

EXT. DESERT GAS STATION - DAY

A lone pump island waits on the edge of the highway. Starting out as a shiny dot in the distance, the Volvo pulls off the road toward us. By the time it comes to a stop at the gas pumps, its windshield fills our frame. There's Walt, behind the wheel just like in the final shot of the Teaser.

After twenty-some hours of driving, all that New Hampshire snow which covered the car has been replaced with red Southwestern dirt. (This Volvo, in case you didn't realize, is the same one from the Denny's in episode #501. Also, Walt has swapped his heavy parka for a familiar surplus jacket, and is now dressed exactly as he was in that flashforward.)

Walt cuts the engine and climbs out, stretching his stiff and aching muscles. He's exhausted, but he's not letting that stop him. He's a lone Blues Brother, minus the sunglasses -- on a mission from God.

CLUNK! CLOSE ON the gas inlet as a PUMP NOZZLE gets slammed home and clicked on.

As the Volvo's tank fills, Walt notes a nearby water hose -- the kind they keep by the air pump so that folks can fill their radiators. Walt starts it dribbling and splashes some water in his face. COUGHING a bit now, he pats his pockets. Where did I stash my meds..?

Walt keys open his trunk -- revealing that it is absolutely BRIMMING WITH CASH. Here are the entire contents of that barrel, and just barely. Seems Walt stopped by his cabin and packed a few choice items before he hit the open road.

There's a bit of room left over for a black overnight bag (again, something we established in #501), and Walt fishes in it for an amber PILL BOTTLE. He shuts the trunk, pops a pill and washes it down with water sipped from the radiator hose.

By the way, there's no danger of anybody seeing this money. The only person for miles is a clerk inside the Kwik-E-Mart. And Walt is parked on the opposite side of the pump from him.

EXT. DESERT GAS STATION - PAY PHONE - DAY

A minute or two later. CLOSE ON QUARTERS getting shoveled in the coin slot of a sandblasted old pay phone. Walt is finished pumping gas and stands here by the front window of the Kwik-E-Mart, the receiver to his ear. A beat, then:

WALT

Hi, this is David Linn from the New York Times. May I speak to Susan?
Thank you.

Cool Walt peruses a hangnail, then blandly stares off at the horizon. The hell's he up to?

Also, note the twenty-something CLERK who mans this place. Bored out of his skull, he glances out the plate glass at Walt, giving him a once-over. Walt doesn't see this, as the kid is behind him.

Uh-oh. What's that mild frown? Does this young clerk recognize Walt? Well... probably not. He eventually wanders off out of sight, in no particular hurry.

WALT (CONT'D)

Hi, Susan, it's David again. I was just calling to see if --
(listens)

No, I figured we'd do the interview by phone, seeing as they're no longer in the city. But we'd really love a photo of Mr. and Mrs. Schwartz. You know, to go along with the article. We've got a stringer out of Albuquerque who we like a lot. When are they scheduled to return home? Think maybe we could --

(listens)

Tonight? Are they still at, uh... the address I have is Upper Canyon Road. Are they --

(listens)

Bishops Lodge. Got it. Okay, lemme call my photographer, check out his availability.

Meanwhile, that clerk who was in the window? He's BACK. And he does recognize Walt! The look on his face is one of fear and fascination... and it's tickling the back of Walt's neck.

Walt glances over his shoulder, notes the kid -- who, eyes going wider, slowly shrinks back out of sight.

Is Walt concerned or distracted by this? Nope.

WALT (CONT'D)

No, no, their call. We're at their disposal. I know the Schwartzes are very busy people.

(MORE)

WALT (CONT'D)

Listen, thank you so much for your time. You too. Bye-bye.

Whatever this is, it doesn't sound like good news for Gretchen and Elliott. Walt hangs up. Keeps staring off at the horizon, the gas station store behind him. Oh, well. Time to go see what we shall see.

He wanders over and pulls the door. It opens with a JINGLE.

INT. GAS STATION KWIK-E-MART - CONTINUOUS

The clerk is back behind his register counter, in full-on Sergeant Schultz mode (I know nothing, I see nothing). Walt nods to him as he enters.

WALT

Howya doing?

The kid manages a nod in return. He thinks he's playing it cool, but he isn't. Walt glances up at a SECURITY CAMERA mounted high in one corner. He moves deeper into the store to do a little shopping.

Walt makes a brief, unrushed circuit, stocking up on bottles of water, chips, energy bars and granola bars. He considers a six-pack on Ensure, silently debating its merits. As he does, he shoots a glance at the clerk.

Again, he catches the guy eyeing him. The clerk looks away, instantly finding fascination in rearranging the Tic Tacs. Hoisting the Ensure, Walt makes his way to the counter.

