

Desert Song

By

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"There's something that's in the air, it's just different. The sky is different, the stars are different, the wind is different."

-Georgia O'Keeffe on Ghost Ranch

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Characters:

The Musician, late 20s

The Maid, late 60s

Setting:

A guest room at Ghost Ranch, a retreat and education center near Abiquiu in northern New Mexico.

Time:

Now.

Note:

In the program, please refer to the characters as The Musician and The Maid to protect The Maid's identity.

Lights up on rustic living quarters. Summertime. Around two in the afternoon. There is one single bed, stripped, with new, folded sheets on it ready to be used. There is a small table and chair, and a dresser. A worn, cushy chair is pushed up against a wall. A sink is outside a bathroom off right. The front door to the cottage is open. A screen door is closed. In a plastic frame on the front door is a slip of paper and the name of a guest. There is a large front window. The drapes are pulled wide open. Light spills into the room. On a wall, is a poor imitation of "Horse's Skull on Blue," a Georgia O'Keeffe painting. In a bland, old, washed-out uniform, ELIZABETH, late 60s, is vacuuming the thin, cheap, dusty rug. There is a small cleaning cart near the bathroom. CARLOS, late 20s, appears at the screen door. He looks, sees ELIZABETH, knocks. Her back is to the door, and she can't hear the knock over the vacuum. CARLOS enters with a huge hiking backpack and guitar over his back. He's worn out, unshaven, dirty, and sweaty, but excited. He's in jeans, and an open, long-sleeved, button-down shirt (with a t-shirt underneath). He watches ELIZABETH a moment, slightly transfixed, and then puts his guitar down on the bed. She turns, sees him, and, irritated, kills the vacuum cleaner.

ELIZABETH

Get that fucking guitar off that bed.

He picks it up, then just stares at her.

ELIZABETH

I haven't made that bed. You can see that, right?

CARLOS

I can.

ELIZABETH

And, yet, you went right ahead and piled your crap right on top of it.

CARLOS

Sorry.

ELIZABETH

Job applications are up at the front desk. Now go away.

She turns and fires up the vacuum again. She pushes it around a bit, then notices he hasn't moved. She shuts off the vacuum.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

I could have sworn I told you to get the hell out of here.

CARLOS

You didn't. You said "Go away."

ELIZABETH

Funny. You're not from around here are you?

CARLOS

Me? No.

ELIZABETH

You don't look Mexican. Are you Native American? You seem too dumb to be Pueblo, and you look too much like a pussy to be an Apache. You must be some kind of mongrel.

CARLOS

I'm Venezuelan.

ELIZABETH

¡Vete de aqui!

CARLOS

I know what "aqui" means, but my parents died when I was really young, so, uh...

She approaches him and, with two hands on his chest...

ELIZABETH

Get...out!

...and, a little too roughly, tries to push him out of the room. With everything he's carrying, he loses his balance and falls backwards onto the floor. His guitar goes flying. He lands hard on his back, on his backpack.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Shit. Are you OK?

CARLOS

I don't know.

Groaning, he gets to his knees and removes his backpack.

ELIZABETH

You're gonna run to Holly now, aren't you?

CARLOS

Holly?

ELIZABETH

You're gonna run and tell her one of the staff knocked you down, aren't you?

CARLOS

No, I'm not gonna-

ELIZABETH

Let me save you the trouble. She never fires anyone. All she's ever said to me is "watch the language, baby girl, especially around clergy."

He goes into his backpack.

CARLOS

I don't know who Holly is.

ELIZABETH

Oh, bullshit.

CARLOS

How would I know her? I've never been here before.

ELIZABETH

Oh. Then never mind who Holly is. She's nobody.

CARLOS

OK.

ELIZABETH

So you're absolutely fine?

CARLOS

Yes, I'm fine.

ELIZABETH

I'm gonna remember you said that if you start hurting later.

CARLOS

(feeling around inside the
backpack)

Why would I do that?

ELIZABETH

It's not impossible. We had this Presbyterian "poet"...

She air quotes.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

...who showed up to Sunday service at the Agape Center in a neck collar three days after slipping on some Mop Glo. What are you looking for?

CARLOS

I landed on...

Out of his backpack he pulls a large, crushed box of paperclips, which spill everywhere.

ELIZABETH

Oh, for God's sake. Are you trying to torture me? You're making a big mess!

CARLOS

Sorry.

She gets down on the floor with him and helps him put the paperclips back in their crushed box.

ELIZABETH

Who walks around with a giant box of paperclips? What are you, a Staples rep? Or just a klepto?

CARLOS

Klepto?

ELIZABETH

The ladies up at the Welcome Center are a little slow, but they should have told you the rooms aren't ready until three.

CARLOS

But I'm not-

ELIZABETH

Your ranch packet will say the same thing.

CARLOS

But I'm not staying at the ranch.

ELIZABETH

You're not?

CARLOS

No.

ELIZABETH

You're not...

She turns to the front door and, leaning in, reads the slip of paper in the plastic frame.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

...Sara Takahashi?

CARLOS

Am I Sara Takahashi?

ELIZABETH

I guess you wouldn't be. Then why are you in this room? This is a guest room for people staying at the ranch. Are you working out on the farm, because those people stay out there.

CARLOS

The farm?

ELIZABETH

Do you always answer a question with a question?

CARLOS

(confused)

Do I always answer a question with a-

ELIZABETH

Never mind! Look...

She stuffs the paperclip box back into his backpack, and zips it up as:

ELIZABETH

...I have a lot of work to do, OK? I still need to finish this room by three before Sara Takahashi gets here, so whatever your story is, can you just leave so I can work?

She sweeps up a few stray paperclips and hands them to him, which he stuffs in his pants pocket. She stands, he stands.

CARLOS

Well, it's just that-

She puts the backpack into his arms, grabs the guitar and puts that into his arms, too, as:

ELIZABETH

No, no, no, go. Go, please. I have about 45 good minutes left in me today, and then I'm hitting Bode's on the way home, because tonight is a Tecate night if there ever was one.

CARLOS

You don't understand. I came to Ghost Ranch to see you.

She stops. Looks at him.

ELIZABETH

Me?

CARLOS

You are Eliza, right? Eliza O'Donnell?

ELIZABETH

No.

CARLOS

Oh. The front desk ladies sent me to housekeeping, and housekeeping said Eliza O'Donnell was in Poplar Five. Is this Poplar Five?

ELIZABETH

Yes, it is.

