

Tribal - Episode 13: Elena ©



He catches a glimpse of her going up a long steep alley and carefully follows.

50 EXT. BUS DRIVING ACROSS PLAINS - DAY

Bill gazes out the window of a crowded bus at the sprawling Venezuelan plains as the bus speeds along. In addition to ranch cattle, wild birds and capybaras can be seen wading into streams.

51 INT. CARACAS BUS TERMINAL - DAY

Bill is overwhelmed by the utter chaos in the bus terminal. He finds a bank of pay phones and looks through a phone book, tracing down with his finger a list of names all containing Elena Villarroel. His finger comes to rest under Elena Villarroel Correa. He picks up the phone and dials the number but gets a recording saying the number is invalid so he writes down the address which is a post office box number in Petare, on the outskirts of Caracas. He pushes away a beggar and heads out to the equally chaotic street.

52 INT. PETARE POST OFFICE - DAY

Bill stands, sweating, speaking to a harried POSTAL CLERK, 60s . A ceiling fan slowly rotates.

POSTAL CLERK

Look, we have over 1,000 post office boxes here. I don't know every one of them.

BILL

But surely you could tell me where she lives or how to get in touch with her?

POSTAL CLERK

How would I know? She must live around here somewhere. These places in the barrio don't have normal addresses. You think any of these alleys have ever been mapped? That's why people have mail boxes.

Bill looks disappointed.

POSTAL CLERK

Hey, I'm sorry. All I can say is maybe hang around and see if you see her come to pick up her mail. We're open 8:00 to 5:00 Monday through Friday. She'd probably come first thing in the morning or close to five, you know, before or after

(MORE)

POSTAL CLERK (CONT'D)
 work...if she works. Or maybe around
 noon on her lunch break. Friday's
 are busier because that's payday.
 That's all I can suggest.

BILL
 I don't even know if I'd recognize
 her. It's been a long time. But
 thanks for your help.

POSTAL CLERK
 OK, no problem. Good luck.

53 EXT. YANOMAMI VILLAGE CLEARING - DAY

Leather Man is having an animated (unheard) conversation
 with Young Yanomami. He then walks off into the jungle with
 a rifle over his shoulder.

54 INT. CARACAS CAFE ACROSS STREET FROM POST OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Bill is sipping a coffee and watching people going in and
 out of the post office. A couple times he leans forward
 looking more carefully at women but then sits back.

55 EXT. CARACAS CAFE ACROSS STREET FROM POST OFFICE - LATER

The sun is lower in the sky as Bill stands outside the cafe
 smoking and watching. He looks at his watch (it's 4:55) and
 appears about to leave when a woman entering the post office
 catches his attention. He waits and when she walks out he
 gets a better look then has a memory from the last time he
 saw Elena.

56 EXT. FLASHBACK 3: CARACAS - RUTA 66 CONFITERIA - DAY

ELENA
 Take me with you?

57 EXT. CARACAS CAFE ACROSS STREET FROM POST OFFICE -
 CONTINUOUS

Bill's face puts two and two together. He starts to cross
 the street but is almost hit by a bus as the traffic light
 has just changed. As he is frustrated from crossing the
 street by the heavy rush hour traffic he sees Elena
 approaching the corner.

After a series of buses and trucks pass and the corner becomes visible again Elena is gone. The traffic light finally turns red and he bolts across the street. He walks toward the corner, slowed down by the pedestrian crowd. When he reaches the corner he looks in all directions and thinks he sees a glimpse of Elena rounding a bend in the side street going up the hill.

Bill starts to run but then slows to a quick walk when he notices a heavily armed policeman looking at him suspiciously. He smiles at the cop and looks back up the street but has lost sight of Elena again. As he works his way into the barrio and starts gaining altitude, the roads narrow and become more windy and disorganized. He catches a glimpse of her going up a long steep alley and follows.

Elena seems to notice she's being followed and picks up her pace. Finally, way up high in the barrio she turns into a narrow alley and, after looking back over her shoulder, unlocks a door, enters and slams the door behind her just as Bill reaches the entrance to the alley. He cautiously approaches the door and knocks. No response so he knocks again, louder this time.

BILL

Elena?

No response.

BILL

Hello? I'm looking for Elena Villarroel. If you're not her, I'm sorry to have bothered you.

Still no response.

BILL

Hello? Can you tell me if....

ELENA

Don't move.

Elena is standing behind Bill holding a pistol to his back. Bill raises his hands slowly.

BILL

Easy.

ELENA

Who are you? What do you want?

BILL

Are you Elena?

ELENA

Who are you?

BILL

Guillermo. Guillermo Ramirez.

ELENA

Who?

BILL

Elena, it's me, Guillermo. They call me Bill. Do you remember me?

Elena stares at him suspiciously and then a look of remembrance comes over her face.

