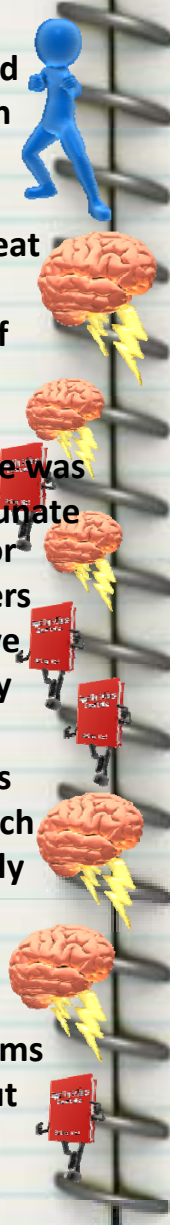


**25** What is the theme of "The Babysitter," and how does the author develop that theme as the story unfolds?

The theme of "The Babysitter" is that when faced with a terrifying situation, if you can stay rational in the face of that terror, you have the best chance of handling the situation successfully. When the babysitter in the story is faced with a terrifying threat while babysitting for the Nixons, she manages to keep her cool and deal with the situation in spite of the growing terror she experiences while doing so.

The theme is introduced with the help of a very upbeat mood that soon shifts to the dark side. "She was bright, responsible and pretty. The Nixons felt fortunate (p.49)" to have her watching their kids. The author then shifts the mood to fear when Mary Lou answers what could be a prank phone call. "I'm upstairs. I've got the kids...More breathing sounds (p. 49)." Mary Lou is scared at first then realizes, "Wait a minute. It's just a prank call (p. 49)." Her fear intensifies as the caller continues to call and threaten her, but each time, though even more fearful, she thinks rationally and is able handle the situation effectively.

After involving the police and managing to keep the caller on the line long enough for the police to isolate his location, she receives the call that confirms her worse fears. The caller is in the house. "Get out of the house immediately." she is told by the police (p. 50). Even though her greatest fear has been



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confirmed, she still manages to keep her head. "But what about the children (p. 50)?" Remarkably, she is still thinking, thinking about her responsibility while at the same time thinking about her own safety. Only after the police arrive does she give in to panic, and that panic is for the safety of the children. When she finds them safe and unaware in their beds, the reader can finally relax. And at this point the message is clear. Keeping your cool in the face of terrifying circumstances may not be a guarantee that things will turn out okay, but in this case at least the reader sees a good example that it can.

The author of this story takes the reader on an increasingly intense ride by shifting the mood then turning up the volume on terror. All the while, the hero manages to think her way through the situation in spite of that terror. Hopefully we will not find ourselves in this same situation, but we can all count on experiencing situations that will pit our nerve against our ability to think rationally. If we can manage to keep our cool, we may find that like Mary Lou we manage to do our part in finding the best possible outcome.