CARLOS

That's why I'm here. To meet Eliza O'Donnell. Do you know where she is?

ELIZABETH

I told you the ladies up there are slow, didn't I?

CARLOS

Yes, you did.

ELIZABETH

The one with the pony tail sniffs glue and the one in the leather vest got kicked in the head by a horse. She can barely count to 10. It's sad as hell.

CARLOS

Wow.

ELIZABETH

Eliza died a month ago.

CARLOS

(stunned)

What?

ELIZABETH

She got disoriented and walked off a trail up in Box Canyon.

CARLOS

Oh, my God.

ELIZABETH

She was old and a little stupid.

She died?
CARLOS

ELIZABETH
Don't fret. She wasn't well-liked.

CARLOS
How can you say that?

ELIZABETH
I knew her. Trust me. Kind of a bitch. Even the burros didn't like her. She won't be missed.

CARLOS
This is...this is...I feel dizzy.

ELIZABETH
It's the altitude. Why don't you park yourself on the bench outside the door there and-

He starts to stagger.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
Hurry. Go. You're gonna-

She tries to help him outside, but he falls against her, and she gets pushed back towards the bed.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
Not on the goddamn bed!

She wheels him around and guides him awkwardly into the cushy chair. He falls, dropping his guitar and his backpack, into the chair with a giant thump.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
I guess I'll vacuum around you.

CARLOS
I really don't feel good.

She sighs.

ELIZABETH
You have any water in your backpack?

CARLOS
I'm out.

ELIZABETH
You should have water with you at all times.

Going to a sink, she peels the plastic from a cup, filling it with water:

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

The dry air, the heat, and the elevation here is a killer. Literally.

CARLOS

Is that what happened to Eliza?

ELIZABETH

Uh, yeah. She went hiking without enough water, got dehydrated and, bam, fell over a hundred feet.

CARLOS

Oh...

ELIZABETH

Yeah, they didn't find her body for three days.

CARLOS

That's terrible.

ELIZABETH

You're telling me. The turkey vultures had a field day. It was hideous. So I'm told. I'm oversharing. Here. Drink.

He takes the cup. He drinks.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Jesus, you look like shit. Did you crawl here?

CARLOS

My car quit in Española. I walked part way, until I got a ride from a minister coming out this way.

She goes to the door, as if to show him out.

ELIZABETH

Why don't you go plant yourself on one of the Adirondack chairs under the oak by Lower Pavilion? It's nice and shady down there.

CARLOS

I don't know where Lower Pavilion is.

ELIZABETH

It's back down the path from here. Next to the Welcome Center. You passed it on your way in. You can sit down there and gawk at the wonder of Pedernal for as long as you want.

CARLOS

I can't move.

ELIZABETH

There is a bench right outside this door. On the porch here. You stand, walk like three steps, and boom, you're home free.

CARLOS

I can't move.

ELIZABETH

Can't or won't?

CARLOS

I can't believe she's gone. What am I gonna do now?

ELIZABETH

I don't know. But you can't do it in here.

She gathers up his backpack and guitar and puts them on the porch as:

CARLOS

All the people I've been talking to...to find her...how is it none of them knew she had died?

ELIZABETH

Why should they?

CARLOS

You say you go way back and you don't know her story?

ELIZABETH

She didn't like people knowing too much about her.

CARLOS

One of the most famous songs ever was written about her.

ELIZABETH

Oh, yeah?

CARLOS

Surely you know it. Everyone knows it. It's called *The Ballad of Eliza*.

ELIZABETH

I know it.

CARLOS

I've loved that song for as long as I can remember.

ELIZABETH

It is a good one.

CARLOS

It was the first song I ever learned on the guitar. And I'd pretend it was my song, you know, that I had written it, and that there was girl I was in love with named Eliza, and I would sit at home, in my room, alone, and sing it to her.

ELIZABETH

Well, that started sweet, then got weird as fuck.

CARLOS

I wanted to meet Eliza. The real one.

ELIZABETH

You're not gonna cry, are you?

CARLOS

I'm too tired to cry.

ELIZABETH

I say that every day. What about some sustenance?

She goes to a bookshelf with her things.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

I have Cheetoh's, Raisinets. Take the Raisinets. No one gets my Cheetoh's.

She goes to him with the Raisinets, opening them.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Here.

She puts the box in his hand and she sits on the bed across from him.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Try them. Fruit? Chocolate? It'll perk you right up.

CARLOS

You don't understand. I can't quite...I just can't seem to...I'm stuck.

ELIZABETH

You're stuck? In the chair?

CARLOS

No. My music. I'm blocked. I need inspiration. That's why I'm here. So she can help me.

ELIZABETH

Throw a rock, kid, and you'll hit inspiration. The world is overflowing with shit to get you going.

CARLOS

Not for me.

ELIZABETH

When you were walking here, you didn't look around?

CARLOS

At what?

ELIZABETH

There's clouds and mountains and rocks and lizards and all kinds of beautiful shit here.

CARLOS

That kind of stuff never really did it for me.

ELIZABETH

Most of the people that come here flip for it.

CARLOS

I don't.

ELIZABETH

You've never been in love? Never had your heart broken?

CARLOS

Sure, of course. I guess.

ELIZABETH

You guess? Maybe the problem isn't everything else, maybe the problem is you.

CARLOS

Yeah. Maybe.

He seems to sink into himself.

CARLOS (cont'd)

For over a year, I've been on the road looking for Eliza O'Donnell. I went to Oneonta, in New York, where she's from. I went out west. I talked to musicians from back in the day. Everyone was, like, "she's been out of the scene for a long time." It's been like chasing a ghost. I'm so tired. I'm so broke. And now, it's all for nothing.

ELIZABETH

You are gonna cry, aren't you? I can see it coming.

CARLOS

No, I'm not gonna cry.

ELIZABETH

Jesus, how could you not cry? I feel like crying.

Outside, thunder rumbles.

CARLOS
I'm sorry. I'm just gonna go.

ELIZABETH
Probably a good idea.

He gets out of the chair.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
Take the Raisinets with you. Let me help you with your stuff.

She pushes open the screen door, and grabs the backpack, which she helps him into. She hands him the guitar.

CARLOS
I'll just...uh...I don't know.

He leaves. We hear his footsteps in the dry dirt. They fade. Outside it begins to rain. And rain hard. Torrential. Lightning, thunder, wind. She watches him through the open door. After a few moments, he comes running back in, soaked.

CARLOS (cont'd)
I'm wet.