ELENA

Is this some kind of joke?

BILL

I swear its the truth. Can I turn around now?

Bill starts to lower his hands and turn but Elena jams the pistol into his back.

BILL

Remember we used to hang out at Ruta?

Elena's fearful expression softens and she lowers the pistol. Bill slowly turns and smiles softly.

ELENA

Guillermo, is it really you?

BILL

Yes, it's really me.

Elena starts to smile too but then her expression turns to anger and she socks Bill in the face. He falls to the ground.

ELENA

You said you'd come back for me!

Astonished, Bill holds his head.

BILL

Uh, can we talk?

Elena looks down at him, her anger slowly fading. He looks back with blurred vision and passes out.

58 INT. EXECUTION HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: United States Penitentiary, Terra Haute - 2003

Bill sits at a table picking at his last meal, repeatedly checking the clock to the hum of glaring fluorescent lights. He stands as his lawyer, BOB DIETZ, 40, and WARDEN AMMERMAN, 62, enter the cell.

WARDEN

Please sit.

The Warden and Bob both sit down across the table from Bill who looks at them anxiously.

BOB

No word from Washington, Matt.

BILL

Didn't think there would be.

WARDEN

Bill, is the food not to your liking?

BILL

No, no, it's fine.

WARDEN

I understand, it's hard to focus.

BILL

On the contrary. There's nothing quite like waiting to be executed to sharpen your concentration, but I do appreciate your empathy, Warden and all your support over the past five years.

BOB

The Warden has some information you might be interested in hearing.

BILL

What, pray tell, could possibly interest me at this point? Oh, don't tell me they're out of the chocolate cake I ordered for dessert?

WARDEN

Bill, despite what personal feelings you might have towards me, I really do want to help. If you'll let me.

Bill looks quizzically at Bob who nods reassuringly.

WARDEN

As you know, it's been a long, arduous process but you've finally exhausted

(MORE)

WARDEN (CONT'D)

all your appeals and clemency has not been forthcoming.

BILL

Please tell me something I don't know. I'm late for an appointment.

BOB

Bill.

WARDEN

No, he's right, there isn't much time. That's why it's important you hear me out. There is...

He glances quickly towards the door, assuring it's closed.

WARDEN

There's a way for you to avoid all this.

As he lets it sink in, an open mouthed Bill looks at Bob, then at the Warden, back at Bob and back at the Warden.

WARDEN

Bill, are you familiar with the government witness protection program?

BILL

Yeeees?

WARDEN

Well, there's an offshoot program, which isn't publicized, called CPR.

BILL

CPR?

WARDEN

Condemned Prisoner Resettlement. Basically, it provides death row inmates such as yourself, convicted solely on circumstantial evidence, an opportunity to relocate and assume a new life. A second chance, if you will.

BILL

You're yanking my chain, right? Bob, he's yanking my chain?

BOB

It's legit, I vetted it.

Bill looks back at the Warden who smiles faintly.

BILL

OK, so how does this CPU...

WARDEN

CPR

BILL

How does it work? But...first, how about telling me why you're bringing me this Christmas present now? You haven't exactly been my buddy during my stay here. My entire appeals process was a nightmare.

The Warden gives Bill a cigarette and lights it for him.

WARDEN

We had to let your case run its course because it was circumstantial. The possibility always existed you could get off. You see Bill, much as you might think otherwise, the state really is very uncomfortable putting someone to death based solely on circumstantial evidence. It's bad publicity and weakens other death penalty cases. So...if you simply admit to the murder you will be spared and the state will have accomplished its goal of achieving an iron-clad conviction, stifling death penalty opponents and keeping the door open for future convictions.

BILL

Nice, real nice. Admit to it? But I didn't do it! I did not kill my brother. Bob, don't tell me you're going along with this?

BOB

Unfortunately, it's the most prudent.. and only..option you have left, Bill.

BILL

(thinks on it)

So, what, is it like a plea bargain?

BOB

Not exactly, you won't be sentenced for a lesser crime. The way it works...

WARDEN

The way it works, is that you will be executed by the United States at 11:59 as scheduled. At least as far as the public is concerned.

BILL

As far as the public is concerned? How do you intend to pull that off with a room full of witnesses out there?

WARDEN

You're a learned man so I'm sure you're aware of how the state's multi-step lethal injection process works?

BILL

Yes, I've read about it.

WARDEN

The first step, in which a barbiturate is administered, will be carried out, but with a lower dosage, more aligned with routine surgical procedures. This will, nevertheless, be enough to render you unconscious. For the second step, rather than using the usual paralyzing agent, we'll use a derivative which will slow your breathing to a level which will be undetectable from the viewing room. The illusion will be that prisoner Bill Ramirez has been executed.

Bill is speechless. They all sit in silence for a few beats.

BILL

So what you're saying is that it's all a magic trick?

