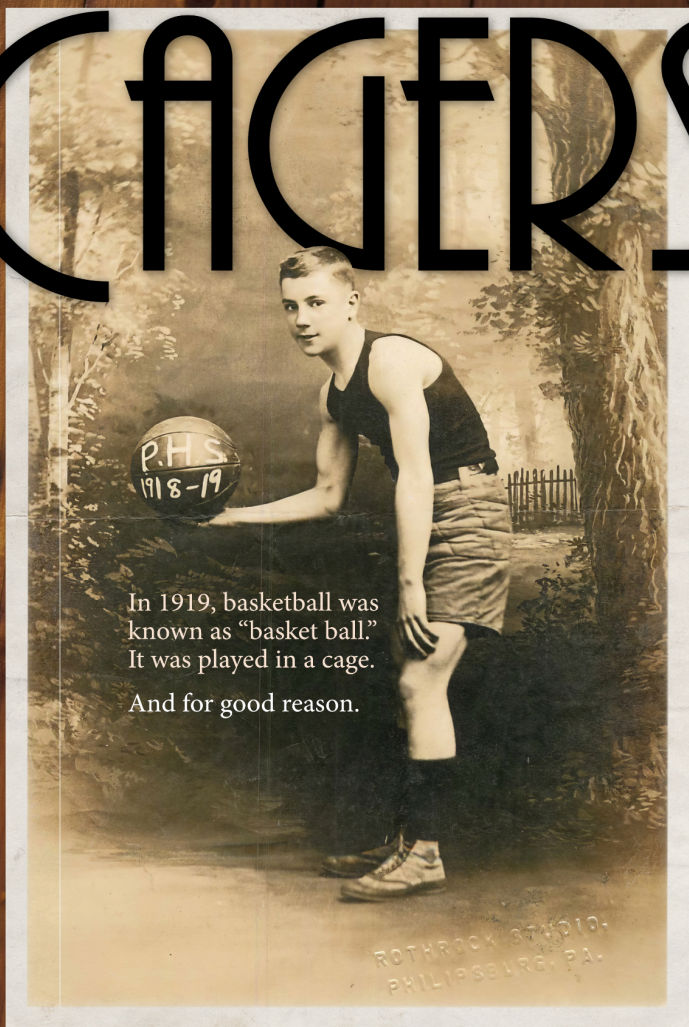


THE CAGERS



In 1919, basketball was
known as "basket ball."
It was played in a cage.

And for good reason.

ROTHROCK STUDIO,
PHILIPSBURG, PA.

Complete Original Series Screenplay

THOMAS TOSI



Keep human in the humanities

The author of this book wrote it on a 1956 Remington Quiet Riter typewriter and a 1951 Smith Corona Silent. Cover design uses public domain and licensed photographs. Cover layout created by Thomas & Heidi Tosi. Thank you for supporting work created by people, not algorithms.

THE CRAGERS

Text copyright ©2026 Thomas Tosi
Cover design ©2026 Thomas & Heidi Tosi

ISBN 978-1-954782-23-5

Library of Congress control number 2026918395

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review. Educators wishing to reproduce part or all of this work should contact Dooney Press.

Dooney Press
www.dooneypress.com

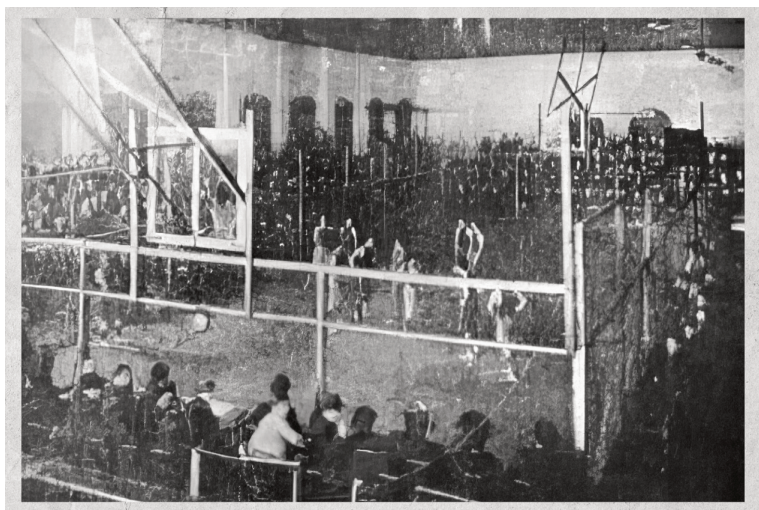
Printed in the United States of America

First edition 2026

"After You've Gone" Broadway Music Corporation, 1918—composed by Turner Layton with lyrics by Henry Creamer (public domain). Cover and interior period photographs c. 1915-1920 (public domain). Cover wood texture photograph by AS Photography, Pixabay-used under license.

ONCE AGAIN, FOR HEIDI.

—T.T.



THE CRAGERS

THOMAS TOSI

Complete Original
Series Screenplay



Dooney Press

GOFFSTOWN, NEW HAMPSHIRE

THE CAGERS IS NEITHER a documentary nor a textbook. It is a work of fiction. Some locations and basketball teams mentioned in the story are (or were) real. However, the featured teams, events, and characters depicted in the screenplay are fictionalized in an attempt to present an entertaining story respectful of its time and the people who lived then.

all stone.

JOE-JOE (CONT'D)

(placing the slush ball in Jules'
hand)

See how they handle your fast ball, man.

PANCAKES

(indicating the crank handle)

Jules!

BLIND BILLY (O.S.)

Crank it, man! C'mon!

JOE-JOE

I got this.

Joe-Joe grabs the crank handle beside Jules' hand.

AN AUTHOR'S REQUEST

GIVE ME FIFTEEN PAGES.

That is, if you're not used to reading screenplays.

Give me fifteen pages, and you'll stop tripping over abbreviations like INT (interior), EXT (exterior), OS (off screen), VO (voice over), and POV (point of view).

After fifteen pages, you won't fret over unfamiliar terms like SOTTO VOCE (soft voice), or wonder why seemingly random words are presented in ALL CAPS.

After fifteen pages, you'll understand that a screenplay is a kind of blueprint giving the filmmakers the bare amount of instruction they need to turn the story into a movie. And you'll see that because of this, a good script reads like greased lightning.

