the summer with his Aunt Caroline and Uncle Hugo at their home in the South of England. Harriet, also aged eighteen, is a frequent visitor to the house and during the long summer's evenings, she plays hide-and-seek with Vesey and his two young cousins. Both Harriet and Vesey are something of a disappointment to their elders. Harriet shows no signs of fulfilling any of the ambitions or passions of her mother who, together with Caroline, was an active participant in the suffragette movement. Having struggled at school, Harriet now seems content to daydream and pick flowers in the countryside. Vesey, on the other hand, is bright, but somewhat lazy and insensitive. At times, he seems attentive to Harriet, but he can also be spiteful and uncaring. He envisages himself as a writer, a man of letters, and a place at Oxford beckons.

Over the summer months, Harriet falls in love with Vesey; she imagines a life with him, possibly a future defined by marriage and everything this entails. But while Harriet is clearly in love with Vesey, his future intentions remain somewhat unclear.

Vesey, whose next steps would take him over the threshold of a new and promising world, wished to go without any backward glances or entanglements. He was not one to keep up friendships, never threw out fastening tendrils such as letters or presents or remembrances; was quite unencumbered by all the things which Harriet valued and kept: drawers full of photographs, brochures, programmes, postcards, diaries. He never remembered birthdays or any other anniversary. (pg.16)

As the days pass, Hugo and Caroline become increasingly intolerant of Vesey's behaviour, and it's not long before they find an excuse to ask him to leave. Fearing that she may have missed her chance with Vesey, Harriet is bereft at his departure. A year seems a long time to wait until the following summer when she hopes to see him again.

With Vesey gone, Harriet finds a job in a gown shop, and in time she meets Charles Jephcott, a man who, at thirty-five, seems old before his time. Charles, a solicitor by profession, is solemn, steady and unexciting, but he is attentive to Harriet and wishes to marry her. When Vesey pays Caroline a brief visit, Harriet's hopes are revived again only to be dashed when he fails to show at a dance. All seems lost, especially when Harriet's mother dies unexpectedly. Uncertain of what the future may hold for her, Harriet agrees to marry Charles even though she is still in love with Vesey, a development that brings us to the end of the first part of the novel.

In the second half, we move forward some sixteen or seventeen years – the exact year isn't clear, but we seem to be in the late 1940s following WW2. Harriet and Charles have been married for several years, and they have a daughter, Betsy, aged fifteen. There is a sense that Harriet has filled her days with domestic duties, managing the household administration and taking care of Betsy. The one thing that's missing is any feeling of love or passion for Charles.

When she married Charles, she had seemed to wed also a social order. A convert to it, and to provincial life, and keeping house, she had pursued it fanatically and as if she feared censure. [...] But now she flouted what

she had helped to create – an illusion of society; an oiling of the wheels which went round but not forwards; conventions which could only exist so long as emotion was in abeyance. (pg. 262)

To read the rest of my review, please click here:

<https://jacquiwine.wordpress.com/2016...>

Huw Rhys says

Imagine a painter. After much contemplation, he daubs down one, thick streak of paint. Then over the next few days, he proceeds, very slowly, methodically and with great thought and accuracy to add other layers on top of this one streak. After a substantial period of time, the original streak of paint is almost completely obscured - but you know it's still there. Each subsequent addition has enriched the original streak - but it's still just the one single streak. You are aware that the canvass is massive, and this is really only one, small streak on it...

That's what this exquisite book from Elizabeth Taylor is like - one simple love story which is augmented and contextualized over a number of years, by a number of seemingly un-earth shattering events.

This love story takes place over the middle years of the last century, so we get a rarely broadcast insight into a period of history in the UK which was coloured by war, depression and the gradual erosion of the class system that had pervaded for so many centuries. A shift to more liberal moral values is also redolent of these times.

Our main protagonists - Harriet and Vesey - straddle most of these social indices. Their story gently unfolds over two or three decades, never quite becoming what is tantalisingly suggested at various stages in the development of their narrative.

