

MONSTER IN THE CLASSROOM

by

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FADE IN:

EXT - A NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL - DAY

Establishing. A SCHOOL BELL RINGS. We hear the RAUCOUS CHEER OF KIDS who've reached the end of a school day.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

We're CLOSE on the face of a wall clock. It reads 3:15. OVER the sounds of the exiting children's CHATTERING VOICES and SCUFFLING FEET, we hear a WOMAN'S VOICE addressing them loudly as they file out.

JOANNA (O.S.)
...And don't forget your history
assignments are due tomorrow!

By the time we TILT DOWN AND WIDEN to reveal the room itself, it is empty, with the exception of the teacher JOANNA NADLER. She is forty or so, attractive in her way but fading. She returns to her desk, sits down and begins marking papers.

SEAN (O.S.)
Yo, Miss Nadler?

She looks up to see two young boys in the doorway: SEAN is the older of the two, about eleven, African-American; MARCO is no more than seven or eight, Latino.

SEAN (CONT'D)
We here for detention.

JOANNA
We are here for detention, Sean.
And it's Ms. Nadler. The proper
designation these days is Ms.

He stares at her for a beat.

JOANNA (CONT'D)
(sighs; then)
Just take a seat.

The boys go to a pair of desks in the middle of the room and sit down.

JOANNA (CONT'D)
So what is it this time, Sean?

SEAN

Ah, man, they said I blew off a cherry bomb in the lavatory, but it wasn't me, I swear.

JOANNA

The jails are full of innocent people, Sean.

(she turns to Marco)

How about you, Marco? What was your crime?

Marco looks down, embarrassed.

SEAN

My little brother's in his class. Said the teacher caught Marco and Maria Hernandez in the supply closet.

MARCO

We wasn't doin' nothin'. We was just playin'!

SEAN

You was playin' doctor, that's what you was playin'.

MARCO

We was not!

JOANNA

Enough! Now, I want the both of you to take out your books and study.

The boys glumly take out their books as Joanna goes to the door.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

I have to step out for a moment, but I'll be right back. Is that understood?

She leaves. Sean immediately resumes teasing Marco.

SEAN

Yo, dog, you an' Maria gonna get married?

MARCO

Shut up!

INT - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

School principal CHRIS BARRETT, trim, fifty, wearing glasses, is seated behind his desk, working over some papers.

A GENTLE KNOCKING is heard at his door. Before he can answer, the door opens and Joanna peeks in.

JOANNA

Busy?

CHRIS

Uh, yes, actually. But...

She enters and closes the door behind her.

JOANNA

I'm covering detention today.
Thought I'd drop in and say hi.

She comes around to his side of the desk, sits down on the edge and slips his glasses off. He tenses uncomfortably.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Sean's teasing has changed its tack.

SEAN

You must be one brave little kid,
I'll tell you that. No way would
I go in one a those supply closets.

MARCO

What d'ya mean?

SEAN

Don't you know? Little monsters
live in 'em. Know what I'm sayin'?
Chupacabra, and all that.

Marco looks at the closed door of the supply closet located near the front of the classroom.

INT - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Joanna kisses Chris softly on the lips. He pulls away.

CHRIS

Joanna, please.

JOANNA

What's wrong?

CHRIS

We can't keep doing this. Our reputations, our careers...

(pauses; then)

It's just not worth it.

JOANNA

What you mean is, I'm not worth it.

CHRIS

For God's sake, we've been over this a dozen times. I'm a married man!

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Marco regards Sean dubiously.

MARCO

You're lying. There ain't nothin' in there.

SEAN

Check it out, dog, you so brave. See if I'm lying.

Marco looks back toward the closet door. Hesitates.

INT - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Joanna's cheeks are flushed. Her eyes well with tears.

JOANNA

I can't believe this. You used me. You used me!

CHRIS

It wasn't like that and you know it.

JOANNA

Really? What was it like, Chris? You tell me.

(He doesn't answer)

God, it never fails. You're all alike!

CHRIS

Don't be such a victim. You pursue
a married man, and when the
inevitable occurs...!

JOANNA

Shut up! Just...

