# In the Red

by James Elwood

(Based on, "In the Red" by Dan Elwood 2003)

FADE IN:

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Two BOYS, about seventeen years old, are limping, and helping each other walk. They are BRANDON and MATT. Their faces are beaten to a pulp, with black eyes and bloody noses.

BRANDON (V.O.) I suppose you want a story, you're wondering how this could have happened to us. I guess I should tell you, maybe you won't make the same mistakes I made.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

BRANDON gets out of the drivers seat of his car and slams the door. The car is kind of old. Roughly a 1995 model. He sprints to the back door of his friend's house.

FREEZE FRAME: BRANDON FROM UPPER TORSO TO HEAD

BRANDON (V.O.) That's me, Brandon McCallister, on what was supposed to be the pinnacle of my teenage years. The day I got my license. I didn't know it was gonna result in more bad than good as early as the first day. Well, at least I didn't crash.

He slams on the door frantically until he gives up and opens the door himself. He rushes in.

BRANDON Guess who's officially licensed to drive upon these roads.

His friend, MATT, looks at him annoyed.

FREEZE FRAME: MATT

BRANDON (V.O.) That's Matt. My best friend in the whole world! Ugh, I guess he was, before all this. I'm not not friends with him, I don't know right now, let's just say things are different. Whatever, you'll understand.

MATT Sure, come on in.

BRANDON Answer's me by the way.

# MATT

Let's see it.

Brandon pulls out his drivers license and hands it to Matt.

# CLOSE UP: BRANDON'S DRIVER'S LICENSE

The driver's license has the goofiest picture of Brandon Matt's ever seen.

MATT Ugh. Look at that, a face only a mother could love.

BRANDON I thought it was alright.

MATT Cory Feldman would be rolling over in his grave.

BRANDON Whatever. Bet it's better than yours.

Matt takes out his license and shows Brandon.

Brandon pulls five dollars out of his pocket and gives it to Matt.

BRANDON

Damnit.

MATT It's a deal, but this license... It could be our golden ticket!

BRANDON It's funny that MY license is OUR golden ticket.

MATT Okay, there's this game Saturday.

# FREEZE FRAME: MATT

BRANDON (V.O.) I guess I should have told you before, Matt has what we call a gambling problem. He's obsessed. He's obsessed with all of it, card games, races, sporting events, the whole lifestyle. That's not even why it's a problem. The problem is, he's never *really* gambled. He just always talks about it.

# INT. - CARD ROOM - FLASHBACK

Matt being taught how to play cards by an older kid. The kid is his older brother BILLY.

BRANDON (CONT'D) Matt's always strived to be like his older brother Billy. Billy hit the ultimate jackpot, winning \$10,000 on a lottery ticket on his eighteenth birthday. Ever since then Matt's been obsessed with gambling. He ignores the fact that Billy lost all of his winnings within eight months, with bets that didn't quite go his way. Matt says that won't ever happen to him because he has, quote, "the Luck of the Irish." I was never sure that'd pay off for him, really, because he's German.

BACK TO MATT

MATT

Will you stop zoning out?

BRANDON

Sorry, go ahead.

MATT

There's a game on Saturday, Auburn-Alabama. Alabama's the underdog, if we put down \$5,000, there's no telling how much we'd get back.

BRANDON

(Pause) I've got a better idea. Now, I'm just spitballin' here, how's about, it's crazy, just hear me out, rather than me giving you any money... You just leave me out of it.

MATT Won't work.

BRANDON I won't even be jealous when you win all your money.

MATT I appreciate your lack of envy, but it won't work.

BRANDON Why not?

MATT Won't work, I need your license.

BRANDON

Why?

MATT Proof of Identification and social security number.

BRANDON Then we wouldn't be able to do it anyway, you don't have your license.

Matt reaches for Brandon's license.

MATT That's where this guy comes into play.

BRANDON You want to make a bet... In my name?

MATT Not your name... both our names.

BRANDON Even split between us, we don't have \$5,000.

MATT It doesn't matter dude, It's a lock. We're gonna win so we don't have to pay anything, we just sit back and collect.

BRANDON I dunno man, um, I'll think about it.

