

AMERICAN MONSTER

By

Mark E. Davidson

Alexander Robb
Insignia Entertainment
310.936.7694
AlexRobb@InsigniaEntertainment.Com

V6
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FADE IN.

EXT. HIGHWAY 789 - DAY

A barren stretch of Wyoming highway. FIVE WORKERS patch the road.

WRITTEN: RIVERTON, WYOMING, 1984
BASED ON A TRUE STORY

RONNIE CRADDICK (37), monster in a man suit, sits on the curb.

Ronnie looks as if he's a million miles away. Blank face. Eyes at half-mast. Mouth partly opened as if at any moment a forked-tongue might flick out to taste the air. A thick horseshoe mustache surrounds his mouth. Atop his head, thinning slicked back hair.

One hundred yards away, THREE JAIL TRUSTEE'S in orange county jail jumpers slowly approach as they collect trash. A SHERIFF idles along the road next to them.

LATER

The road crew takes five. They sit at the side of the road. Ronnie sits apart as he munches at his sandwich and stares off into the distance. Far away, a storm brews. Thunder RUMBLES and lightning licks at the treetops.

Suddenly, an 18-wheeler ROARS by and covers the men in dust.

Ronnie chews methodically even as he's coated with grime.

RONNIE'S POV: as he watches the sign that reads 'STATE HIGHWAY 789' rock in the big trucks wake. He looks down the road. Another 18-wheeler approaches in the distance.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - AMY LYNN'S ROOM - DAY

A room painted pink. On the walls, posters of a 'tween: Michael J. Fox in 'Back to the Future', horses, Michael Jackson as the Zombie from Thriller, more horses. On top of the bed are stuffed animals and a carnival pillow with 'AMY LYNN' stitched in rhinestones.

It's a happy room.

SKREE SKREE SKREE!

The SCRAPE of metal on metal.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

AMY LYNN CRADDICK (13) spins on a merry-go-round in a small playground that borders the trailer. Wrapped in a heavy winter coat, she's almost androgynous. The only hint of her gender, her brown shoulder-length hair that surrounds her innocent face.

She lies on her back and looks up at the sky as the merry-go-round spins, each revolution marked with a--

SKREE SKREE SKREE

EXT. HAPPY ACRES TRAILER PARK - PLAYGROUND - DAY

It's a pathetic playground. Rusted. Dirty. Unused. But somehow Amy Lynn has made the best of it.

AMY LYNN'S POV: Of the bright blue sky as it spins above her.

After a few dizzy rotations, Ronnie appears in the POV and looks down at her.

RONNIE

Gonna make yourself dizzy, girl.

BACK IN THE PLAYGROUND

Ronnie slows the merry-go-round to a stop, holds out his hand, and helps her stand. She wobbles a few steps.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

See. Tolja.

AMY LYNN

I love spinning. Feeling dizzy.
Feels like I'm floating out of my
body.

RONNIE

Out of your body, huh?

AMY LYNN

Yup.

RONNIE

How 'bout I push you on the swing?

AMY LYNN

OK.

They walk to the swing. Amy Lynn sits in the seat. Ronnie crouches in front of her, pushes her hair away from her face.

RONNIE

You're a pretty girl, Amy Lynn.

She smiles and blushes.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Birthday, huh?

AMY LYNN

Yup.

RONNIE

How old?

AMY LYNN
Thirteen tomorrow.

Ronnie smiles, runs his hands down the side of her face, across her shoulder, casually over her breast. She doesn't notice.

RONNIE
Wow. Thirteen. Darn near a woman.

He goes behind her, pulls her back, lets her swing forward. As she comes back toward him, she asks--

AMY LYNN
Dad?

He pushes her. She swings away. Swings back.

RONNIE
Yeah?

The process repeats. Away she goes. Back she swings.

AMY LYNN
Will I feel different?

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Someone watches Ronnie and Amy Lynn through the front window.

EXT. HAPPY ACRES TRAILER PARK - PLAYGROUND - CONTINUOUS

Amy Lynn swings back. This time, Ronnie catches the small girl and pulls her close. Real close. His mouth, by her ear, one arm crossed over her chest, the other wrapped around her hips.

RONNIE
Different?

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

A WOMAN'S HAND reaches forward, pushes the cheap curtain aside. There's a wedding ring on the ring-finger.

EXT. HAPPY ACRES TRAILER PARK - PLAYGROUND - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie holds his only daughter close.

RONNIE
Different how?