She leaves in tears, SLAMMING the door behind her.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Marco approaches the closet door. He reaches for the knob,
then pauses and looks back at Sean.

SEAN

Well?

Marco turns and faces the door again, as...

Sean removes a rubber band and a paper clip from his pocket.
He hooks the paper clip to the rubber band and pulls it taut,
aiming it like a crossbow at Marco's backside, as...

Marco reaches for the doorknob. Slowly turns it. He pulls
the door open a crack.

REVERSE ANGLE - FROM INSIDE THE CLOSET

on Marco's face as the door opens.

MARCO'S P.O.V.

as he scans the interior of the dark supply closet, which is
large enough to be considered a small room. Wide shelves
line the walls, crammed with stacks of paper, jars of glue
and finger paint, staple guns, tape, a pair of yellow eyes...

Yellow eyes! Marco catches his breath and stares mesmerized
at those two glowing orbs, as...

Sean is about to fire his paper clip. But just then...

a distraught Joanna enters the room.

Marco SLAMS the closet door shut and turns to face her.

JOANNA

What...are you doing...out of your
seat?!

Marco's lips tremble as he gazes into Joanna's flushed, angry countenance, while Sean sinks in his chair.

JOANNA

I asked you a question, young man.

MARCO

I...I...

Marco looks at Sean, then back at Joanna.

JOANNA

Answer me, you duplicitous little mute!

Marco flinches. He's scared, but doesn't want to break the unwritten code and fink on Sean.

MARCO

I...I...needed an eraser...

She moves toward him.

JOANNA

Oh, is that it? You needed an eraser. So you just took it upon yourself to get up...go into the supply closet...and take one. Is that how we do things around here?
(Marco remains silent)
Well, is it?

Joanna steps in front of Marco, looming over him menacingly.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

I don't think it is. I think we wait until there's a teacher present, and then we raise our hand, and ask -- politely -- if we may get up and get an eraser. I think that is how we do things around here.

Marco moves to return to his desk.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Where do you think you're going?

Marco stops. Looks at her.

MARCO

Back to my seat?

JOANNA

Oh, no. You wanted to go into the supply closet. Well, go ahead.

She opens the door. Marco stands frozen.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Get in there.

MARCO

But...!

She grabs him by the arm.

JOANNA

Now, damn you!

She pushes him into the closet and shuts the door.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

You can stay in there for the rest of detention.

INT - CLOSET

Marco stands with his back pressed against the door, his fearful eyes darting about the dark room.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Joanna leans against the door, breathing hard. She turns and sees Sean looking at her.

JOANNA

What the hell are you looking at?
Open that book and bury your nose
in it.

Sean does as he's told.

Joanna goes to her desk and sits down. Her lower lip begins to quiver. She turns her swivel chair around to face the blackboard.

Sean looks up furtively at her, then back at his book.

She turns around, opens a drawer and roots out a prescription bottle. Empties one pill, then two, then three into her hand, turns her back to Sean again and swallows them. She closes her eyes and breathes deeply.

INT - CLOSET

Marco has not moved. He whispers to himself, over and over...

MARCO

There's nothing to be scared of...
nothing to be scared of...

But there is something to be scared of...

and it moves, darting behind a stack of books, its form
indiscernible in the shadows.

Marco freezes, holding his breath.

OVERHEAD ANGLE

looking down at the top of Marco's head. Something...a sound,
a rustle of paper, or perhaps an intuitive feeling...compels
Marco to slowly look up.

MARCO'S P.O.V.

Peering down at Marco from over the top shelf, so high above
the frightened little boy, are those same shining yellow
eyes, set within a leering face. We only see it for a brief
moment before it retreats from sight.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

The closet door flies open and Marco runs out, SLAMMING the
door shut behind him. He stands there panting and drenched
in sweat.

Joanna glares at him angrily.

JOANNA

Why you little...! Did I say you
could come out?

MARCO

There's something in there!

She rises and approaches him.

JOANNA

What do you mean, there's something
in there?

MARCO

I don't know. It's...some kind of monster!

Sean once again sinks guiltily in his chair.

JOANNA

I don't wanna hear any more of this. You just get your fanny back in there.

MARCO

I don't wanna!

