

JUST A BALLAD

Laila Wilson

CHARACTERS

Freida... seasoned song writer and studio engineer. Early 30's.

Sloan... studio engineer intern, quirky college junior. 20.

EJ... early 2000's artist trying to climb his way back onto the charts. 40's.

Kobe... EJ's protégé. 22.

TIME

2019

PLACE

Sound Studio in Harlem

Scene 1

On stage is a small recording studio. A male singer, EJ, is behind plexiglass facing the audience. Sloan and Freida sit opposite the plexiglass and behind the sound board, facing EJ.

EJ

This ain't it.

Freida holds her finger on a button on the sound booth in order to communicate with EJ through the plexi glass. She leans forward into a small mic.

FREIDA

Which part?

EJ

The whole damn thing. I can't help this feeling burning inside? What's that about?

EJ rips the headset off and walks out the plexiglass sound booth. He approaches Sloan and Freida on the other side.

FREIDA

EJ, what happened?

EJ

What happened? This is not how I talk. C'mon, hook me up with something else, this is straight sappy.

FREIDA

I'll work on it. Don't worry I got you.

EJ

I'm a platinum selling artist! I don't have to do music I don't like because the label wants it... Gotta talk to my manager about this bullshit. You're lucky I'm hungry anyway. Make it right by the time I am back or pack your shit.

Sloan shifts uncomfortably in her seat. EJ exits the stage. Sloan and Freida swing to the side in their chairs to face each other.

SLOAN
(mumbling)

Someone's used to getting their own way.

FREIDA
Yeah, well this guy does not know good music. Finally he had some real lines to work with and he didn't like it. Have you listened to his older songs?

SLOAN
I was kind of a fan a couple years ago. It was one of those phases. That's all they played at my job back then...I didn't even know he still made music to be honest.

FREIDA
(chuckling)
Interns are usually scared of their own shadow. I just might like you. Sloan, right?

SLOAN
Yes! You don't enjoy all of your interns though? If I'm allowed to ask.

FREIDA
Oh please. There are many different personalities that get sent here and I'll tell you this, I have to practice self control sometimes. Some of the interns are just so nervous. They are too uptight. Which is fine, I get it but still. Having fun at work is key. It's good for the soul.

SLOAN
Wow, I'd like to stay on your good side then. After all I still have so much to learn. (pause) I just wanna say your lyrics are amazing...To me, at least.

FREIDA
Thanks. I'm glad you appreciate quality lyrics. Well, you can watch what I'm going to do now on the sound board to mix the song. If you have questions please ask.

(long pause)

SLOAN
What do you think about arranged marriage?

FREIDA

Huh? Is this a suggestion for the lyrics or-

SLOAN

I just want to know your opinion on it.

FREIDA

Well, would I agree to it? No. Hell no.

SLOAN

Why not?

FREIDA

I want to go out and meet a guy for myself. I feel like arranged marriages are really weird and staged.

SLOAN

You wouldn't trust your parents to find the perfect mate for you? Who would know you better?

FREIDA

No, I actually don't. My mom would've picked what she thought was the perfect man for her back then. It'd be like her do over, you know.

SLOAN

Oh wow, it's not going to be like that for me. I believe my parents will pick the perfect husband.

FREIDA

Huh, nice. So you're getting one?

SLOAN

Well, my mother has been grooming me for an arranged marriage. After hearing your lyrics it just made me wonder how long before I might feel like this... Although, I had never experienced anything you were talking about. Sometimes I'm just up at night thinking about it. I hope one day I'll share these feelings with my future husband.

FREIDA

Okay, I get I wrote some really heavy shit but...really? You've never had butterflies?

SLOAN

Nope.

FREIDA

It's really hard to explain. It's just one of those things you have to experience yourself.

SLOAN

I guess I'll find out. What about you, are you in a relationship right now?

FREIDA

No, but I was with him ...for like four years.

SLOAN

Oh my God, how did you get over it?

FREIDA

Oh, I've been on this hamster wheel before. The last two relationships I was in, I stayed for four years... both times! It's just been like that for me, I don't know. I guess I'm somewhat of a romantic.

SLOAN

Wow, I don't even know what to say.

FREIDA

My only advice to you is to be open because there's a lot of shit to know about love. Both the good and the bad.

SLOAN

My mom told me I should be open because I don't have to worry when I meet him. Do you think there's hope for me?

FREIDA

I don't know. I'd want to believe so.

SLOAN

Me too.

FREIDA

Sometimes when I'm writing, I BS it, but this time I meant every word. I was writing about my ex. Maybe that's why it was referred to as *sappy*.

SLOAN

I just think EJ's never been in love.

FREIDA

Now that's an assumption to make.

SLOAN

That was so mean, was I really being that mean?

FREIDA

No, it was funny. But seriously, I think love is different for everyone. I don't know what he's into but it's probably different for you and me... well, for me.

SLOAN

Touché. I'm just waiting until it's my time. I might not know now but when I do, I'd like to think our beliefs aren't so different after all.

FREIDA

I more so said that because we're both women. You know, Woman are from Venus and Men are from Mars. If you get me.

SLOAN

I'm not sure if I do.

FREIDA

Guys are full of shit. In my experience, my last man was trying to mold me into his perfect girl. As if that was okay.

SLOAN

That sounds awful. Why wouldn't he appreciate you for who you are?

