

LOVE IS A STRANGER

Film Bible

Format: Feature Film

Genre: Gothic Romance / Supernatural Tragedy

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Logline

A struggling young artist falls under the spell of a mysterious aristocratic woman who promises to make his dreams come true, only to discover that her love, patronage and beauty are sustained by a blood-bound bargain that grants success at the cost of his youth, his future, and the lives of those who try to save him.

Short Pitch

Love Is A Stranger is a dark, seductive gothic romance about ambition, desire and the fatal cost of being chosen. When working-class artist Johnny Lyle meets Aveline de Clare, a mysterious woman living alone among antiques and secrets, she offers him everything he has ever wanted: artistic success, love, wealth, access and a life transformed. But Aveline is an immortal sustained by blood, and every dream she grants pulls time out of Johnny's body and feeds it back into hers. As Johnny rises through the art world and falls deeper into her spell, the one person who sees the danger clearly — his neighbour Diane — becomes the story's moral witness and, ultimately, its most tragic casualty.

Project Overview

At its heart, *Love Is A Stranger* is a supernatural love story built on a simple but emotionally devastating bargain: what if someone could give you the life you always wanted, but only by taking the life you would have had to live it in? Johnny is not tricked into wanting success, or love, or transformation. He genuinely longs for them. Aveline's power lies in her ability to offer exactly what he already craves and make the cost feel like destiny rather than theft.

The film moves from social realism into gothic tragedy. It begins in a world of cramped flats, supermarket shifts, sales work and stalled aspirations, then gradually opens into antiques, galleries, tailored clothes, transatlantic art success and old-money seduction. But that upward movement is also the mechanism of the tragedy. The more Johnny gets, the more he loses: time, health, family, ordinary love and ultimately his life. The final act completes the Gothic structure by turning Diane's attempt to save him into a fatal intervention that kills them both, leaving Aveline once again the immortal survivor of a chapter that consumed everyone around her.

Why This Film

Love Is A Stranger offers:

- a high-concept supernatural romance with emotional depth
- a strong central metaphor around success and life-force
- a seductive, female-led gothic role in Aveline
- a tragic love triangle that avoids cliché
- rich visual and tonal contrasts between working-class realism and decadent old-world glamour
- an ending that is haunting, fatalistic and memorable

It feels like a classic gothic tale told through modern concerns: class mobility, artistic identity, emotional loneliness, fame and the hunger to matter.

Story Engine

Core Premise

Johnny Lyle, a struggling young artist, is offered love, patronage and accelerated success by Aveline de Clare, an immortal woman who sustains herself through a blood exchange that rejuvenates her while burning through the life of the person bound to her. The more Johnny accepts, the more he thrives outwardly and deteriorates inwardly. Diane, Johnny's neighbour and oldest friend, sees the danger long before he does and tries to save him — too late.

Narrative Shape

The film works in four movements:

1. Seduction

Johnny meets Aveline as an elderly recluse, receives her blood unknowingly in tea, returns, and willingly enters the blood bargain.

2. Ascension

Aveline transforms Johnny's life: studio, money, clothes, artistic momentum, gallery access, love and social elevation.

3. Corrosion

Johnny's body ages unnaturally as his career explodes. Diane investigates Aveline and recognises the supernatural truth.

4. Tragic Reckoning

Johnny's success proves hollow, his parents die, and Diane's attempt to save him ends with her shooting Johnny by mistake and dying herself after Sindere's cat causes her fatal fall. Aveline survives.

Main Characters

Johnny Lyle

Johnny is 26, working-class, talented, underemployed and quietly starving for a larger life. He is not arrogant or delusional about his talent — he simply believes, with some justification, that he could be more than what his current life allows. That makes him emotionally open to Aveline's offer. Johnny's arc is tragic because he gets everything he thought he wanted: recognition, access, patronage, sex, glamour, status. But the bargain strips meaning from those rewards as fast as it elevates him. By the time he understands the cost, his body and future are already gone.

Aveline de Clare

Aveline is the film's great gothic figure: elegant, mournful, seductive, centuries old, and emotionally persuasive enough that she never feels like a simple villain. She first appears as a lonely old widow surrounded by antiques and grief, then rejuvenates into a stunning, poised, dangerous immortal. Aveline genuinely loves Johnny in the only way she knows how, but her love is inseparable from consumption. She gives him life by taking his. She offers dreams while feeding on the years required to inhabit them. She is both patron and predator, lover and destroyer, maternal guide and erotic force.

Diane

Diane is Johnny's neighbour, oldest friend and the emotional counterpoint to Aveline. She represents ordinary love: awkward, patient, underexpressed, grounded in concern rather than spectacle. Diane knows Johnny's real life — his poverty, self-doubt, habits, history, family. When Aveline enters the picture, Diane's initial jealousy quickly becomes intuition and then conviction that something supernatural and dangerous is happening. She investigates, confronts Aveline, and in the end tries to save Johnny with a gun. Her tragedy is that she is morally right but acts too late, and in trying to rescue him she kills him and dies herself.

Bob Lyle

Johnny's father is one of the film's quiet anchors of wisdom. Practical, affectionate and resigned, Bob accepts life's limitations in a way Johnny and Aveline both resist. His scenes around Marjorie's decline provide the film's most humane

moral counterpoint: that mortality, grief and imperfect love are not failures to be corrected at any cost. Bob's perspective clarifies what the film thinks about Aveline's bargain, even before Johnny understands it himself.

Marjorie

Johnny's mother, slipping into dementia, becomes one of the film's most painful measures of ordinary human loss. Her confusion around Johnny and his dead brother Peter reveals how memory itself becomes unstable in mortal life. Johnny's desire to have her "restored" for his father's sake reflects his inability to accept limits. Bob's refusal of that supernatural intervention becomes morally significant.

Sinders

Aveline's black cat is more than atmosphere. Sindere appears throughout the film in the background — watching, moving silently through rooms, perched on sills — as a subtle folkloric marker of Aveline's archetypal nature. The cat becomes crucial in the ending, when it leaps at Diane and causes her fatal fall. This makes Sindere not just symbolic but active: the final, quiet embodiment of the uncanny force surrounding Aveline.

Supporting Characters of Note

Harry

Johnny's friend and sometime employer, who offers a grounded, ordinary-world contrast to the art and aristocratic worlds Johnny moves into. Harry helps underline how extraordinary and suspicious Johnny's transformation appears from the outside.

Quinten Barnaby

Gallery manager and one of the most visible faces of the art-world machine Aveline ushers Johnny into. He helps turn Johnny's talent into market event.

Fenella Hamilton / Hilary Collingwood / other patrons

These figures widen the world of privilege, access and collector culture. They are not villains in themselves, but they help reveal how Johnny becomes increasingly commodified as his success rises.

Cammy

A small but useful presence in the final act, helping Diane acquire the means to act. He reflects Diane's desperation and the collapse of ordinary options.

Story Summary

Act One

Johnny Lyle, a young artist stuck doing door-to-door sales work, meets Aveline de Clare while canvassing a tenement block. She invites him in, buys all his stock, gives him tea laced with her blood, and leaves him creatively electrified. He returns, and Aveline reveals that she is centuries old and can help make his dreams come true through a blood exchange. Johnny accepts. Aveline rejuvenates before his eyes, and the relationship becomes both romantic and supernatural.

Act Two

Aveline transforms Johnny's life: she gives him a studio, clothes, money, artistic focus and access to the gallery world. Their blood-sharing intensifies into an erotic and creative ritual. Johnny's work flourishes and he is fast-tracked toward exhibition and public success. At the same time, Diane grows increasingly suspicious of Aveline and hurt by Johnny's emotional distance. She senses that what looks like a fairy-tale romance is actually consuming him.

Act Three

Johnny's career grows rapidly, but so does the physical cost. He ages visibly, coughs blood and becomes increasingly hollowed out even as his name rises. Diane investigates and finds Aveline listed in nineteenth-century directories, confirming something impossible is happening. She confronts Aveline and calls her a witch. Johnny's mother dies, then his father. Johnny realises the bargain has hollowed out what he thought success would mean and tells Aveline he wants to stop. But it is already too late. In the final confrontation, Diane enters with a pistol to save Johnny, sees how close to death he is, and fires at Aveline. At that instant Sindere leaps at Diane, she falls backward, hits her head on the fireplace, and the shot kills Johnny instead. Diane dies on the floor. Johnny dies in Aveline's arms. The film ends where it began: Aveline laying a rose on Johnny's sarcophagus in the de Clare mausoleum.

Tone

What It Feels Like

The tone is:

- lush
- seductive
- melancholic
- intimate
- fatalistic
- gothic without becoming camp

The story should feel romantic enough that Johnny's surrender to it makes sense, but always with an undertow of dread. This is not a horror film built on shocks. It is a tragedy built on seduction and consequence.

Humour

Humour is light and human:

- Johnny's ordinary wit
- Diane's groundedness
- Harry's irreverence
- small class and social observations

This humour makes the tragedy hurt more because it keeps the characters recognisably alive and ordinary before the bargain devours them.

