

LOVEJOY

Screenplay
by

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please **CLICK THE CONTACT BUTTON** and leave your info. Thank you.)

INT. LOVEJOY BAPTIST CHURCH - BAPTISMAL - MORNING

Ten wide-mouthed, whiskered CATFISH swim inside a baptismal.

EXT. LOVEJOY TOWN LIMITS - MORNING

The morning sun fights through a row of plush green trees. In the distance, a blue F-150 blows into town, its tires crunching over a gravel road. Leaving dust trails in the air. A dingy BABY PIGLET waddles and oinks past a wood carved sign reading, "Welcome to Lovejoy, Mississippi: Population 4,844."

EXT. LOVEJOY COMMUNITY - MORNING

Flatness stretches across a modest community. Cotton fields. Farm houses. Acres of land. The F-150 barrels down the road.

EXT. LOVEJOY BUSINESS DISTRICT - MORNING

American and Confederate flags wave in front of businesses around a compact town square. Post office. Bank. County Courthouse. Public Library. Pharmacy. Chamber of Commerce. The square is so small if you blink you'll miss it.

EXT. SNAPPA'S PLACE - MORNING

The local town hang out. Simple, unassuming in design.

INT. SNAPPA'S PLACE - CORNER BOOTH - MORNING

Down home southern decor. Black legends adorn the walls. MILES SANDLER, 9, a cute, caramel toned kid with a patch of gray hair, doodles a ketchup sketch across his omelette while his best friend JOHN JOHN, 10, a blonde, spike haired kid with a perfect tan, feeds lettuce to his caged caterpillars, housed in a homemade ventilated shoe box conservatory. Seated across from them, Miles' dad, CRAIG SANDLER 35, black, boyishly handsome top shelf eye candy, eats oatmeal. John John devours his food while noticing Craig's swollen hand.

JOHN JOHN

Sir, what happened to your hand?

CRAIG

Bee sting.

MILES

Dad killed a bee in the house.
Now bad luck is coming for a visit.

CRAIG
Stop repeating your granddaddy's
silly superstitions.

JOHN JOHN
Look, Miles. There's the new girl.

Miles looks up, ketchup splatters. Miles smiles at TORI, 9,
black, cute with braids and glasses. She sits at the counter.

CRAIG
Go on over and talk to her, son.

MILES
(holds out hand)
Donation? Cash makes the fun last.

CRAIG
And so does a job.

MILES
Daaaad. Come on. You know girls
don't like boys with no money.

CRAIG
And boys don't need girls who only
care about their money. Remember
what I told you. You want a girl
that's got your back.

Miles gives Craig the sad faced, puppy dog eyes routine.
Craig relents, gives Miles a ten. Miles happily irons it out.
FAYE CARMICHAEL, black, 35, pretty, shapely, wearing a tight
diner uniform, sashays up, drops ketchup packs on the table.
Craig nods toward Tori. Faye grins and helps Miles fold down
his collar. They all watch him coolly strut off.

INT. SNAPPA'S PLACE - COUNTER AREA - MORNING

Tori swivels on a stool. Miles approaches, fingers wiggling.
Miles does sign language, slow and awkward.

MILES
Hey. My name is Miles.

She signs back, fast and comfortably.

TORI
I know who you are. Hi. I'm Tori.

Their braces meet in a smile. Craig crosses to the bathroom,
gives Miles a supportive wink before he enters.

INT. SNAPPA'S PLACE - FRONT ENTRANCE - MORNING

Diner door opens, revealing... SYDNEY ROBERTSON-SANDLER, 40, a sexy, plus size, eccentric beauty with a urban hippy style. A hush falls over a diner full of curious stares, except Miles who's in his own world, getting his flirt on with Tori. Using her thumb, Sydney nervously spins her ring around her finger. She spots Miles and cautiously approaches. A walk of shame through a maze of curious gawks and gossiping whispers.

INT. SNAPPA'S PLACE - COUNTER AREA - MORNING

Miles and Tori sip juice. Miles sees Sydney approach. His eyes widen. The glass misses his mouth. Juice spills on his shirt. Sydney approaches nervous, spinning her ring faster.

SYDNEY

Hi.

