

RED CARD

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

An intense game of football. Two teams—one in red, the other in blue.

JACK is the referee. Out of breath, he's struggling to keep up with the pace of the game.

The team in red has possession. One player charges into the opposing team's box. He's tackled—fairly—by a member of the blue team.

Jack's eyes grow wide. He rushes to put his whistle to his lips, pointing toward the penalty box.

JACK
Penalty.

Jack then pulls out a yellow card and gives it to the tackling blue player.

The other members of the blue team surround Jack, screaming and shouting. They're furious.

BLUE TEAM (O.S.)
"Cheat!"
"Bastard!"
"Wanker!"
"Fucking bullshit!"

FADE TO:

INT. GAMBLING DEN - DAY

JACK, hunched over, sits on a dirty overturned bucket. He grips a handwritten betting ticket with all his might, knuckles turning white.

This underground basement has no windows and only one door. A square room. One wall is littered with televisions of all shapes and sizes—some from the '80s, others modern flatscreens.

All of them show some kind of racing: horses, camels, pigs—even chickens.

The room is loud and frantic. Men gamble, scream, and shout at the screens.

Some are having the time of their lives. Most look utterly lost and miserable.

Jack stands, crunches up his ticket, and drops it to the floor.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - DAY

Jack stumbles out of a side door into a dirty, rubbish-filled alleyway.

He heads toward the street.

Two large men in long coats follow him out. Mean and intimidating. The kind who look like they enjoy fighting.

Jack glances back. Upon seeing them, he instantly gives up.

JACK

Fuck.

The two thugs grab an arm each. The taller one leans in close, right into Jack's ear.

TALL THUG

You've been a very naughty boy.

Jack closes his eyes, resigned to his fate.

JACK

I can't do this anymore. I'm so fucked.

They drag him back the way they came, forcing him through the door.

INT. MODERN OFFICE - DAY

Jack's face is battered and slashed. Broken nose. Split eyebrow.

He sits slumped on the floor, back against a plush sofa.

MR. BLACK, well-dressed in a three-piece suit with slicked-back hair, stands in front of him. A lit cigar in hand. He leans against a fancy glass-top desk.

MR. BLACK

You just couldn't stay away, could you?

JACK
I guess I've got a problem.

MR. BLACK
(mocking)
Just one more race, then I'll quit
gambling for good.

JACK
Wouldn't be much of an addiction if
it wasn't a hell of a lot of fun
while you're doing it.

Mr. Black studies Jack. Takes a long pull from his cigar.
Then holds up two fingers.

MR. BLACK
I want two red cards.

Jack puffs out his cheeks.

JACK
It's not possible. I'm going to
lose my licence anyway.

MR. BLACK
Two red cards. That's all I want.
You can referee the rest of the
game however you see fit.

JACK
I'm already being watched. I'm
under investigation. I might not
get another game.

MR. BLACK
You better hope you do. You owe me
a lot of money. Two red cards.
£2,500 each. That's £5,000 for one
game of football.

Jack considers. He holds his face in his hands, looking like
he wants to scream.

JACK
£10,000.

MR. BLACK
You're not in a position to
negotiate.

JACK
£10,000. Two red cards. For
£10,000, I'll do it. That's what I
owe you. Then me and you are done.

MR. BLACK
Two red cards before half an hour
is played.

JACK
Jesus. You don't make it easy.

MR. BLACK
Just do it.

JACK
Fine. Then I'll never have to see
you again.

MR. BLACK
You're an addict. You're
blacklisted from every legal
bookmaker. I'm all you've got.

JACK
No. After this, I'm done.

MR. BLACK
Fine. But if you don't give me
those red cards, I'll break your
legs.

JACK
(grinning)
Want to bet?

Mr. Black laughs.

MR. BLACK
Fucking addict.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Jack, looking much fresher and cleaner, has had his nose
reset and the cut on his eyebrow stitched closed.

Now dressed in matching white underpants and socks, he
whistles a happy tune to himself. He pulls out his freshly
washed and ironed, professional-looking referee's uniform and
lays it out on the bed behind him.

Then, from a box inside the cupboard, he fetches his whistle
and cards—both yellow and red.

Holding the red card, he poses in the mirror, brandishing it at imaginary players all around him.

JACK

\$10,000. That's all you've got to think about. Start a fight. Two red cards. \$10,000—easy money. You've done it before, you can do it again.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Jack, dressed in his referee uniform, zips up a long jacket as he enters the kitchen.

There at the table, watching and waiting for him, are Ellie and Tom. They're both leaning forward, grinning with huge, excited smiles.

Jack notices something is off instantly, and it puts him on edge.

He stops. Looks around the kitchen, then comes back to them. Chuckles nervously.

JACK

What?

ELLIE

Sit down.

JACK

I've got to set off soon.

ELLIE

You've got time to sit down.

Jack switches back and forth between Ellie and Tom. They're still staring and grinning at him in a way that says they know something he doesn't.

JACK

Should I be worried?

TOM

Dad, just sit down.

Jack reluctantly sits at the end of the table, slightly away from them.

JACK

Alright...

Tom pulls a black box from under the table—it had been resting on his lap. He places it on the table and slides it across to Jack.

TOM

Open it.

JACK

What is it?

TOM

It's a surprise.

JACK

(annoyed)

Alright, you two need to tell me what the hell is going on. I don't like surprises at the best of times.

ELLIE

(rolling her eyes)

Just open the goddamn box, Jack. Just play along.

Jack opens the box slowly.

JACK

I'm just under a lot of stress at the minute. I'm not feeling myself.

(to Tom)

You best not have knocked up any girl at school. If there are pregnancy pictures inside this box, I'm going to freak out.

The box is open. Inside is a flag, a whistle, and a football referee badge—everything someone would need to be a referee's assistant at a football match.

Jack stares at it.

A beat.

He knows what it is, but he doesn't understand why it's here.

JACK (CONT'D)

What is this? I don't need any of this.

Ellie and Tom both laugh.

ELLIE

Guess again.

TOM

It's mine.

Jack now locks eyes with Tom, a deep frown.

JACK

What?

TOM

I passed. I got my licence. My first game. I'm one of your assistants. How cool is that?

ELLIE

We wanted to keep it a secret for as long as we could. But seeing how the game is kicking off in a couple of hours, probably best to tell you now.

JACK

(furious)

Over my dead body.

Ellie and Tom are both shocked by this reaction. But they know he's not joking.

TOM

Dad...

JACK

(louder)

Over my dead body.

ELLIE

Jack...

JACK

(even louder)

Over my dead body.

TOM

Dad, I want to do this.

JACK

Okay. Ball hits the ref, stays in play, and leads directly to a goal. What then?

TOM

Drop ball. Ref's considered part of play unless it leads to a goal, change of possession, or a promising attack.

Jack leans back, nodding slowly.

JACK

Keeper comes off his line during a penalty kick, but the ball misses the target. What do you do?

TOM

Retake. Encroachment by the keeper affects the outcome—even if it's a miss.

Jack stares at him. A long beat.

JACK

I don't care. It's a no.

Tom is crushed. He gathers the box, puts the lid back on, and leaves the kitchen.

Ellie reaches over and grabs Jack's arm, digging her nails in hard.

ELLIE

What the hell is wrong with you?

JACK

He's not being part of this game. No way. He isn't doing this. Not a chance.

ELLIE

He just wants to be like you.

Jack laughs bitterly.

JACK

You think being a referee is fun? It's nothing but abuse.

ELLIE

I've put up with a lot of shit from you. This is your son's dream. Hell, I tried to talk him out of it—but it's his dream. Now, you can either let him follow it, or you can get the fuck out of his house.

JACK

Ellie...

ELLIE

He looks up to you. You're his hero.

(MORE)

ELLIE (CONT'D)

For some men, that's a dream come true. But no. You have to be a fucking asshole about it. Surprise, surprise.

JACK

(softly)

Maybe I don't want him to be anything like me. He shouldn't be aiming so low.

ELLIE

Tough.

(She takes a deep breath
to steady herself)

Now, you've got a game to referee.
Both of you.

INT. JACK'S CAR - DAY

Jack drives. Tom sits beside him, head down, looking angry and betrayed.

Jack glances over a few times.

JACK

Are you going to talk to me?

Tom stays silent.

Jack pulls the car over and slams the brakes. A sudden stop.

JACK (CONT'D)

Why the hell would you want to be a referee?

TOM

You're a referee.

JACK

That's not a good enough reason.

TOM

Since I was little, I watched you do this. Now I want to. I just want to.

JACK

And I can't talk you out of it?

TOM

No.

JACK

You know what people say about me,
right?

TOM

I don't care.

JACK

That I'm a cheat. That I'm scum.
Abuse for the whole game. And the
more successful you are, the more
people chant your name and scream
at you in the street. You want
that?

TOM

I want to do what you do.

JACK

I might lose my job.

TOM

You're the best and bravest referee
I've ever seen. Why is it so bad
that I want to be like that?

JACK

Because I want better for you.

TOM

This is what I want. And to have my
first professional game alongside
you—I thought that would mean
something.

JACK

It does.

TOM

Then why doesn't it feel like it?

Jack takes a few slow, deep breaths. He needs a moment.

JACK

And what if I am a cheat? What if
what everyone says is true?

TOM

I'll never believe it.

JACK

Why?

TOM
Because you're my dad.

Jack laughs, despite himself.

JACK
You really look up to me that much?

TOM
Yes.

JACK
I hated my dad. Hated him.

TOM
Well, I don't have him as my dad. I have you.

Jack puts his head in his hands.

JACK
Your first professional game.

TOM
My first.

JACK
And there's no way of talking you out of this?

Tom shakes his head.

TOM
(determined)
I want to be a referee like you.
And I want to reach the very top.

Jack starts the engine.

JACK
Then I guess I'd better not blow this for you.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Jack, still in his referee uniform, is sweaty and out of breath. He's come straight from the game.

Mr. Black stands with his two thugs flanking him, staring hard.

MR. BLACK
One yellow card. No reds. You're a naughty boy.

JACK
Yeah. Good game though.

Mr. Black shrugs.

MR. BLACK
Is that what people are saying?

JACK
The crowd chanted that I was a wanker for ninety minutes. But both teams said I had a good game. That I was fair. I haven't heard that in a long time.

Mr. Black signals. The thugs grab Jack and pin him against the sofa.

From behind his desk, Mr. Black picks up a large mallet. He walks over, takes aim.

MR. BLACK
You remember what I said?

Jack nods.

MR. BLACK (CONT'D)
Say it.

Jack tries to be brave, but he's clearly afraid.

JACK
Two red cards before the half-hour mark—or you'd break my legs.

Mr. Black looks puzzled.

MR. BLACK
And you didn't do it. Even after you promised.

JACK
Well, I also made a promise to someone else. And they're a lot more important than you.

MR. BLACK
I honestly thought you'd be more afraid.

JACK
I am. But I guess...

MR. BLACK
Guess what?

Jack chuckles nervously.

JACK
I guess I've had this coming.

Mr. Black raises the mallet.

FADE TO BLACK

CRUNCH.

Jack screams in agony.

THE END.