After fifteen pages, the technical jargon will disappear. You'll thread the film into the projector of your mind, and you'll be watching the movie in real time.

Pretty cool, right?

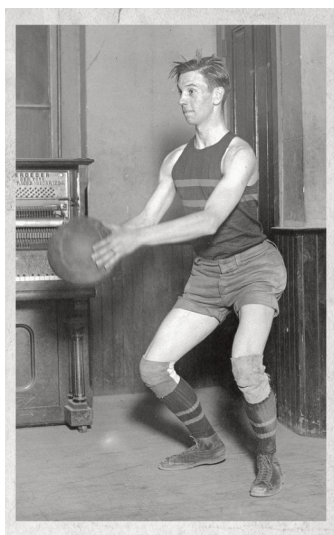
So, play some music softly in the background.

Preferably ragtime.

And give me fifteen pages.

—T.T.

EPISODE 1



INT. TRENTON YMCA, GYM - NIGHT

AUTUMN 1919:

A smoke-filled gaslit hall.

Tight on a sweaty man's face — KEAGAN [20s, athletic, white].

Currently beat-up, dazed, looking down.

Beyond the edges of the face, a riotous crowd of what appears to be fight fans.

Gradually, Keagan looks up, straight into the camera. A faint smile.

Ghostly, sepia-toned, and with the syncopated frame-rate of a silent film — dreamlike, until a bare-knuckled fist screams in and punches the face.

It looks like an early 20th Century boxing match between Keagan and ANOTHER FIGHTER, but what the...?

Glimpses of MULTIPLE OTHER COMBATANTS in elbow pads and knee pads.

Now the entire melee.

INTERTITLE: "1919 TRENTON, NEW JERSEY"

Two teams brawling — on a COURT ENCLOSED BY A CHICKEN WIRE CAGE.

Primitive pull-chain baskets, a lumpy leather ball with laces rolling around ignored, and a bloodthirsty crowd.

INTERTITLE: "BASKET BALL"

Iris in on Keagan getting pummeled.

After a moment, iris all the way to black.

THE CAGERS

INT. SMITH COLLEGE, GYM - DAY

Iris out, silent film effect continues.

Early 20th Century women's basket ball — dainty, refined, gossip, tea, and scones.

INTERTITLE: "SMITH COLLEGE, NORTHAMPTON,
MASSACHUSETTS"

The privileged young ladies are playing in uniforms that resemble sailor tops and bloomer bottoms.

Leaning haughtily in the door frame of the gymnasium, is Madeline Bancroft Lancaster, MADDY [19 or so, aristocratic even in her uniform, white], taking a long drag from a CIGARETTE IN A TORTOISESHELL HOLDER.

The ball rolls to Maddy's feet.

Her classmates clamor for the ball, one in particular, HARRIET [college student, white].

Maddy disdainfully retrieves the ball and lets fly with a hard line-drive throw that clocks Harriet in the head.

Iris in on Maddy.

Laughing.

Then to black.

EXT. SMITH COLLEGE - DAY

NO LONGER SILENT FILM STYLE.

We're flying along with the winged hood ornament of a 1919 PIERCE ARROW ROADSTER.

Opulence.

Even on this campus of the privileged, the car draws attention.

Titles over the roadster traveling through the botanical gardens and brick edifices of Smith College, one of the "Seven Sisters" to the Ivy League.

INT./EXT. SMITH COLLEGE, WAITING ROOM - DAY

Maddy and Harriet sit in chairs in the waiting room of the office of the college president.

Harriet's nose is clumsily bandaged.

A SECRETARY, avian in appearance, complete with a feathered hat, types to the rhythm of "Listen to the Mockingbird."

Irritated by the typing, Maddy pulls out a monogrammed case and offers a cigarette to Harriet.

With the bandaging all over her face, it's laughable. Daggers from the eyes of Harriet.

MADDY

No?

Maddy lights up.

"Listen to the Mockingbird" ends abruptly.

SECRETARY

No smoking among the women of
Smith, Miss Lancaster, not even you.

Maddy looks around. No ashtray.

She makes for the wastepaper basket.

THE CAGERS

The secretary lowers her round specs and glares.

Maddy turns and opens the window to throw away her cigarette, and the secretary happily returns to "Mockingbird."

MADDY'S POV FROM THE WINDOW:

The Pierce Arrow glides to a stop in front of the building.

A CHAUFFEUR opens the door for William Joseph LANCASTER [middle-aged, titan of industry, white].

BACK TO SCENE:

MADDY

(sotto voce)

Daddy.

MADDY'S POV FROM THE WINDOW:

Also emerging from the car is Reginald VON WESSEL [30s, dapper, white].

BACK TO SCENE:

MADDY

(sotto voce)

The weasel.

She slams shut the window and flees the waiting room.

SECRETARY

(sharply)

Miss Lancaster!

INT. SMITH COLLEGE, CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Racing down the corridor, Maddy slides sideways and crashes

into a JANITOR mopping the floor.

AT THE STAIRCASE:

She starts down but freezes when she hears footsteps climbing from below.

She can glimpse the top of her father's hat as he ascends.

Oh shit! No, she doesn't say it but we can see her think it.

INT. SMITH COLLEGE, WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Harriet and the secretary are startled as Maddy bursts back into the waiting room.

The tinny voice of college PRESIDENT NELSON [middle-aged, white], crackles over the intercom.

PRESIDENT NELSON (O.S.)

Send in Miss Lancaster now, please.

At the sound of her father's footsteps out in the corridor, Maddy panics.

She slams open the door to the president's office and races in.

INT./EXT. SMITH COLLEGE, PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Maddy, panting in full "fight or flight" mode.

PRESIDENT NELSON

(unperturbed)

Miss Lancaster...

No other doors to be seen, Maddy pushes past Nelson and climbs out his office window onto a ledge.

THE CAGERS

Shocked, Nelson starts after her but...

LANCASTER (O.S.)

(congenially, from the waiting room)

Nelson!

OUT ON THE LEDGE:

Clinging to the outside of the building, Maddy sees below her that Von Wessel has not accompanied her father; he's standing with the chauffeur by the Pierce Arrow and eyeing the passing co-eds.

MADDY

Jeepers creepers!

She needs another cigarette and so slips out her MONOGRAMMED CIGARETTE case while carefully maintaining her balance.

Maddy begins inching sideways, trying to get out of view of the window.

