

The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane

Canada / US / France : 1976 : dir. Nicolas Gessner : ICL / Filmedis-Filmel : 94 min
prod: Zev Braun : scr: Laird Koenig : dir.ph.: Rene Verzier

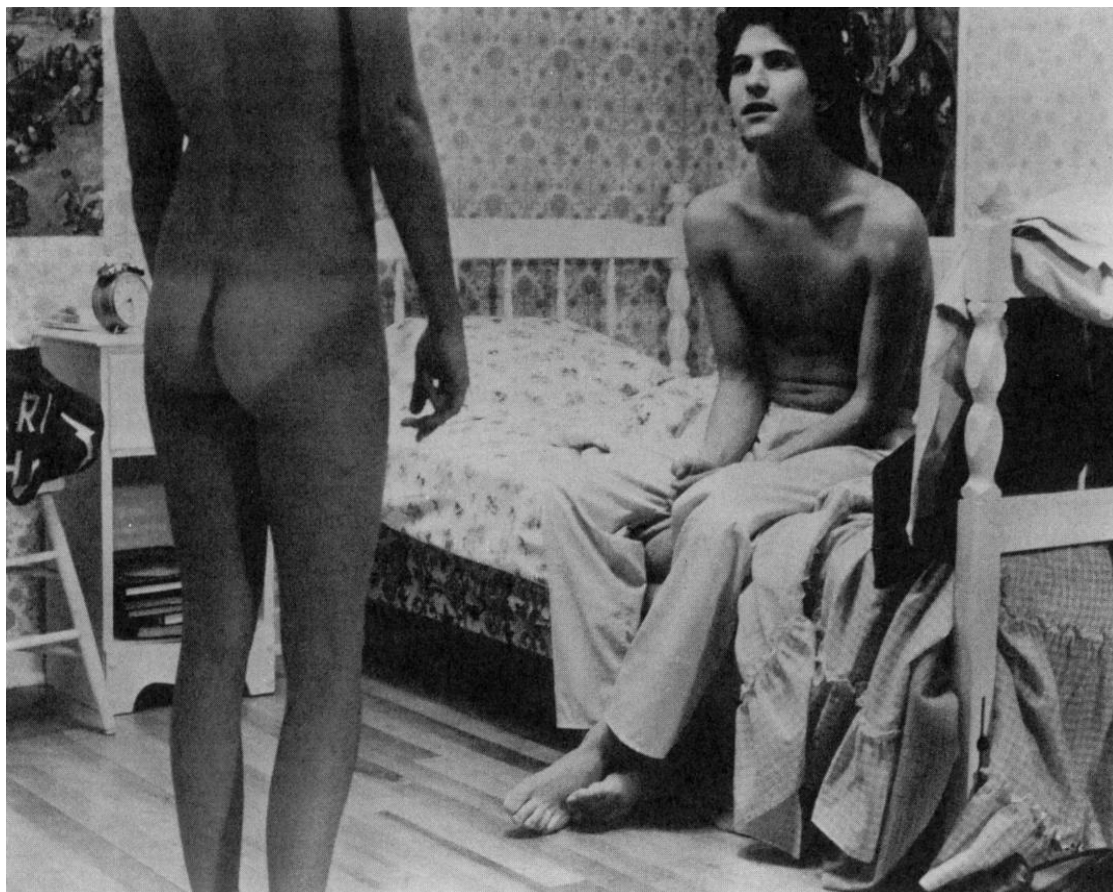
[Jodie Foster](#)
Martin Sheen; Scott Jacoby; Mort Shuman; Alexis Smith; Dorothy Davis; Clesson Goodhue;
Hubert Noel; Jacques Famery; Mary Morter; Julie Wildman

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8	⌘ M	⌘	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5770a	6	10	8	1,540	- 3 -	- 3		No	Pre 1990



Parents? Who needs 'em?

Source: Cinema 78



Former "miss Coppertone" baby model Jodie Foster shows us she still has a photogenic bottom, even without the moisturising cream. Scott Jacoby stares resolutely into her eyes. Source: *Hollywood Lolitas*

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"Complex, unique mystery with Foster as a young girl whose father never seems to be home – and she gets very nervous when anyone goes near the basement. Think you've figured it out? Forget it, Charlie; you haven't even scratched the surface. Engrossing, one-of-a-kind film written by Laird Koenig. Shot in Panavision. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Foster is good in her role of a teenage girl who carries on as though her father is away to disguise the fact that he's dead. Enthralling, under-rated mystery. *** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A 13-year old girl, when her father dies, is discovered to be keeping her mother's corpse in the cellar, and doesn't stop at more murders

to keep her secret. Tasteless piece of grand guignol, badly directed and over-acted. It was originally intended as a TV movie. Scr: Laird Koenig, from his own novel."

