



All the Boys Love Monster Girls

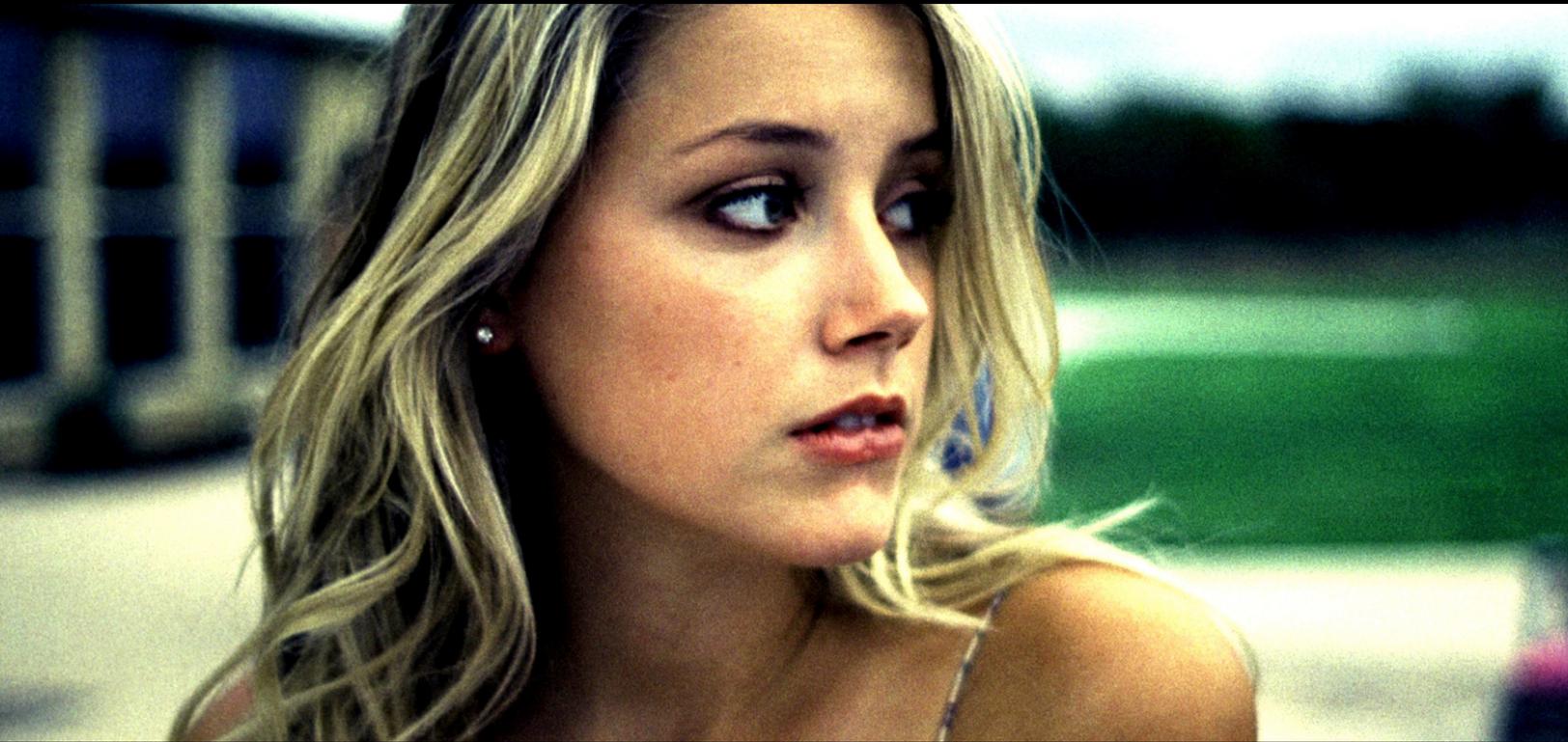
ALL THE BOYS LOVE

MONSTER GIRLS

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"Mandy Lane! You went and got fuckin' hot this summer."



That bit of dialogue is hurled at the titular character in *All the Boys Love Mandy Lane* (2006) with aggressive enthusiasm, cluing the audience into the fact of *Mandy's* recent metamorphosis. Her entry into popularity is hinted at in a prior series of shots lingering too long on *Mandy's* breasts and curves--the evidence of her pristine hotness--and what the complimentary jock is so obviously excited about, as she walks down the hallway of her high school. Ethereally backlit, blonde hair fanning out in the late summer light like a halo, *Mandy* is a teenage fantasy, with her inscrutable beautiful face. The other students, boys and girls alike, stare in awe as she walks by, but she ignores them, oblivious to their adoration and desire. Or, as I would come to think later, impervious to it.

Mandy agrees to attend the jock's pool party where, in an attempt to garner her attention, he's goaded by another boy into leaping off the roof of the house to his accidental death. Before he jumps, he shouts out *Mandy's* name like an exaltation.



I remember the summer I 'got hot'.

That's how it felt, anyway. More accurately, it was the summer I suddenly had breasts that warranted a bra and the summer men started catcalling me without looking guilty about it. It was the summer I learned to apply black eyeliner, doing so with diligence, and it was the same summer boys started asking me out. I was sixteen. My friends and I grew up sheltered. We spent our childhoods in the relative bliss of suburban safety, fed feeble warnings about the things children in the suburbs are supposed to fear: unwrapped Halloween candy, strangers with dark vans and evil intentions, etc. Abstract threats that felt more like ideas from movies than things that happened in real life...even if they did happen sometimes, elsewhere.