BACK TO SCENE:

Lancaster blows into the office.

LANCASTER

Nelson, I...

He notices a woman's legs and backside behind Nelson, outside the open window.

LANCASTER

Good lord! Am I interrupting?

PRESIDENT NELSON

Inter...? William, no I... This isn't...

As she continues to move slowly along the ledge on the outside of the

building, all that can be seen of Maddy is her hand holding her cigarette case bearing the initials *M B L*.

LANCASTER

(noticing the case)

Madeline!

OUT ON THE LEDGE:

Maddy continues shuffling along toward the corner of the building when her father's head emerges from the window of the president's office.

LANCASTER

Madeline!

Startled, Maddy struggles to regain balance.

MADDY

Hello, father.

(nods in the direction of
Von Wessel down on the
ground)

I see you brought the weasel with you.

LANCASTER

If you're referring to Reginald Von *Wessel* —

MADDY

You certainly made good time.

LANCASTER

I have no idea what you are talking...
You think I'm here for you? Nelson's
office? You're in trouble again.

MADDY

Says you.

THE CAGERS

She rounds the corner and disappears from view. Lancaster ducks back inside the window.

INT. SMITH COLLEGE, CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Lancaster dashes into the corridor, and he too crashes into the janitor.

He tries a door in a location that seems it would give access to where Maddy is heading out on the ledge.

It's locked.

EXT. SMITH COLLEGE, LEDGE - CONTINUOUS

Unsuccessfully shooping away a pigeon with her foot.

MADDY

Scram.

INT. SMITH COLLEGE, CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Lancaster notices the enormous key ring on the hip of the janitor. There must be a hundred keys jammed packed on the thing.

LANCASTER

You there! The door!

Knowing authority when he sees it, the janitor lifts the ring.

He slowly works his way through the keys, carefully considering each one.

LANCASTER

For heaven's sake, man!

Lancaster grabs the ring and makes for the door.

A thin chain fastens the key ring to the janitor's belt. After three steps,

Lancaster is rudely made aware of this fact.

As the chain pulls taut, Lancaster's feet fly out from under him on the wet floor and the janitor's pants rip at the seam, sending him to the floor as well.

The bird-lady secretary, Harriet, and Nelson are framed in the waiting room doorway. They're greeted with the scene of Lancaster and the janitor sprawled on the wet floor, engaged in a tug-of-war, the janitor trying to keep his pants from being yanked off and Lancaster trying to get the key into the lock.

EXT. SMITH COLLEGE, LEDGE - CONTINUOUS

The pigeon still will not give way to Maddy.

She flicks her cigarette at it.

MADDY

Go on. Beat it!

The pigeon pecks at the cigarette and comes up with it in its beak.

MADDY

Didn't you get the message?
There's no smoking at this hoity-
toity joint. Not even by fly-boys.

Lancaster's head emerges from a new window, just beyond the pigeon.

Startled, the bird flies off, cigarette still hanging from its beak.

MADDY

(after the pigeon, envious)

Attaboy.

(to Lancaster)

Oh, it's you again.

THE CAGERS

LANCASTER

Who else were you expecting?
Madeline, darling, please.

MADDY

Please what? Come back inside so
you can marry me off to the weasel?

LANCASTER

I did not come here to marry you
off to the weasel... Von Wessel.

She glares at him. Liar.

LANCASTER

I most certainly did not. This time.
And even if I did, what of it? He's
a fine young executive who's very
fond of you — heaven knows why.

MADDY

Horsefeathers!

LANCASTER

And I did not send you to this
institution to speak like a common
street urchin.

President Nelson, the secretary, and Harriet, have all now lined up
behind Lancaster, trying to look through the window.

MADDY

Of course you didn't. You sent me here
for your pal Nelson to play nursemaid
to me.

She starts shuffling away from him back toward the corner from the
direction she came.

MADDY

Then when I'm out of this joint, get
hitched to the weasel? Applesauce! It's
just one cage after another from you.

She rounds the corner.

INT. SMITH COLLEGE, CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Lancaster and the others race back toward the waiting room and, en route, slip and fall into a pile on the still-wet floor of the corridor.

EXT. SMITH COLLEGE, LEDGE - CONTINUOUS

Watching Von Wessel below still hit on passing students, Maddy inches her way back to the window from which she originally emerged.

Lancaster, once again, leans his head out.

LANCASTER

I told you that I am not here for you!

MADDY

Then why are you?

LANCASTER

Madeline, I have come here to speak
with your mother.

MADDY

(horrificed)

Speak with mother? Oh Daddy!

Shaken, Maddy loses her balance and slowly falls back as if fainting.

LANCASTER

Madeline!

THE CAGERS

ON THE GROUND:

Maddy lands mere feet from the Pierce Arrow, an ENORMOUS HYDRANGEA breaking her fall.

She emerges from the bush covered in twigs and leaves.

Von Wessel has noticed her for the first time.

VON WESSEL

Darling!

Maddy blows twigs and hair from her face.

MADDY

(sotto voce)

Speak with Mother?

EXT. TRENTON YMCA - DAY

Handbill on the outside of the building.

INSERT HANDBILL: "BASKET BALL! WORLD CHAMPIONS THE ORIGINAL SHAMROCKS VS TRENTS"

INT. TRENTON YMCA, BOARDING ROOM - DAY

With scraped and bruised knuckles, Keagan's hands count a meager amount of paper money.

His face shows old bruises and scratches.

He's wearing his basket ball uniform.

Sliding his cot aside, he lifts a loose floorboard to reveal a cache consisting of a TATTERED ENVELOPE and a small PEWTER KEEPSAKE BOX with a CLADDAGH DESIGN on the lid. He adds the new paper money to a modest amount already in the envelope,

then replaces the cache and cot.

NEWT, [50s, male, commanding, white] is in the doorway of the room. How long has he been there? How much has he seen?

NEWT

Saving up your prize-fight
dough... excuse me, your basket
ball winnings, for Mother
Machree's steamship passage?

KEAGAN

Feck off. How's the house?

NEWT

To the rafters. But you know them
bastards ain't here yet.

KEAGAN

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! The Shamrocks?

NEWT

The *World Champion* Original Shamrocks.

KEAGAN

World champion my arse! They
beat six teams in New York. New
York's not the world.

NEWT

Neither is Trenton, New Jersey.

