

LA LA LAND

by

Damien Chazelle

The door opens. Two EMPLOYEES step out, setting up a valet stand. Sebastian watches them -- and shakes his head. The employees notice him. Recognize him. *What is it with that guy...?*

23A OMIT

23 INT. SEBASTIAN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sebastian enters his apartment -- cramped, dingy, bare walls, no furniture or decoration, boxes filled with dusty black-and-white photographs and unused instruments on the floor, a black Steinway upright piano in the center of the living room -- and sees a WOMAN rummaging around.

SEBASTIAN

You gotta stop breaking into my home.

She looks up. She's 37 quickly going on 50, and dressed like she doesn't care. This is LAURA, Sebastian's older sister.

LAURA

You think Mom or Dad would call this a home?

Seeing that she's seated on a stained, decrepit stool --

SEBASTIAN

Please don't sit on that.

LAURA

Are you serious?

SEBASTIAN

Yes. Hoagy Carmichael sat on that stool. The Baked Potato was gonna throw it away.

LAURA

I wonder why.

(then, rising,)

I brought you this. It's a throw rug.

SEBASTIAN

Don't need it.

LAURA

Yeah? What if I told you Miles Davis pissed on it?

SEBASTIAN

That's almost insulting...

(then,)

Did he?

She shakes her head: *Unbelievable*. Tosses the rug to the side.

LAURA

When are you going to unpack these boxes?

SEBASTIAN

When I unpack them in my club.

LAURA

Oh my God. It's like a girl broke up with you and you're stalking her.

(then, looks at him --)

You're not still going by there, are you?

SEBASTIAN

No.

A beat. Then --

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

They've turned it into a tapas-samba place. You believe that?

LAURA

Seb --

SEBASTIAN

Who wants to tapas while they samba?

LAURA

I have someone I want you to meet.

SEBASTIAN

I don't want to meet anyone.

LAURA

You'll like her.

SEBASTIAN

Uh-huh. Does she like jazz?

LAURA

Probably not.

SEBASTIAN

Then what are we gonna talk about?

LAURA

You'll talk about the weather.

SEBASTIAN

Ok. Then I have someone I'd like you to meet. He's got a face tattoo, but a heart of gold.

LAURA

Sebastian --

SEBASTIAN

How long's it been?

LAURA

You need to get serious. You live like a hermit. You're driving without insurance.

SEBASTIAN

I am serious. I had a very serious plan for my future. It's not my fault I got Shanghai'ed.

LAURA

You did not get "Shanghai'ed", you got ripped off.

SEBASTIAN

What's the difference?

LAURA

It's not as romantic as that.

(she starts to walk off)

And everyone knew that guy was shady except for you.

SEBASTIAN

Why do you say romantic like it's a dirty word?

LAURA

Unpaid bills are not romantic. Call her.

She heads to the door. He follows her, won't give it up --

SEBASTIAN

You're acting like life's got me on the ropes -- what you don't understand is, I want to be on the ropes. I'm letting life hit me 'til it gets tired. Then I'm gonna make my move. It's a classic rope-a-dope.

Laura can't help but laugh. Stops by the door. Looks at him.

LAURA

I love you. Unpack your boxes.

SEBASTIAN

I'm changing the locks.

LAURA
(out the door with a smile --)
You can't afford it.

She's gone. Sebastian thinks for a beat, then calls out --

SEBASTIAN
I'm a phoenix rising from the ashes!

No reply to his triumphant declaration. He shuts the door.
Looks again at the napkin. Thinks. Tosses it in the trash.

A23 INT. SEBASTIAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

Moments later. Sebastian takes a slice of pizza from the fridge, pours himself some more coffee, places a Thelonious Monk LP onto a record player, and sits down at the piano.

"Japanese Folk Song" -- the piece we heard in his car -- plays...

Sebastian plays along. Stops. Moves the record back a few bars. Starts it again. Plays the same passage over. Stops. Moves the record back a second time. Plays the passage again. Stops. Over and over, just like in his car -- until, finally, he gets it right.

He keeps playing, louder now, and we're --

B23 OMIT

24 OMIT

25 OMIT

26 OMIT

27 INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A red-booth bar-and-restaurant. Christmas decorations all over. Sebastian steps in. Immediately beelining over --

BOSS
Seb.

SEBASTIAN
(putting on a smile)
Bill. Thanks for having me back.

BOSS
Your welcome. Stick to the set list.

SEBASTIAN

Of course.

(under his breath as he heads
to the piano)

Though I don't think they care what I
play.

BOSS

I do, and I don't want to hear the free
jazz.

SEBASTIAN

How 'bout one for you, one for me? Or two
for you, one for me?

(the Boss just glares)

Or all for you, none for me? Ok, that
works. Good deal.

Sebastian sits down at the keys. A WAITRESS passes by.

WAITRESS

Well... Welcome back.

SEBASTIAN

There's a nice way to say that.

With that -- he starts playing "Jingle Bells".

28

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

The restaurant's demographic has changed. It's now younger stragglers wandering in. Sebastian looks beyond bored. He finishes "We Wish You a Merry Christmas". Zero applause.

He begins a new chart: "Deck the Halls". But something seems to come over him now. He's restless. Slowly, his playing drifts off -- his fingers charting their own path...

And then -- we hear a melody. The one Mia heard outside. The one we'll refer to from now on as Mia and Sebastian's song...

The door opens -- and Mia steps in. She sees Sebastian at the piano. Is instantly struck by his playing. **[MIA AND SEBASTIAN'S THEME]**

Gradually -- all sounds but the music drop out. We drift away from reality. Even the walls seem to go slightly darker -- as though Sebastian and Mia were all alone... He concludes his piece with a jumble of chords, his playing almost free jazz now, as we pull back to real life...

...and see the Boss looking on in scorn.

Sebastian finishes. Silence. Mia looks like the wind has been knocked out of her. Sebastian looks up for a second -- and sees her. They look at one another. Just a moment.

Then -- the Boss taps Sebastian on the shoulder. WE STAY ON Mia as she watches Sebastian rise with the Boss. We just see the Boss talking to Sebastian, can't hear what is said. Then, we get closer -- and realize:

BOSS
...every goddamned night.

Sebastian is silent. Then, doesn't want to have to beg but --

SEBASTIAN
I'll stick to the set list, I promise --

BOSS
Too late. You're done.

SEBASTIAN
You're not gonna find a better player. You know that.

BOSS
(leans in, and --)
Do you think anyone here gives a shit?

With that, the Boss walks off. We linger on Sebastian. Anger giving way -- to hurt. He starts hurrying toward the door.

BACK TO Mia -- who didn't hear what was said. She watches Sebastian -- takes a breath, so moved that she's about to lay it all out -- swoops in to corner him -- and --

MIA
I just wanted to say -- I saw your playing, and I --

-- but Sebastian just walks right by -- his shoulder bumping against Mia's for an added measure of disdain.

He heads out the door. Slams it shut. Mia is left standing on her own. She looks like she's just been slapped.

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.