INT. BRANDON'S ROOM - DAY

Brandon paces frantically in his room, looking at notes of the game. He sits on his bed and puts his head in his hands.

EXT. MATT'S BACK DOOR - DAY

Brandon is knocking at Matt's back door rapidly. Matt opens.

MATT I HAVE a doorbell.

They go inside.

BRANDON That's fine, I'll just knock.

MATT Alright, what's up?

BRANDON

I figure since I trust you, I might as well just go all out.

MATT

Best decision of your life.

BRANDON

Yeah, whatever, but my only issue is why are we goin' with the underdog? Why don't we play it safe? It's our first time.

MATT

Well, I was originally goin' with the "high risk, high reward" way of thinking but there's new details.

BRANDON What do we got?

MATT

Okay, Auburn's favored to win by 25.5 points, which is a ridiculous spread anyway, but their starting runningback blew out his knee in practice. So I don't think they're gonna put up 26 with a backup, when they're a predominately run based offense.

BRANDON Are you serious?

MATT

Yeah.

BRANDON Alright, I'm definitely in.

MATT Good, 'cause I placed the bet.

BRANDON

You scumbag.

MATT

Well I got scared doing it by myself. Besides, game's a lock.

The two boys are sitting on Matt's couch. They're waiting for the big game to begin.

MATT You think, like, when they pay us, they can pay me in predominately gold coins?

BRANDON No, I really don't think that. But you're supposed to be the one who knows that stuff.

MATT Maybe if I ask real nice.

#### BRANDON

Well, they make those \$1 gold coins, why don't you just go to the bank and trade in like a \$20 in for some of them?

MATT I'd need more than that.

BRANDON Why? What are you doing?

MATT

I wanna figure out like, a Scrooge McDuck bathtub situation.

#### BRANDON

Like frolic in a bathtub of gold coins?

MATT To an extent. I figure I'd have to fill it manually, instead of like, changing the plumbing in my house.

BRANDON I don't think it'd work like a cartoon.

MATT Yeah, I wouldn't be able to do the whole back stroke thing, but...

BRANDON So you'd essentially be sitting in a bathtub... With gold coins on you.

Yeah.

MATT

# THREE HOURS LATER:

The screen goes black and the words THREE HOURS LATER appear on the screen.

The boys are staring at the television with their jaws open in disbelief.

TV ANNOUNCER 1 Who would have thought it! The Auburn Tigers had a hidden gem at backup runningback! 289 all purpose yards on the day as The Tigers roll over the Alabama Crimson tide, 56 to nothing!

TV ANNOUNCER 2 Alls I have to say Johnny, is, those of you out there that bet on the Crimson Tide when Auburn's number one guy went down... SHAME ON YOU!

Matt has his head down in his hands. Brandon is still staring.

MATT Turn it off.

Brandon turns the TV off.

Matt picks his head up violently.

MATT

Dude, Think about it. These guys deal with hundreds, maybe thousands of bets a day, and probably billions of dollars. \$5,000 is like pocket change to them. It'll probably be a few months before we actually hear anything, and a few months after that before we actually have to pay. We'll have time to raise the money, don't worry about it.

The phone rings.

BRANDON You think that's...

Matt nods.

Matt picks up the phone.

There is a deep voice at the other end.

MAN ON PHONE

Hello?

Matt nods.

BRANDON Dude, talk, mouth.

MATT Oh, uh, hello.

MAN ON PHONE Hello, am I speaking to either Matt Krussenhoff, or Brandon McCallister?

MATT (choking on words) Yes.

MAN ON PHONE Do you have our \$5,000?

MATT (panicking) Um.. Can you hang on?

Matt begins whistling GIRL FROM IMPANEMA

He looks to Brandon and motions for advice.

BRANDON (Whispering) Dude, just tell 'em we don't have it. Maybe they'll give us a grace period or something.

Matt nods head and gives thumbs up in approval.

He stops whistling.

MATT Well uh, funny story. The thing is... We uh, we don't have the money.

MAN ON PHONE I don't find that story at all amusing. You have only...

Call waiting sound beeps, causing Matt to miss how many days the man said.

...days to get the money. We're sending MING THE MERCILESS to your school to collect the money. You better have it.

MATT Wait! How many days to we...

MAN ON PHONE (cutting him off) Good luck.

He hangs up the phone.

MATT (sigh) ...have.

BRANDON So uh.. We screwed?

MATT

We seem to be.

BRANDON What's the deal?

MATT

Well, as you may know, we do not have the requested \$5,000, and they uh, they noticed, and they're sending an intimidating sounding figure to our school, on an undisclosed date, to collect the money... that we don't have.

BRANDON Undisclosed date?

MATT I got the call waiting noise when he said it!

BRANDON

Who was it?

MATT

Who cares?

BRANDON Maybe they had \$5,000!

MATT We don't know anyone with an extra \$5,000!

BRANDON Alright, what're we gonna do?

MATT I dunno, I'll talk to Billy, I'm sure he knows the guy, he's like an expert.

BRANDON What's the guys name? MATT It's like, Ming the Merciless.

BRANDON That's probably THE most intimidating name I've ever heard.

MATT

That's what I was thinking, he sounds legit. But this is gonna probably be the most important week of our young, yet flourishing lives. I wanna see you early on Monday. Real early, like right when the doors open. Go straight to the MATH hallway, and meet me at my locker. We need to plan our whole day, CAREFULLY.

BRANDON Aren't we not allowed in the halls that early?

MATT We'll be fine.

INT. MATT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Matt's sitting in his room. He picks up his drawn out plan of Scrooge McDuck's gold filled bathtub. He looks at it for a few seconds, shakes his head and crumples it up. He throws the crumpled piece of paper in his trash can at his feet.

BLACK SCREEN:

In white MONDAY appears.

INT. ENGLISH WING - MORNING

Matt approaches Brandon at his locker. He taps his shoulder.

Brandon jumps.

BRANDON HOLY CRAP! Don't get me all hyped up with your "avoid big scary Ming, the Grandma killing Asian character" junk, then sneak up on me like that.

# FREEZE FRAME: BRANDON

BRANDON (V.O.) Alright, Matt called me about 40 times the day before, not to mention talking on the computer and the 16 E-mails. Apparently ,pohe heard from his brother Billy that Ming once killed his own grandmother for owing him \$20. I would have been annoyed, but I decided to show leniency given the situation. But now in our heads, knowing but one detail about the man, we became self proclaimed experts on him.

MATT Sorry. But hey, you were supposed to be meeting me, not the other way around.

BRANDON Does it matter?

MATT Not at this point. But this week, we need to be ridiculously careful. Especially when we're not together.

MR. ST. MARTIN steps out of his classroom and approaches the boys.

MR. ST. MARTIN What're you boys doing out here? Get down stairs or I'm giving you detention.

BRANDON Hey Mr. St. Martin. Can you let it slide just this once? It's important.

MR. ST. MARTIN I can, but I probably won't. I really don't like breaking the rules.

MATT Please, Mr. St. Martin? We're under extreme circumstances.

MR. ST. MARTIN Like what?

MATT Um.. We really can't say.

BRANDON It wouldn't feel right. MR. ST. MARTIN It does sound important. Maybe just this once.

MS. LERNER appears over Mr. St. Martin's shoulder.

MS. LERNER What's going on over here?

MR. ST. MARTIN (startled) Nothing! Just giving this little punks some detention.

He begins frantically writing up hours for the two boys.

MS. LERNER That's what I thought, just making sure. It's against the rules to be up here this early. They should know that.

Ms. Lerner exits.

MR. ST. MARTIN Well, here are your hours.

He hands the boys a pink slip each.

MATT Are you serious?

BRANDON You said you weren't gonna!

MR. ST. MARTIN You're right, but then I said I was writing them, so I did write them. Don't try to make a liar out of me. Okay, I'm not gonna give you real hours, just report to my room at 2:05.

INT. - CLASSROOM - DAY

Brandon is in class. He clearly needs to use the bathroom and is holding it in. He has his fists clenched and his legs pinched together. The TEACHER approaches him.

> TEACHER Is there a problem Brandon?