INT. TRENTON YMCA, STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

Keagan and Newt descend the stairs.

KEAGAN

Every damned pissant backwoods

THE CAGERS

team that beats a bunch of flatfoot
fives are crowning themselves
Lord-God World Champions. And
folks swallow that hogwash?

NEWT

Not anymore. Not like the good old
days. It's gettin' so a team's got to
actually *do* somethin' to call themself
champion. Else, people won't believe it.

KEAGAN

What people believe is no concern of mine.

NEWT

What would be your concern? Passage
money for that mother and sister of
yours?

Newt's hit a nerve.

NEWT

There's always the tourney, Keagan.

KEAGAN

Tourney?

NEWT

The new tourney, for Chrissake. The
New York State League World
Championship Tournament. The one
bein' organized by the Original
Shamrocks —

INT. TRENTON YMCA, GYM - CONTINUOUS

Keagan and Newt enter from the staircase. The gym is smoky, packed
with fans, overheated, and restless. But no opposing team.

KEAGAN

The Original *No-Show* Shamrocks.

NEWT

Fair enough.

(motions to the crowd)

But this lot's here for the *World
Champion* Original Shamrocks. What
did the Trents' last game draw?

Not much. Nothing like this. We see it on Keagan's face as he looks around.

It's standing room only right up to the chicken wire cage that encloses the playing area. Even the balcony with running track that circles above the gym is full. Some up here throw trash down to the court.

NEWT

The Shamrocks are invitin' the best
teams from far and wide. Pennsylvania
State League, Interstate, Connecticut,
independents...

KEAGAN

And that's the world?

NEWT

The basket ball world. Win that
tourney and you'll be the *legitimate*
World Champion Trents. Crowds will
come, women will swoon, money will
flow.

(as if he can see it now)

Steamships full of immigrant
families will sail from Ireland.

KEAGAN

And how are the Trents to be invited

THE CAGERS

when the Original Shamrocks won't
even show for our match?

NEWT

A journey of a thousand miles begins, my boy.

It's on the verge of getting ugly. A group of FIVE YOUNG BLACK MEN in street clothes start to climb the wire cage.

TOMMY, [late-teens, redhead (ginger), SCARRED CHEEK on his otherwise boyish face, white], wearing a uniform similar to Keagan's, sees Keagan and Newt and fights his way over.

TOMMY

They say there was a telegram Mr.
Keagan. The Shamrocks, they ain't
gonna make it. Should we start givin'
all the money back?

KEAGAN

Give it back? Are you mad?
There'll be a match, Tommy.

TOMMY

Against who?

KEAGAN

We'll split up and play ourselves.

NEWT

I expect this crowd deserves a bit more
than to watch you lot playin' with
yourselves.

TOMMY

Besides, there ain't enough.

KEAGAN

(nods to the court)

Fine. Even better, how 'bout them?

The young black men have picked up the leather ball and are tossing it back and forth. The crowd angrily jeers.

TOMMY

The colored boys?

KEAGAN

That's right.

TOMMY

I ain't never played against no colored boys. All the people here —

KEAGAN

Paid to see a match.

NEWT

They paid to see the Shamrocks. The
World Champion Original Shamrocks.

KEAGAN

And so?

NEWT

This mob just might like to see a bunch
of bog trotters tangle with them coons.

KEAGAN

And the side bet?

NEWT

Sure.

THE CAGERS

KEAGAN

And at 5 to 1, yet?

NEWT

Turn that around, my boy. 1 to 5 on.

KEAGAN

Bastard! How am I to make any money 1 to 5 on?

NEWT

With a larger bet, of course. Them boys out there ain't the Original Shamrocks, champions of the world. If you've no longer the stomach for the wager...

INT. TRENTON YMCA, BOARDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Keagan bursts into the room, slides the cot aside, and retrieves the CACHE ENVELOPE. Tommy is behind him in the doorway.

KEAGAN

(sotto voce)

Sorry Ma, but I swear I'll pay it back and then some.

He does a quick count of the money, disappointed.

Before replacing the cot, Keagan opens the Claddagh keepsake box. He takes from it a PEWTER PENDANT WITH A BRAIDED LOCK OF HAIR UNDER GLASS, kisses the pendant, and replaces it.

KEAGAN

Ciara. Forgive me.

INT. TRENTON YMCA, GYM - CONTINUOUS

Newt has worked his way over to the court and leans on the cage from the outside. He sizes up the young black men as they laugh and horse

around sloppily with the ball.

He catches the eye of one of the men, WINNIE [20s, black] who becomes suddenly more serious as they exchange a knowing glance.

INT. TRENTON YMCA, STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

Keagan and Tommy hustle down the stairs back toward the gym.

KEAGAN

The house money...

TOMMY

Mr. Keagan?

KEAGAN

I'll have it now.

TOMMY

That ain't ours to bet.

Keagan glares at him.

TOMMY

Yes sir.

At the bottom of the stairs, they part ways.

INT. TRENTON YMCA, GYM - CONTINUOUS

Keagan pushes through the crowd and finds Newt courtside.

Keagan hands Newt the money from his cache envelope.

NEWT

Jesus! That's it then?

KEAGAN

I've more on the way.

THE CAGERS

NEWT

I should hope so. I'm a fool for lettin'
you have the 1 to 5 on.

(about Winnie and his
friends out on the court)

For Chrissake, they're not even in
uniforms. What kind of show is this, then?

Tommy arrives with a bundle of money.

When Keagan tries to take the money, Tommy hesitates and holds
tight for a moment.

They exchange a glance, and Keagan takes the money, but when he
goes to hand it to Newt, it is Keagan's turn to hesitate.

NEWT

Don't tell me the mighty Trents are
scared of colored boys in street clothes —

Releasing the money.

KEAGAN

Take the feckin' bet.

INT. TRENTON YMCA, GYM - DAY

At the side of the gym, a SCORING BOY readies the numbered
wooden tiles for insertion into the slots of the scoreboard.

At the center of the court, Keagan prepares for the jump ball against
his opponent, Winnie.

Keagan assesses Winnie's ragged street clothes from top to bottom. All
the way down to his PROFESSIONAL A. G. SPAULDING & BROS.
LEATHER HIGH-TOP BASKET BALL SHOES, identical to Keagan's
own.