ELIZABETH
I see that.

CARLOS
And so are the Raisinets.

ELIZABETH
Too bad.

CARLOS
Maybe I'll wait until it passes.

He drops his backpack and guitar again.

ELIZABETH
For Christ's sake. Do you have any dry clothes in your backpack?

CARLOS
Dry, yes. Clean, no.

She fishes a new towel from her cleaning cart.

ELIZABETH

Here. Dry off.

She tosses the towel at him. He catches it. Starts rubbing his wet head.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Get dressed. In the bathroom. You can't stand here dripping everywhere like a wet dog.

He grabs his backpack. She hurries him to the bathroom.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Hurry, before you catch pneumonia and die and I have to figure out what to do with your body.

She snatches the Raisinets from his hand. He takes the backpack into the bathroom, closing the door. The rain continues, loudly. She turns the soggy box of candy over, and pours the Raisinets, and fair amount of rain water, into the trash by the sink. She looks around the room. She grabs the vacuum and rolls up the cord and wheels the vacuum towards the front door. The rain slows. She looks outside and up at the sky. The rain stops. She goes to the bathroom door, listening. It's very quiet.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

The rain has stopped. You can probably make a run for it if you hurry. (beat) Everything OK in there? (beat) Carlos?

CARLOS, from the bathroom:

CARLOS

Something is behind the shower curtain. Holy shit!!

There is a faint rattling sound coming from the bathroom. We hear him struggling, jumping, half-screaming, bouncing off the door, until he comes flying out, in a t-shirt, and no jeans, in underwear, and bare feet. He has a huge bandage on his left forearm. In his other hand, he grips a new long-sleeved shirt.

CARLOS (cont'd)

Jesus Christ!

He slams the door.

CARLOS (cont'd)
Sheets! Sheets! It's gonna get out!

Tossing the long-sleeved shirt down on bed, he grabs sheets from the bed and, almost like a maniac, stuffs them in the crack between the door and the floor.
ELIZABETH doesn't move.

CARLOS (cont'd)
Oh, my God, oh, my God...

He backs away from the door quickly.

ELIZABETH
Those sheets were clean.

CARLOS
There's a snake in there and it's huge!

ELIZABETH
Yeah, there are some big ones around here.

CARLOS
You've been cleaning up in here! How come you haven't noticed it?!

ELIZABETH
I haven't gotten to the bathroom. I got interrupted. By guess who?

CARLOS
My heart is literally coming out of my chest right now!

ELIZABETH
Did it bite you?

CARLOS
No!

ELIZABETH
Let me see the snake.

CARLOS
Don't go in there!

She does anyway, slowly. The door drags the sheets with it.

ELIZABETH
Ooh, it's a nice one!

CARLOS
A nice one?!

She comes out.

ELIZABETH

It's a rattlesnake.

CARLOS

(re: the door)

Tuck the sheets back in!

He drops to the floor and shoves the sheets firmly into the crack.

ELIZABETH

And it's gone into your backpack.

CARLOS

What?!

ELIZABETH

Yeah. Slithered right in.

CARLOS

Oh, my God!

He leaps back from the door.

ELIZABETH

Ghost Ranch has snakes. People bring bags. It happens.

CARLOS

It does?!

ELIZABETH

There's no reason to be afraid. Unless it bites you. And then you have a reason to be afraid.

CARLOS

I would think so!

ELIZABETH

Yeah, they're very poisonous. And while we do have a nurse at the ranch, she's not exactly Clara Barton. Beyond her, there's nobody for at least 20 miles in any direction.

CARLOS

How do I get the snake out of my backpack?!

ELIZABETH

Calm down. I zipped up your backpack. They don't chew canvas.

CARLOS

What am I gonna do?!

ELIZABETH

First, you don't have pants. You have to go back into the bathroom and put on pants.

CARLOS

My dry pants are still in the backpack!

ELIZABETH

Ah. Kind of a problem.

CARLOS

Yes!

ELIZABETH

Why don't you get your backpack and we'll assess the situation.

CARLOS

I'm not going in there!

ELIZABETH

Fine. I'll do it.

She starts to go in.

CARLOS

No, I'll do it!

She stops.

ELIZABETH

You don't have to be a hero about it. I'm not gonna think less of you.

CARLOS

Yeah, you will.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, you're probably right.

He grabs his long-sleeved shirt from the bed and puts it on over his t-shirt, covering the bandage.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Snake fangs go right through cotton.

CARLOS

You're not helping!

He crosses past her to the door frame.

ELIZABETH

You'll be fine. Unless there is another snake in there.

What?!

CARLOS

She laughs. Grabbing the Cheetoh's, she sits on the bed.

ELIZABETH
(eating)

This is gonna be fun to watch. Go ahead. Get your backpack.

CARLOS

Do snakes run in packs?

ELIZABETH

I don't think so, but did you see that movie *Snakes on a Plane*?

CARLOS

You're not reassuring me!

ELIZABETH

That's not really my thing.

CARLOS

This is turning into an all-time great shitty day.

ELIZABETH

All time? You want to hear about my day?

CARLOS

No!

He goes into the bathroom and drags his backpack out into the room, quickly, backing away.

CARLOS (cont'd)

Ahhh! (beat) Why isn't the snake moving?

ELIZABETH

Maybe it's comfortable in there. Wait. It's moving. See?

He looks.

CARLOS

No, I don't see. Are you positive it's in there?

The snake rattles.

CARLOS

OK, it's in there. Holy shit. How am I gonna get it out of there?

ELIZABETH

I can go down to facilities and they can send someone here. Or you can go down there yourself. You could even take the backpack down there.

CARLOS

I'm not going anywhere without pants.

ELIZABETH

Why don't you wear your old, wet pants?

CARLOS

They're soaked.

ELIZABETH

Someone doesn't like to get wet I guess.

CARLOS

Fine, I'll put on the wet pants.

ELIZABETH

Or you go into the backpack right now for the dry pants.

CARLOS

Are you serious!?

ELIZABETH

Sure. I'm not emotionally invested.

CARLOS

Why are you making light of this situation?!

ELIZABETH

You know, maybe there is a song in this for you, because it seems like the snake has gotten you going.

CARLOS

Yes! I think the snake has gotten me going!

ELIZABETH

Should we think of song titles?

CARLOS

No!

ELIZABETH

"Snake Me Home Country Roads."

CARLOS

Oh, for God's sake.

ELIZABETH

"Snake Rattle and Roll." Ohh, that's a good one.