JOANNA

What's the matter? I suppose you don't like it so much in there without your...what's her name? Maria, that's it. I bet if Maria were around for you to have your way with, you wouldn't mind staying in that closet at all, would you? And don't try an' tell me you weren't doing anything with her! You're all after the same thing, and once you get it...

She waves her hand in a gesture of futility, then reels slightly as the pills she took really start to kick in.

MARCO

But there is a monster! I swear!

JOANNA

Listen, you brat, there are no such things as monsters. Understand? Now get in there!

She grabs him by the arm and slings him back into the closet. Then she closes the door and locks it.

INT - CLOSET

Marco hears the CLICK OF THE LOCK. He tries the knob, but it won't turn.

MARCO

Hey! Let me out!

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

An increasingly woozy Joanna closes her eyes and leans against the door.

MARCO (CONT'D O.S.)
Please, Miss Nadler! Let me out!

JOANNA
It's Ms., ya little chauvinist!
Mizzzzz!

INT - CLOSET

Marco looks around the dark room, terrified.

MARCO
But the monster's gonna get me!

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Joanna sneers.

JOANNA
What did I say? There's no such
things as monsters!

INT - CLOSET

Marco turns and presses his back against the locked door. He can hear the PITTER-PATTER of tiny feet skittering across the wooden shelves.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Joanna continues outside the door.

JOANNA (CONT'D)
At least not the kind of monster
you mean. Hairy creatures with
glowing eyes and vampire fangs,
howling at the moon...

INT - CLOSET - DAY

Marco spots a staple gun sitting on the shelf opposite him. He scoots across the room to grab it...

just as the closet monster leaps for the spot where Marco was standing an instant before.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Joanna continues, oblivious to Marco's plight.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

But there are plenty of monsters
in the world, all right...the kind
I'm surrounded by day in and day
out...nasty, lying little boys with
nasty, lying little minds...who grow
up to become nasty, lying little
men!

INT - CLOSET

Marco grabs the staple gun, turns like a western gunslinger and FIRES at his shadow-obscured attacker, which leaps up onto the middle shelf.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Joanna continues her bitter diatribe.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Men who say things they don't mean...
make promises they don't keep...who
use you up and then throw you away
like...like...kleenex!

INT - CLOSET

We see a small, dark shape scurrying along the wall behind the piled-up supplies, as...

Marco FIRES at it repeatedly, as if it were a duck in a shooting gallery. We hear a HIGH PITCHED SQUEAL as one of the staples hits home.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Outside the closet, Joanna is consumed with her own demons.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Those are the real monsters...
and they're everywhere.

INT - CLOSET

Silence. Marco stands still, his eyes moving back and forth, looking from shelf to shelf. Where is it?

POUNCE! It's on your shoulders, Marco, that's where it is, grabbing you by the ears and riding you like a bronco.

Marco staggers about, banging up against the shelves, knocking over books and other supplies, struggling to throw the creature off.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Joanna hears the commotion and grows angry. She POUNDS on the door with an open hand.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Be quiet in there, ya little rapist! You're lucky all you got for assaulting that sweet little girl is detention. If it were up to me, you'd all be castrated at birth!

Suddenly, the noise from inside the closet ceases.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

That's better.

But then Joanna looks down...

and sees a dark red pool seeping out from under the door.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Hey..Marco?

She looks down at the creeping pool of red with a growing sense of horror.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Marco! Are you all right?

She tries to open the door, but can't. Panicking for a moment, she tugs wildly at the knob. Then, remembering that it's locked, she twists the latch and pulls the door open...

and sees that, although the seeping pool is blood red in color, it isn't blood; rather, it's ink, spilling from a bottle that has fallen from a shelf and broken on the floor.

Marco sits near it in a daze.

JOANNA (CONT'D)
Why you...you stupid...you
inconsiderate...!

She is nearly choking with rage.

JOANNA (CONTD.)
Look at this...this...mess!

MARCO
It was on me...on my shoulders...
it had me...!

Stoned and angry, she looks down at him.

JOANNA
What had you?

MARCO
The monster!

She reaches down, grabs his wrist and twists it.

JOANNA
Listen to me, you wimpy, weeping
little rodent, there's no such
thing as monsters! Who's been
filling that empty head of yours
with all this monster crap?