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"Very involving thriller concerning strangely independent adolescent girl threatened by child molester [sic] who knows her guilty secret. Well acted all round. ***1/2 "

Radio Times Guide to Films review:

"This chilling oddity – a psychological thriller exploring serious themes – features an intuitive performance from 13-year old Jodie Foster that hints at what was to come. Grief-stricken Foster murders her mother when her father commits suicide and then buries both corpses in the cellar. Unfortunately, her suspicious actions arouse the curiosity of landlady Alexis Smith and – worse – the interest of her child-

molesting [sic] psychopathic son (a startling | turn by Martin Sheen). This macabre fairy-tale



Source: indeterminate film guide

becomes a captivating experience under Nicolas Gessner's sensitive direction. *** ”

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

“Foster gives a first-rate performance in this provocative thriller. She plays a composed and independent 13-year old who dispatches a few nasty adults with aplomb. The script is flawed in part, but the suspense compensates, and there’s a poignant relationship between Foster and Scott Jacoby, who supports her endeavours. Also with Mort Shuman. Rated “PG” *** ”

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

“With portraits of prostitutes and gangster’s molls already behind her, the 13-year old Jodie Foster handled her role as a disturbed teenager with amazing confidence in this Canadian thriller that reminds you of Hammer chillers of the mid sixties. She’s the whole show, especially with a plot that telegraphs every shock a few shivers in advance. ** ”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

““THE LITTLE GIRL WHO LIVES DOWN THE LANE” is a remarkably subdued film from a genre that has existed primarily on

gore, violence, and audience manipulation. Jodie Foster gives an absorbingly realistic performance in the title role. Martin Sheen is the child molester [sic] who menaces her. It’s a well-acted chiller. Rated “PG”. ***1/2 ”

The Virgin Film Guide review:

“This Canadian-made film, a star vehicle for the then 13-year old Jodie Foster, is a disturbing, wonderfully acted, well-scripted, and suspenseful study of a murderous 13-year old girl, Ryan (Foster). Living in her father’s home, Ryan makes up stories that her father is away when in fact he is dead. She handles the bills, the upkeep, and her own survival, admirably putting into practice what her father taught her. When a snooping neighbour makes a nuisance of herself, Ryan knocks her down the stairs. Matter-of-factly, Ryan lets the cellar door close and gets back to her work. Soon the creepy Frank (Martin Sheen) is making a pest of himself, wanting both answers to his suspicions and Ryan’s barely pubescent body.

Meanwhile, Ryan becomes genuinely attracted to Mario (Scott Jacoby), a youngster her own age¹. Frank, knowing that something is odd about Ryan’s situation, presses her for answers about her father, his insistence threatening to ruin the private, self-sustaining, child-as-adult world she has created with Mario. This leads

¹ The “barely pubescent” youngster Jacoby was in fact 20, and Foster 13...

to a fatal game of cat-and-mouse between Ryan and Frank. Tautly directed by Nicolas Gessner, the film is a showcase for the young

Foster and she does not disappoint, turning in a slyly nuanced performance that is downright



Foster has her friendly neighbourhood "psychopathic child-molester" over for tea... But it isn't Foster's safety that's in jeopardy here. After all, she's the murderer in the scene, not him. He's a victim-in-waiting. But heck, he has sexual designs on an independent 13-year old. The man **deserves** to die, right?



creepy and at the same time oddly innocent².
***1/2 ”

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies of the Seventies", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide" or "Variety Movie Guide 1993"]

Radio Times review:

² Sic! They just couldn't forebear to finish off the review without invoking that word, could they!