Visual Language

The visual design should move from:

- grey tenements, supermarkets, suburban kitchens and stairwells
to
- antique-filled rooms, old wood, candlelight, wine, paintings, marble, leather, tailored elegance, galleries and chauffeured cars

Aveline's spaces should feel old-world, layered and slightly unreal even in daylight. Sindere should recur as a subtle black presence at the edge of frames. The blood-sharing should be sensual and intimate, never grotesque for its own sake. The final act should return to darker, more enclosed interiors so the film ends in a true gothic register.

Comps

Comparable Films / Lanes

The Hunger for erotic immortality and beautiful predation.

Only Lovers Left Alive for romantic timelessness with fatal melancholy.

Phantom Thread for love as control and devotion as possession.

A Portrait of Jennie or classic gothic melodrama for romantic fatalism.

Black Swan or **The Picture of Dorian Gray** in thematic terms, for success tied to bodily/spiritual cost.

Positioning Statement

Love Is A Stranger is a **prestige gothic romance about ambition as blood bargain** — a seductive supernatural tragedy where fame, love and artistic ascension come at the price of life itself.

World of the Film

Modern City, Gothic Undercurrent

The story is set in a recognisably modern urban environment:

- tenements
- supermarkets
- buses
- suburban parents
- cafés and bars
- galleries and transatlantic art travel

But within this modern setting sits a hidden older world:

- ancient family mausoleums
- antique apartments
- inherited wealth
- blood rituals
- aristocratic memory
- old names and old rooms untouched by time

The friction between those two worlds is essential. Johnny thinks he is simply crossing class boundaries. In fact he is stepping into another order of existence.

Key Settings

Aveline's apartment — first as dim widow's lair, later as luminous seduction chamber.

Johnny's studio — the place where ambition blooms and bodily decline becomes undeniable.

The gallery — public validation, market machinery and commodified success.

Johnny's parents' home — mortality, memory and ordinary love.

The de Clare mausoleum — the story's circular endpoint and symbol of Aveline's repeating chapters.

Thematic Positioning

Wish Fulfilment as Predation

The film's central argument is that the most dangerous bargains are often the ones that truly deliver. Aveline gives Johnny the life he wanted. That is what makes her so devastating. The problem is not that the wish is fake; it is that the price is existential.

Love as Nourishment vs. Love as Consumption

Diane and Aveline embody two radically different kinds of love. Diane's is ordinary, patient, awkward and human. Aveline's is intoxicating, total, possessive and literally draining. The film's tragedy comes from Johnny recognising the difference only when he can no longer escape the second kind.

Success, Art and the Fear of Being Nothing

Johnny's longing to matter is genuine. He fears obscurity, stagnation and wasted talent. The film takes that fear seriously — then asks what happens when success arrives so quickly it becomes another form of erasure. He becomes celebrated before he becomes fully himself.

Mortality vs. Immortality

Bob and Marjorie's thread embodies mortal love: aging, forgetfulness, grief, decline and acceptance. Aveline embodies a refusal of those limits. The film sides emotionally with mortality even while being fascinated by immortality's allure. It suggests that finite life, honestly lived, may be richer than endless life sustained through consumption.

Folklore Hidden in Modern Life

Diane calling Aveline a witch is not melodrama — it is the story naming its own archetype. The black cat, the blood, the ageless woman in old rooms, the impossibly long paper trail, the final fatal hearthside fall: these are classic folkloric elements placed inside a modern setting of shops, buses and art PR. The film's power comes from how naturally those ancient shapes still fit.

Audience and Market Positioning

Who It's For

This is for audiences who want:

- adult supernatural romance
- gothic mood with emotional seriousness
- tragic love stories
- elevated genre
- female-led mystery and power
- visual elegance with a dark aftertaste

Commercial Hook

The hook is strong and immediate:

A woman can make your dreams come true — but every time you drink her blood, you give her your future.

A second hook:

A starving artist gets fame, love and genius overnight, only to realise he is aging into death while his immortal muse grows younger.

Ending / Franchise Potential

The film is fully complete as a standalone gothic tragedy. Johnny dies, Diane dies, and Aveline survives, closing the story in the de Clare mausoleum where it began. The circular structure gives it powerful finality. That said, Aveline's survival

and long history imply she has lived through many such chapters and could again, but the strongest reading is as a self-contained romantic tragedy rather than a franchise starter.

Closing Statement

Love Is A Stranger is a seductive, sorrowful gothic tragedy about what happens when longing meets the wrong kind of miracle. It offers romance, supernatural mythology, class ascent, artistic ambition and emotional ruin in one darkly elegant package. Most importantly, it ends exactly where a true gothic should: with love, death, blame and grief entangled so completely that no one gets out clean — except the immortal who has learned how to survive every chapter by feeding on those who still believe in forever.