

MYSTERY GIRL

We hired a babysitter, a girl we didn't know very well, on the strength of her saying she wouldn't touch anything, eat anything, or have any of her friends over. "I have references from all over the neighborhood," she assured me. Her hair was a spiky strawberry blonde and she already knew how to use make-up so you barely saw it.

"I'll just do a little work on my term paper while I'm here," she said, going into the kitchen and spreading her books out on the table. My son bounced downstairs in his Spiderman pajamas. She smiled at him. "Nice pajamas!" Then she turned to us: "I hear it's a great movie. Don't feel you have to rush right back." Obviously, the whole thing seemed too good to be true.

As we drove to the theater, I pictured wild orgies, human sacrifices, kegs of beer exploding, windows breaking. The minute the movie was over, we raced out to the parking lot and jumped in the car. I gunned it all the way home, thinking the worst, then something worse than the worst.

But she was there on the porch to greet us, ruffling my son's hair and saying what a well-behaved little boy he was. When her father pulled up in front of the house, I paid her quickly and she left. For hours afterward, we checked drawers and closets, looking for teenage traces, some indication that she'd been in our midst. Nothing.

This was a girl who didn't eat anything, didn't touch anything, and didn't have any friends.

It was sad to think of her growing up and becoming a mother.

-- Peter Morris

Lansdale PA