Yes, this book is very subtle - but it also has moments of humour, social comment, humanism and pathos. If you like your books full of thrills, knife edge scenarios and full blooded action, you may not immediately warm to this gentle piece of writing. But if you like richly coloured pictures that run deep, you may well find this very rewarding.

SarahC says

I happened upon Elizabeth Taylor, as I read that this novel was being republished and released last week. I am glad I did because it was a quiet, lovely read. The relationship is described and perhaps receives its best explanation in the beginning pages of this book. The couple, Harriet and Vesey, are playing actually a real game of hide and seek with Vesey's young cousins, Harriet's surrogate family at their relaxed home on the edge of town. Vesey and Harriet's friendship had grown here as they both had been welcomed by the Macmillan family through the years.

The description of their typical hide-and-seek game gives us a glimpse into the story of Harriet and Vesey as they sat quietly waiting to be found by the younger children: "The ticking of each heart, which they believed the other must hear, was like a pendulum rocking in a hollow case... Vesey would move his eyes toward

her, as if to move his head, too, would betray them...A different hiding place would have prolonged the search and their exquisite stay in heaven or hell; but neither could suggest what might mean their betrayal to one another."

This is a life-long story of two people, and I don't mean to make it sound too grand, but it is about more than marriage or betrayal or judgement. The novel starts out and ends much more than that. The undercurrent of other stories within the main story work to show us that because the beginning story is really the friendship between Vesey's aunt and Harriet's mother, who were bonded in girlhood through their work as suffragists. The main characters' life stories are important too. As Harriet's life reaches a difficult point, she seeks belonging and finds a job as a shop girl. Vesey breaks from his family to become an actor. Taylor gives these characters a life, a history, and a place in imagination beyond the pages of this book.

So many authors stumble with the challenge to carry the story through completely. In the attempt to tell emotional, subtle relationship stories, a trap door springs open and the attempt falls through, taking us with it. Not so with Taylor. This story is soulfully established and carried through to the end. This story is from life. It is not one that adds artificial ingredients to emotions so perfectly within our existence already.

Laura says

Opening lines:

Sometimes in the long summer's evenings, which are so marked a part of our youth, Harriet and Vesey played hide-and-seek with the younger children, running across the tufted meadows, their shoes yellow with the pollen of buttercups.

This is the love story between Harriet and Vesey, a love they captivated since their youth. However, their lives take a different course and Harriet married another man. But their love nevertheless persists even if this not brings a happy end to the story.

This is the first book of this author I've read and I'm planning to read more. The author has a vivid way of writing, portraying in a very sensible way the social paradigms of the beginning of 20th century.

Sarah says

Elizabeth Taylor writes so sensitively about inner feelings. She is very clever at recalling adolescent yearnings and their romanticised views. I found it a very moving book. Dealing with life and how our choices affect everything and everyone involved. Harriet's relationship with her mother was very touching to me. The danger of idealizing memories and people. It was beautifully written and I loved it.

Resh (The Book Satchel) says

A Game of hide and Seek is the story of Harriet and Vesey who develop affectionate feelings for one another as children but fate plays a game of hide and seek with their lives.

The novel has very strong character sketches. The reader almost feels as if inside Harriet's head. As for Vesey, I found myself warming to him as the novel nearly reaches its end. Vesey is always the insensitive fellow, but Taylor explains how or why he is so towards the ending which made me love his character too. Both Harriet and Vesey are victims of misunderstandings, unsaid confessions and unexpressed feelings. Charles (Harriet's husband), who is aware of Harriet's affections towards Vesey, feels his marriage threatened by Vesey's presence. Taylor brings out his fears and agony as a husband while contrasting it to the desperation and yearning that Harriet and Vesey feel for each other. The secondary characters are well crafted too.

I found this to be a heart touching read. It is one of my favourite novels now. Highly recommended. For a detailed review visit - <http://www.thebooksatchel.com/game-hi...>

Laura says

Looking at the other reviews, I am shocked that this got anything higher than 3 stars. Perhaps it is just me, but it was one of those books that I had to make myself read to the end.

I had a hard time putting my finger on what it was that I didn't enjoy about this book.