CARLOS
Please stop.

ELIZABETH
"I Only Have Snake Eyes for You."

She laughs.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
This is fun.

CARLOS
No, it isn't!

ELIZABETH
Boy, you are really wound up.

CARLOS
YES!

ELIZABETH
You should get your guitar out right now. See what happens.

CARLOS
You know what? Fuck it. I'm going into the backpack.

He approaches the backpack.

ELIZABETH
You can't go into your backpack if there's a rattlesnake in there.

CARLOS
I don't give a shit. I'm getting my dry pants.

He gets on his knees. The snake rattles and doesn't stop.

ELIZABETH
You don't want to get bitten, trust me. There's pain, swelling, nausea, paralysis-

CARLOS
I came here for Eliza, and she's dead, what do I care what happens to me now?

He grabs the main zipper. The rattle seems to get louder.

ELIZABETH
You're making it mad.

CARLOS
One...two...

ELIZABETH
(moving to stop him)

Don't!

CARLOS
Wait, I just realized the pants are in the side pocket.

He unzips the side pocket and out they come.

CARLOS (cont'd)
Here they are.

He puts on the jeans. She just starts laughing. She can't stop. He starts laughing, too.

ELIZABETH
I haven't enjoyed myself this much in years.

CARLOS
Glad I could be here for you.

She laughs. He laughs. After awhile, the laughter dies. She looks at him.

ELIZABETH
Let me call the office.

At her cleaning cart, in the mess, she pulls out her cell phone. She calls. He sits on the bed.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
(on phone)
Hi, this is...this is the cleaning staff up in Poplar Five. There's a rattlesnake here. He slithered into a backpack. We have him trapped. (beat) A rattlesnake. (beat) Rattle...snake. Yeah, send someone from facilities down to fish it out. (beat) No, it's not a fish, it's a snake. (beat) No, we're in Poplar Five. Five. Thanks.

She hangs up.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
S-l-o-w.

She grabs the backpack and drags it outside. The snake rattles. She comes back in.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
Boy, that snake is *pissed*.

The rattling stops. She sits on the bed next to him. She kind of gets the giggles looking at him. He does, too, until it turns a little sad. Beat. Silence.

That was wild. ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Yeah. CARLOS

Beat.

ELIZABETH
(getting up)
Why don't you help me make the bed?

Help you make the bed? CARLOS

That is a habit you really need to kill. ELIZABETH

Which one is that? CARLOS

Following a question with a question. ELIZABETH

Following a question with a- CARLOS

Get up. Help me. It will do you good to do some work. ELIZABETH

He gets up.

Grab the sheets. ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Aren't the sheets dirty now? CARLOS

I know that, and you know that, but Sara Takahashi doesn't know that. ELIZABETH

He grabs the sheets from the floor. They start making the bed. In silence. She considers him. Watches him as they work. Just then, outside, the sound of voices and footsteps in the gravel. She goes to the door.

CARLOS

Is that Sara Takahashi?

ELIZABETH

No.

She stays at the door. He goes back to working.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

I hate that sound. Feet in the gravel. You hear it everywhere here. At all hours, day and night. But especially when people are arriving to start a new week. But after everyone is gone, all you hear is the wind, and maybe the rain. A roll of thunder in the summer. Birds zig-zagging across the sky. It's glorious.

He grabs the bed spread and lays it out, finishing.

CARLOS

There. Done.

ELIZABETH

When I first met John, he called it Oneonta (she says it "One-own-ta").

CARLOS

(confused)

What?

She turns to him.

ELIZABETH

The town, where I'm from, in New York. John would say Oneonta (she says it "One-own-ta"), instead of Oneonta (she says it "Oh-nee-ahn-ta").

CARLOS

(getting excited)

What are you saying right now!?

CARLOS can hardly contain himself.

ELIZABETH

Sorry to mess with you. I just like being left alone.

CARLOS

(a little overcome)

You're Eliza?

ELIZABETH

Stop saying Eliza. No one calls me Eliza anymore.

CARLOS

You're Eliza? You're Eliza O'Donnell?

ELIZABETH

The front desk girls sent you to housekeeping, and housekeeping said I was here. Who else would I be?

CARLOS

Well, uh, I don't know-

ELIZABETH

They're slow up at the front desk, but they're not liars.

CARLOS

Right, OK. You told me Eliza was dead. So she's not dead? I mean, you're not dead?

ELIZABETH

Do I look dead?

CARLOS

I'm gonna lose it right now.

ELIZABETH

Meeting me is nothing to have a seizure over, so take it easy.

CARLOS

Take it easy?! Do you know what I went through to find you?!

ELIZABETH

You've told me, so no need to repeat it.

CARLOS

I FOUND YOU! (beat) I found you! (beat) I found you.

He calms, out of breath.

ELIZABETH

I really don't see how you're blocked, musically.

CARLOS

I'm not normally like this.

ELIZABETH

Look. I've had my fun. And you've found me. So I think, after facilities gets the rattlesnake out of your backpack, it's time you headed home. I have real life to get back to.

CARLOS

I have to admit. You're not what I expected.

ELIZABETH

Sorry to disappoint you.

CARLOS

I'm not the first, am I, to come looking for you?

ELIZABETH

Well, you're the first in a very long time.

CARLOS

I'm sorry I didn't recognize you.

ELIZABETH

I'm not the girl I was. Life does that. It shows up around 50 with a new instructional manual that says "You're fucked!"

She laughs to herself, bitterly.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

What's your name? You haven't said it.

CARLOS

Carlos.

ELIZABETH

Carlos, I can't help you. I can't.

CARLOS

Why not?

ELIZABETH

The young girl that John wrote about, and sang about, is long gone. In more ways than one. I'm sorry to tell you that.

CARLOS

But the song is true, isn't it?

ELIZABETH

Sure, maybe. But that was 40-some years ago.

CARLOS

How did you inspire him?

ELIZABETH

I don't know. Why is this so important to you?

CARLOS

I'm struggling to find the truth in my music.

ELIZABETH

And you thought coming here to find the muse for one of the most popular songs of all time would help you find the truth?

CARLOS

Yes.

She smiles at him. Marvels, really.

ELIZABETH

You know there are a million other people out there who have inspired great songs. Patty Boyd, Stevie Wonder's daughter. Why don't you try them?

CARLOS

Everyone has a song. *The Ballad of Eliza* is mine. It's the most important song to me. It's the one. You're the one.

