

LIZA MINNELLI & DESI ARNAZ

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as suddenly, according to one old night-hand and columnist, "the huge dinner crowd ringsided as Liza necked heavily with Desi." When Desi, Sr. returned, the necking subsided. But when he took off again, to tell another old friend about his California college professorship in communications, there were Liza and Desi again, providing "quite a passionate floor show."

The crowd gasped. "If they wanted to do that," commented one veteran of passionate floor shows, "why did they bring Daddy along?"

A companion giggled. "You didn't think he was here so Liza could meet the family," she said. "She did that back when she was about a year old. They know her longer than they know him! And they do love her. They're just not looking for him to be a child bridegroom or a daddy again. No, sir. I think Desi, Sr. received a suggestion—from the red-haired lady he used to call wife—that his presence would be a pretty good idea. It's her way of fighting for her son. She can't do it directly. She tried it with Patty Duke. And look what happened! It broke her heart. Well, she still thinks Desi is too young to marry—especially to a girl so much older than he (Desi's 19, Liza, 26). She's in constant fear that the same thing will happen to Liza that happened to Patty, and she couldn't bear it. That's why, in a way, this is really a fight between Liza and Lucy—over Desi. And Desi, Sr. is her secret weapon. She figures at this point, he can stop all the rumors, if nothing else."

Desi Jr. made no overt sign of protest when his father appeared on the New York scene. But friends made no bones about the fact that he wasn't too happy about it. He isn't exactly an idiot. He, too, knows how the stories about Patty Duke and himself did, indeed, do damage to him and hurt his parents, and so spent a few days in Daddy's company. But when Daddy headed back to California, there could be no doubt on whose side Desi was on. In spite of alleged massive protest, he remained in New York with Liza. Though it's been made very clear to him that he could be hurting Liza as well as himself by his unchaperoned presence, Liza's apparent need for his

love won out. What's more, he's apparently decided that the only way to handle the Patty Duke stories—which still rage on—is by not avoiding them. It may hurt mama. But an embarrassed silence on the subject could hurt Liza more—and he won't do that.

Take, for example, that night in New York, when Liza was appearing on the *Dick Cavett Show*. Desi, Jr. showed up backstage to wait for her, and not knowing there was a reporter back there, began talking to a press agent named Sandy about the fact that the whole world was sending their mail meant for Patty Duke to his Los Angeles apartment.

"Could you please tell them that Patty Duke doesn't live there anymore? I do."

Later, when Liza came backstage to meet the reporter and Desi, Jr., the reporter couldn't help but bring up the subject.

"Well, I just wanted Sandy to know that Patty doesn't live in my apartment anymore," Desi said, eyes somewhat cast down.

"Surely, he didn't think she *did*," replied a wide-eyed Liza.

But those old Patty reports were still doing their stuff, and the reporter broached the subject of Patty's little boy, Sean.

"Oh, the *baby*," said Desi, almost as though this was one of the few times he'd heard about it. "Well, you see, that's not necessarily true (that it was his). It's *probably* by me. But Patty's engaged to somebody else."

In a sense, perhaps, Lucille Ball couldn't hope for a better weapon than Desi's experience with Patty in her battle for her son. After all, shouldn't that be a lesson to Liza—a firm look-see at what Desi isn't for, no matter what happens?

But Liza's a pretty tricky fighter herself, and so far she's waged her own victorious battle for the boy. To begin with, she absolutely charmed Desi, Sr. when he came to New York, and showed him nothing but respect and perhaps even a little sympathy for his errand. She did wait until he wasn't around to lavish her almost uncontrollable love on Desi, Jr. Maybe it was a little close—like when he left that table at "21"—but she did wait until he'd left. Nor has she shown any less respect for Lucille Ball. When asked, for example, if Desi'd brought her home to meet the family, she

replied, "Oh, I met them when I was one and a half. We get along fine."

But most important, perhaps, is the fact that Liza can sit through all of the Patty Duke talk very calmly and objectively, and even make some lady-like observations right in Desi's presence. "Patty's a terrific actress," she says. "One of the great American actresses of any time. But for some reason, she has to keep proving it."

However, Liza's most powerful weapon in this fight is her faith and very unique attitude about Desi's qualities as a man. She sees in him things nobody's quite noticed yet—things they wouldn't believe possible in a boy his age.

"Desi understands the need for calmness the way I do. He has a steadiness that's very important to me. I hate abrupt changes of emotion, and I can't live in that kind of atmosphere."

So far, nobody's accused Desi of being steady and unchangeable as far as the girls are concerned—except for Liza. And right now, her faith seems to be working out for her. But she'll have an opportunity to test that faith to its utmost shortly. For even as you read this, Desi will be in Japan, making a movie. Asked how she felt about it, Liza said, "I won't know till he's gone."

Well, he's gone now, and perhaps it will be Lucille Ball's turn to win a battle. She wishes Liza no harm, only happiness, in fact. But she can't help wondering if Desi is ready to give that to a woman yet. She's been made painfully aware that her son is too young to marry—but old enough to be a father—and the lesson nearly killed her. And she knows how heartbreaking that can be for a girl friend and a baby as well as the boy's mother. That's why she might battle another woman for her son—because she wants no more broken hearts—including her own.

DAVID CASSIDY

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California and try for a show-business career of his own—and share in this new way of family life.

It was rough going at first, David really didn't want his father's help. He wanted to be his own man, do his thing his way. He took his father's advice because he respected Jack Cassidy's knowledge and years of experience in the industry. But David