

Six Days Of Madness

by

Gary Gurner & Tom Hugh-Jones

Inspired by the book by Ted Harper

WGA Registered

Canyon Literary Management

canyonlit@yahoo.com

310-453-1967

Before the picture fades up, we HEAR the voice of LEE GIBSON reminiscing.

LEE (V.O.)

Before World War Two, it was bigger than football and baseball combined. They were stars. Heck, Torchy Peden was making more money than Joe DiMaggio. Nowadays, it's all but forgotten...

FADE IN:

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN -- DECEMBER, 1940

A DOZEN CYCLISTS thunder around a banked wooden track, waging a gladiatorial battle of men and machines. The strain on their faces is matched only by the fierce determination in their eyes. They've been racing this way for six days.

The bikes rattle dangerously close, as the riders jostle for position. Their legs pump like locomotives, their faces contort as they gulp down air. But nobody is willing to give ground. This is the final sprint.

Surrounding the "wooden saucer," a capacity crowd rises as one. Among them, a young man, HARPER GIBSON, follows the action with a passionate intensity. His hands grip imaginary handlebars, as he leans into a curve with the riders below.

Down beside the track, "RAILBIRDS" squeal as one man pulls away from the pack.

With a ferocious snarl, French Canadian star, MICHEL LAFLEUR, summons up his last ounce of energy and pedals across the Finish line.

The crowd goes wild.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION -- EVENING

A train pulls into the platform with a screech of brakes and a hiss of steam. A carriage door opens.

LEE GIBSON steps on to the platform with a suitcase in his hand. He stands there for a second, getting his bearings, then smiles. He has arrived.

LEE (V.O.)

It was my first time in New York and my brother, Harper, was supposed to meet me at Grand Central. He didn't show up. That's the kind of hold six day racing had on him.

EXT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION -- EVENING

Lee steps out into the cold city night. He pulls out a scrap of paper with directions, looks at a street sign and nearly winds up as a hood ornament as he steps in front of a Yellow cab.

LEE (V.O.)

But I understood. The race at Madison Square Garden was the Championship. And if my train was on time, I'd have been there. That was the night Michel LaFleur won five thousand dollars.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN -- LATER

In the center of the arena, the race PROMOTER hands over a silver trophy and a check to Michel LaFleur.

LEE (V.O.)

And everybody inside knew it. They just went quiet. That was a lot of money.

The crowd of Depression-weary faces stares in envious wonder.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN -- LATER

Lee carries his suitcase through the crowd as they make their way out of the stadium.

LEE (V.O.)

But don't get me wrong. Harper was also making money riding. It was just a tad different from the way he described it in his letters.

Lee stops where the crowd has gathered to watch another spectacle.

Right there on an empty patch of sidewalk, Harper Gibson is riding around on a unicycle, performing like a seal.

HARPER

Anyone wanna give me five thousand dollars?

A chuckle ripples through the crowd.

HARPER (CONT'D)

I mean, those guys may be fast but can any of them ride backwards?

Harper does a hundred eighty degree turn and rides backwards, swooping his hat down to collect a nickel from a generous soul.

HARPER (CONT'D)

Thank you, ma'am. God Bless You. A nickel is a good start. Can I get a dime?

As he spins around for his next stunt, he spots Lee. The surprise throws him off balance. He pedals back and forth until finally, he jumps to the ground.

Lee puts his suitcase down.

LEE

What the hell are you doing?

Harper spreads his arms wide.

HARPER

Riding--

LEE

--I can see that--

HARPER

I told you. I ride every time there's a race.

Lee laughs. They embrace.

EXT. APARTMENT BLDG. -- NIGHT

Harper and Lee arrive outside an apartment building in Hell's Kitchen. Lee looks up at the seven-story tenement. He's not impressed.

LEE

Swanky place. Does it come with a doorman?

HARPER

You mean my steel friend here, Henry?

Harper jumps up to grab the lowest rung of the fire escape ladder and pulls it down.

EXT. APARTMENT ROOF -- NIGHT

Harper steps off the fire escape onto the roof. Lee follows.

LEE

Too bad "Henry" doesn't carry bags.

HARPER

Yeah, but that's the way it is with
a penthouse.

Harper waves with a flourish. Lee looks and sees what is
clearly little more than a converted pigeon coop.

INT. PIGEON COOP -- NIGHT

Lee enters and looks around at a crudely furnished space
that has been put together with more love than money.

LEE

This is where you live?

Harper leads him past a bed, a table and a chair to a one-
wall window that was clearly salvaged from a demolition site.
He points out to the sparkling Manhattan skyline.

HARPER

No, I live here.

Lee takes in the view. It explains everything.

LEE (V.O.)

As I looked out over New York, I
realized it didn't matter where we
lived. It was where we were going.

EXT. APARTMENT ROOF - COOP -- MORNING

The morning sun bathes the rooftop in golden light. Lee comes
out of the coop, sleepy-eyed, and watches pigeons flutter
off the roof.

Harper removes a tarp, revealing a lightweight racing cycle.
It looks a little beaten up but the real problem is the wheels --
there're no tires on them.

HARPER

She doesn't look like much but she'll
go. It's just that I keep blowing
tires. Seven dollars a pair adds up.

LEE

How about used ones?

HARPER

Nobody sells used ones.

LEE

They must have gone through hundreds
at the Garden.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN -- DAY

Lee climbs in a big trash dumpster. Harper peers over the side with a look of distaste as Lee burrows among the garbage.

LEE

Bingo.

From among the trash, Lee lifts up a bicycle tire. Harper takes it from him and examines it skeptically.

HARPER

I don't know about this.

Lee emerges with a second and then a third.

LEE

Well, how about these?

Harper is still skeptical.

LEE (CONT'D)

They're Brownings.

