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**Engagement Rings - From Grass to Glitz**

**By M J Plaster**

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Diamonds are a girl's best friend, but it hasn't always been so. The practice of giving a ring for the promise before the "I do" dates back to prehistoric times, since cavemen and cavewomen walked the earth. The engagement ring predates the discovery of diamonds by eons, winding through ancient civilizations, traversing along the spice route, and eventually gaining popularity during the industrial revolution, fueled by guess what—the most successful advertising campaign of the twentieth century.

The first engagement rings were thought to belong to the cavewomen—simple, practical, maintenance free, easy to replace—hand-crafted from heavy grasses and reeds and later replaced by cord. Some accounts claim that the cavewoman was "tied" to the caveman by the cord. Oh, those lucky brides-to-be!

The history of the engagement ring is shrouded in the same mystery that surrounds the intrigue of love; much of it seemingly calculated after-the-fact to explain the designs and customs that evolved over time. Accounts differ, and there are contradicting reports on which civilization deserves credit for any given ritual, but all accounts offer a fascinating glimpse into society's attempt to quantify, define and codify love. Among the differing accounts, two consistent facts emerge—the promise of eternity and the symbolism of the eternal loop, the continuous, unbroken circle symbolizing eternal love, devotion and commitment.

The ancient Roman and Greek civilizations replaced cord rings with crude metal rings crafted of iron. Several centuries later, iron was scrapped in favor of gold. It was the shape from which the ring received its significance, not the material from which it was crafted. The ancient Greeks called it a betrothal ring, borrowed from the Anglo-Saxon "troweth," which meant truth—in this case, true love.

The ring first evolved from a mere circular loop to hold simple embellishments. Some ancient Roman rings sported a key on the ring, which allegedly symbolized the key to the heart or the key to 50% of the riches, a less romantic notion. The Fede ring, predecessor to the Irish Claddagh ring, appeared

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around the same time, but its origin remains in question, originating in either the ancient Greek or Roman civilization—maybe both. The Fede ring, short for "Mani in Fede" in Italian, means the hands of love. It held two clasped hands intertwined, almost identical to the Claddagh ring.

The ancient Romans first placed the ring on the third finger. The "vena amoris," Latin for vein of love, was thought to be the vein that led from the third finger directly to the heart, a theory derived from the ancient Egyptians.

It wasn't until the 15th century that diamonds first adorned the eternal circular band. History records the first diamond engagement ring in the 15th century when Archduke Maximillian of Hamburg presented the ring to Mary of Burgandy. At that time, diamonds were scarce, traveling via the spice route from India to Europe, and diamond engagement rings were prohibitive to all but royalty and the very wealthy. It would be centuries until diamonds would be discovered in Brazil and Africa. DeBeers would not open its doors until 1888, and there was no Antwerp Diamond Exchange.

It was not until the industrial revolution that life took a quantum leap. Advances in transportation brought goods and services that were once the province of the rich and famous to the masses. Diamond mines opened in South Africa, and while diamonds were still precious, they were at least accessible.

It was in 1939 that a concerted effort to popularize the diamond engagement began in earnest with an advertising campaign in New York City. The sale of diamond engagement rings had been on the decline since 1919, decreasing by as much as 50%, due in part to the Great Depression. Harry Oppenheimer of De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd, the famed South African diamond mine, took action and with the help of N.W. Ayer & Son, a New York advertising agency, launched an all-out assault with an ad campaign. It was in 1947 that the slogan "A Diamond is Forever," was born and launched the most successful advertising campaign of the twentieth century, moving the diamond engagement ring from a luxury to THE most important element of a proper engagement. And little has changed since then.

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### **Buying A Cheap Diamond Engagement Ring**

**By Low Jeremy**

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Face the facts. If you are looking for a cheap diamond engagement ring, better be prepared to find a not that cheap diamond engagement ring. Engagement rings are expensive as it is and wanting one with a diamond on it is enough to dry up anyone's pockets.

Still, if you are really that determined to buy one in such a limited budget, here are some tips that may help you in your search. These may not of course guarantee success but at least you will not be getting any headaches while you scour the metropolis.

Set a realistic budget.

As mentioned before, diamond engagement rings are pretty costly. Finding one that is dirt cheap will be next to impossible. Save yourself a lot of headache by setting a budget that would actually allow you to buy a diamond engagement ring.

To do this, try looking at the prices in jewelry stores, both upscale and those that are in the mid-range. Ask about the specifics such as the carat, the color and the clarity. Compare prices and then decide just how much is the cheapest one. When you have already determined that, try looking at what you have saved up. Is it enough?

Thrift stores

There are stores that specialize in selling second-hand stuff. Try looking at these stores and find out if they are selling used diamond engagement rings. You can also try joining garage sales or estate sales. Here you will find great stuff. Who knows, you might even come across antique engagement rings that you or the person you'll be giving it to will love.

Surf the Internet

There are also online stores that sell diamond engagement rings. Some are brand new while some are already used. You can also try eBay and see if their price range is within your budget. Be careful though as some items are up for bid and you may end up paying more than what you have in your budget.

Try other gemstones

Although diamond engagement rings are really great, if you really cannot afford it, why waste the effort. Engagement rings set with other precious stones will also look great on the fingers of your loved one. Sapphires, amethyst, topaz and even rubies make great engagement rings. One thing that you can also do is to match the color of her eye with the gemstone. You can also buy multiple colored gemstones, even with a small diamond on it. This is less expensive.

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