

Harper's Bazaar - December 1996

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Drew Barrymore is late. Very late. Beyond late. Her assistant Gwen Stroman, armed with beeper and cell phone, is beginning to get nervous. "She's walking her dogs in Central Park," says Stroman, doing her best to put a smile on the tension. "She should be here any minute." It's a Friday evening in early fall, and we are sitting at the counter at Shopsin's, a famous West Village diner. While working on Woody Allen's new film, *Everyone Says I Love You*, Barrymore took an apartment in the neighborhood, and when filming ended, she decided to keep it; this is her favorite local hang. The owner runs the place with an iron fist and is eccentric to the extreme. When Stroman's beeper goes off, she is instructed to take the phone outside to make the call: no cellular technology allowed. It is not Barrymore, Stroman returns with bad news; Drew is at the vet. Her dogs are sick. She is in tears. We have to reschedule. Just then, the owner, who has been listening and apparently reading my mind, leans across the counter, fixes me with a mischievous stare and says, "Kill her."

"I am soooooo sorry," says Barrymore as I enter her suite at the RIHGA Royal Hotel in midtown two days later. She has been prisoner here all weekend, doing press for the Woody Allen movie; yesterday alone she did 47 interviews. The inconvenience of being stood up fed my fears that Barrymore might be irresponsible, difficult, spoiled, of all of the above. I have convinced myself that the dog story was a big fat lie, but now, in the presence of this adorable, charming little person, my suspicious and residual irritation evaporates in a nanosecond. "It's so terrible," she says. "My babies, Flossy and Templeton, have diarrhea and they're coughing and wheezing and their eyes are running. Usually they'd be with me, but they're sick at home, shitting all over the place. In fact, one of them in my roommate's shoes." Still, I give her a hard time. "I swear- if it was anything other than my dogs, I would never be a flake."

She is only 21, and yet Drew Barrymore-once considered to be America's "apple dumpling" (as she describes the burden of *E.T.*), then America's youngest Hollywood tell-all-mess, always a member of perhaps the most legendary thespian family in American history-seems to have lived a lifetime already. And though she is not completely free of the public's perception that she is the by-product of a twisted, amoral Hollywood upbringing, her solid and steadily growing film career had dispelled most of the lingering doubts-the film audience's and industry's -that have dogged her in the past. Like Madonna, with whom she is constantly compared, she has a canny sense of style and reinvention (fashion photographers love to work with her) as well as taste for public stunts (flashing David Letterman on his birthday last year, stripping at the Blue Angel nightclub in New York City). But unlike Madonna, Barrymore's audacious, cheeky sexuality doesn't seem to turn people off. As Letterman told her when she appeared on his show the week before I interviewed her, "There's just something lovely about you."

Barrymore's second, post-rehab career kicked in when she was 16 and built through a slew of films, including last year's *Boys on the Side*, featuring a lethargic Whoopie Goldberg and Mary Louise Parker, the film had one thing going for it: Drew. Her recent career decisions seem to bode well: Playing a Manhattan private-school girl opposite Edward Norton in *Everyone Says I Love You* (out this month), Barrymore, with her pale, luminous visage, literally lights up the screen. She turns in a slightly campy but nevertheless nail-biting performance in Wes Craven's Christmas movie, *Scream*, a horror film that makes fun of horror films while being absolutely horrifying. Her two-year-old production company, Flower Films, has a couple of projects in the pipeline. One is *Like a Lady*, which Barrymore describes as "Pygmalion meets *The Wizard of Oz*." The other is *All She Wanted*, the true story of Teena Brandon, a woman who lived as a man and was ultimately murdered because of it. "Playing a boy," says Barrymore, "would be the biggest challenge of my life."