He looks back up to Winnie's face and finds him smiling. Then a glance to Newt.

Keagan knows he's been played.

KEAGAN

(sotto voce)

Street clothes my arse.

INT. SMITH COLLEGE, INFIRMARY - DAY

Holy cow, even the infirmary at this school is upscale.

Maddy sits on the side of an Art Deco exam table while having cuts and scrapes attended to by the INFIRMARY NURSE.

The nurse examines Maddy's shoulder and she flinches.

INFIRMARY NURSE

(picking up a syringe)

If it's too painful, you can have an injection of novocaine.

Maddy waves her off and gingerly works her shoulder.

INFIRMARY NURSE

Lot's of people don't like the feeling of being numb.

MADDY

Lot's of people don't realize they are.

The nurse giggles, unaware that Maddy is serious.

Von Wessel enters unseen by Maddy or the nurse; he's on the other side of a rolling privacy screen.

VON WESSEL

Madeline darling?

THE CAGERS

MADDY

Weasel.

INFIRMARY NURSE

This is an examination room. I'm
afraid you'll have to leave.

VON WESSEL

Surely I have the right to inquire after my fiancée?

Maddy rolls her eyes and shakes her head "no" to the nurse about the fiancée comment.

MADDY

(to Von Wessel)

What's the big idea?

VON WESSEL

Well, darling, I'm concerned for your —

MADDY

I mean what's the big idea of
bringing Daddy here? He says
Nelson didn't contact him, that
means you brought him. Why?

VON WESSEL

Your father is understandably
melancholy. Of course, I would do all
in my power...

MADDY

(violently shoving the partition aside)

Listen you!

Intimidated, the nurse leaves.

MADDY

Lay off of my father!

VON WESSEL

Leave all the tormenting to you?

MADDY

There's a difference, see. I do it out of love.

Von Wessel has just noticed that with the privacy screen removed, he can see, in a mirror, Maddy's backside exposed through the opening in her "Johnny" gown.

MADDY

The old coot wouldn't know I cared if I
didn't pay him some attention. You?
Whaddya you get out of it?

Von Wessel leans in close. Too close.

VON WESSEL

Madeline I —

Closer still, lingering for a kiss.

MADDY

(turning her head away)
Bank's closed, bub. Don't tell me you're
starting to believe your own fiancée
baloney.

He slides down onto the exam table himself, scooching up against her.

Now, Von Wessel twirling a lock of her hair around his finger, Maddy grimaces.

VON WESSEL

Darling, you know your father

THE CAGERS

disapproves when you speak like a
common tramp.

She pushes his hand away, but he comes back stronger.

MADDY

What's the idea? Lay off! I talk the way
I want.

VON WESSEL

No, you do not. You speak that way to
annoy your father. And perhaps me.
But, I confess, at the moment I find it
delicious.

She pushes him back.

Unseen by either of them, Harriet appears in the doorway, listening,
but saying nothing.

MADDY

I'll talk in the king's English if it'll keep
your mitts off me.

VON WESSEL

Delightful.

MADDY

Oh dry up. Now, what's all this about
talking with my mother? You're behind
this somehow.

Von Wessel leaning back in and now fiddling with the string on the
back of her gown while staring at the reflection of her backside in the
mirror.

VON WESSEL

Your father is a sad man; I told you
that I want to help —

MADDY

What kind of sap do you take me for?

VON WESSEL

He means the séance tonight, darling.

He leans into Maddy, forcing her to lay back on the exam table.

When he does this, Maddy catches the direction of his gaze and sees that he has been looking at her reflection.

MADDY

(trying unsuccessfully to push him off)

Séance!

More amorous aggression from Von Wessel. She's struggling under him.

VON WESSEL

He thought if we held it here, you
could participate as well. You do want
to, don't you?

(thrusting motion with his pelvis)

Participate?

Maddy's arm is outstretched and her hand fumbles for anything on the stand beside the exam table. She nearly stabs her finger on the novocaine syringe.

In one swift move, she grabs the syringe and sweeps it up under his body at his crotch.

MADDY

My mother is dead!

(squeezing down the plunger)

And so is little Von Weasel Jr. You
won't be "participating" in anything for
awhile.

THE CAGERS

INT. TRENTON YMCA, GYM - DAY

The game is over and clearly didn't end on a high note for Keagan and his white team.

Mayhem in the gym. The CROWD jeering, fighting, throwing anything not fixed in place.

The GAME BALL still sits in a BASKET. By 1919, most basket ball nets had a hole in the bottom, but this one is behind the times.

The SCORE BOY reaches to start removing the TILES from the SCOREBOARD.

TRENTS: 8

VISITORS: 12

A half-eaten apple smashes into the board and breaks one of the tiles of the visitors' score.

A TRENTON YMCA REF yanks on the handle of a pull rope that runs up, through a pulley, and is fastened to the bottom of the basket net. Pulling the bottom of the net up, the ball tumbles out of the basket and down to the ref. Behind him, THE POLICE are entering the gym, blowing WHISTLES.

In the chaos, Newt finds Tommy.

NEWT

Quick now boy, fetch me the gate money.

TOMMY

Sir?

NEWT

The gate money, fetch it now! Hurry!

TOMMY

But —

NEWT

Now boy!

TOMMY

I can't sir.

Newt grabs him by the shirt.

TOMMY

You already have it!

NEWT

The hell you say!

TOMMY

Mr. Keagan sir, it was the gate money he bet with!

NEWT

The son of a bitch bet me with my
own damn money!

Newt draws a revolver from his waistcoat and shouts above the crowd.

NEWT

KEAGAN!

EXT. TRENTON YMCA, ALLEY - DAY

A decommissioned DOUBLE-DECK transit BUS sits in the alley
beside the gym.

A TINPLATE CHIMNEY is jerry-rigged onto the back corner of the
bus. It serves a SMALL COAL STOVE INSIDE, currently unlit, which
we will see later.

THE CAGERS

On the side, a faded "*Fifth Avenue Coach Company*" sign has been over-painted with "*The Harlem Knights*."

Winnie, and the other young men from his team, hastily board the bus.

The sound of the pandemonium from inside the gym grows as a back doorway of the building bursts open. Newt races into the alley steps ahead of RIOTOUS FANS.

INT. TRENTON YMCA, BOARDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Keagan grabs the torn-open envelope with its letter and the Claddagh box and shoves them into a DUFFEL BAG with his other meager belongings.