BRANDON Um, no, well, yes, I really, really need to go to the bathroom.

TEACHER You can go, write out a pass. Why didn't you just ask? Um, (waving her closer) Can you come with me?

INT. - ST. MARTIN'S ROOM - AFTER SCHOOL

The two boys are sitting in detention, talking to each other.

MATT How'd you get through today?

BRANDON Well, I almost peed myself, but I'm still alive.

MATT That's cool. I had an idea. Ming the Merciless is probably huge. I mean, they wouldn't send some little dude in to kill two kids.

BRANDON So be on the look out for anyone huge?

MATT More or less.

St. Martin pokes his head in the doorway.

MR. ST. MARTIN Hey, pipe down in here. You guys just got yourselves detention for the rest of the week.

BLACK SCREEN:

In white TUESDAY appears.

INT. - CLASSROOM - DAY

Matt and Brandon are in the same class together. They're sitting next to each other.

A LARGE MAN enter's the room. He is about five foot seven, has short brown hair, and a black eye patch. He walks over to the teacher. He is asking her questions regarding some students. He points toward Matt and Brandon. Matt and Brandon notice and are visibly scared by it. They can't hear what he is saying. CLOSE UP: MATT'S FACE

MATT

Ming.

The man walks over to Matt and Brandon.

He bends over, hands on hips, peering into their eyes.

He straightens up, and walks away.

MAN I think I've seen all I need here.

The man exits.

INT. HALLWAY- CONTINUOUS

MAN Wait, (Looks at notepad) If this is Walpole...

The man sprints down the hall.

INT. - ST. MARTIN'S ROOM - AFTER SCHOOL

The boys are sitting in the second day of Mr. St. Martin's detention.

BRANDON I dunno man, that short fella kinda gave me the creeps.

MATT Wasn't him.

BRANDON How do you know?

MATT I thought he was. But he isn't. Ming's Asian.

BRANDON What do you mean?

MATT Of Oriental decent.

BRANDON 'Cause of his name? Dude, I don't wanna profile. MATT Why, you don't wanna hurt our killer's feelings?

BRANDON No, I don't wanna offend our... Not killer.

MATT You'll profile the short guy, just 'cause he's short, but not when someone's Asian.

BRANDON You don't choose to be Asian.

MATT You choose to be short?

Brandon rolls his eyes, knowing he's been defeated in the argument.

BRANDON Alright, I'll keep my eyes open for any Asian guys.

BLACK SCREEN:

In white WEDNESDAY appears.

INT. - CLASSROOM - DAY

Brandon and Matt are sitting next to each other in the same class as last time. This time, An ASIAN BOY enters the room and hands the teacher a note.

TEACHER Everybody listen. We have a new student today! His name is...

The teacher looks at the note.

Matt and Brandon are freaking out, they're both shifting nervously in their chairs, almost ready to sprint out of the room.

TEACHER (CONT'D) You're gonna have to help me out with this one.

The new student gives a funny look to the teacher.

ASIAN BOY It's John Smith. TEACHER Wow, interesting. And you come all the way from...

JOHN Uh... Newton North.

TEACHER Fascinating. Why don't you take a seat over there by Matt and Brandon.

Matt and Brandon's hands immediately go up.

TEACHER What is it, you two?

MATT AND BRANDON Can we move?

TEACHER

I don't believe you two. At this day in age. Typical Americans! Not wanting to sit with a boy JUST because he's Chinese!

MATT AND BRANDON No, it's not so much that...

TEACHER I don't want to hear it! You should be honored to sit with a Chinese boy. (...)

JOHN I'm uh, I'm Taiwanese.

TEACHER The Chinese have brought us so much. (...)

The camera changes shot angle after each thing that the teacher lists.

TEACHER The Compass, Silk, tattoos, gun powder, Bamboo, Sony, Yao Ming's like the tallest guy in the NBA, ninjas, pork fried rice,I've heard great things about that Bhuddah guy, Toshiba, the wok, Keanau Reeves is like half Chinese.

The teacher keeps ranting, as John goes and sits in the vacant seat by the boys.

JOHN Hey, I'm John. MATT We know who you are Ming.