Miles, in disbelief, notices gawks, becomes uncomfortable. She grabs a napkin, gently wipes his shirt. He steps back.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

(timid, apprehensive)

I didn't mean to-- I'm sorry...

You look handsome. How are you?

She looks into his angry eyes. Tries to peel back bitterness.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

I know it's been a long time. Would

it be okay if I... Gave you a hug?

She reaches out. He side steps her. She blocks his path.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

I've missed you, son.

He sees her eyes moistening. He hardens up. Craig approaches.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

(smiles, nervous)

Hi, Craig. How you been?

CRAIG

What are you doing here, Sydney?

Miles eyes escape routes. The front door. Side door. Kitchen.

SYDNEY

Can we all go somewhere and talk?

Miles bolts off. Sydney goes to chase. Craig stops her.

CRAIG

You shouldn't have come back.

Miles bursts through swinging double doors into the kitchen. Craig brushes past her, chasing after Miles. Faye emerges from the kitchen. Sydney quickly swallows her in a bear hug.

SYDNEY

Oh Faye, it's so good to see you.

Faye rigidly hugs Sydney. Sydney feels the estrangement.

FAYE

I'm just caught off guard is all.
Why didn't you give us a heads up?

Sydney gazes the diner, sees faces of familiar strangers. She becomes acutely aware that she's not being welcomed.

SYDNEY

I didn't know I needed permission
to come home.

Sydney angrily walks out, avoiding all eye contact.

INT/EXT. SYDNEY'S TRUCK - SNAPPA'S PARKING LOT - MORNING

Sydney gets in her truck. Her OVERHEAD MIRROR COVERED WITH A CLOTH. Through her side mirror, she sees Craig chasing Miles across the road through a pasture, fading in the distance.

EXT. LOVEJOY - GRASSY PASTURE - MORNING

Craig closes in on Miles. The air smacking their faces. Craig catches Miles in a safe bear hug, wrestles him down. Tired.

CRAIG

I got you... It's alright.

MILES

No, it's not... You did this...
It's your fault! Why did you...
have to kill that bee?!

Miles struggles to break free. Craig holds him tighter.

MILES (CONT'D)

You could'a just let it fly out.
The window was open. Granddaddy
said, "Don't kill it! It's bad
luck." But you did it anyway. Now,
she's back... and it's your fault.

CRAIG

I know... I'm sorry you're hurting.

MILES

I hate her. I hate her!

Father and son, both exhausted, sit in an open field, comforting each other. Miles picks at the skin around his thumbnail cuticle. Lips tightly clenched. He fights tears.

EXT. ROBERTSON FARM - DRIVEWAY - MORNING

Two-story, brick home with a screened-in porch and back deck. A tin topped, barn house connects to a hog pen. An apple tree grows next to a garden and two acres of thriving cotton. Sydney eases into the driveway and parks at the farmhouse.

EXT. ROBERTSON FARM - GARDEN - MORNING

A MAN waters tomatoes. His back to Sydney. She approaches.

SYDNEY

Hi, granddaddy. I'm home.

ED ROBERTSON, 80, lean, caramel skin, full head of hair, mostly gray, turns. A rabbit's foot in his coverall pocket. He quizzically eyes her hair. She becomes self conscious.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

My hair. Outfit. I know it's probably shocking at first glance.

ED

You look like an out of work clown looking for the circus. All you need is a sign and a cup.

SYDNEY

Granddaddy, that's mean.

ED

And those big red shoes. That nose.

SYDNEY

You're not glad to see me either?

ED

You said you'd be home last month.

SYDNEY

Guess I just got cold feet. Even now the butterflies won't stop dancing. Feel.

She moves to him, her hand on her stomach. Ed stares blankly. She grabs his rabbit's foot. Plays with it nervously. Looks out, eyes surveying the vast land.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Farm looks great. How are you?

ED

Managing. Got my health... You?

SYDNEY

I'm glad to be home, granddaddy.

ED

Then how fast can you take a smile out that pocket and gimme a hug?

She smiles, leans in to hug Ed. He sprays her. Chase ensues.