He moves toward the door but is stopped by the sound of the people clamoring and ascending the stairs.

The door to the room swings open. It's Tommy and the rest of his Trents teammates, white, JUMPIN' JAKE, BRUGGY, FERGUS, and LUTHER.

TOMMY

He's got a gun, Mr. Keagan.

EXT. TRENTON YMCA, ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Shoving open the second-story window of his boarding room, Keagan surveys the alley.

The bus directly below him makes for a shorter drop.

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

Winnie moves to the back of the bus, where a young pregnant woman, SUNSHINE, [19 or so, black] anxiously sits in the corner of a bench seat.

Four other players, black, JOE-JOE, ARTHUR, and JULES clamber aboard as one, BLIND BILLY drops into the driver's seat.

JOE-JOE

C'mon, man!

Blind Billy works the ignition key, spark advance lever, throttle, and choke while yelling to another black player, PANCAKES, who is in front of the bus with a hand crank.

BLIND BILLY

Choke it, man, choke it!

EXT. TRENTON YMCA, ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Pancakes puts his back into turning the crank of the big bus.

Above, from the window of the YMCA Keagan drops his duffel bag onto the upper deck of the bus.

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

At the sound of something hitting the bus, Sunshine, already on edge with all the commotion, overreacts.

WINNIE

Just get down. I'm not going to let anything happen.

EXT. TRENTON YMCA, ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Keagan jumps from the window. He's followed in line by Tommy and the rest of the team.

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

Thuds and slams as Keagan and the others land on the upper deck.

THE CAGERS

WINNIE

(shouting to the front)

Blind Billy get this bus moving!

EXT. TRENTON YMCA, ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Keagan peers over the wall of the top deck and Newt, gun drawn, spots him.

NEWT

Keagan! Ya bastard!

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

Blind Billy frantically turns the key and fumbles with the other controls. Distracted by the commotion, he does not inform Pancakes who continues cranking.

Blind Billy pumps the throttle one more time and the engine roars to life followed by a thunderclap of a backfire.

EXT. TRENTON YMCA, ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

With the backfire, the hand crank kicks back violently and smashes Pancakes in the mouth, bloodying his lip.

Newt and the surging crowd behind him, thinking they are being shot at, scatter for cover.

EXT. TRENTON YMCA, FRONT - CONTINUOUS

The police leading ARRESTED FANS out to the street also hear the backfire and race to the alley corner, weapons out.

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

Pancakes leaps up the bus stairs, his face bloodied.

PANCAKES

Blind Billy get this bus movin'!

EXT. TRENTON YMCA, ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

From behind a trash can, Newt begins firing at the bus toward the front of the alley and the police.

Thinking Newt is shooting at them, the police return fire.

The bus is caught in the middle as Blind Billy races it toward the back alley and Newt.

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

Everyone except Blind Billy drops low as bullets punch holes in the side walls and windows of the bus.

EXT. TRENTON YMCA, ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

The bus belches smoke and backfires yet again as it roars through the crowd and past Newt.

As the smoke dissipates around Newt, he catches one final glimpse of Keagan, looking back at him from the upper deck, laughing.

Newt scowls, holsters his weapon, and disappears into the crowd.

INT. SMITH COLLEGE, LIBRARY READING ROOM - NIGHT

Alone in the dimly-lit room, Lancaster solemnly retrieves personal artifacts from a VELVET SACHEL.

A HAIRBRUSH.

A Harry Winston gold and diamond WEDDING RING — luxurious but tasteful — NOT ostentatious.

THE CAGERS

A leather-bound JOURNAL.

As Maddy silently enters the room from behind him, he settles on an item, a small round pewter keepsake box with a Claddagh design on the lid. VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL TO THE ONE KEAGAN HAD under his cot.

He sighs deeply.

MADDY

Tell me you're not really going
through with this séance hooey.

LANCASTER

Madeline.

MADDY

Daddy, tell me.

LANCASTER

Von Wessel says that it is important to
have personal items. Items of deep
meaning. Deep meaning to her.

MADDY

That guy's not on the level, you see
that, don't you?

LANCASTER

It occurs to me that I do not know
what your mother held dear. Aside
from you, of course.

MADDY

She loved this library. This room. And
you.

Lancaster holds up the pewter Claddagh box for Maddy to see.

LANCASTER

You'll help me pick, won't you?

MADDY

Say, that isn't —

LANCASTER

Your biscuit.

MADDY

Ye gods and little fishes.

LANCASTER

She held it dear?

MADDY

And how.

Lancaster opens the Claddagh box and removes a yellowed slip of paper and a tiny petrified biscuit, with gnaw marks on it.

LANCASTER

(reading from the paper)

For a good girl. Madeline Bancroft

Lancaster cut her teeth on this biscuit,

June 8th, 1901, Boston, Massachusetts.

MADDY

(laughing)

Oh my. She was always so cornball. The biscuit.

LANCASTER

Darling, I've forgotten how to be close.

To her. To you.

MADDY

Then let me leave this place and come

THE CAGERS

back home. Just for a while, 'til I know
that you're on the mend, that's all.

She takes the biscuit from him and replaces it in the Claddagh box.

MADDY

And you'll quit all this baloney, see?

He looks at her sadly, smiles, but retrieves the box.

MADDY

(disbelief)

Oh Daddy.

EXT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - NIGHT

The bus lumbers along a well-traveled dirt road.

Save for Keagan and Tommy, the Trents all lie asleep on the upper deck. They're huddled on benches and covered in coats and satchels, whatever they can do to stay warm.

KEAGAN

Can't you sleep then? Worried
about where we're headed?

TOMMY

Doesn't matter.

KEAGAN

Doesn't it?

TOMMY

I was thinkin' 'bout the stars.

KEAGAN

Stars?

TOMMY

Sure. I ain't never been out of a city since coming to America. I thought the sky here was different. But now look at it. Anyone... Ciara, your ma... can see. It's just the same as back home. Don't you think so, Mr. Keagan?

KEAGAN

Same as home? I pray to God not.

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

Most on the bus sleep.

Winnie has changed into decent clothes. Nothing fancy, but clean. More fitting his character. Educated. But not refined, and certainly not affluent.

He's not the bumpkin character he played in Newt's hustle at the YMCA. We are beginning to see why he's the leader of the team.