Walt sets down his purchases one by one. There's no attitude here, he's not meaning to intimidate... but his gaze stays fixed on the clerk. The young guy mechanically rings it all up, handling Fritos and granola bars like they were TNT.

What is it about this kid? Walt studies his face, frowning. It's as if he's familiar. But why?

WALT (CONT'D)

What's the damage?

The young clerk avoids Walt's eyes like the plague.

CLERK

Thirty-eight eighteen.

Walt peels off two twenties. The guy manages to drop a bunch of coins while he's making change. They CLINK and ROLL and SPIN on the floor. He squats to pick them up... which makes him feel even more vulnerable.

He's got kind of a nervous Kilroy-thing going on down there with his eyes just cresting the edge of the counter.

He rises again, offers Walt his change. His hands are practically shaking. Walt pockets his money.

WALT

How about a bag, maybe?

CLERK

We got plastic. Is that okay?

WALT

Yeah, plastic. Plastic's good.

The clerk fumbles with the bags, struggling to peel one loose. Walt once again considers the SECURITY CAMERA over their heads. As this counter is ground zero for any robbery, the camera is pointed at them both.

Walt looks from it to the clerk -- whose nametag says "BILL." And suddenly, it dawns on Walt. He figures it out.

WALT (CONT'D)

Ah. Yes.

(then)

Bill, you know who I am, right?

BILL

(not looking up)

No.

WALT

You do, Bill. You know who I am. Since I know who you are, it only stands to reason. How else could you recognize me so quickly?

(off silent Bill)

Bill Cohen. Billy. You were in my Chemistry One class back in... I wanna say... 2004?

BILL

(still not looking up)

I don't, uh... I mean, I wasn't. So, I don't know who you are.

WALT

(losing patience)

C'mon, Bill.

BILL
(still not looking up)
I don't know who you are, I really
don't. And maybe there's some
other guy named Bill, so...

With that, Walt reaches inside his coat -- like for a GUN.
At that exact moment, Bill most definitely looks up.

BILL (CONT'D)
Y-You don't have to do that.

But instead of a gun, Walt comes out with... a crisp, wrapped
stack of CASH. He sets it down on the counter between them.

WALT
Bill. That right there is ten
thousand dollars. It says so right
on the wrapper. That is a stack of
one hundred hundred dollar bills.

BILL
Okay.

WALT
Far as I'm concerned, once I leave
this store, that is yours to keep.
But I foresee one pitfall.
(points to it)
Does that camera work?

BILL
No.

WALT
Of course it works, Bill -- why on
earth would it be there? But I'll
bet you don't have access to it.
Only your boss...?
(off scared Bill)
Bill, you don't have access.

BILL
No.

WALT
No, you don't. So, once I leave
and you call the police, they're
gonna come, they're gonna interview
you -- all very exciting -- and
then they're gonna get your boss to
show them that security tape.
(MORE)

WALT (CONT'D)

And when they do, and they see there used to be ten thousand dollars right here on this countertop...

(tap-taps it)

You see the pitfall, Bill?

Bill nods. He's starting to.

WALT (CONT'D)

You see the pitfall. They're gonna ask you for it. They're gonna claim it's "evidence."

Walt shrugs -- bullshit, right? Stupid cops. He gathers his bag and starts for the door, leaving Bill to do the math.

A thought strikes Walt and he turns back.

WALT (CONT'D)

Now, to be fair -- they are offering a million dollar reward for information leading to my capture.

(then)

But that's what gamblers call "long money."

Bill gets the message loud and clear. One glance at this fearful, dry-mouthed clerk tells us he ain't calling NOBODY.

Walt starts out again... then pauses once more. Something's nagging at him. He simply must ask.

WALT (CONT'D)

Bill, what kind of a teacher was I?

BILL

What kind of a..?

WALT

Was I any good? A good teacher?

BILL

Good, yeah. Great teacher.

WALT

What do you remember from my class?

(Bill ponders)

Just... one thing. Name something.

Owing to the fact this could mean life or death for him, young Bill really wracks his brain.

BILL

That time you sprayed the chemicals in the fire. In, like, the Bunsen burner. And it made the fire turn green and red.

WALT

Yeah. Yeah.

(recalls fondly; then)

What did you learn from that?

BILL

That... chemicals change the fire color.

Oka-ay. Some of the air goes out of Walt -- not that Bill's answer surprises him. No, Walt realized two years ago what it is he's truly destined for. And it isn't teaching.

WALT

You gonna remember what you learned here today?

Bill gives a grave nod. Yes, sir. Yes, indeed. Walt considers, crooks a finger back at the ten grand in cash.

WALT (CONT'D)

Spend it wisely, son. That could change your life.

With that, he's out the door and gone. Bill shuts his eyes, breathes a ragged sigh of relief... and does not pick up the phone. Off Bill, nervously eyeing all that lovely money: