Like all the Barrymores, acting is as necessary to Diana as breathing. But she's cutting out most of the Barrymore loopiness to prove to Hollywood that it's a serious business for her, even though she's a star.

The Barrymore Brat

By Nord Riley

BEFORE Walter Wanger began production on his latest movie, Eagle Squadron, he showed a photograph of Diana Barrymore to Arthur Lubin, the director of Eagle Squadron.

"This is the kid playing the feminine lead," said Mr. Wanger.

Lubin stared at the likeness and uttered a mournful cry: "Who you kidding, Walter? This doll isn't even good-looking."

When Wanger went on to say that he had the creature under contract for a thousand dollars a week Lubin nodded glumly and shuffled off, muttering his wonder that a gent as smart as Wanger could take a shellacking from a brat like this Barrymore. Fresh from his golden successes directing Abbott and Costello, Lubin was all set to begin the classiest picture of his career, and for a heroine he had drawn a long-faced kid who had never acted in a movie.

"From all I had heard about her," he says, "spitting in a director's eye was a hobby of hers."

The upstart's first few days in Hollywood did not allay the suspicion that Wanger had been swindled. Never having been in Hollywood, she announced that she thought she'd find the place noisome, but upon arriving she rented a palace large enough to billet a regiment and amid slight uproar settled down with a French companion, a colored cook, a houseboy, a gardener, a romantic Great Dane named Cleo and a papillon, this last a pooch of great rareness.

Reunion with her father, John Barrymore, was a happy affair, and numberless pictures were taken. He was going to teach her Shakespeare. Then came an unnerving report that John Barrymore, himself the Clown Prince of the Royal Family of the Theater, had found it necessary to roar at his offspring: "Stop acting like a Barrymore!"

The child plainly suffered seizures of Barrymore loopiness. She was sassy. She had gone Hollywood, which is to say that she was putting on the dog. . . . Nobody knew whether she could act. She was by no means as toothsome as Lana Turner and she had a long face.

Subsequent events have served to prove that in hiring her Wanger wasn't so nutty after all. The first day of shooting on Eagle Squadron, the upstart took the director aside and informed him that she knew he expected her to behave like a berserk Barrymore. She vowed she wasn't going to, and if she did, it would be all right for him to beat her over the head. To the astonishment of all, she exploded only once. After three weeks of maintaining an uneasy peace she suddenly got lippy with Lubin, the director. That gentleman promptly hooted: "Ah-ah, putting on the old Barrymore mantle, are you?" This stopped the upstart cold. She regarded him balefully for a moment, then amiably stuck out her tongue at him. Since then she has been moderately unwarlike.

A Star is Born, but Quickly

Universal took a gander at the rushes on Eagle Squadron and began crying aloud at what blessings heaven had sent. With the froth of Hollywood hyperbole wiped off, this meant Diana had eased through her first picture with some to spare. To give substance to their shouting, Universal borrowed her from Wanger while Eagle Squadron was still shooting, hiked her salary to twelve hundred fifty iron men a week, and tossed her a part many great ladies of the screen would have hocked their husbands to get. The part is the kind likely to put Diana in solid as an actress or send her slinking back to where she came from. In Between Us Girls, she tears into six roles: a 12-year-old girl, a Sadie Thompson, an iron-shirted Joan of Arc, a high-voltage actress, Queen Victoria at 82, and a lady like herself. Robert Cummings, Kay Francis and John Boles are in it too, but Diana gets the gravy. Her name will precede the name of the picture, which means she is officially a star.

Diana is the daughter of John Barrymore and his second wife, Blanche Oelrichs, who writes poetry under the nom de plume of Michael Strange. The child's full legal name is Diana Blanche Barrymore Blythe—Blythe being the Barrymores' real cognomen. John's wit and noble rhetoric did not descend to his daughter. She has a nervous quick intelligence, with a talent for pinning back a citizen's ears and a bad way of saying what she thinks, which is considerable. Nothing surprises her much, for she has kicked around enough, in Europe and America, in the society set and the theater mob, to be wise beyond her years.

"Don't let anyone tell you this Barrymore won't hold on to her coleslaw," an enthusiast at Universal points out. "Old Jawn adored bankruptcy. Not this kid. You know what she did with that fancy car she bought? She talked the studio into renting it from her for her picture. Twenty-five bucks a day ain't hay."

The saga of Diana's schooling is a study in how to be a brat. From the time she was born in New York in 1921, until she was five, her record is mild. After that it really sizzles. She left the convent when she was seven (her parents were divorced when she was six) and in the next nine years fought her way in, and out, of fifteen of the nation's classiest boarding schools.

Diana was seventeen when her mother decided that she should become a debutante. "Debutantes!" and she shudders. But mother

wanted me to come out, so out I came." A debutante, she says, is supposed to stay out for six months, theoretically long enough to capture a well-heeled husband. After putting up with being a debutante for two months she chucked it for acting.

She hadn't done any acting, other than stumbling around in school plays. She was a Barrymore, to be sure, but her father was merely a name in the papers to her, and she had been reared in high society. Her talent seemed to be sketching, which she had studied a good deal in Paris. Now she abandoned that to take a whirl at the stage. She entered the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York and studied drama for two years. Summers she learned theater, playing stock in Ogunquit, Maine, where she opened her career as a somewhat scrawny Juliet opposite a Romeo played by William Faversham's son, Philip. In her two summer stands in Ogunquit she ran through the usual stock-company plays: Springtime for Henry, You Can't Take It With You, and the others. In the winter season of 1939-40 she got the role of Ann in Outward Bound. That the Barrymore name helped her get the part she admits cheerfully. "It helped me get in, but no name could keep me in," she points out.