Harper breaks into a grin as he looks at his trash-covered brother.

LEE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Harper laughed at me but he knew I was on to something. Rose Browning made the best tires in the business.

EXT. BROWNING TIRES -- DAY

A light industrial building in New Jersey. The sound of humming machinery comes from within.

INT. BROWNING TIRES -- DAY

ROSE BROWNING, 45, feeds a continuous thread of cotton onto a long wooden drum -- the first step in the process of making tires by hand.

ROSE

I'm not in the repair business.

LEE

But they are your tires, aren't they?

ROSE

Sure they're my tires.

LEE

Well, don't you stand behind your product?

ROSE

Hey, my tires are the best in the game.

LEE

We know that. That's why we want to use them. But if you don't help us now, we won't come to you when we're winning.

Rose turns, with an amused look on her face. She's heard all this before.

ROSE

Don't tell me you two are going to be champions?

Across the room, Harper is admiring autographed pictures of six-day cycling champions that line the walls. He turns to Rose.

HARPER

That's right. Someday, you'll be putting us up on this wall.

ROSE

(laughing)

You've got a ways to go if you can't even afford tires.

Rose's daughter KAY watches from another drum, where she is applying rubber cement to a layer of cotton already rolled. She steps back from the machine and pulls down a mask to reveal a beautiful face.

KAY

Don't be so hard on them, Mom. I don't mind fixing the tires. We could get them to do some work around the house.

Rose considers the suggestion, noticing the way Kay looks at Harper.

ROSE

We can't guarantee the repairs.

LEE

Neither can we.

INT. BROWNING HOUSE -- AFTERNOON

Harper wrestles a wrench around a radiator. Kay watches him from the bed.

KAY

It'll be great to have heat in here again. I've been freezing for the last six weeks.

HARPER

Why didn't you get it fixed?

Kay hesitates for a second before answering.

KAY

My dad passed away. Things have been kind of --

HARPER

-- Oh, I'm sorry.

There is a moment's silence. Which then breaks.

KAY

I've never been to Pittsburgh. What's it like?

HARPER

It's like the rest of the country. They're so busy laying people off, it's hard to get started.

They look for something else to say but don't find it. Harper goes back to work on the radiator.

INT. BROWNING HOUSE -- DAY

Rose bustles around the kitchen as she fixes tea. Lee unwraps a parcel of tires on the kitchen table.

Rose comes over to inspect them. She picks one up and runs her thumb around the inside, until she finds the puncture.

ROSE

I don't know if all of these can be repaired.

INT. LAFLEUR MANSION -- RIVERDALE, NEW YORK - DAY

Michel LaFleur paces an elegant room, reading aloud from the morning paper. In the background, skilled fingers play on a piano.

LAFLEUR

"...Smelling the five thousand dollars waiting beyond the finish line, Michel LaFleur pulled out the stops to snatch victory from the favorite in the final sprint."

LaFleur stops reading. His face falls.

Behind him, IVORY MILLER glances up from the piano and completes the article LaFleur was reading.

IVORY

"...It was only after the race was over that rumors began to surface."

LaFleur stares at him in surprise. Ivory stops playing.

IVORY (CONT'D)

I fed them the story.

LAFLEUR

You started rumors about me?

IVORY

The rumors were already there, Michel. I just gave them to the press.

LAFLEUR

What rumors?

IVORY

Where would you like me to start? That Buck Darnell didn't put his heart into the race. Or that Charlie Thomas was paid not to show up?

LAFLEUR

What? This is nonsense!

IVORY

(smiling)

That's why they're called rumors.

LaFleur looks confused.

IVORY (CONT'D)

But if I can make the Wheelmen's Association believe them...

Ivory returns to noodling at the piano.

IVORY (CONT'D)

I'm tired of Theo Ackland.

LAFLEUR

So you ruin my reputation to slander him?

IVORY

You're 38 years old. What difference does it make?

LaFleur pounds his chest.

LAFLEUR

It makes a difference to me!!!

Miller ignores him and continues to play, losing himself in the music. He doesn't care what LaFleur thinks.

INT. COOP -- EVENING

Harper and Lee are eating dinner.

LEE

It sure sounds like an amateur race.

HARPER

It's twenty bucks. And promoters come to Saratoga. They're always looking for new blood.

LEE

I say we save our blood for the pine saucer.

HARPER

Pine saucer? You need to get your nose out of the sports section.

LEE

I thought we were doing this to get into the sports section.

Harper smiles. A door buzzer SOUNDS.

EXT. APARTMENT ROOF - COOP -- EVENING

The boys come out, walk to the edge of the roof and peer over.

BOYS' P.O.V.

Down below Kay stands at the front door carrying a package of tires wrapped in paper.

BACK ON THE BOYS

They look at each other in surprise.

LEE

She didn't take the ferry over just to deliver some tires.

Harper scales the roof wall and leaps onto the fire escape.

INTERCUT

Laughing, Lee races down the interior stairwell of the apartment building.

INTERCUT

Harper clatters down the fire escape's iron steps.

INTERCUT

Outside the front door, Kay looks up, startled by the noise of descending footsteps.

INTERCUT

Lee runs along a hallway toward the entrance, grabs the door and pulls it open.

OUTSIDE

Harper swings down the final leg of the fire escape, dropping to the ground in front of Kay. Kay looks from one to the other and smiles.

KAY

Delivery.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- EVENING

The boys take the tires and lead her inside and up the stairs.

LEE

We're upstairs.

INT. STAIRWELL -- CONTINUOUS

The boys reach the top of the stairs and wait for Kay, who is flagging a little. Once she's caught her breath, they open the door onto the roof.

EXT. ROOF APARTMENT BLDG -- EVENING

Kay steps out onto the roof, a little perplexed.

KAY

You keep pigeons?