He stuffs the RATTY CLOTHES in a canvas sack, then sits on the bench next to Sunshine—watches her slumber. Her breathing softly fogs the bus window against which she leans.

She winces and gasps.

Winnie places his hand atop hers but quickly removes it as she stirs awake.

SUNSHINE

(grimacing)

Where are we?

WINNIE

What's wrong?

THE CAGERS

SUNSHINE

(holding her abdomen)

Where are we!

WINNIE

Blind Billy?

BLIND BILLY

(still driving)

I don't know, man, it's dark out there.

Road to Northampton someplace.

EXT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

Keagan and Tommy hear the commotion in the bus below.

KEAGAN

What do you think? Do we make our introductions then?

TOMMY

I am a wee bit cold.

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

WINNIE

Well, is it, you know, your... special time?

SUNSHINE

My special time? You tell me, then we'll both know.

Sunshine takes a breath and grabs Winnie's hand.

WINNIE

Billy! Pull over!

The bus lurches to a stop.

EXT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

The Trents tumble from their benches with the shuddering of the bus.

KEAGAN

That would be our cue.

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

All the Harlem Knights players crowd around Winnie and Sunshine. She stares in deep concentration, one hand still holding Winnie's, the other on her abdomen.

BLIND BILLY

Well, what the fuck we do now?

PANCAKES

Watch your mouth, man.

BLIND BILLY

Why? Ain't no kid here... yet.
(to Sunshine)

Right?

SUNSHINE

I don't know.

BLIND BILLY

Oh shit.

Pancakes cuffs him off the back of the head.

WINNIE

We have to find her a doctor.

PANCAKES

Out here? A doctor? A colored doctor?

THE CAGERS

Keagan looks in through the window behind Winnie and Sunshine.

BLIND BILLY

Pancakes, you seein' what I'm seein'?

PANCAKES

If you seein' that white boy we
whipped back to Trenton, then I 'spose
I am.

Keagan enters and immediately notices Sunshine's condition.

KEAGAN

Evenin', lads.

JOE-JOE

Man, I know you ain't just stepped on
our bus.

Keagan ignores him and addresses Sunshine.

KEAGAN

You look as though you've a couple
months yet.

SUNSHINE

That's just about right. But it sure
don't feel that way right now.

He reaches his hand toward Sunshine's belly and Winnie grabs him by the wrist.

Joe-Joe puts an arm lock around Keagan's neck and squeezes.

JOE-JOE

No sir! Not on our bus.

The other Trents begin showing up.

KEAGAN

(straining to speak)

Water.

BLIND BILLY

What the fuck you say?

Another slap from Pancakes.

KEAGAN

(croaking it out)

For her.

WINNIE

She needs water? Joe-Joe.

Joe-Joe relaxes his grip.

EXT. SMITH COLLEGE, LIBRARY - NIGHT

The campus in darkness.

If not for the light from one second-story window, you probably wouldn't notice the Pierce Arrow parked out front.

INT. SMITH COLLEGE, LIBRARY READING ROOM - NIGHT

The séance is about to begin.

Lancaster, Maddy, Von Wessel, and Nelson sit around a small table. MEDIUM MADAME GEEST BELLER [distinctly European in dress and manor, 40's] moves about the room, lighting candles.

Standing near the door is a burly bouncer, STERKE.

Geest joins the others at the table.

GEEST

Sterke, we shall begin.

THE CAGERS

Sterke switches off the electric room lights, leaving only the candles.

Moving items one at a time to the table — the items Lancaster had gathered.

GEEST

(placing a doll)

A symbol of the happiness of
childhood...

(now the leather-bound journal)

A symbol of the story of growth and
discovery...

(the hairbrush)

The vanity of young womanhood...

(the wedding ring)

A lover's promise...

Geest opens the lid of the CLADDAGH BOX and displays the NOTE and BISCUIT for all to see.

GEEST

A mother's love...

An eye roll from Maddy as Geest closes the lid and sets the box on the table, next to the other items.

GEEST

(placing a tin horn)

And now, a spirit horn, an instrument
to communicate with those beyond, as
well as a symbol of your dear Mary's
love of music.

MADDY

(to Lancaster)

She knows Mother played the piano
not the horn, right? Should we tell her?

LANCASTER

Madeline, please.

MADDY

Ah, probably too heavy to float a piano
around our heads on wires anyway.

(to Sterke)

Liften' the horn's easier on your back,
right big six?

When Sterke refuses to respond, Maddy makes a sarcastic spooky sound.

GEEST

This is a sacred and solemn ceremony.

MADDY

Sorry. Don't mind me. Please.
Continue.

Ramping up to the height of her drama, Geest reveals a PISTOL and ceremoniously places it in front of Lancaster.

GEEST

Lastly, a symbol of the thin veil
between two worlds, an instrument of
death.

MADDY

Instrument of death? In Mother's case,
shouldn't that be a bottle of hooch?

A wounded look from Lancaster. An angry stare from Geest.

MADDY

(aside to Lancaster)

Sorry, Daddy but between the Palooka
guarding the door and Madame eye

THE CAGERS

shadow here, this baloney's really
getting to me.

LANCASTER

I beg of you.

GEEST

And now, we complete the circle. All join hands.

Maddy notices that she is beside Von Wessel. Instead of taking his
hand, she raises hers.

GEEST

Yes?

MADDY

Is it too late to change seats?

LANCASTER

Madeline!

Before Maddy can apologize to her father, the spirit horn rolls toward
her and a tinny FEMALE VOICE emanates.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Madeline dear, be kind to your father.

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - NIGHT

Sunshine walks the aisle and sips water from a CANTEEN as most of
the players have drifted back to sleep.

Still awake and watching her are Winnie and Keagan, seated together.

KEAGAN

The water and the walkin' helped then?
No more pains?

SUNSHINE

I ain't felt one for awhile now.

KEAGAN

That's good. Just a wee bit more then
you can rest.

SUNSHINE

Just a wee bit more an' I'm gonna wee.

KEAGAN

(to Winnie)

You're wife's gonna be just fine.

WINNIE

No, we aren't married.

KEAGAN

Sorry, it's not my business.

WINNIE

It's not like that —

Sunshine walks past them and eases herself into a seat in the back.
Keagan and Winnie exchange a look then lower their voices.

WINNIE

I It's a long story.

KEAGAN

As I said, not my business.

WINNIE

Look, I appreciate what you did, you
know, and I'm sorry about the hustle
back in Trenton. If there were anything
I could do —

THE CAGERS

KEAGAN

You could give me and my boys our share of the purse.

WINNIE

Purse? There's no purse. That was payback. Just working ourselves even off a debt.

KEAGAN

Who?

WINNIE

Newt. We got whooped by the Original Shamrocks. Bet that team big. More than we had.

KEAGAN

And so Newt made a deal with you.

WINNIE

Sorry.

KEAGAN

The bastard.

WINNIE

You got that right. Anyway, I do appreciate the help. How'd you know about the water?

KEAGAN

Those pains she had. They're a false labor. The water can help sometimes.

WINNIE

Yeah, but how'd you know? You and your wife have a whole lot of

little white squishy Irish kids?

KEAGAN

No, I'm not married.

A look from Winnie.

KEAGAN

It's a long story.

WINNIE

Not my business, right?

KEAGAN

Right.

INT. SMITH COLLEGE, LIBRARY READING ROOM - NIGHT

The SPIRIT HORN from which the female voice emanated remains angled toward Maddy.

LANCASTER

Mary?

MADDY

Mother?

GEEST

(hushed)

I have not summoned, yet the spirit joins. Be cautious.

(aloud)

We thank you for joining us in our Earthly plane and have much to ask you.

MADDY

(to Geest)

Just what are you up to? How are you

THE CAGERS

working this grift?

LANCASTER

Mary, have you found peace?

The séance table vibrates under their hands, accompanied by SPUTTERING and CRACKLING from the CANDLE FLAMES. The spirit horn rolls toward Lancaster.

FEMALE VOICE

Peace?

Lancaster is about to lift his hand in the direction of the horn but Geest grips tightly and sharply admonishes him.

GEEST

Do not break the circle in the presence
of a spirit lest you invite danger!

MADDY

You're all goofy! This isn't real.

The horn rolls back toward Maddy.

FEMALE VOICE

Darling, I'm here to help. There is so
much you do not understand. I want
you to listen to your father.

In the corner of the room, unseen by anyone other than Sterke and Geest, a column of white, gossamer, SMOKE-LIKE MATERIAL begins to form.

STERKE

(to Geest)

Madame...

GEEST

Ectoplasm.

MADDY

(still speaking to spirit horn)

If you really are my mother, you
wouldn't say that. You know he
wants to marry me off to the weasel.

FEMALE VOICE

Father wants you to marry a weasel?

VON WESSEL

Reginald Von *WESSEL!*

The sputtering and crackling candle flames turn blue and FLARE UP frighteningly. The TABLE VIBRATION becomes a violent, unsettling rumble.

MADDY

Another four flusher obsessed
with dough — just like Daddy.

LANCASTER

Madeline!

MADDY

It's true!

FEMALE VOICE

That's not quite fair, Darling —

MADDY

Maybe it wasn't at first, but it got true
in a hurry!

(to Lancaster)

You spent more time at the mills than
with us! Why do you think she got so
thirsty for the giggle water?

FEMALE VOICE

My dear —

LANCASTER

I was securing your future!

MADDY

Future? Ha! Oh boy did you secure our future.

(nods to Von Wessel)

And you're still tryin'!

(back to Lancaster)

You skipped out on us!

LANCASTER

I would never abandon you, darling!

MADDY

Liar! It's because of you she's dead!

Von Wessel raises his hand to slap Maddy. The spirit horn flies from the table — it's unclear if Von Wessel knocked it — and the pistol slides and spins toward Geest.

VON WESSEL

Spoiled brat! How dare you address your father in that tone —

Lancaster catches Von Wessel by the wrist before he can strike. Both men's arms meet in front of Maddy's face.

Dead quiet.

Candles retreat to normal flame. The séance table settles.

Everyone else distracted, Geest surreptitiously slides the pistol within reach of Maddy.

Breathing hard, they all look from one to the other. Except Maddy. She's looking at her father's vice-like grip on Von Wessel's wrist before her. She raises her own hands, no longer holding anyone else's.

MADDY

Oh, Daddy.

An ominous ELECTRIC HUM builds.

GEEST

May heaven help us. You have broken
the circle.

LANCASTER

(noticing the ectoplasm
which is now forming
into the shape of a
woman)

Good lord! Mary?

As it floats toward him, Lancaster squints to make out the apparition's face. Before he can, the windows fly open and...

All HELL BREAKS LOOSE in the room.

The spirit now roars — in every sense — toward Lancaster.

It ain't his wife.

Lancaster screams and cowers. But as the spirit reaches him a SHOT RINGS OUT.

The "spirit" falls forward onto the séance table, its face in front of Maddy and Lancaster. The gusts that came in through the open windows cease and the room calms. The fall has knocked free a grotesque mask from the "spirit."

Maddy, holding the pistol she just shot, sees that the form splayed on

THE CAGERS

the table is a young woman with blood flowing from her mouth and a bruised nose... Harriet, the student Maddy clocked with the basket ball.

LANCASTER

Madeline. What have you done?

EXT. NORTHAMPTON, MA - NIGHT

The Harlem Knight's bus rolls into town and slows in front of the King Street YMCA.

INT. HARLEM KNIGHTS BUS - CONTINUOUS

BLIND BILLY

This the place, boss?

The players on the bus can see lights through the windows and hear commotion inside the YMCA. They also see the attention they're drawing from the white people still entering the building.

WINNIE

Don't stop here. Around the corner.

BLIND BILLY

I heard that.

KEAGAN

There's a match here tonight? Who?

WINNIE

The *world champions* that left you hanging back in Trenton.

TOMMY

The Original Shamrocks? Here?
Tonight?

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED THIS
SAMPLE



IN 1919, YOUNG HEIRESS MADELINE BANCROFT LANCASTER flees an arranged marriage and her privileged life, only to find herself managing a **barnstorming team of cagers** - traveling warriors in the bare-knuckled birth of professional basketball.

Contained in this volume is the complete screenplay for the four-episode drama series.



Dooney Press
www.dooneypress.com

Cover period photographs public domain
Wood texture used under license, Pixabay
Cover design ©2026 Thomas & Heidi Tosi

ISBN 978-1-954782-23-5



9 781954 782235