JOHN

Huh?

BRANDON Ignore him, I'm Brandon.

JOHN Did he just call me Ming? Is everyone at this school racist?

Brandon shakes his head.

TEACHER And last time I checked, there's no Great Wall of America.

# INT. BRANDON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Brandon is pacing in his room.

BRANDON (V.O.) With the week over half-way done, and us still alive we considered ourselves both lucky and scared. We knew Ming was coming. We were running out of time, but we still didn't know what the guy looked like, which made it way harder for us to avoid him. We were starting to have ridiculous thoughts on who Ming might be.

INTERCUT BETWEEN MATT'S ROOM AND BRANDON'S ROOM

BRANDON Ming's inside us. We're all Ming.

MATT Brandon's Ming.

BRANDON Ming is our fear.

MATT That's why he agreed to make the bet.

BRANDON Without fear, there is no Ming.

MATT He want's all the money to himself. Well he's not seeing a dime.

BRANDON There is no Ming.

MATT I'm TAKING HIM OUT!

BLACK SCREEN:

In white WEDNESDAY appears.

INT. - HALLWAY - BEFORE SCHOOL

Brandon's at his locker. Heavy footsteps approach. Brandon takes a step back and closes his locker. He finally looks up to see the where the footsteps are coming from. Directly as he looks up he is tackled by a running Matt.

BRANDON

(pinned on the ground) I'm sure you have an excellent reason as to why you're pinning me on he ground, and I'd love to hear it, really, I would, but I think I'd enjoy the story even more standing up.

MATT (pinning Brandon) I know you're behind the whole thing!

Matt gets off of Brandon. Brandon brushes himself off.

BRANDON You're absolutely right. I am behind the whole thing. I'm as behind it as you are, on our side... With you.

MATT

But you're Ming.

BRANDON I'm letting this go. Because last night I led myself to believe that thère was no Ming.

MATT

At all?

BRANDON

At all.

MATT

That's dumb.

BRANDON

I know.

MATT Like, really dumb.

BRANDON

It was dumb.

MATT That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard.

BRANDON

I get it.

MATT I almost hate you now. I used to like you, now I'm close to hating you.

BRANDON

Great.

MATT That's how dumb that was.

EXT. - SCHOOL - BEGINNING OF DAY

Students are filing into their classrooms.

BRANDON (V.O.) My little encounter with Matt before school distracted us from the very real fact that Ming was indeed coming. It didn't take long for that fact to hit us.

INT. - ST. MARTIN'S ROOM - AFTER SCHOOL

The two boys are sitting in detention, talking to each other. Matt is wearing an old, blue, hood-less Auburn sweatshirt.

MATT Okay, I've seen no signs of Ming today, have you heard anything?

BRANDON Yeah, I heard all kinds of things. I just chose not to tell you anything about it until you asked. I actually met the guy. He was pretty nice.

MATT You're lying to me.

BRANDON

I am.

MATT

This is a time of crisis... And you make time for jokes. Our lives are on the line, and you're making a light hearted attempt at humor. I WISH I was that ignorant.

BRANDON What do you mean by that?!

Matt stands up.

MATT Why do you always think I mean stuff by things!?

Brandon stands up.

BRANDON You're the one ignorant enough to make a \$5,000 bet with \$5 to your name!

MATT That was your idea!

BRANDON Are you kidding?

MATT You came to my house with your license, all excited to finally be able to bet on a game!

BRANDON (Now getting as upset as Matt) You're making up your memories!

MATT And we had to bet on Auburn 'cause you're such a huge fan. That's why

you're such a huge fan. That's why you wear that stupid shirt all the time.

BRANDON We bet on ALABAMA! That's why we freakin' lost you idiot. Are you stupid?

MATT Holy crap, you're right.

Matt sits down, he has a loss for words as he realizes how real the situation has become.

FREEZE FRAME: THE TWO BOYS SITTING

BRANDON (V.O.) Matt realized, that no matter how hard his brain may try, he can't change what happened. This was all very real and all we could do now was let the pieces fall into place.

CLOCK: 3:00

MATT Okay, it's 3 O'clock. Let's just leave now, so we can get out.