WARDEN

Are you familiar with Romeo and Juliet? Juliet took a potion which only gave the appearance of death.

(slight smirk)

A little too convincing, unfortunately, for the hapless Romeo.

BILL

Yeah, yeah, yeah, but what happens next? What happens to me?

WARDEN

This can only work because no next of kin has come forth indicating they'll claim the body for burial or cremation. Your only known next of kin is your daughter and she has indicated she wants nothing to do with it.

BILL

Yes, Luisa thinks I killed Bob in cold blood. Me and my brother didn't get along for years but we had reconciled just before he died, only she didn't know that. She just remembered the years of fighting so me killing him made perfect sense to her. Nothing I could say convinced her otherwise.

WARDEN

Yes, well, you'll be declared dead by the onsite physician and your body removed from the chamber. Then, rather than going to the coroner's office, you'll be taken to an offsite location where you'll be revived. After that you'll be taken to a safe house where you'll undergo two months of briefing and training before ultimately being relocated to your new home.

BILL

Briefing? New home? Where the hell am I going?

BOB

Bill, you're going to have to leave the country. And never come back.

BILL

Leave? Why? Wouldn't I be put in a small town in Idaho or somewhere?

WARDEN

It doesn't work like that. This is very sensitive program. We can't risk you ever being recognized in the U.S. You'll be resettled in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

BILL

Argentina? How will I survive in Argentina for Christ sake?

WARDEN

That's the operative word, survive. Listen, I know it won't be easy, but would you rather the alternative? Latin America made sense since your native language is Spanish.

WARDEN

You'll be given a regular cover job in the restaurant business as a chef which is your normal profession, is it not? Occasionally, you'll be assigned work by the foreign service.

BILL

Foreign service? What kind of work?

WARDEN

Routine services, surveillance and the like. The specifics will all be discussed during your safe house briefing.

BILL

Bob, you checked this all out? Shit, you're not one of them, are you?

BOB

I met with the Feds. Its real. You have no other choice. That's it.

Bill thinks this over for a while, looks at the Warden, then at Bob who nods and smiles. Finally Bill puts out his cigarette.

BILL

OK. OK, I'll do it. Either I'll wake up in Argentina or I won't wake up. What have I got to lose?

WARDEN

That's the right decision, son. Just sign right there at the bottom.

The Warden hands Bill a form which he signs and hands back. The Warden and Bob stand to leave. He shakes the Warden's hand.

BILL

Warden, I..I...thanks. Bob...

Bill hugs Bob and they exit the room. He sits back down, stares at his meal and digs in voraciously. In the hallway outside the holding room, the Warden tucks the form into his

vest pocket and, smirking ever so slightly, speaks to a uniformed man.

WARDEN

We got it. Proceed as discussed.

59 INT. ELENA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Bill and Elena are sitting at the kitchen table finishing a meager meal. Bill has a black eye. Elena pours coffee. Her older face shows signs of having had a hard life and yet she still remains pretty under it all. Outside the kitchen is a small balcony beyond which Petare sprawls beneath the darkening sky. The cacophony of barrio life percolates in the background.

ELENA

Wow, I can't believe all that actually happened to you!

BILL

Neither can I but there you have it.

ELENA

Well, I can't top that. I've been stuck in this sewer for the past twenty years. I had a good job in an office for like ten years but then things got bad and I got fired. Now I'm a maid for some rich family over in Altamira.

BILL

What happened to Carlos?

Elena looks away with a sad, disgusted look.

BILL

Bad question?

ELENA

No it's alright. We were married for a couple years. But he was a bum. And abusive. You remember Carlos, right? I was young and didn't see any other choices. Anyway, we divorced. I heard a couple years later he died in a motorcycle accident. Drunk.

Elena looks wistfully out the window.

ELENA

We had a son, Pedro.

(smiles)

A beautiful boy. And smart.

Elena points to a photo on the wall of a young boy smiling, holding some sort of award. Bill smiles sympathetically. Elena is quiet for a bit.

ELENA

He died too. When he was sixteen. After I lost my job and things got tight we had to move here. He got involved in a gang. I tried to stop him but there wasn't anything I could do. He got shot one night.

Bill puts his hand on Elena's hand.

BILL

I'm so sorry.

Elena smiles weakly, then starts clearing the dishes.

ELENA

More coffee?

BILL

No thanks, I'm good.

60 EXT. ELENA'S APARTMENT BALCONY - LATER

Bill looks out over the glowing lights of Petare and Caracas beyond. Elena walks out to join him. They both gaze out at the view.

BILL

It's like a dream being back here.

ELENA

More like a nightmare.

Bill turns toward her.

BILL

I'm sorry I didn't come back for you. I got caught up with family matters and everything I told you. Time just got away. Things really didn't turn out the way I thought they would.