SEAN
It was me, Miz Nadler.

She turns to look at Sean.

JOANNA
What?

SEAN
I...I told him there were little
monsters living in the supply
closets. I never thought he'd
take it so serious.

MARCO
But there really is a monster!

SEAN
Oh, grow up, will ya?

Joanna lets go of Marco and walks unsteadily toward Sean.

JOANNA

It was you. You told him. My God...you lied to him. Oh, you're all the same! You can't open your mouths without telling a lie! You even lie to each other. There's no end.

Marco crawls away from the open door.

SEAN

Hey, like, ya know, I'm sorry.

She looks at Sean incredulously.

JOANNA

You're sorry? You're sorry?
 (laughs bitterly)
 I bet you think that covers it, don't you? You say you're sorry, and all is forgiven. Sorry, honey, I can't make it tonight, something came up. Sorry, sweetheart, I thought I could get away this weekend, but I can't. Oh, my, I'm truly sorry, dearest, but I just plain forgot you were cooking dinner for me tonight. You only planned it for a week, right? It only took you all day to prepare, right!

Sean hasn't got the slightest idea what she's talking about.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Well, sorry just won't do anymore! You got that? Sorry...just...won't do.

Tears run down Joanna's cheeks.

SEAN

Miz Nadler, are you alright?

JOANNA

Of course I'm alright! What do you think I am, a schoolgirl? I am a modern...independent...woman...and I don't need anybody! I can make it on my own just fine, thank you...

Marco rises and makes a run for the door at the rear of the classroom.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Hey!

Joanna lurches after him and grabs him as he struggles to get the door open, pushing on it when he should be pulling.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Get back here, you!

She pulls him back, and they both fall to the floor.

MARCO

Le'me go!

JOANNA

Sure, make a mess and then leave it for a woman to clean up. Is that what you had in mind? Huh?

Marco sits in forlorn silence while Joanna glares at him.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Well, no way! Not this time!

She takes Marco by the arm and drags him to her desk, from which she grabs a box of tissues.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

I'm sick and tired of cleaning up after you little monsters! Come on!

MARCO

No! I won't!

Marco struggles in her grasp as she pulls him toward the supply closet. He succeeds in breaking free...

then runs and cowers behind Sean.

JOANNA

Get back here!

SEAN

It's cool, Miz Nadler. I'll clean it up.

JOANNA

I don't give a damn who cleans it up, long as it ain't...isn't me.

Sean takes the box of tissues from her.

MARCO

Sean, don't! The monster!

SEAN

Would you chill with that? I'll
clean this up for you, but you
gotta quit whinin' about a monster.

INT - CLOSET

We see those yellow eyes peeking out from behind a collection of jars. They are squinting from the light pouring in through the open door.

CLOSET DWELLER'S P.O.V. FROM INSIDE THE CLOSET

as Sean moves near the doorway.

SEAN (CONT'D)

There ain't no monster in here.
I just made it up to spook you.
Now, shut up about it, will ya?

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Marco is not convinced, but remains silent.

Sean gets down on his knees and begins wiping up the spill.

Joanna pulls a chair out from one of the small desks and plops down into it. Watches Sean cleaning the floor.

JOANNA

Forget it. No use tryin' to
convince him. Like talking to a
wall. Don't appreciate a thing
you do...

She looks at Marco, her expression flashing with anger.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

They appreciate nothing!

Now she turns back to Sean, and in a more plaintive tone:

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Do you know what it's like...to give
yourself completely to another
person? Everything you are...

(MORE)

JOANNA (CONT'D)
everything you feel deep inside...
just give it all to another person?

SEAN
Um...no.

JOANNA
Of course you don't! You're a
man. You don't know how to give.
Only how to take. You take and
take and take until there's
nothing left but...emptiness.

CLOSET DWELLER'S P.O.V.

of Sean as he finishes cleaning the spill.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Sean rises, walks to the wastebasket and dumps the stained
tissues into it.

SEAN
I'm done, Miz Nadler.

JOANNA
Wha...?

SEAN
I said I'm done. I'm through.

She smiles sardonically.