The Outward Bound company went on the road, playing Chicago, among other whistle stops. By epic coincidence, her father, whom she hadn't seen since she was twelve, was performing nightly in My Dear Children in an adjoining theater. With droll comment on his wives and his bartenders, he put the citizenry in the aisles clutching their tummies with glee; if he followed the script the audience went home disgusted. After one performance he found a young thing in his dressing room, a skinny dame with a smile like his own and gleaming brown eyes.

"Ah," he cried in his courtly way, "you ambrosial creature!"

"Thanks, Daddy," the creature said.

"Daddy?" The great one was stunned. Then he recognized her and roared, "My daughter!"

By this time the movie people, whose feeling of inferiority makes them drool over anything from the stage, realized that here was an actress whose name alone was worth something even if she fell into the orchestra pit every time she walked downstage. They advanced on the young Barrymore with contracts. "How much?" she demanded of them. "And for how long?" When they told her she said simply: "I want more money." She added that she thought she would hate Hollywood.

how sensitive a camera is in picking demonstrations of emotion. After watching herself in a couple of rushes, she calmed down and did okay.

"Movie acting," she says, now hep to the racket, "is nothing but not doing

anything."

Except for the minor explosion in Eagle Squadron recorded earlier, she has endured long hours of toil and numerous indignities with glacial serenity.

The mauling she took in Between Us Girls was so bruising there was a feeling that if she didn't holler uncle they would have her still, cold body on their hands. First off, she had to roller-skate and she landed on her rear with unrehearsed violence so many times a massage table and masseuse had to be installed in her dressing room to keep her repaired. Mr. Maxie Rosenbloom, former light-heavyweight champion, was employed to clout her on the jaw. "Not me," cried Maxie. "I won't punch no lady, especially a Barrymore. Barrymores and Rosenblooms are artistes."

To replace the gallant Mr. Rosenbloom, Big Boy Williams was hired and he walloped her good. When Williams was through, Robert Cummings took a turn at cuffing her around.

Hollywood Via Broadway

Nevertheless, she made a couple of screen tests. These she describes by holding her nose. No doubt the studios had a similar opinion, for they dropped the matter. After that came more spasms of stock-company dramas, including a leading role in Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines which opened in White Plains. Last fall she grabbed a part on Broadway in the Edna Ferber-George S. Kaufman play The Land is Bright, a drama that caused no stampedes to the box office. She was toiling here when Walter Wanger hove into sight lugging a bag of Hollywood gold. He offered her a contract for four pictures a year at a thousand dollars a week. Being no dope, she took it.

Her first few days in front of the camera were hard. Everyone expected her to blast the joint wide open with temperament, the cameraman had troubles handling the angles in her face and her acting was not the kind to drive Bette Davis to opium from envy. Like most actors fresh from the stage, she overacted, because she didn't realize

Miss Barrymore Gets Slapped

Twenty-two times he slapped her sassy face and each time it did nothing but disgust Henry Koster, the director. "Forget you are a gentleman," he yelled, "and sock her!" As Cummings wound up for the twenty-third swipe, Diana kicked his shins with her high heel. Cummings almost knocked her block off for it, but Koster got what he wanted. They thought the lady was sore, but she wasn't. "That slapping," she said wearily, "could have gone on all day. I knew he wouldn't hit me unless he was angry. So I kicked him."

At the sound of the assistant director hollering that it is lunch time, she often hotfoots it over to a kitchen she has found on the lot and there throws together a luncheon for her stand-in and herself. She even washes the dishes when she gets through, which is arousing some consternation, because nobody can remember any other actress who ever did such things. Unlike other Hollywood pretties who are forever being photographed stumbling around in a kitchen, this character takes honest delight in cooking. This may be explained by the even greater delight she takes in eating what she cooks. Also she is fond of fixing little repasts for Mr. Bramwell Fletcher, a Broadway actor she met a couple of years ago in the Outward Bound company, and whom she recently married.

He wallops her at table tennis, badminton and gin rummy. In revenge she drags him out to see as many horror movies as his stomach can stand. As Diana sees it, being Mr. Fletcher's spouse will not cramp her career. She will stoke the gentleman to the gills on her cooking, and hopes to present him with exactly two children, but the acting will go on.

Blackout Incidents

Miss Barrymore is content with the present state of affairs. To her astonishment, she likes Hollywood, declaring that only superior force will pry her loose from the place. She is acting and being paid handsomely for it. If anything bothers her, it is Edna, her colored cook. Edna can cook like nobody's business but in a blackout she becomes a menace.

Diana, Edna, the colored houseboy and a soldier who had dropped in trying to find his way to Riverside were caught in the dark during a recent alert. The houseboy became possessed of an urge to play the piano, and Edna was heard clucking to a pair of hot dice, which she said would be a big help in passing the time if the folks had any loose change on them. With the houseboy beating out Beethoven, Edna rattled and rolled a month's wages off Diana and picked the warrior clean. When the fleecing was complete, they tramped out on the lawn to look for bombers, Edna in a white dress. The warrior pointed out that the white dress would draw bombers like an arsenal, but Edna was inspired this night. "Ah knows what Ah'll do," she cried. "Ah'll take it off. Den dey won't see no Edna in no blackout."