BRANDON Dude, wait five minutes, St. Martin'll let us leave.

MATT

I'm not waiting, this five minutes could be the difference between life and death. Let's just go, if we get more hours we'll deal with it.

Brandon shakes his head as he gets up from his desk.

The two boys pick up their backpacks and leave.

INT. - BASEMENT HALLWAY, BY BOILER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The boys exit the elevator on the basement level. They start walking towards the closed door at the end of the hallway.

FREEZE FRAME: THE TWO BOYS EXITING THE ELEVATOR

BRANDON (V.O.) With my car parked by the cafeteria, we chose the wrong day to attempt a shortcut.

The two boys reach the end of the hallway. Matt attempts to turn the handle and fails.

MATT It's locked.

A dark figure approaches behind them. We see the back of the man but not his face.

FIGURE Matt Krussenhoff and Brandon McCallister?

The two boys pick their heads up in unison.

The camera cuts back and forth between Matt and the figure staring each other down.

The figure looks Greek, and not the least bit Asian.

The theme from "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly" is being whistled.

Matt nudges Brandon, who was the one whistling.

BRANDON

Sorry.

MATT Ming the Merciless? Dude, we're really sorry please don't hurt us.

The boys fall to their knees.

BRANDON I'm sorry that your dynasty failed!

MATT Listen, Ming, uh... Mr. uh, the Merciless.

FIGURE I'm confused. What do you keep calling me?

BRANDON Ming the Merciless?

FIGURE Haha. Wait a minute, was there a really deep voice that you spoke over the phone with?

MATT

Yeah.

FIGURE That's Larry's fault, he can never pronounce my name. It's Mina Thamerceles. It's Greek. So do you have the money or not?

BRANDON That's the thing, we uh, we don't.

MATT Please don't kill us, we're too young to die.

THAMERCELES (Laughing) I'm not going to kill you. How much money do you have?

The two boys reach in their pockets and collect all their loose change. It equals 79 cents.

BRANDON We got 79 cents.

THAMERCELES I would have liked a little bit more.

Thamerceles pulls out a note book and writes down he number.

THAMERCELES Seventy nine cents. Alright, what we're gonna do is put you two on a payment plan.

MATT That's it?

THAMERCELES

That's it. I mean I could kill you if you like, but I prefer not to, too messy.

BRANDON (laughing uncomfortably) Well, I guess we'll pass on the killing for today.

THAMERCELES You two might want to think about getting jobs, getting the payments done quickly.

MATT

We will.

INT. BOTTOM OF BASEMENT STAIRWELL BY SIDE EXIT

The boys are leaving side by side, talking and laughing, their faces show signs of relief. As the boys turn the corner, they notice Mr. St. Martin waiting at the top of the stairs.

# MR. ST. MARTIN

Hello boys.

Mr. St. Martin walks down the stairs.

MATT Mr. St. Martin, there you are.

MR. ST. MARTIN You guys thought you could just leave whenever you felt like it?

MATT Funny story actually, we had some business to take care of, you understand. MR. ST. MARTIN (very serious) Oh, I understand.

BRANDON (smile fades) We're probably gettin' more hours, huh?

MR. ST. MARTIN You think it's that easy? You think you can just take advantage of me, when I get you off the hook! I put my reputation with Miss Lerner on the LINE for you two! AND THIS IS HOW YOU RE-PAY ME?!

MATT Dude, calm down, we're sorry.

MR. ST. MARTIN Sorry doesn't cut it this time.

Mr. St. Martin pulls a 9 iron out of the back of his shirt. He pulls back and swings.

SMASH CUT: BLACK

EXT. SCHOOL

Brandon and Matt are limping and helping each other walk. Identical to the opening shot.

BRANDON (V.O.) I hope you weren't looking for a happy ending. But I'm glad it worked out the way it did. Our wounds will heal in time, but we learned a lesson.

MATT Dude... I think I know how we can pay the debt.

BRANDON Get Jobs?

MATT West Virginia plays Texas Tech tonight. Spread's 11.5.

BRANDON

I'm in.

FADE OUT: