

by Peer J. Oppenheimer



In happier days, Liz Taylor bubbles as ebullient husband Mike Todd hams it



Ten days before crash, Todds lunch with Cohn (right).



WHAT NOW FOR LIZ TAYLOR

Mike Todd brought this "sleeping beauty" to life for the first time; now that he's gone, what

"LUCKY LIZ"—on March 22 that nickname became tragically ironic. It was the name Mike Todd had bestowed on the plane that plunged him to his death in New Mexico, along with film writer Art Cohn and Todd's pilot and copilot. It was also a pet name for his wife, Elizabeth Taylor. In either case, "luck" was a word that scarcely applied. Todd's widow is 26. Yet her closest friends agree that she has lived less than 14 months—from the time she married Todd in Mexico until his death. Neither before nor since has anything mattered as much to Liz as this brief and turbulent marriage—even though she's been called "the girl with everything."

That title, like "Lucky Liz," overlooks the facts of Miss Taylor's pampered life. For all her wealth and fame, her years have been a succession of boredom, indifference, and dullness. Born in London, Elizabeth and her older brother Howard enjoyed the gracious living of the English upper class. Her father, Francis Taylor, was a well-to-do art dealer and her mother an American actress who was known as Sara Sothorn. Elizabeth had her own nurse; her godfather, Col. Victor Cazalet, gave her a horse when she was barely four; at five she rode with Sir Anthony Eden; when she was seven, war threatened Europe and Taylor sent

his wife and children to stay with Mrs. Taylor's family in Pasadena. He joined them six months later and they settled in Beverly Hills where he opened the highly successful Taylor Art Galleries. By then Elizabeth already had crossed the Atlantic several times, called on England's prime minister, met the British royal family, eaten oysters Rockefeller at Antoine's in New Orleans and crepe suzette at Maxime's in Paris. She missed one thing, however—a spanking. Her parents had put her on too high a pedestal for that. Where they left off, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer took over after signing Liz to a long-term contract at 10. Two years

later she won stardom with one of the leading roles in "National Velvet." The Culver City studio is famous for its protective attitude toward its players, but no one was ever sheltered like lovely Liz. She was never criticized or reprimanded (even when she deserved it). She could do no wrong. When she got her first divorce—from hotel heir Nicky Hilton—a reporter wondered how this might affect the future of the 18-year-old-star. Before Liz could answer, a publicist cut in, "Why, every girl from a good family is divorced at least once!" Liz had been identified as the most beautiful girl in Hollywood, but not one of the brightest. Gossips said she didn't have the brains to keep up a



After three marriages, Liz has three children: a girl by Todd, and two sons by Michael Wilding.

Liz, on set of "Raintree County," won Academy Award nomination for her lead role in this film.

does the future hold for her?

conversation, but most people were convinced she was simply too lazy to think. Why should she? Everything came to Liz without effort. Liz also had the problem of growing up too fast. "I was a child one day, and an adult the next," she complained. Physically, this was true. But if she kept pace mentally, it was a well-hidden secret—even after two marriages. Liz had difficulty discussing any subject except movies and animals. She was unable to make friends because she had no interest in anyone except her current beau or husband. She could capitalize on her beauty, but on nothing else—until she met Mike Todd.

Before him, the only satisfaction she derived from life was her work. While she would be late for most appointments, she was always on time on the set and never came unprepared for the day's shooting. After her marriage to Hilton, Liz admitted she was completely unprepared for the responsibilities of matrimony. She'd had only a few dates with boys her age and, strange as it may seem, often had a hard time finding any date at all. Fellows were too awed by her position to ask her out. Frequently her mother would talk her brother Howard into taking her to parties, which he did reluctantly because, as he put it, "Nobody wants a movie star tagging along."