AMY LYNN
I dunno. Seems like a teenager's pretty close to an adult.

Ronnie lets her go. She swings away.

RONNIE
I 'spose that's right.

Ronnie looks towards his trailer. CLARISSA (29), his wife, stands on the porch, arms are crossed over her chest. She knows.

CLARISSA
Amy Lynn, you get on in here.

AMY LYNN
Coming, Mama!

Amy Lynn drags her feet, skids to a halt, hops from the swing, and runs toward the house.

RONNIE
Love you, Amy Lynn.

Amy Lynn looks back, childish innocence. Childish love.

AMY LYNN
Love you, daddy!

Amy Lynne runs past Clarissa and disappears inside. For a long moment, Clarissa and Ronnie stare before Clarissa shakes her head, turns and walks inside.

INT. RIVERTON DINER - DAY

Clarissa busses a table. A CUSTOMER walks in. She smiles, nods towards a table.

CLARISSA
Be right with ya'. Coffee?

The Customer nods 'yes' and she goes to fetch it.

BY THE COUNTER

She picks up the coffee carafe, about to go, but the phone RINGS. She answers.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)
Riverton Dine --
(beat)
Oh, hey baby. You home from school?

She glances at the clock: 3:15.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)
Cripes. Day's almost over.

Sudden concern. She tries to hide it --

CLARISSA (CONT'D)
Is your daddy there?

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - KITCHEN - SAME

Amy Lynn has the phone pressed to her ear. Her school books are on the table behind her.

AMY LYNN
Just me, mama.

CLARISSA (PHONE FILTER)
I should be there before him. You see his truck coming, you get on down to Ms. Gina's house. Let her watch you a spell.

AMY LYNN
Watch me? Why?

Clarissa's a little on edge.

CLARISSA (PHONE FILTER)
Do what I say, girl. And don't let him see you.

AMY LYNN
I don't understand.

INT. RIVERTON DINER - SAME

Clarissa looks concerned. She glances at the clock again.

CLARISSA
There's nothing to understand. Just trust me. Do as I say. Don't fuss now, OK? He shows up, get on down to Ms. Gina's.

AMY LYNN (PHONE FILTER)
OK, mama. I will --

CLARISSA
Don't you 'I will' me. He shows up, you go. I'm off at 3:30 and I'll be there 'fore 4.

AMY LYNN (PHONE FILTER)
OK. Bye...

CLARISSA
Amy Lynn?

No answer... Clarissa sounds concerned as --

CLARISSA (CONT'D)
Amy Lynn?

AMY LYNN (PHONE FILTER)
 (exasperated)
 Yes, mama?

CLARISSA
 I love you.

AMY LYNN (PHONE FILTER)
 Love you too, mama. Bye.

CLICK

Clarissa sighs and slowly puts the phone on the cradle.

KATHY (38), co-worker and friend, approaches. She can see that Clarissa's troubled. She picks up the carafe from the burner.

KATHY
 I got that. Is it Amy Lynn?

Clarissa nods 'yes.' She glances at the clock. Kathy senses her friends anxiety.

KATHY (CONT'D)
 Go. I got this.

CLARISSA
 You sure?

KATHY
 Go.

Clarissa nods in thanks, then impulsively hugs Kathy.

KATHY (CONT'D)
 Go. Get.

Clarissa steps to the time clock and punches out.

EXT. RIVERTON DINER - DAY

Clarissa hurries out, trots toward her beat up Ford Escort.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Amy Lynn sits at the kitchen table with her math book open and a half-filled glass of milk in front of her. She writes the answer to a homework problem on her paper and then stands, turns, and walks towards the bedrooms.

THROUGH THE LIVING ROOM WINDOW

Ronnie's pick-up approaches and stops outside the trailer.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Amy Lynn flicks on the light. Approaches the mirror.

Checks her teeth. Continues to the toilet, drops her pants, sits.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie sorts through the mail as he walks towards the kitchen.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

CLOMP CLOMP CLOMP CLOMP

His heavy steps echo through the trailer. Amy Lynn looks up, alarmed. Her eyes flutter as she realizes: *trapped*.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - KITCHEN

Ronnie tosses the mail on the table as he enters the kitchen. The envelopes skid across the table and bump into Amy Lynn's glass of milk. He doesn't notice.

He walks to the sink, gets a glass from a cabinet, fills it from the faucet and begins to GULP it loudly.

ANGLE ON HIS EYES

as he gulps. They cut slowly toward the kitchen table.