“Riveting adult thriller with a dangerous theme. Jodie Foster (aged 13). In the same year as she plays a teenage prostitute in "**TAXI DRIVER**", is spellbinding as the little girl with a terrible secret and Martin Sheen is chilling as the amorous adult who finds out what she's up to. **** ”

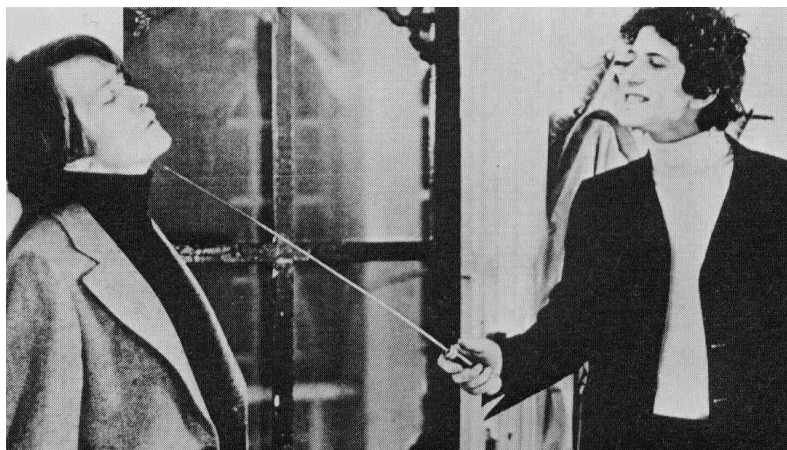
“A mysterious 13-year old girl lives alone in her father's house. She explains his absence to curious neighbours by saying that he is away from home. But one man suspects that there is something sinister about the girl, and his troublesome snooping threatens to expose her private existence, with deadly consequences.”

TV Times review:

“Ryan Jacobs, aged 13, has rented a house with her father in a small Canadian town. Mrs Hallet, the estate agent, takes a dislike to Ryan, especially when she hears that her disturbed son Frank (a known child molester *[sic]*) has been lurking around the house.”

Cast:

Ryan Jacobs**Jodie Foster**
Frank HalletMartin Sheen
Officer MiglioritiMort Shuman
Mario PodestaScott Jacoby
Mrs Hallet.....Alexis Smith
Town Hall clerk.....Dorothy Davis
Bank ManagerClesson Goodhue
Bank clerksHubert Noel
.....Jacques Famery
Bank tellersMary Morter
.....Judie Wildman



It's an interesting synthesis of two often-filmed ideas – the child or family who attempt to continue as normal after the death of their parent or guardian (as in “**OUR MOTHER’S**

HOUSE", **"LA FRACTURE DU MYOCARDE"**, **"THE CEMENT GARDEN"**), and the psychotic kiddie Whom No-One Would Suspect. Although described as a thriller, the emphasis lies more heavily on the first theme, and independent-minded Foster's efforts to fend off all the nosing around her by officious town busy-bodies and neighbours with overworked tongues. What the children in all the above-mentioned films share in common is a morbid dread of being put into a children's home (this is before they became caricatured as dens of illicit vice), and the deceased parent is generally buried quietly in the back garden for that very reason.



Laird Koenig throws another spin on that idea – perhaps an unfortunate one, from the point of view of independent children – by making his heroine a Norma Bates character, dead mother stashed in the cellar and all.

A further unfortunate sideline is the leering Frank Hallet as a comic strip creep with a yen for – in that priceless phrase from **"THINGS TO DO IN DENVER WHEN YOU'RE DEAD"** – "itty-bitty titty". This (goes the subtext) is the consequence of young kids trying to manage their own affairs – the next thing you know they have a gentleman caller with designs on their genitals. Of course, the Scott Jacoby character has designs on Ryan's genitals also, but he's only 20, so I guess that must be OK, yes?

Foster, needless to say, is perfect for the part. An intelligent seasoned actress, and a savvy, strong-willed 13-year old in her own right, she is nobody's idea of a "victim". It was that combination of qualities which made her role in **"TAXI DRIVER"** bearable to watch. Foster was quite unfazed playing a seasoned New York whore, and her scene with pimp Harvey Keitel, where he dances with her, coaxing her psychologically to continue in the work, is more highly charged than her overtly sexual "we'd better make it or Sport'll get mad" scene with Robert De Niro. Whatever the pro's and cons of the roles Foster took in this period, it's clear she already had the personal mettle to handle anything, and it comes as no surprise at all that she went from strength to strength where so many other child stars wither on the vine in their late teens.

It's too long since I watched this to review it in more detail. An interesting if flawed film, and commendably unsensationalised when compared with a good deal of comparable TV movie garbage in the decades that followed. The title implies that it plays out as a latterday Grimm

fairy tale, but there is no attempt by the director at that “**COMPANY OF WOLVES**” quality, and there are no subsidiary levels of meaning, which was rather a wasted opportunity.

See subject index under [ORPHANS / ADOPTION](#), [SEX & SEXUALITY](#), [THE CHILD AS EVIL IN OUR MIDST](#), and under [SIBLING HOUSEHOLDS](#) for children going it alone.