I was quite readable at times, but overall I thought it didn't flow very well; it jumps uncomfortably from one time period to the next and for many parts I had trouble knowing what on earth she was on about (and frankly, didn't care to know). I didn't really feel any emotion towards any of the characters, even the main character. At any point I did start to feel a bit of dislike for Harriet, Taylor changed perspective to a different character. Which is fine for some books, but I felt it didn't work well here.

The structure of the story was not the only problem for me, I also found the plot to be very dull. I gave it two stars because I did manage to read it until the end (which was also a disappointment).

Sorry Taylor, but you are no Austen.

Kirsty says

On the face of it, *A Game of Hide and Seek* is a love story, but I found that it was far more than that. I absolutely loved the way in which the novel began, with the vivid scene of a hide and seek game. The imagery throughout is lovely, as is the way Taylor builds her scenes. The social context was marvellous, particularly with regard to the Suffrage Movement, which I am endlessly fascinated by.

This is the first novel of Taylor's which I've read, and I found that she presented the human psyche and differing relationships between her characters so well. I warmed to the protagonist, Harriet, immediately, and by the end of the book I was longing to have a friend just like her. The other characters, too, are marvellously drawn. They are three dimensional and step off each page.

Not a lot happens in the novel in terms of plot, but the characters were so well done, that it didn't really matter. I am very much looking forward to getting through the rest of Taylor's novels now, as I am sure that some real treats lie ahead.

Jonathan says

A Game of Hide and Seek was published in 1951 and was Taylor's fifth novel. The main narrative concerns the relationship between Harriet and Vesey from their friendship when they were young which blossoms into an awkward love. Although in love, it is not strong enough to keep them together when Vesey goes to university. Vesey becomes a second-rate actor and Harriet marries the older, and rather boring, Charles with whom she has a daughter Betsy. Fifteen years later Vesey shows up again and Harriet and Vesey embark on an affair; only they both seem to be just as awkward with each other as they were when they were younger.

Well, that's the main plot and I won't reveal any more about it but I must admit that I found it a bit dull, especially the early part of the novel. When I was reading it the main plot seemed to me unimaginative and the main characters just dull. But Taylor is a great writer and as with *Mrs Palfrey* there are some great one-liners and some brilliant supporting characters. One of the best episodes of the book is when the young Harriet gets a job in a shop where the work just gets in the way of the gossiping. Here's a description of one of Harriet's colleagues:

Miss Lazenby was rather free and easy with men, but the men were not always themselves in that happy position. She pinned them down, swore at them, drank a great deal at their expense and had good fun describing to her friends their dufferish attempts at lovemaking.

All the women at the shop are interested in Harriet's lovelife and offer her endless advice. Harriet dates and then marries Charles and we are introduced to his mother, who is another fascinating, if irritating, character:

Julia Jephcott was in her sixties. Mad, raffish, unselfconscious, she had the beautiful and calm air of one who has all her life acknowledged compliments. This air, associated with beauty, lingered after the beauty itself had collapsed and fled. She seemed to be lovely still to herself, as if no amount of looking into mirrors could ruin her illusion.

There is also a subplot about Harriet's lonely daughter Betsy becoming obsessed with her teacher and some great passages concerning Elke, a bemused Swedish au pair; she's bemused by England, the English and their customs and she breaks a lot of china and hides the pieces in her room.

Since reading this book many of the characters and situations have stayed with me and I'm often reminded of scenes from the book. I loved the supporting characters and Taylor's style and I suspect that my criticism of the main plot and characters may be a bit harsh; if I were to re-read it I think my view may be different. I intend to read more by the 'other' Elizabeth Taylor.

Emer says

Perfect love casteth out awkwardness

The intro described this as a cross between Wuthering Heights and Persuasion... Yeah.... I think I'd rather read *actual* Brontë and Austen. *yikes*

I couldn't make head nor tails of the love story in the beginning. Of the why these two together. And that just set a more negative tone for the whole novel for me which I could never get over. The writing was, however, very lovely and there was much to admire in the development of certain characters.

Hovering around the two and a half to three stars rating...
Maybe closer to two...

Full marks for the gorgeous hardback cover on this edition though! So pretty
