



On one of many trips together, Todds paid much-publicized visit to Moscow. Ironically, Liz turned down chance to go with Mike on the flight that was fatal.

LIZ TAYLOR (Continued)

ested, and bored with her co-workers as they were with her. For all practical purposes, she was just another fixture on the set.

Yet when she started "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," just a week before Mike was killed, every member of the cast found a bouquet of flowers in his dressing room with a note from Liz. Could it have been Mike's idea? Possibly. Probably. But she reaped the benefits of a new friendliness. In general, she made herself more liked during her 14 months of marriage to Mike Todd than in all her previous years in Hollywood.

Mike insisted he was not going to interfere in the production of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" and wouldn't show up on the set. No one really believed him, of course. Especially not after he took an office at the studio and moved in with two secretaries. What's more, he made it quite clear that this film would mean every bit as much to him as to Liz. The day Liz went to work he told her, "If you don't get an Oscar for 'Raintree County,' you will for 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.'"

On the first day of shooting, there was an unusual air of excitement on the set, sparked by Liz' own gay mood and the question of how long Mike would stay away.

About 10 a.m. the stage door swung open and two delivery men—followed by Mike, their six-month-old daughter, Elizabeth Frances, and Liz' children by her marriage to Michael Wilding—carried in a huge roof made of red carnations with a cat shaped of white gardenias perched on top. To complete the picture, the whole display lighted up.

"For good luck," Mike cried out. Liz was as exuberant as a girl opening her first Christmas present. Mike's theatrics threw the whole set into such turmoil that director Richard Brooks was unable to accomplish anything for two hours, yet everyone was delighted with the Todds.

Liz sensed it, too, and reciprocated. Never one to give of her herself, she now learned to accept people's warmth and interest—and return it.

Then, just as she was turning into a popular, happy woman, Mike crashed to his flaming death.

The possibility of her breakdown was anticipated by Mike's secretary, Dick Hanley, the first to hear about the accident. He had the good sense to bring the family physician with him when he told Liz the news.

While everyone sympathized with Liz, few close friends feared for her own well-being through the tears and hysterics that followed. That reaction was normal and expected from a woman who had just lost the man she loved dearly.

They did become worried, however, after her return from the carnival-like funeral in Chicago, when Liz wouldn't cry or talk, but sat stony-faced in her bedroom, hardly noticing the people who came to offer condolences. All life seemed to have drained away from her.

IT WAS THEN that speculation started about what the future would hold for Liz. The immediate future concerned her role in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." Her friends felt she should return to the studio and get her mind off her troubles for at least a few hours.

At first, there was no comment from Liz herself, and rumors cropped up that she would be replaced by Academy Award Winner Joanne Woodward. About 10 days after the crash, however, Liz notified the studio that she would complete her commitment "because Mike would have liked me to do it." But she gave no indication of her plans after finishing this picture, which also terminates her contract with MGM.

Three weeks after Mike's tragic death, Liz reported to the studio, eight pounds thinner, pale, but composed. Her performance during the subsequent weeks made director Richard Brooks insist, "It was the finest ever given by her."

Ordinarily, discussing another person's future leads to little more than a calculated guess. Yet in Liz' case, those close to her generally agree that while she may go into temporary retirement after her present film, she will not withdraw permanently from making pictures.

With Mike gone, motion pictures have once again become Elizabeth's prime interest other than her children. She has already fallen back into the protective custody of the studio.

Furthermore, in spite of her statement a few months before Mike's death that she would retire and concentrate on being Mrs. Mike Todd, there is considerable doubt that she would ever have gone through with it.

"Raintree County" was to have been her "last film." "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" was to have been her "good-bye" performance. The lead in Todd's planned production of "Don Quixote" was said to be her "final" attempt.

Yet the Friday before Mike went on his fatal trip he had lunch with India's top movie producer, Mehboob Khan, to discuss co-production of "Taj Mahal." With whom in the lead? The "retired" Miss Taylor, of course!

As one critic remarked, "There would always be 'one last film.'"

At the moment, Liz needs work more than ever. Not financially, however. For the first time in her life, except for her brief marriage to Nicky Hilton, she doesn't have to worry about paying her bills. She inherited half of Mike Todd's estate, estimated at between \$3,000,000 and \$5,000,000. The other half went to his son. Although it was put into a trust fund, she has enough money to live comfortably for the rest of her life.

Liz needs to be busy in the months to come for other reasons. She must outgrow her sorrow, and work will make the job easier.

There was some speculation that Liz would temporarily move in with her brother Howard, a marine illustrator for the Scripps Institute in Delmar, Calif. But the quiet life would require a change of pace for which Liz is poorly equipped, although she benefitted greatly during a short visit before returning to MGM.

Liz will never live with her parents, now in Florida, because she and her mother have been at odds since her marriage to Hilton. Some people feel Sarah Taylor's domineering influence drove Liz into that marriage.

Evidently the relationship remains strained. Mrs. Taylor was conspicuously absent during most of Liz' ordeal, and Liz is supposed to have said, "Keep Sarah away from me!"

Yet she can't stay by herself in the palatial Spanish mansion she and Mike had rented in Beverly Hills, because being alone has always scared Liz. Except when she was with Mike, Liz has had to have people around her. When she was married to Wilding and Hilton, they often partied until the early hours of the morning because Liz could never feel content in the company of only one person.

The eventual solution probably will be another marriage. Said one friend, "I don't think it's in bad taste to discuss Liz getting married so soon after Mike's death. Frankly, I think he'd want her to marry again."

It probably won't happen soon. Chances are that months will go by before she will ever have a serious date, and more likely than not, she will spend a year or more traveling abroad, although as an MGM spokesman puts it, "Liz can never get away from memories by traveling. She's been everywhere with Mike."

Still, Liz doesn't really want to forget because, brief as her marriage was, it taught her how full and exciting life can be.

And she knows better than anyone that no man will have an easy time following in Mike Todd's footsteps.

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