RONNIE'S POV: of the table. The book. The glass of milk.

BACK IN THE KITCHEN

He finishes the water and calmly sets the glass by the sink.

He looks towards the back hallway and calls --

RONNIE

Amy Lynn?

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Amy Lynn breaths heavily. She carefully pulls a few squares of toilet paper off the roll, wipes, pulls up her pants, stands.

RONNIE (O.S.)

Amy Lynn? You answer me now.

CLOMP CLOMP CLOMP CLOMP

Amy Lynn flicks off the light switch as Ronnie CLOMPS towards her.

She presses her ear to the door.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie disappears into his bedroom at the end of the hall. For a moment, silence... and then he reappears, sans shoes.

He moves silently, head cocked as he listens. He pads down the hall, opens the door to Amy Lynn's bedroom, and disappears inside.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Amy Lynn's presses her ear tightly to the door. She has her hand on the knob, ready to flee.

PUSH THROUGH THE DOOR

to the other side. Ronnie stands, bent over, ear pressed to the door. His eyes are dead. He licks his lips.

SLIDE BACK THROUGH THE DOOR

as Amy Lynn draws a breath, holds it, and opens the door. Empty.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Amy Lynn's head pokes out. She looks towards her parents room, Ronnie's work boots are just inside the doorway. She emerges into the hall and backs down the hall, an eye on the bedroom.

Quietly. So quietly. Step. Step. Step.

Right into Ronnie. She startles, turns --

AMY LYNN

Oh. Daddy... I... I was --

RONNIE

Was you hiding from me, Amy Lynn?

AMY LYNN

No, I --

RONNIE

I called you.

AMY LYNN

I... I was in the bathroom. I couldn't hear you.

Ronnie nods slightly, not believing the lie for a second.

RONNIE

Uh huh. OK. You done with your school work?

AMY LYNN

No Daddy.

RONNIE

Well get to it, girl.

She's forced to brush against him as she passes in the small hall.

He turns, grabs her arm.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Amy Lynn?

AMY LYNN

Yes, daddy?

RONNIE

My love for you's so overpowering,
I'm afraid I might disappear.

The girl looks confused.

AMY LYNN

What? I... I don't understand.

Ronnie pulls her close. Too close. He hugs her. Strokes her hair.

RONNIE

You love me too, right?

AMY LYNN

Yes, Daddy.

CLARISSA (O.S.)

What's this then?

Ronnie looks at Clarissa in the doorway of the trailer. They lock eyes as he maintains his tight hold on Amy Lynn.

RONNIE

Can't a father hug his daughter?

CLARISSA

Amy Lynn, go get the mail.

Ronnie nods toward the mail on the kitchen table.

RONNIE

Already got it, Clarissa.

She composes herself, draws a breath --

CLARISSA

Amy Lynn. Go down and visit with
Ms. Gina. Like we talked about. Me
and your daddy need to talk.

AMY LYNN

But --

Clarissa's angry. Pissed. Trapped.

CLARISSA

Go! Sass me one more time I swear
to Jesus I'll bust your hide!

Amy Lynn pulls free from Ronnie and squeezes past Clarissa.

Clarissa and Ronnie stare at each other.

EXT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

The shadows are long as the day ends. Amy Lynn stomps past Clarissa's Escort and across the parking lot, confused, pissed.

From inside the trailer Ronnie and Clarissa's UNINTELLIGIBLE VOICES RISE IN ANGER.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - KITCHEN - THE GLASS OF MILK - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie and Clarissa jockey for position. The surface of the half-drunk glass of milk vibrates in time with their rising voices.

CLARISSA (O.S.)
She's a baby! Your daughter! How could you?!

They scuffle.

WHAP! SMACK!

RONNIE (O.S.)
Don't you --

They bump into the table. The milk sloshes.

CLARISSA (O.S.)
I seen the way you look at her!

BUMP! WHAP!

RONNIE (O.S.)
Now you stop that woman!

CLARISSA (O.S.)
I seen the way you look at her!

Another bump into the table. The milk sloshes over the lip of the glass onto Amy Lynn's open math book.

EXT. SUBURBS OF RIVERTON - KATHY'S HOUSE - DAY

Morning. A NEWSPAPER BOY (13) peddles past Clarissa's Escort and tosses a paper onto the porch.

INT. CLARISSA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Clarissa and Amy Lynn sit in silence. Clarissa looks past Amy Lynn towards Kathy's house.

CLARISSA
Stan's still sleeping. She'll be right out.