

Scene 5
October 7th, 2000

Outside it's 72°F. In the news: After yet another gun incident at a school, Attorney General Janet Reno reassures the public that "American schools are safe places." Two hundred people camp overnight at a Reading electronics superstore hoping to be the first to buy the \$350 Sony Playstation 2.

Bar. Television screen. Jessie sits slumped at a table. Stan checks inventory. Oscar enters. A moment.

STAN. So, when were you gonna tell me?

OSCAR. What?

STAN. ... You crossed the line.

OSCAR. Who told you?

STAN. Nelson.

OSCAR. They were hiring part-time temps to replace some of the locked out workers. I can pick up a couple of hours in the mornings, and maybe get a full shift.

STAN. Be careful.

OSCAR. Why?

STAN. Why?! Emotions are running high. That's why.

OSCAR. Yeah, well, they're offering eleven dollars an hour.

STAN. I know. Looks good from where you're standing, but that eleven dollars is gonna come outta the pockets of a lot of good people. And they ain't gonna like it.

OSCAR. Well, I'm sorry about that. But it ain't my problem. I been trying to get into that shop for two years. And each time I asked any of'em, I get nothing but pushback. So now, I'm willing to be a little flexible and they ain't.

STAN. You want my opinion?

OSCAR. Do I have a choice?

STAN. Don't do it.

OSCAR. That's your opinion. You gonna give me a raise? Huh?

STAN. It's not up to me, it's Howard's call. I just put the money in the till, I ain't responsible for taking it out. But, let me ask him.

OSCAR. They're offering me three dollars more per hour than I make here. Three dollars. What they're offering is better than anything I've touched since I got outta high school. So yo, I ain't afraid to cross the line. Let'em puff up their chest, but it don't scare me no more than walking through my 'hood. I know rough. I ain't afraid to roll in the dirt.

STAN. Fine tough guy. But, trust me, you're gonna make some real enemies. Couple of folks you know.

OSCAR. They ain't my friends. They don't come into my house and water my plants.

STAN. Okay. But for the record, I think it's seriously fucked up. Six months, watch, they're gonna get another set of guys like you who'll cross the line, and guess what? They'll offer them ten dollars. Watch. Then you'll be outta a job, wanting someone to stand by you. But ain't nobody gonna do it. And, let me tell you something. My ol' man—

OSCAR. Yeah, yeah—

STAN. Don't you "yeah, yeah" me. My dad put forty-two years into building that plant, those benefits, those wages, that vacation time you're so hungry for, guess what? He fought for'em when the going wasn't so great. That's right. And you think you're gonna walk in and tear it all down in a day. There are folks out there that won't go down easy.

OSCAR. Why are you coming at me that way? I'm not disrespectin' you. I'm just trying to get paid, that's all. For three years I've been carrying nothing but crates. I've got twenty-dollar bills taped to my wall, and a drawer full of motivational tapes. Got a jar of buena suerte from the Botanica, and a candle that I keep lit twenty-four/seven. I keep asking for some good fortune. That's it. A little bit of money. That's it. My father, he swept up the floor in a factory like Olstead's, those fuckas wouldn't even give him a union card. But he woke up every morning at four A.M. because he wanted a job in the steel factory, it was the American way, so he swept fucking floors thinking, "One day they'll let me in." I know how he feels, people