IN A WAY it wasn't surprising that practically the first boy to show real interest in Liz also became her first husband. According to friends, "The marriage was doomed before it started." Nicky Hilton was only four years older than Liz, a playboy, and every bit as spoiled as she. His father had sent him to hotel school in Switzerland, but Nicky had more fun giving parties. After a few months, he became such a disturbing influence that he was asked to leave the school. He was as incapable of accepting responsibilities as his bride. Their marriage started with the most publicized wedding in recent Hollywood history and led to a turbulent honeymoon in Europe where Liz reportedly accused him of excessive gambling and drinking. He fought back by claiming she was just a toy wife who spent too much of his money. The quarrels mounted in intensity until Nicky reluctantly agreed to give Liz a divorce. It didn't take Liz long to convince herself that what she really needed was an older man, who would look after her with gentle understanding. Michael Wilding was just the "right" age—old enough to be her father. He claimed to be 39 when he married 19-year-old Liz in London on Feb. 21, 1952. The best guess is that he was around 44. For two years Liz convinced herself that Michael was all she wanted. He was charming, gracious, understanding. If his career lagged behind hers, it made no difference. Besides, she insisted that she didn't really like to work and did it only "because I like to live comfortably." They called each other "Nose" and "Nostril," "Lazy" and "Old Drawers," and other nicknames which nobody could figure out. They dressed casually—some people called it sloppily—and lived a lazy, uneventful life. Their "friends" accepted invitations to the Wilding home more out of curiosity than for a stimulating evening. In the meantime, Liz and Michael spent money easily, even carelessly. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer had to extend a helping hand to help pay the obstetrician's bill for their second child. It didn't seem to bother either of them. Typical of their attitude was Wilding's present for Liz's birthday, a white Cadillac convertible. "How can we afford it?" Liz asked. "It was easy," Michael replied. "I just sold the blue Cadillac you gave me as a present two years ago." No one, not even the principals involved, can explain what makes marriages break up in Hollywood. In the case of Liz and Michael Wilding, the best guess is that she finally became irked with the easygoing attitude she once admired and also with his apparent unwillingness to work. His calmness in face of her increasing anger only kindled more anger. But the final factor was the gradual switch

in relationships—Liz, the bride who wanted to lean on somebody, found herself bolstering an increasingly dependent husband. Rumors that "another man" had entered the picture—perhaps Montgomery Clift or Rock Hudson—were never taken seriously by anybody but Hollywood's more malicious gossips. When she and Michael separated, Liz showed no more regret than she had when she left Nicky Hilton. The marriage, like life itself, had been a bore; there was nothing to look back to, or forward to, except her sons, Michael Howard, now 5, and Christopher Edward, now 3. So at 24, twice-divorced Liz still reigned as Hollywood's most beautiful woman—and most empty one. THEN THE INCREDIBLE Mike Todd burst upon the scene—the brash, boisterous, wise-cracking, sometimes crude, always self-assured Boy Wonder of Broadway and Hollywood. A millionaire before he could vote, Mike made and lost fortunes as other men change shirts. "I have been broke many times, but I have never been poor," he used to say. There was about the same age difference between Liz and Mike Todd as there had been between her and Michael Wilding. At the time of his death, Mike's age was given as 50. But he looked and acted so young that Liz once remarked with a grin, "Sometimes I think I'm too old for Mike." Mike's influence on Liz was immediate and spectacular. He brought out a quality which her closest associates never thought she possessed: he made her interesting. Mike himself vibrated excitement that attracted people to him just as Liz's beauty attracted people to her. And this excitement rubbed off on her. Yet if the marriage of Mike and Liz was "ideal," it was also hectic. There was a constant cycle of fights, reconciliations, and gifts. Mike loved the publicity that went with it, and Liz insisted she enjoyed arguments because it was so much fun to make up again—particularly with such presents as a Rolls Royce and diamond tiara to save her feelings. The change in Liz became evident to everyone who knew her. Until she met Mike, reporters dreaded interviewing her; she never had anything to say. Once, when asked about a tour of Europe, she said, "It was nice." Crossing the main street in Cactus Junction would have sounded like a more thrilling experience. How different was her account of a trip to Moscow with Mike last Winter! Without being coaxed, she gave a detailed and informative report on everything from Russian fashions to their attitude toward Americans. Indications of the "new" Liz were even more evident in her attitude toward work. Except when she was before the cameras, Liz used to be as disinter-

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