JOANNA
So am I...
(the smile turns into a
scowl)
Go on. Get outa here.

SEAN
But the Principal says I'm supposed
to stay till four --

JOANNA
To hell with the Principal! He
can go rot for all I care. I'm
telling you to leave. Now, get
outa here before I change my mind.

Sean leaves.

MARCO
What about me?

JOANNA
What about you?

MARCO
Can I go, too?

JOANNA
Oh, you can go...

She rises and comes toward him.

JOANNA (CONT'D)
Back in the closet.

MARCO
No...please...!

She grabs him by his bruised arm and starts dragging him toward the supply closet.

JOANNA
You were told to stay in there
till the end of your detention,
and that's what you're gonna do!

Marco resists with all the strength he has. The soles of his sneakers SQUEAK along the waxed floor.

JOANNA (CONT'D)
You've given me enough trouble
today...and now...you're gonna do...as
you've been told!

She is winning the tug of war, drawing him closer to the open door...

but then she loses her grip on him and tumbles back into the closet.

Marco regains his balance, rushes forward, closes the door and locks it.

INT - CLOSET

Joanna rises to her knees and tries the door.

JOANNA
What the...? Hey! Open this door!

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Marco stares at the knob, sees it jiggling uselessly.

JOANNA (CONT'D)
You little creep! Open this door!
Let me out of here!

INT - CLOSET

She tugs at the knob, and pounds on the door.

JOANNA (CONT'D)
You don't know what trouble is!
I'll have you suspended! I'll
have you expelled! I'll have
your parents deported, ya little
spic bastard!

And then she hears something moving along the shelves.

JOANNA (CONT'D)
I'll have you...I'll...

It's so dark. She can hardly see. There's nothing but shapes and shadows. But something is in here with her. She can sense it. She knows it...

and then all at once it's on her, clawing at her back as she flails about, spinning like a mad ballerina and sending the bloodthirsty little creature sailing against the wall. It falls behind a stack of books, knocked senseless.

She cowers with her back against the door.

JOANNA (CONT'D)
Marco! There's something in here!
Please! Let me out!

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Marco hovers near the door, but doesn't move to open it.

MARCO
What is it? What's in there?

INT - CLOSET

Joanna screws her eyes shut, then opens them as if she might wake from this nightmare.

JOANNA

I don't know! Some kind of animal!
Please! Open the door!

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Marco is enjoying this.

MARCO

You know what it is. Say it.

INT - CLOSET

Joanna is terrified, but can't quite bring herself to say what Marco wants to hear.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Marco is unrelenting.

MARCO (CONT'D)

Say it!

INT - CLOSET

Joanna struggles with the words.

JOANNA

It's...it's...it's a monster! Now
please, let me out!

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Marco smiles a venal smile of satisfaction.

MARCO

But Miz Nadler, there's no such
thing as monsters.

He turns and leaves.

INT - CLOSET

She turns and faces the door.

JOANNA

Marco? Marco! Are you there?

She POUNDS on the door with both fists.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Marco! Let me out!

Suddenly, the voracious creature is on her back, wrapping a length of twine about her neck.

INT - CLASSROOM - DAY

Hearing Joanna's CHOKING CRIES, we PULL BACK from the closet door, and...

DISSOLVE TO

CLOSE - ON THE WALL CLOCK

as it strikes four o'clock. A moment later...

Principal Chris Barrett enters, pausing near the back of the classroom.

CHRIS

Joanna? I was hoping you'd sent the kids home. I wanted to talk to you.

HIS P.O.V. OF JOANNA'S DESK

Joanna is seated in her swivel chair, her back to us and Chris, facing the blackboard.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I may have been a little hasty before in...cutting things off. I guess I got scared. I'm sure you can understand.

He approaches her desk as he speaks.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
But I've thought about it, and
I realize...I want you in my life.
I don't want to lose you.

He's right behind her now.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I love you, Joanna. Damn the
consequences. I love you.

She doesn't move, doesn't speak.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Joanna? Did you hear what I said?
I love you.

He turns her chair around...

and sees turned-up eyes, blue lips and a lolling tongue.
Realizing she's dead, he backs away in horror, as...

the closet door is pulled shut.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END