INT. ROBERTSON HOUSE - GRACIE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Pink walls. A twin bed. Remnants of a little girl's room. Sydney stares, a painful nostalgia washing over her.

INT. ROBERTSON HOUSE - MILES' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sydney snoops. She peruses books on poetry. Picks up dirty laundry and makes the bed. She spots a birthday countdown calendar taped to the wall. Reveals 30 days until Miles turns ten. Sydney hears the sounds of anxious SQUIRRELS scurrying inside the bedroom wall. She touches the wall and smiles.

INT. ROBERTSON HOUSE - UPSTAIRS - CRAIG'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Set up like a studio. Wood walls and floors. Bed. Desk. Trays of archived football games on DVDs. Stacks of play books. Sydney snoops, sees a drawer half opened, takes a shoebox. Inside are her letters to Miles. Never opened. Mood deflates.

INT. ROBERTSON HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - DUSK

Sydney unpacks. She pulls out a laptop, puts it next to a cigarette pack. She pulls out a ROLL OF FILM, ponders it reflectively then hides it in the night stand. Ed enters. He eyeballs the two large duffle bags next to the bed.

ED

You sho' have come back with a
awful lot of stuff for a woman who
left with only a set of keys and
roll of film in her hands.

Sydney stops unpacking, turns to Ed.

SYDNEY

Found my letters stuffed in a damn
shoe box. Never opened. Is Craig
trying to turn my son against me?

ED

Found? You must'a been snooping.
And ain't nobody gotta turn that
boy against you, Toodles. You done
that all by ya'self.

SYDNEY

Point is, Craig had no right
withholding my letters from my son.

Irritated, Sydney resumes unpacking.

ED

(harsh tone)

I thought I smelled smoke on you.

Ed gestures to the cigarettes. She dodges his piercing stare.
Irritated, Ed leaves. Sydney pulls out TWO ALCOHOLIC
ANONYMOUS CHIPS. A white one day sober coin and a red one
month sober coin. She proudly displays them on the dresser.

EXT. FAYE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A colonial style home with a screened-in porch and back deck.

INT. FAYE'S HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Miles lies in bed. Faye sits bedside, reciting him a poem.

FAYE

"... But for livin' I was born.
Though you may hear me holler, and
you may see me cry-- I'll be
dogged, sweet baby, if you gonna
see me die. Life is fine! Fine as
wine! Life is fine!"

MILES

How do you have only one favorite,
when he's written so many?

FAYE

"Life is fine" just speaks to me. I feel like I can take on the world after I read it. To me. That's what makes Langston Hughes a great poet. His works give you courage.

She kisses him good night and walks to the door.

MILES

Love you, godmama.

FAYE

Love you too, baby boy.

Door closes. Miles grabs his poetry book and lucky rabbit's foot pen. He jots a title, "My Blues," and scribbles words.

INT. FAYE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

A TEA POT SCREAMS out steam. Faye pours hot water in a basin.

FAYE

He'll feel better in the morning.

CRAIG

I really hope it's that easy.

Craig lays his hand inside the steamy water. Sighs relief.

FAYE

Pretty bad bee sting.

CRAIG

The worst.

Craig flexes his hand under water. Faye gently massages it.

FAYE

How does this feel? Still tender?

He pauses, his eyes trapped inside her webbing gaze.

CRAIG

I had no idea she was coming home.

She towel dries his hand, softly rubs it. Eyes still locked.

FAYE

Soreness should be gone by morning.

CRAIG

I hope so.

Craig leans in to kiss her. She pulls away abruptly and knocks the basin. Some water spills. She wipes frantically. Craig puts a hand over hers, stops her wiping. Locked gazes.

FAYE

She's my best friend, Craig... And I love her... Just as much as you.

Faye hops up, empties the water. Drops the basin in the sink.

FAYE (CONT'D)

I'll bring Miles home in the morning. You should say good night to him before you leave.

Hurt and disappointed, Craig relents and walks away.

INT. FAYE'S HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Miles jots in his poetry book. Craig enters. Miles signs his name, shows his poem to his dad. Craig reads.

MILES (V.O.)

If a mourning sun frowns upon the new day, can my dreams wash my blues away? If daddy hadn't killed that bee, there would be no bad luck day.