Even our parents failed to commit to the act fully, letting us ramble back and forth between our houses and anywhere else we liked on foot or rollerblade through those supposedly dangerous streets, as long as we were home by dinner.

As I got older, though, the warnings shifted. They became oddly oblique, but also more desperate, and they were always about boys. Don't dress like that, don't show too much. Don't be alone, don't be vulnerable, don't be too friendly. But don't ever be rude. Don't be mean, but don't give him the wrong idea. Underneath each terse admonition was the same threat, the only threat: sex, and even in our little suburb, it was lurking around every corner.

With its retro soundtrack and sun-drenched cinematography of attractive teens frolicking in the countryside, the air thick with humidity and hormones, one could mistake parts of *Mandy Lane* for a Hollister ad straight out of the early aughts, if it weren't for all the underage weed-smoking and Ritalin-snorting. But in *Mandy*, bright montages of road tripping teens bump up against grittier realities, and dreamy, meandering scenes often collide with jarring acts of sexualized violence and murder.



"Will you protect us from bandits? ...How about teenage boys?"



Mandy is watched, openly and covertly, throughout the entire film. The oppressive weight of teen male machismo permeates the air around her, and everywhere she goes the possessive male gaze follows.

Even in her own bedroom at night, someone watches her from the bushes as she's getting undressed. *Mandy* does nothing to invite this attention, except simply existing. She doesn't flirt or wear flashy clothing, she rarely even speaks, and when she does it's in short, carefully considered sentences—and so it feels inevitable that this is just what happens to pretty girls. Polite girls. Any girls. These are simply the indignities we have to endure. There's also, of course, the fascination with *Mandy's* rumored virginity, her supposed **purity**. If you're quiet, people will project anything they want onto you.

Throughout the film, the male characters consistently take *Mandy's* silence as agreement or acceptance of whatever they're saying or doing, despite her obvious discomfort. On a weekend trip to a family ranch, *Mandy's* male "friends" are constantly near her, infringing on her personal space, touching her. They ask if they can hold her hand or have just one kiss. Later, when one sees his opportunity to make a pass at *Mandy* and she rejects him, his demeanor turns on a dime, from charming and friendly to outraged and hostile. "*Why the fuck did you come here, anyway?*" As if sex with him was the only fathomable answer.



The first time a boy asked me out, he cornered me in a hallway and wouldn't let me go.

I was shy and so I declined, but when I turned to leave, there was his thick arm up against the wall, caging me in. He was taller than me but suddenly his face was too close to mine, his breathing too fast. Nothing happened.

The strained moment held itself taut, the expectation of sex or violence or some combination of the two hanging in the muggy air between us, when suddenly he let out a short, frustrated bark. The moment passed. He dropped his arm and let me hurry away, but made sure I heard him mutter '*bitch*' as I went.

It should have been scary, but the truth is, it was exhilarating. The truth is that at sixteen, any sexual attention can feel like power – and it was, even if I had no idea how to wield it yet.

That was the same summer my friends and I became unstoppable girl-monsters instead of mere girls, driven if not by sex, then by the enigmatic promise of what it could be. Armed with Juicy Tubes of lip gloss and a wild, hungry confidence, we collected boys that summer. We learned quickly that all we had to do was offer and they'd show up. I wasn't *Mandy Lane* but I was coming to realize it didn't matter, that I was something just as potent.

We all were.



We had parties at my house every weekend because I had the most tolerant parents, and when they got tired of us, we roamed the streets of our town in droves, feared and reviled by adults for our boldness and the fever-pitch intensity we carried with us everywhere.

We liked moving in a pack. We felt untouchable, striding along the highway in our short shorts, tossing middle fingers at the cars that honked as they drove by. I remember lilac on the warm evening breeze, and honeysuckle. The smell of scorched asphalt. I remember holding hands with my girlfriends while trading heated glances with the boys. I remember the thrill of it, how those nights felt pregnant with possibility.

I remember cicadas, the ceaseless droning of their mating calls and the lost shells of their bodies scattered over the cement. I used to think they'd died making love, and how delicious that sounded. I remember my first kiss in the hot sun, standing at the end of my block, feet bare, our faces mashing gracelessly together. It wasn't a good kiss, and the boy would dump me in less than a month for failing to have sex with him. But I still remember how it felt: like I was at the beginning of something so much greater than everything I'd known up until that point.



My teendom was a mess of now-deemed-problematic influences and *Mandy Lane* could likely be considered one of them. She's a female character who uses both her fictional innocence and her feminine wiles to manipulate everyone around her--particularly eager and unsuspecting boys.

But *Mandy* seemed to know what I'd long suspected as a teen: that high school is temporary and the boys you meet there might be nothing more than a means to an end. We're the babes with the power. It's ultimately revealed that *Mandy's* geeky friend—a boy who's as infatuated with her as everyone else, but equally clueless about who she really is—has been picking off her new friends one by one over the course of the weekend, murdering them at *Mandy's* behest. The dirty deeds done, she gives the boy a slow, tender kiss. "*That's why you did all this, right? That's what you wanted.*" She stabs him in the chest as a look of disbelief blooms across his stunned face. "*I did it all for you.*" Her pretty face slides into a contemptuous sneer.

"But you never do anything for me."