FREIDA

I know. I fucking know. That's what I'm saying.

SLOAN

But there's so much desire hidden between, between these lines.

FREIDA

I was in love with the idea of being in love. These fucking love songs started blurring my vision or something. Chock it up to a hazard of the job.

SLOAN

Oh... Sorry if I got all in your business or something.

FREIDA

Nah, I have a big mouth. No worries.

SLOAN

I appreciate your thoughts on arranged marriages; I just wanted to hear someone else's thoughts outside of my culture. I've never gotten an outside view.

FREIDA

Oh yeah, don't take my word as law or anything. You may do way better than me.

SLOAN

I heard that for the most part it works out long term.

FREIDA

Well, this was very eye opening but we should probably get back to work now before EJ tries to come for my neck.

SLOAN

Do you think he's going to come back?

FREIDA

Yeah, he'll come back in a half hour or so. We've all got a reputation to maintain.

SLOAN

Okay so, let's think more like EJ and take all of the passion out of it.

FREIDA

Yeah, I think I'm giving these deep lyrics a rest for a while.

Scene 2

The recording studio is illuminated by green LED lights. Freida is comfortably curled up in her chair, resting her chin on her knees. She writes intensely on a clip board. Sloan sits up straight, quite perky. A 70's love ballad plays. Sloan shuts her eyes and sways slowly as if she is taking it all in. Freida looks at her and chuckles.

FREIDA

You like this one, huh?

SLOAN

This song is everything.

FREIDA

It's 6:30.

SLOAN

Oh yes, EJ should be here by now.

FREIDA

I know.

SLOAN

EJ is going to love the new lyrics. He's going to adore them, don't you think?

FREIDA

This is surely more along his route. The new guy should be coming too.

SLOAN

There's another artist?

FREIDA

Yeah, he's doing a small part. It's like EJ is trying to bring him out as a rising star or something. Yet EJ been fell off himself. I think he's hoping to make a comeback and use this new young guy, *that is hot by the way*, to make him more relevant.

SLOAN

That make sense. Poor EJ. So what exactly are we doing today?

FREIDA

First let's hear what this new guy has got. We might have to adjust some lyrics or edit the instrumental. Let's see.

SLOAN

Okay.

EJ and a young attractive man, Kobe, speed walk onto the stage and stand behind the plexiglass. They stand side by side. Kobe looks noticeably nervous.

FREIDA

You're late.

EJ

What do I care? Ya'll working on my time. You on the other hand young blood, you can face that.

Kobe scratches his head awkwardly. Sloan and Frieda exchange a quick look.

KOBE

It's an honor to work with ya'll, I'm sorry about the delay.

FREIDA

Yeah. Alright, did you both review the new lyrics? and-

EJ

Yep, they are valid now let's get it crackin'.

Sloan sinks in her chair a little. Freida starts messing with the sound board. The instrumental version of the song starts to play.

EJ

(rapping)

Uh, Uh, Uh, Uh. Yeah. At first I told her no but I'm thinkin' yeah we can kick it. Just a lil' vibe nothing too serious. I can do me and you can do you but when we both need that late night high, you know what to do. Hit my celly and I'll be there in a minute girl. Yeah, I'm there. I'll drop everything. Because it's you and only you. I'm realizing what these feelings startin' to do. They got me thinking, they got me fighting about wether its true.

Freida bobs her head a little. Sloan starts to follow as if she has too.

KOBE

(singing)

Wooaahh. I just want to be your first option.

EJ

Nah, nah, nah. Cut it. Cut the track.

The song shuts off abruptly. Freida crosses her arms. She leans forward to speak to them through the mic.

EJ

I just got a dope idea! For Kobe's line too. We gotta be on the same page, he sounds old school or something. I'm tryna reach the young dudes.

FREIDA

Well, I hear what you're saying. What are you seeing?

EJ

I don't want to leave the editing all up to you this time. I think we can do this together. C'mon.

FREIDA

Um, Okay. We can make it a better fit for both of you, fair?

EJ

Yeah.

KOBE

Cool.

FREIDA

Kobe you can just go out there with Sloan. We'll be out with some adjusted lyrics shortly. If you two want, you can brainstorm a couple new lyrics too maybe? We have a lot to cram in today so be productive.

Freida gets out of her chair and walks around the glass to join EJ. Kobe walks around the other side of the glass to join Sloan. The lights dim on EJ and Freida until it is black. The light remains bright on Sloan and Kobe. Sloan remains in her chair while Kobe paces back and fourth by the sound booth.

KOBE

Maybe, could you get me something to drink?

SLOAN

Uh, sure.

*Sloan gets up from the chair
and steps out of the spotlight.
She returns with a soda.*

KOBE

I appreciate it.

SLOAN

Uh huh, of course.

KOBE

(singing softly)

I just want to be your first option.— I practiced singing that part on my way here and it's still wrong.

SLOAN

I think you have to put a little more soul into it. Sing it like you mean it. Like a 80's love ballad.

KOBE

Is that what you listen to usually?

SLOAN

Yes! I love them.

KOBE

Me too. Growing up my dad played a lot of Spanish love songs. Those hit different.

SLOAN

Who are some singers you like?

KOBE

Julio Iglesias, Gloria Estefan, umm Luis Miguel, Raphael.

*She pops out a small notepad
from her back pocket.*

SLOAN

Thank you so much. I'm going to have to check them out.

KOBE