Beat.

CARLOS (cont'd)

Maybe we could go for a walk or something? While we wait for facilities.

ELIZABETH

A walk?

CARLOS

Yeah.

ELIZABETH

Hold hands? Look into each other's eyes?

CARLOS

Well...

ELIZABETH

I'm 68-years old. I'm not in the business of inspiring anyone anymore, least of all a young man.

CARLOS

I don't believe that.

ELIZABETH

I don't exist for you, Carlos. I am not alive for you. I don't walk this Earth for you. Do you understand?

CARLOS

Yes.

ELIZABETH

You don't own me.

She crosses away from him. He doesn't move. He just watches her.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

What did you think was gonna happen when you found me? That we'd get together and then, like, snap...

She snaps her fingers.

Inspiration? ELIZABETH (cont'd)

I don't know. CARLOS

ELIZABETH
Look at me. I'm an old lady in a sad, worn-out uniform who spends her life cleaning toilets, doing laundry, and making beds.

CARLOS
That's not who you really are.

ELIZABETH
Who am I then?

CARLOS
Who are you?
(singing, quietly)
*Eliza is the melody
written on my soul*

This stops her. She smiles at him. He smiles back. She snaps out of it.

ELIZABETH
For fuck's sake. Come here, Carlos.

He goes to her. She holds out one hand to him.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
Carlos, give me your hand.

He does. She looks down at it, sees the bandage of his left arm poking through the sleeve. He notices her noticing it, so he covers the bandage with the sleeve. It's a moment. She knows he's hiding something. She takes his hand, and then closes around it with her other hand.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
Do you feel anything?

CARLOS
Uh...I feel your hands.

ELIZABETH
What do they feel like?

CARLOS
They're a little rough, honestly.

ELIZABETH

Those are calluses. I work for a living. Anything else?

CARLOS

Not really.

ELIZABETH

That's right. Because there is nothing else. I'm not pixie dust, Carlos. Not now, not then. I'm just a person.

CARLOS

No. You're not just a person.

She lets his hand go.

ELIZABETH

You're determined, I'll give you that.

She considers him.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

So what's your story?

CARLOS

What do you mean? I told you why I'm here.

ELIZABETH

Right. You said you're Venezuelan. I don't hear an accent. Where'd you grow up?

CARLOS

I was born in Caracas. But we moved to Kansas when I was a baby.

ELIZABETH

Why'd you move?

CARLOS

Things were changing, political stuff, Chavez and all that. My parents wanted out of it.

ELIZABETH

Why Kansas?

CARLOS

Some friend of my father's could get him a job at an aircraft factory in Wichita.

ELIZABETH

You still in Kansas?

CARLOS

After high school, I moved to Austin. Then New York, briefly. Then L.A. I live in San Francisco now. So that's pretty much it. That's my story.

ELIZABETH

Right. I think there's a little more to you than that.

CARLOS

Well, I'm a musician, and-

ELIZABETH

You're stuck, I know. You've loved "The Ballad of Eliza" blah, blah, blah. How old are you, Carlos?

CARLOS

28.

ELIZABETH

What happened to your parents? You said they died when you were young.

CARLOS

Hate crime.

ELIZABETH

Shit. Really?

CARLOS

They didn't call it that back then. They called it a "drive by." Happened in front of their little grocery shop, which they started after my father quit the factory. Carraotas galore! (beat) I remember my mother screaming at me to run. They said I landed against the wires of a chicken coop next door.

ELIZABETH

I'm sorry.

CARLOS

My father had this four-string guitar he'd play sometimes in front of the shop. Sing songs from back home. Some people didn't like it, I guess. I remember there were always lots of arguments.

ELIZABETH

How old were you when this happened?

CARLOS

Five.

ELIZABETH

Where did you go?

CARLOS

Foster care.

ELIZABETH

No relatives from Venezuela?

CARLOS

Nope. Wasn't so bad. Most of the families were good people. Most of them. School was harder. Being the only Venezuelan.

ELIZABETH

What's with the bandage on your arm?

CARLOS

Bandage?

ELIZABETH

On your arm. I saw it when you came out of the bathroom. YYou covered it up when I held your hand.

CARLOS

I covered it up?

ELIZABETH

There you are again with answering a question with a question. Stop evading.

He looks at her. He's caught.

CARLOS

I was in an accident. It's not healing well. It got infected.

ELIZABETH

What kind of accident?

CARLOS

A couple weeks ago, I got attacked by a...uh...this dude on a Yamaha who came at me with a knife...outside this motel...near uh...the Salt Flats...in Wendover.

ELIZABETH

I thought you said it was an accident.

CARLOS

Right. Uh...it was. He didn't mean to cut me. Well, he meant to cut me, but I wasn't who he thought I was, because it was dark. I was walking back to the room...with a pizza. Pepperoni and pineapple.

She looks at him a long time because she knows he's lying. But she lets it go. She turns and goes to the screen door, looking out.

ELIZABETH

Facilities is usually not this slow in responding to a snake. But they've been dealing with some flooding down in Pot Hollow. Wrecked one of the art buildings. Casa de Los Artesanos.

Beat. He sits on the bed.

CARLOS

Can you tell me about you and John?

She turns to him. Sighs. He won't let it go.

ELIZABETH

Carlos, what can I tell you that you can't get on the internet?

CARLOS

Oh, come on. The internet? What goes on between two people is not on the internet.

ELIZABETH

But what is it you don't already know?

CARLOS

I don't know what I don't know. I've read the People Magazine version, and I've seen the VH1 Behind the Music version. I've even read a shitty biography. But I've never heard your version.

ELIZABETH

It's all the same version.

CARLOS

No, it's not. Half the musicians and record execs I talked to got everything all twisted up. Even they don't know.

ELIZABETH

John would be the one to tell you everything you want to know. He wrote the song.

CARLOS

You miss him?

ELIZABETH

Miss him? He broke up with me long before he died.

CARLOS

Yeah, but do you miss him?

ELIZABETH

Sure. Mostly what I miss is what I was to him. I miss being that girl in the song.

CARLOS

You're still the girl in that song. You always will be.

She smiles at him. Maybe for the first time, he's reached her.

CARLOS (cont'd)

How could anyone write a song like that and just walk away?

ELIZABETH

I don't know.

Some place deep, deep inside her, a little heart has broken. Beat.

CARLOS

I know you don't want to talk about him. Or you. But I've come so far to find you.

She regards him.