CRAIG

Nice. But "morning" is misspelled.

MILES

It's called word play, dad.

Father and son smile, taking a moment. Miles' smile fades.

MILES (CONT'D)

I wish I was invisible.

CRAIG

I know you're upset. You deserve to feel what you feel. But do you remember what I told you about using that word, "Hate?"

MILES

We only hurt ourselves and take away our power when we use it.

(beat)

But she's the one that walked out and left us for eight hundred and thirty three days.

CRAIG
 (realization)
 You've been counting.

Miles looks away. Craig consoles him.

MILES
 Dad, don't ever leave me. Promise?

Father and son pinky promise. Craig kisses and tucks him in.

INT. FAYE'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Faye waits at the front door. Craig approaches. He takes her hand, rubs her face and kisses her. He leaves, frustration in his eyes. Faye sinks to the floor, sobbing quietly.

INT. ROBERTSON HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sydney lies in bed. Ed enters, glass of water in hand. A hall light slices Ed's silhouette, casting a shadow on the wall.

ED
 Heard you coughing. You alright?

Ed gives her water. She sips. Heavy hearts weight the room.

SYDNEY
 Thanks for always taking my calls.
 Returning my letters. Passing my
 messages. Being there for me.
 (remorseful)
 I'm sorry... For everything.

ED
 You get you a good night's rest.
 (kisses her forehead)
 'Cause come morning, Toodles. I'll
 be needing to hear what the hell
 you gotta say for ya'self.

Sydney takes another sip of water. Passes the glass back to Ed, who promptly gulps down the rest of her water.

ED (CONT'D)
 Miles threw ya'letters out. Craig
 got 'em out the trash. The boy
 knows where they are. He'll read
 'em when he's good and ready.

Ed leaves. Door closes. She stares at the ceiling. Egg on her face. Regretful eyes. She hears Ed's door close and jumps up.

INT. ROBERTSON HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sydney hovers over the commode, sick and vomiting. Exhausted.

INT/EXT. FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

Wind chimes CLANK. Sydney rocks on a porch swing, smoking. She watches Craig park. She puts out her cigarette, hides the pack. Craig approaches. She notices his missing wedding ring.

SYDNEY

Where's my son?

Craig ignores her and beelines toward the door.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

You're angry. Two years is a long time. I get it. But can we please just have a conversation, Craig?

He stops. Their eyes connect momentarily.

CRAIG

Do you honestly expect for us to just pick up where we left off?

SYDNEY

No, I don't. I don't deserve my family's forgiveness. I'm just asking can we have a conversation.

CRAIG

You've gone off and explored the world. Now you're coming back, this... new, enlightened person.

SYDNEY

I never said that. I'm still struggling like everybody else.

He sees her sincerity and reluctantly sits. Long pause.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Congratulations. Winning state. I knew you could do it.

(smiles, pauses)

See you cleared out Gracie's room. Can't bring myself to go see her.

(pauses, reflects)

Thanks for seeing after granddaddy. Taking such good care of our boy.

He notes her wedding ring, spots cigarette ash on the porch.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

I know you must hate me for leaving. And you have every right. But he's my son too, Craig.

CRAIG

Until your next parental hiatus?

SYDNEY

Me leaving didn't mean I don't love him... Or you.

CRAIG

If a man walked out on his family, he'd be called a punk, a coward, and every other expletive in the book. Is it supposed to be different because you're a woman?

SYDNEY

I've made mistakes. I admit that. Please don't keep him away from me.

Craig stands, towering over her, his anger brewing.

CRAIG

You abandoned us for two in a half years. Letters here and there. Then waltz back to town. No notice. Acting like we owe you something.
(dials his anger down)
Raising a kid is full time. Doesn't come and go at your whim. You don't get to take vacations because you need a break or you're tired. You know what... you're the coward!

Sydney stares into Craig's hardening eyes.

SYDNEY

(remorseful)

Not a day goes by, I don't regret what I did to my family.

CRAIG

For a long time I imagined how it would be when you finally came home. Thought I'd be so happy. Now that I see you... I can't stand the sight... And you smell disgusting.

He enters the house. Porch door slams. Sydney rocks, crying.

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