"Let's get in bed," Barrymore says as her publicist and makeup man leaves us alone in her hotel suite. I have brought along a bunch of magazines and a folderful of Drew: glossy layouts filled with saucy photos of her dressed, barely dressed, and totally not dressed. These props were to be my emergency plan, a way to get her to loosen up and react in case she proved awkward. As we climb into bed and stretch out with a bottle of Perrier, she asks, "What's in the goody bag? Can I go through it?" Before I can answer she dives in and pulls out a magazine with Madonna on the cover. "I always get that I look like Madonna. People mistake me for her all the time."

Today she looks nothing like Madonna: Her hair is dyed black, and she has on dark-purple lipstick and eye shadow. She is wearing, in her words, "lame plaid trousers, a black tank top, and a green cardigan. Basically, I don't match and I'm a total nerd." Flipping through the magazine, she says, "Can you believe Madonna as a mother? She seems too career-oriented." Barrymore—who appears a bit fixated on Madonna and on baby-making—has a two-year plan: to finish the movies on her plate and then to move to Texas with her new boyfriend, build a farm, and start a family. Because she wants to protect him, she won't identify the boyfriend, except to say that he is a young actor. We agree to call him Bob. "I've been seeing him for about 6 months," she says, "and I'm madly, madly, madly in love. I've totally met the person I want to have children with. Without question." She puts her bare feet against my arm, and they're so cold I flinch. "My toes are always freezing," she says, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to warm your feet on a total stranger.

Barrymore's past few love affairs have tended to dissolve into public sideshows (perhaps the reason she's keeping a lid on "Bob"). Her most recent relationship, with Eric Erlandson, guitarist for the band Hole, ended several months ago, but not before the press pitted her and Courtney Love against each other. Eric remains a good friend, and of Courtney, Barrymore says, "I really love her. She's so smart, she blows my mind. I think she's such an eloquent person, and if she wants to go out there and be crazy...let her." She is suddenly distracted by the Madonna pictures. "God, look at Madonna's diamond. Hi. Is it big enough for ya? Do you think her boyfriend bought it for her, or she bought it for herself?"

Barrymore's 1994 marriage to Welsh bar-owner Jeremy Thomas appears to be the major source of regret in her life. When I mention that a writer once qualified her failed marriage as her never-ending search for family, she goes into a rant about how she only married so Thomas could get a green card. "It's the only thing I've ever done in my life that was untruthful to myself," she says. "It's really ruined marriage for me."

She gets up to go to the bathroom, and as she returns, she lets rip a huge belch. Then she lies back down, and says, "God, my tits are so fucking big. They always get in the way."

Twenty Little-Known Facts About Drew

1. Is a strict Vegan: no leather, suede, meat fish, or eggs.
2. Does not shave her armpits.
3. Is a natural brunette.
4. Picks her nose in public.
5. Considers herself bisexual, though she has never met a woman who could hold her attention for long.
6. Makes up words (Her latest: *awkwacy*, for "awkward.")
7. Considers herself *maladroit* (definition per Websters; "lacking adroitness: inept"; for synonym see awkward).
8. Has always wanted to have sex with a drag queen.
9. Has been told she looks like Rene Russo.
10. Has been told that she looks like Lisa Marie Presley.
11. Favorite poet: e.e. cummings.
12. Favorite band: the Beatles.
13. Favorite Beatle song: "I will."
14. Favorite flower: daisy.
15. Favorite actress: Jennifer Jason Leigh
16. Favorite actor: Gary Sinise.
17. Believes Alanis Morissette couldn't scare anybody.
18. Drinks alcohol in moderation.
19. Gets annoying, creepy e-mail from a guy called *killedkennedy@...*
20. Says she is the president of the Last to Know Club.

Joan Rivers once told me that in 1983, after her first show at Carnegie Hall, she was feted with a big party at Studio 54. What she remembers most vividly from that night is looking down from the balcony at the madness below and seeing Jaid Barrymore, Drew's mother, with her daughter on her shoulders waving to the star above. It was well past midnight. Little Drew was only eight. Today, Jaid-like Sylvester Stallone's mother- has made a name for herself by riding on her child's coattails. She has been known to give rather embarrassingly masochistic interviews to the likes of Howard Stern.

When I ask Barrymore how her mother has affected her life, she puts her head in her and whispers, "Oh, God, I knew you were going to ask me that." Big pause. "Um..."

"I'm not asking you to dish your mom, I'm just asking what effect she has had on you. And if that's too personal, you can tell me to fuck off."

"Okay, fuck off!" she yells, and then squeals with laughter. She doesn't talk to her mother, she tells me. "It's because.. "She trails off and looks away, "...I don't know. I don't understand her. And I tried to for so long. I just think that way too much shit has happened."

"What's the big difference between the two of you?" I ask.

"I think we differ in the fact that she seems to love Hollywood and I hate Hollywood."

"What is Hollywood to you?"

"It's shallow, inconsistent, competitive, cruel world," she says. "Whenever I get really sad that I'm involved in it, I feel that instead of sitting on the sidelines and complaining, I should go in there and make it better. I like making movies, so I want to make good movies. I want to swim in a creative pool with wonderful people. And as a producer, I want to create a great working atmosphere for people, and I know how to do that. It's in my blood and in my bones."

Drew's father, John Barrymore, Jr., son of the celebrated film actor John Barrymore, has been a sort of homeless recluse for many years. His career as an actor stalled some time ago, after a drug bust. For a long time, Drew would only see him maybe once a year, but recently things have improved. "We're actually really close now," she says, "which is nice. He started wearing shoes, and I stopped wearing shoes - kind of ironic."

"You wanna see a picture of my boyfriend?" Barrymore climbs out of bed to fetch her backpack. "Since you went through my bag," I say, "It's only fair that I should get to go through yours." She agrees and dumps its contents onto the bed. "This is my makeup bag," she says. "It's a plastic Ziploc bag. I can't show you everything that's in it." She pulls out a can of Jerome Russell Hair and Body Glitter Spray. "This is everything in the world to me." She sprays it all over her face and then on me. "See, glitter spray is so important. I wear it everyday. I don't wear any makeup-this is all I wear. Jerome should send me a fucking case of these---Here is my patchouli oil." She puts some on herself and then some on me. "Okay, now here's the winning combination. We put cedar wood on next." She sprinkles the oil up and down both of my arms and rubs it in. "You are going to smell great-like dirt. I love smelling like dirt. Call me crazy-Tea-tree-oil.

"This is my wallet. It's made of hemp, and it has a mushroom embroidered on it. My assistant just put money in here. I have one hundred and fifty dollars. Tylenol with Codeine, because I had terrible, terrible cramps the other day. One baby safety pin, because that's my life. A credit card and a bankcard that doesn't work- that's why I never have cash. Here's my new driver's license. [Middle name: Blythe.] This is my favorite gum-it's natural sap from a tree. Here's two

dollars! No way!! More money! You don't understand-I never have money, and I can't believe I'm finding money everywhere!

"Address of a bar called Rudy's," she continues. "The best blues jukebox. This is what I'm reading Music for Chameleons, by Truman Capote. I'm really excited, because this story is in her that I've always wanted to read, 'A Beautiful Child.' It's about Marilyn Monroe." She opens to a page she has marked and reads:"...and the chameleons scattered like sparks from an exploding star.' Isn't that a great line/ I'm a big underliner of all my books." She picks up two snapshots. "Okay, that's my boyfriend. Isn't he good-looking? He's probably the cutest boy I've ever gone out with. I usually go out with very odd-looking men. These are my two dogs. And that's my stepson, Ted, my boyfriend's dog. They're like family. Isn't it nice?" She pauses for a second, tilts her head coyly, and bats her eyelashes, "Mmmm, we both smell sooo good...OH, here's my Melrose Place tape. I have every episode sent to me wherever I am."

"Who's your favorite character?" I ask.

"I love Sydney," she says. " I think Sydney knows that people like her most and thrives on it. I can't believe Jo's gone, without like, a word of why. Alison bugs me. Billy has got to grow some balls. Jane's just an indulgent bitch. I love Kimberly and Michael. Kimberly's such a loon. Peter and Amanda are really in love right now, and that's really nice. I love Amanda; she's so sassy. And Heather Locklear's a really nice person, too. She played my mom in Firestarter. I was eight. You wonder how old she is."

Barrymore was much seen and photographed on the streets of New York City this summer while she was in town working on Wishful Thinking, a Miramax film due out next year. The media-gossip-entertainment nexus seemed to buzz daily with scandalous rumors about her, most of which proved to be apocryphal. A friend of mine who worked on the movie told me that the production was so low budget that none of the stars had trailers, and that Barrymore, needing some privacy, asked if she could pay for her own. The director objected, for fear that she would appear to be getting special treatment. So instead she rented a U-Haul, put a couch in it, filled it with candles and basically lived out of it for two months. When I ask her about this, she seems surprised and hesitates to answer. Finally she says, "I was really unhappy on that movie, because I got manipulated into doing it."

"Was it a trade-off for getting the part in the Woody Allen movie?" I ask.

"Yeah," she says. "Gwyneth Paltrow had the same deal with Miramax and had to make the Pallbearer to get Emma. And it's so funny, because she totally busted Harvey Weinstein [co-chairman of Miramax] in an interview. So I'm like, not only hats off to Gwyneth Paltrow but I'm going to do it too! I got fucking manipulated into doing a goddamn movie I hated!"

The phone next to the bed rings, and Barrymore makes me answer it. "I never answer the phone," she says. It's Edward Norton, who turns out to be the roomy whose shoes got dumped on. He is calling from their apartment, where he's hanging with Bob. I hand her the phone.

"Edward, Hi, honey. Is my man there? What are you guys doing?" She looks at me. "Bob is reading the paper and Edward's playing the guitar. I love the men in my life." Bob gets on with her, and the rest of the phone call becomes a strange dance of her talking to him and me at the same time. "Hi, honey. Did you get my message that I love you? I do miss you, but I love you more. I do know that, honey. I believe and trust you implicitly. Isn't it great that I believe you love me? God, I swear, I thought I'd never get there in my life. Do you believe that I love you? Oh, yeah! All Riiight! She holds the phone in that air and then flops back down on the bed and rolls around in a fit of giggles.

Barrymore offers me a ride home in the limo that has been at her service all day. When we get in, there are two books in the back-Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* and a collection of e.e.cummings poetry. She picks up the Cummings book and flips to her favorite poem, which begins, "It may not always be so; and I say/ that if you lips, which I have loved, should touch/another..."As she read it, tears roll down her cheeks, "I love that poem so much," she whispers, still crying. "It's the epitome of when someone has stopped loving you."

If she wears vulnerability close to the surface, Barrymore seems finally to have gelled into a person who no longer needs to act out to get the love and attention she so obviously craves. As we near my stop, I ask her if she has heard of Bijou Phillips, the 16-year-old daughter of the *Mamas and the Papas'* John Phillips, who has been grabbing headlines with her outrageous behavior. "Yeah," she says. "They keep talking about me along with her. I know that people always thought that I was really screwed-up in my head, but I always had my head on very straight. I just acted the way I wanted to."

"The new Drew,' 'The new wild child.'" I say, quoting from the gossip columns, and suddenly she is visibly irritated for the first time all day.

"God-fucking-damnit!" she says. "The only thing I have to say to that is, like, I hate when the press compares people to other people. If she is copying me, she has to get a new gig and be her own individual. And if she isn't copying me, then it's not fair to her." Her irritation subsides, and she smiles her funny crooked smile. "I'll tell you something: Unfortunately, I'm not going to take my clothes off anymore. I don't do wild things anymore. I am so subdued and mellow. But I know that people like wild behavior. So I figure, I'm just glad there's some new girl to do it, so I don't have to."