ELIZABETH

I'm tired, Carlos. I just want to be left alone.

CARLOS

I'll never bother you again. I promise.

ELIZABETH

It's been a terrible day, Carlos. I keep telling you that. Right when I got into work this morning Holly said I have to take a pay cut. A pay cut. They want me to go back to the shitty salary I made 22 years ago when I started here. Me and everyone else. Can you believe that? The ranch is bleeding money, they said. They'll change it back as soon as they can. Have faith, they said. God will provide.

CARLOS

Please.

Beat.

CARLOS (cont'd)

Please, Eliza. I've come all this way.

She sits back down next to him. She takes her time before speaking.

ELIZABETH

I left Oneonta when I was 17-years old. My mom was into bad boyfriends and pills, so I stole some money from her and I hitchhiked out west the summer after high school. I guess it was stupid, being a teenager, and a girl, out there alone like that. But it didn't feel stupid. I felt free. I was up in Oregon for awhile. Then Eureka. Tahoe. Got into drugs.

And boys. Finally landed in L.A. I got an apartment on the west side with a girlfriend I knew from back home. We didn't have laundry facilities, so I always went to this all-night laundromat off Pico. One night, must have been two in the morning or something, I was there planning to wash my red and grey work uniform, which I still had on. I had a job at one of the movie theaters in Century City. I was 19 by then. A little hardened, but I was still 19. On this particular night, the place was empty. I remember smelling cigarette smoke, but I just thought it was coming from the alleyway or something. So I slipped out of my uniform and tossed it into the washer. I slipped out of everything. It was 1971. People did shit like that. I put on a t-shirt and some cutoffs. Then I heard this guitar. Just a soft strum. Then this quiet voice started singing. Deep and raspy, almost like an old man. I turned out of the row of washers, and there, on the floor, was this guy, this young guy, hiding behind this waterfall of hair, with a guitar and sheet of lyrics on the tile around him. He was in a corduroy jacket and smoking a cigarette. He looked up at me and said "hi." "I didn't know anyone was here," I told him. "I'm here," he said. I wasn't thunderstruck by him. I sat down on the bench. He went off to collect his clothes in a trash bag. He came back, and sat back down. He looked at me like, "I see you, you exist." He said "What's your name?" And it just went from there. He was from this small, central valley town. You could practically smell the dust coming off him. He was so smart. About life. He was only 23, but, God, he knew things. We were still in the laundromat when the sun came up. I didn't know anything about love. But I had never felt alone, either. Four years we were together. He went from some guy writing songs in an all-night laundromat to being on "The Midnight Special" and getting introduced by Wolfman Jack. *The Ballad of Eliza* was all over the radio and I thought, Jesus, that's about me. *Me*. This girl from Oneonta. He ended up leaving me for a groupie. What a cliché. I can still smell his cigarettes. And I can still feel that big belt buckle he had. And the thickness of his eyebrows. He could be so aloof. But he could be really curious, too, and when he listened, it seemed like everything I said was important to him. I felt good about myself in ways I never had before. And up until then, I thought all I wanted was my independence. But then John came along and what I realized was all I wanted was to matter to someone. He became my lover, my family, my everything. There were a million signs that said he would love me forever. And he didn't. And the whole world knew about it. My heart was broken in a very public way. There were photos circulating of me with my head down with big headlines like "Shattered." And I never got over that. John just moved on. To the next girl. The next record. I didn't.

She goes to the front window and looks outside. He sits there, unmoved, and fully aware he is unmoved.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Sometimes I would watch him write a song. He always described it as hard work. And I know it was. He'd say he wrote songs by parking his ass down and just doing it. Blood, sweat, and tears. But it was more than that. Things came to him, a melody, a lyric, some chord progression, in ways that were beyond hard work. To the world, he was John. Superstar. To me, he was Johnny. Beer drinker. Bad joke teller. Liked to sit on the floor. He had trouble falling asleep at night. Sometimes he would hum quietly in the darkness. And I would feel him turn over, and face me. Then with one finger, he'd curl my hair around behind my ear.

Beat.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Looks like more rain is on the way. (beat) Wow. Look there.

She points.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Look at the light shining on Kitchen Mesa.

He walks over to her and they look out the front window together. He is unmoved.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

It's just exploding with colors.

CARLOS

(listless)

Yeah.

ELIZABETH

Dusk is usually when it's most beautiful, but this is...wow.

They look.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Before you go, you should spend some time here. Go up to Chimney Rock. You can see everything up there. You can hike backcountry or go down to Abiquiu Lake or just sit and do nothing and watch the sheep munch the alfalfa field. (beat) Did you know Georgia O'Keeffe lived here for like 40 years?

CARLOS

That's one of hers on the wall there, isn't it?

He points. She looks.

ELIZABETH

Well, it's not a real one. It's an imitation. Probably made by a guest. It's called "Horse's Skull on Blue."

CARLOS

She was kind of into the skulls, wasn't she?

ELIZABETH

She was into a lot of things. She came here back in the twenties. She said "There's something that's in the air, it's just different. The sky is different, the stars are different, the wind is different."

CARLOS

You believe that?

ELIZABETH

I do. Half the classes taught here are related to the magic of this place. And there *is* a kind of magic here.

CARLOS

There is?

ELIZABETH

Yeah. There really is.

CARLOS

How did you end up here?

ELIZABETH

I saw Ghost Ranch in a magazine. Seemed remote. I liked the idea of being far, far away from everyone.

CARLOS

How come?

ELIZABETH

My husband left me. I had been planning to leave him. We had long stopped communicating. I'm not sure we ever did.

CARLOS

I'm surprised you got married.

ELIZABETH

Eventually someone else loved me, too.

CARLOS

Did you love him?

ELIZABETH

Sure. I guess. I just often felt a million miles away.

CARLOS

I went to see him. He had no idea where you were.

ELIZABETH

How is he?

CARLOS

He told me to tell you, if I found you, that he hopes you're happy.

Beat. She turns away from him. Quietly, he goes and sits back down. She inhales a breeze coming from the window, embracing it.

ELIZABETH

You smell that?

CARLOS

Smell what?

ELIZABETH

The air, through the window. The world outside.

CARLOS

Not really.

ELIZABETH

It's the juniper. Sweet. Almost like gin.

Beat.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

(singing, softly)

*Eliza is the melody
written on my soul
She's sunlight inside of me
when I'm indigo
Free from Oneonta
and free as the wind
Eliza
when can I see you again*

Beat.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

It really is a beautiful song.