ELENA

I'll say. Look, I realize I wasn't too nice to you when we were kids. I was trying to be cool when all the time the boy for me was right in front of me but I didn't know it until it was too late. I don't blame you.

(pause)

Well, at least you're here now.

(another pause)

And by the way, why are you here now?

BILL

I already told you how I need to get back to New York. I thought Caracas would be a good starting point and I couldn't stop thinking about you. I wondered if you were still here or even if you were still alive but I thought it would be worth trying to find out.

ELENA

So your plan is to stay a while until you figure out how to get to New York and then leave me again? Will you promise to come back for me again?

BILL

Elena...

Elena turns away, tears welling up in her eyes. Bill puts his hand on her shoulder. She turns toward him and he hugs her.

BILL

Actually, I kind of hoped you'd come with me.

Elena looks up at Bill and he wipes her tears away. They look at each other and then kiss.

61 INT. ELENA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Bill and Elena lie in bed together, talking.

BILL

Your cousin?

ELENA

Yes, Pepe. Do you remember him? He used to live in Barquisimeto but he visited a few times when we were kids. Kind of tall, red hair. Though its gray now.

BILL

I vaguely remember him.

ELENA

Anyway, he's an officer for a shipping company out of La Guaira. He could probably help us out. He's on shore leave now for the next couple weeks. Do you want me to contact him?

BILL

Can't hurt.

Elena smiles and leans over to kiss Bill. They start to make love when suddenly there's a bang on the door. Elena jumps out of bed.

ELENA

Damn it, I forgot. It's Sergio. Get up, get dressed quick.

Elena and Bill throw on their clothes as they talk.

BILL

Who's Sergio?

ELENA

He's a guy who's interested in me.

BILL

What? You mean he's your boyfriend?

ELENA

No, I mean I think he'd like to be but he's older, a neighbor. He used to work with Carlos. After Carlos died he looked after me and Pedro and he still kind of looks out for me.

Bill looks puzzled. Elena glance at him reassuredly.

ELENA

That's all. Just sit there.

Bill sits at the kitchen table. More banging as Elena walks down the hall to open the door.

SERGIO (O.S.)

Elena? Are you home?

ELENA (O.S.)

Coming!

SERGIO (O.S.)

Were you still sleeping? I was going to the market and wondered if you need anything.

Elena walks back into the kitchen with SERGIO, late 60s, following behind. He sees Bill and looks surprised.

BILL

Hello.

ELENA

Sergio, this is Guillermo. He's an old friend. Guillermo, Sergio.

Sergio looks suspicious.

SERGIO

Hello.

ELENA

Guillermo and I grew up together over in Sebucán. He lives in Argentina now and is visiting so he stopped by to visit.

SERGIO

Oh? Where in Argentina? Buenos Aires?

BILL

Yes, I work in a restaurant there. My mother still lives here, though, so I visit her from time to time.

Sergio looks annoyed and turns to Elena.

SERGIO

So can I get you anything at the market? Or would you like to go with me?

ELENA

No thanks, I'm good. I have to clean and do laundry or I'd go with you.

SERGIO

Alright, well suit yourself. I'll be going then.

Sergio turns to leave and then turns back towards Bill.

 SERGIO
 (without smiling)
Nice to meet you.

 BILL
Same here.

After the door slams shut Elena turns back to Bill with an apologetic look in her eyes.

 BILL
Friendly guy.

 ELENA
Sorry about that. He means well but he's kind of overbearing. He's also the big Chavista in the neighborhood. Always trying to get me and others to go to rallies.

 BILL
You're not a big Chavez supporter I take it?

Elena rolls her eyes and gestures around the apartment.

 BILL
Yeah well, the guy's a lunatic if you ask me.

 ELENA
The Chavistas are like a cult. They worship him like a god. You have to be careful what you say around this neighborhood. There are informers everywhere. People who talk against Chavez have a tendency to disappear.

 BILL
As one who has disappeared, I can relate. So when can we get in touch with your cousin?

 ELENA
Before we do, tell me, why don't you just go to the American Embassy and explain your predicament? Can't they help you out?

 BILL
What, are you kidding? If I walk into the embassy I'll never walk out

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

again. The CIA, at least I think it's them, have a guy looking for me as we speak. They don't want any word getting out about this CPR program. Unless I'm very wrong, I'll bet they have Chavez in their crosshairs right now.

ELENA

Sorry, I didn't know.

Bill smiles and takes her hands.

BILL

That's OK. They view me as a risk. That's why I need to get back to New York so I can expose this CPR program for what it is, namely an army of assassins, and try to clear my name.

ELENA

OK, I'll call Pepe in the morning.

62 EXT. ELENA'S APARTMENT, OUTSIDE DOOR - CONTINUOUS

As Bill and Elena continue talking, Sergio stands just outside listening though a crack in the wall to everything they're saying.