

Cloaks Folded

By John Pascal
Newsday

WHEN you walk into my friends' home, the most arresting decoration on the entrance wall is a 15-by-20-inch color blowup of their daughter Amy. I have always wondered why.

The picture is the pride of the household for reasons that were, until the other day, a mystery to me. I knew it could not be for technical brilliance. I have seen better portraiture on the Tattoo Lady. And I am sorry to say that it is unpleasant to look upon. Amy is a voluptuously attractive girl. But the picture on the wall renders her as somebody's idiot nephew in drag. Why its prominent display then? The answer, as you have certainly guessed, is its very odd provenance.

Here is the way the truth emerged: I was at my friends' house the other day for my (more or less) bimonthly visit and talk turned to the impending investigation by the U.S. Senate of the CIA, the FBI and assorted other intelligence and law enforcement agencies of our good

government. I blathered the guess that the probe, as always when Senators rate rampant, would descend through the Senate sergeant-at-arms to the grade school monitors at P.S. 114.

Would that include the Secret Service? My host asked. I replied it would include not only the Secret Service but their secret girlfriends. "Well," said Amy's mother, "I certainly hope it doesn't hit a couple of real swell guys."

★ ★ ★

I HOPE so too, I said. But you are dreaming. No doubt there are some very swell guys among the Secret Service. But how would you know?

The picture on the wall, said Amy's mother, that's how. If anybody's going to say anything at all about the Secret Service, the picture of my Amy ought to be a footnote at the very least.

It seems, as Amy's parents told it, that Amy's class was given a homework assignment last April to write to Richard Nixon. He was still President then, hard though it is to believe today. The class was to watch Nixon on television that night as he

and Daggers Dulled

explained his noninvolvement with Watergate once again. Then the students were to write to Nixon.

It was an easy assignment for Amy. She had been programmed by her parents for umpteen years to hate Nixon. There was certainly no need to watch him on TV.

★ ★ ★

IT IS now presumably in some hidden vault and cannot be quoted verbatim. But as Amy's parents remembered her letter said:

"Dear Tricky" I hate you. I've always hated you. But I hate you more than ever now. Who needs you on television. You have some nerve ruining everybody's television. You're disgusting. You made me miss my favorite movie and you should be shot and if were right here in front of me I would do it myself. Why don't you go impeach yourself and do everybody a big favor. —(Signed) Amy"

That was in April. In July, two Secret Service agents arrived at Amy's house and were met by Amy's mother. Yes, what is it, she asked. Official business, they said. They had come to interrogate Amy.

Why? Asked the alarmed mother. She threatened to assassinate the President of the United States, one of the agents replied.

Amy's mother sighed in relief. Since the charge was assassination, she told the agents casually, there certainly had to be some mistake somewhere.

No, the agent said, no mistake. They showed her the letter. "I looked it and I got so furious at Amy," said the mother, "that you can't imagine. Doing a dumb thing like that. But here were the government men, deadly serious about it and demanding to talk to Amy and suddenly I got angry at them. 'You're dumb,' I said to them. 'Good great God, you certainly can't take this stupid little thing seriously.'"

★ ★ ★

BUT INDEED they could. "Well, Amy's at camp," said the mother, "and won't be home until August." What camp, the agents demanded. "I'll be damned if I tell you," said the mother.

Sure enough, the G-Men reappeared this past September. By then

of course Nixon was no longer President. But potential assassins, in the bureaucratic mind, are forever dangerous, so they came back and grilled poor Amy. In preparation, Amy's parents costumed their daughter. Amy happens to be a very ripe 14, to the dismay of her parents, so her mother flattened her down with an Ace bandage, put her thick flowing hair into braids and ordered her to wear calf socks and sneakers.

The disguise worked. Amy looked virginal and spoke innocently. The agents took their notes and before leaving asked, cordially, if they might be permitted to take a picture of Amy "for the files."

"Hell, yes," said the mother, leaping up, "and while you're at it, give me one more for my baby because she just came back from diet camp and I may never again have a shot of her skinny."

The G-Men obliged and Amy's parents hung the photo on the wall, a blow-up Polaroid, amateurish, unfocused shot of their burgeoning daughter, a victory over obesity, cloaks and daggers, and the majesty of the United States Government.