CARLOS

I know.

ELIZABETH

I remember the first time John played it. It was in a bar in San Francisco. In the Haight. The Gold Coin was the name of it. Total shit hole.

CARLOS

It's still a shit hole. But now it's a hip shit hole.

ELIZABETH

John surprised me with the song. I was sitting in the back. He sang it to me. To me. I thought, I could love this man forever and ever.

She thinks on that moment. Smiles.
Beat. She sees him. Sees how quiet and still he is. How lifeless. How fragile.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Let me get you some more water.

She grabs his plastic cup and fills it up again. She gets herself a cup of water, too.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Dehydration is no joke. It sneaks up on you, and before you know it, you're babbling incoherently, the room is spinning, and then you're flat on your back.

She hands him the water.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Cheers.

They drink together.

ELIZABETH

I'm gonna walk over to Pot Hollow and try and grab someone from facilities to take away the snake.

CARLOS

OK.

ELIZABETH

If this Sara Takahashi woman shows, just tell her to hang out in the library or something for a half hour.

CARLOS

Library?

ELIZABETH

Yeah, it's that two-story adobe right there. Sign out front says "Library."

CARLOS

Got it.

She looks at him a moment, and then exits. We hear her feet stepping in the dry ground, and then it fades away. He sits a moment, stone-faced.

He looks over at the sink, and then gets up and goes over. He grabs a few paper towels, and sits back down. He puts the paper towels on the bed next to him. He sits quietly. Then he goes into the bathroom and comes out with his wet pants. He sits again, and digs into the front pocket, pulling out a paperclip. He puts it down on the bed next to the paper towels. After a moment, he peels back his shirt sleeve, revealing the bandage. He opens the bandage, revealing his bare arm, which is healing from cuts. He uncoils the paperclip and taking a deep breath, finds a bare spot on his arm, and cuts. And cuts. And cuts. Until he bleeds. He holds his arm in the air and lets the blood roll down his arm in a single red line. He closes his eyes. After a bit, he opens his eyes, takes the paper towel, and wipes his arm. He takes the bloody paper towel and then dumps it, and the paper clip into a trash can near the sink. Just then, we hear footsteps in the dry dirt approaching. In comes ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH

I think the snake has fallen asleep. Someone will be here in 10.

She sees him wrapping up his bandage.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

What are you doing?

CARLOS

Nothing. It was bleeding a little. I was cleaning it.

ELIZABETH

Let me see it.

CARLOS

I got it.

She approaches him.

ELIZABETH

No, no, let me see it.

CARLOS

Really, it's fine now.

ELIZABETH
Let me help you, Carlos.

CARLOS
No.

ELIZABETH
Oh, stop it. Come here.

CARLOS
Leave me alone!

He pulls away from her. She's a little surprised.

ELIZABETH
Well, I'm not going to leave you alone.

She grabs him. He resists.

CARLOS
What is your problem?

ELIZABETH
Let me see it!

CARLOS
Fine! Here! Go ahead!

He stops fighting her. She unwraps the bandage. Sees the new wound.

ELIZABETH
This is a fresh wound.

CARLOS
No, I just keep aggravating it.

ELIZABETH
Does it hurt?

CARLOS
Yes.

ELIZABETH
You need to see a doctor. There are other wounds there, too.

CARLOS
I know. It was a bad situation. With the biker. In Utah.

ELIZABETH
Uh huh.

She wraps it back up. Seals the tape.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
You have blood on your hand. Hold on.

She gets a paper towel, wets it, and
wipes his hands. She tosses it into the
trash.

CARLOS
Thanks.

He turns away from her. She looks down
into the trash can curiously. Sees
what's there.

ELIZABETH
Let me see your other arm.

CARLOS
My other arm?

ELIZABETH
Yeah, you're other arm.

CARLOS
There is nothing wrong with my other arm.

ELIZABETH
Then you shouldn't have any issue showing it to me.

He holds it out to her, palm side down.
She goes to him, grabs it, and turns it
over. She slowly peels back his sleeve.
Scars. All healed.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
What are these scars?

CARLOS
From when my parents were killed.

ELIZABETH
The chicken wire? Twenty-some years ago?

CARLOS
Right.

ELIZABETH
You're a terrible liar.

CARLOS
What are you talking about?

ELIZABETH

You. You're lying. And you're bad at it. Clearly. You avoid the truth and you suck at lying. No wonder you can't write songs.

CARLOS

This from the woman who pretended to be dead when I walked in here?

ELIZABETH

I came clean. It's your turn.

CARLOS

I'm not...I'm not lying.

ELIZABETH

These scars are deliberate cuts.

CARLOS

Deliberate?

ELIZABETH

Stoping putting a fucking question mark at the end of your sentences!

Beat. She calms.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Are you cutting yourself, Carlos?

He turns away from her, walks away. She doesn't follow him.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

What aren't you telling me?

CARLOS

Nothing.

ELIZABETH

Carlos? (beat) Carlos? Look at me.

He does.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Talk to me.

After a moment...

CARLOS

Sometimes I just need to feel things. Because I just don't feel things.

ELIZABETH
How long have you been doing this?

He shrugs.

CARLOS
Long time.

ELIZABETH
Things must have been hard for you. Growing up.

CARLOS
Guess so. (beat). I used to carve little words. Into myself.
Like "dead." And "soul."

ELIZABETH
You were just cutting yourself, weren't you? Just now. While I
was out.

CARLOS
I don't know.

ELIZABETH
I saw the paperclip in the trash. Is it one of your paperclips?
From that box in your backpack?

CARLOS
(devastated)
I didn't feel anything. From that story you told. You and
John. Why didn't I feel anything?

She moves a little closer to him.

CARLOS (cont'd)
It's like there's nothing inside me.

ELIZABETH
There is, Carlos.

CARLOS
No, there's not.

ELIZABETH
It's just not easy to find those feelings. Especially if they
don't want to be found. No one knows that better than me.

CARLOS
I'm still just a dead soul.

She hugs him. With everything she has.
He doesn't respond. After a moment, she
lets him go. He sits on the bed. Then,
suddenly, with his fists, he beats on his
legs, hard.

ELIZABETH

Why'd you come find me, Carlos? Why now? (beat) You didn't just suddenly get stuck, did you? You've always been stuck, haven't you?

Beat. She sits down next to him.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Carlos? Why are you really here?

Beat.

CARLOS

I kept cutting deeper. And one day, I cut too deep. And I woke up, in the city somewhere, in an apartment I didn't know, surrounded by people I didn't know, and there was no one there to help me. I sat up, woozy, kind of half-dead, blood all over me, and I heard something. From the next room. A song. *My* song. *The Ballad of Eliza*. Oh, God, it sounded so beautiful. I followed it to a window and I could hear it down in the alleyway. So I climbed out the fire escape, and went down. Then, suddenly, it was around the building, and I chased it, out into the street, until the song got swallowed up by cars, and buses, and people. And I stood there in the noise, looking down towards the marina, the fog retreating beyond the apartments, the morning sun getting big, and I just knew. I just knew I had to find you.

Beat.

ELIZABETH

Have you ever written about cutting yourself?

CARLOS

No.

ELIZABETH

I wonder what would happen if you did.

CARLOS

I don't know.

ELIZABETH

You want to try?

CARLOS

What...now?

ELIZABETH

Yeah.

CARLOS

Why?

ELIZABETH

Sometimes when John was feeling really low, he would write about it.

CARLOS

I'm not John.

ELIZABETH

I know.

CARLOS

I wouldn't know what to say.

ELIZABETH

I'll bet you'd surprise yourself.

CARLOS

I'll bet I wouldn't.

ELIZABETH

What's the worst thing that could happen?

CARLOS

That I wouldn't be able to do it right. And if I can't write about that, then what can I write about?

ELIZABETH

Try, Carlos. Try and write a song about it.

CARLOS

No.

ELIZABETH

Don't be afraid. What if I helped you?

CARLOS

You?

ELIZABETH

Yeah, me. I ain't no groupie, Carlos.

He looks at her. Considers.

CARLOS

Who wants to listen to a song about a guy cutting himself?

ELIZABETH

You've never heard *Hurt* by Nine Inch Nails?

CARLOS

Uh...yeah, sure. You listen to Nine Inch Nails?

ELIZABETH

Of course not. I know the Johnny Cash version. It is devastating.

CARLOS

Yeah. It is.

ELIZABETH

The important thing isn't the cutting, Carlos. We don't even need to mention it. You think *Puff the Magic Dragon* was about a dragon?

CARLOS

I have no idea.

ELIZABETH

Whatever. What's important here is that you don't bullshit this. Be real with your feelings. Give yourself over to them. That's what John always did.

Beat.

CARLOS

What will I say?

ELIZABETH

Let's just throw some stuff out there.

CARLOS

Like what?

ELIZABETH

Well, let's start with one thought.

CARLOS

OK.

ELIZABETH

I'll ask you a question. And you answer it. And that will be the beginning of the song.

CARLOS

OK.

She looks at him.

ELIZABETH

When did it start? The cutting.

CARLOS

When I was ten.

ELIZABETH

What if that's the first line?

CARLOS

"When I was ten?"

ELIZABETH

Sure, why not? Now where did you cut yourself? Like, in your bedroom, or a bathroom at school or-

CARLOS

In a basement.

ELIZABETH

Where exactly in the basement?

CARLOS

In a corner. By a broken furnace.

ELIZABETH

What was the basement like?

CARLOS

Dark. Cold.

Beat. ELIZABETH thinks.

ELIZABETH

OK, how this?
When I was ten

She thinks.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

When I was ten
In a dark, basement corner
By a broken furnace cold as ice

He looks at her, a little stunned.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Not bad. Not bad at all. Let's keep going. Why did you do it?
Why did you cut yourself that first time?

CARLOS

I just wanted to feel something different.

ELIZABETH

Did it make you feel different?

CARLOS

Yeah.

ELIZABETH

How did it make you feel different?

CARLOS

I knew I was alive.

Beat. She thinks.

ELIZABETH

When I was ten
In a dark, basement corner
By a broken furnace cold as ice

She pauses a moment, and then he finishes
the verse.

CARLOS

I wanted to feel something different
To know I was alive

She smiles at him, nodding her head. He
looks at her, astonished.

ELIZABETH

That's really good, Carlos.

CARLOS

How did you do that?

ELIZABETH

I didn't do anything. Those are all your words.
Now...how might that sound as a melody?

CARLOS

I don't know.

ELIZABETH

Listen to the rhythm of the words.
When I was ten
In a dark, basement corner
By a broken furnace cold as ice

CARLOS

When I was ten
In a dark, basement corner
By a broken furnace cold as ice

ELIZABETH

What words matter most? Ten? Corner? Cold? (beat) How does
it sound to you? Is it slow? Think about what were you feeling
then. You desperately needed to feel life.

Beat.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Try something. Don't be afraid. John was never afraid. Just
sing. Sing, Carlos.

CARLOS hesitates. His mind searches for a melody. He sort of half-starts and stops, until:

CARLOS

(singing)

*When I was ten
In a dark, basement corner
By a broken furnace cold as ice
I wanted to feel something different
To know I was alive*

He looks at her, feeling a little overwhelmed. She smiles at him, nods.

ELIZABETH

Don't ever tell yourself you can't do it, Carlos.

He softly laughs at her, in wonder.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Sing it again.

He does, this time with a little extra. She sort of half-sings it along with him.

CARLOS

(singing)

*When I was ten
In a dark, basement corner
By a broken furnace cold as ice
I wanted to feel something different
To know I was alive*

He's stunned.

ELIZABETH

Now get your guitar.

He does, pulling it out of its case. He sets it on his lap. She scoots away a bit on the bed, to give him room.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Now what music do you hear?

He looks at her. Looks away. Closes his eyes.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

What does it sound like? What's the pulse?

Eyes closed, he swoons a little. Starts to hum.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Something in a minor key maybe. Melancholy. Lonely. But it doesn't have to be any of those things. What do you feel?

He continues to hum.

CARLOS

I feel...

ELIZABETH

Hit a chord and go.

He opens his eyes and starts playing. Slow, easy, heartfelt. Then he sings with it.

CARLOS

(singing)

*When I was ten
In a dark, basement corner
By a broken furnace cold as ice
I wanted to feel something different
To know I was alive*

He keeps playing.

CARLOS (cont'd)

(singing)

*Alive, alive, I am alive
Alive, alive, I am alive
Alive, alive, I am alive
To know I was alive*

He stops playing, astonished. He looks at her.

CARLOS (cont'd)

Wow. Thank you.

ELIZABETH

You are alive, Carlos. You are very much alive. (beat) And so am I.

They smile at each other. Suddenly, everything seems full of hope.

Blackout.

End of play