

# Chasing the Peloton

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a ten minute play

by

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## **Chasing the Peloton**

### **Characters**

JOUPREDOU

VAV

### **Time**

Early afternoon.

### **Setting**

The Tour de France.

Halfway up the Alp d'Huez.

## Chasing the Peloton

The lights come up on **JOUPREDOU** and **VAV**. Both are seated on bicycles. They pedal steadily up a hill.

**JOUPREDOU** wears the Yellow Jersey.

**JOUPREDOU:** (TO HIMSELF) Shit. Shit. Shit.

**VAV:** (TO AUDIENCE) Look at him. He doesn't know what to do. This is not a situation he is accustomed to. Finding himself back here. With me. He is lost.

**JOUPREDOU:** Shit. Shit. Shit.

**VAV:** He fell. Or was he pushed? There are enough people who hate him to push. But no. So many cameras. They would've been seen. He fell. The Great One fell. I would laugh – if I was not in so much pain.

**JOUPREDOU:** Shit. Shit. Shit.

**VAV:** It is my calf. That is what keeps me here. I strained it coming in to *Cuneo*. A drunk Frenchman staggered in front me. I brake to miss him and I strain my calf. Now I climb the *Alp d'Huez*, with one leg.

**JOUPREDOU:** Shit. Shit. Shit.

**VAV:** They are often drunk. These French.

**JOUPREDOU:** (TO AUDIENCE) I was pushed. I did not fall. It was the Australian. They are always pushing, these Australians. Pushing, bumping, kicking. Just as we came through *Le Ribot*.

**VAV:** I am not happy with my calf.

**JOUPREDOU:** He was jealous. Jealous of me and my *maillot jaune*. (WITH AUSSIE ACCENT) 'Yellow Jersey'. I have held it since the 14<sup>th</sup> stage. Coming into *Digne-les-Bains*. I have only three more stages to ride and the *maillot* is mine to keep. So he pushes me.

**VAV:** My calf and I are not good friends.

**JOUPREDOU:** And now I am here. *Arrière de la course*. Back of the race. With *L'Espagnol*. *Arrière de la course*. I should be *Tete de la course*.

VAV: I should like to have words with my calf.

JOUPREDOU: I am six minutes and nine seconds behind the *peloton*. I led by two minutes and forty one seconds. My *maillot jaune* will soon be mine no longer. I must make up three minutes and twenty eight seconds with only six kilometres to the summit of the *Alp d'Huez*. That makes thirty four -

VAV: I wish –

JOUPREDOU: And two third seconds

VAV: I could kill

JOUPREDOU: Each kilometre.

VAV: My calf.

JOUPREDOU: Riding alone on the *Alp d'Huez*, the toughest mountain climb in the whole tour. Alone.

VAV: He thinks he is alone.

JOUPREDOU: *Seulement.*

VAV: He is not alone. He rides with me. *L'Espagnol*. The Spaniard. Vav.  
(BEAT)  
(TO **JOUPREDOU**) You fell ?

JOUPREDOU: (TO **VAV**) *J'ai été poussé.*

VAV: (TO AUDIENCE) He says he was pushed. He fell.  
I speak English to him. I will not speak French to him because he will not speak Spanish to me.  
(TO **JOUPREDOU**) We are far behind.

JOUPREDOU: *Je suis lointain derrière.*

VAV: He says "*He is far behind.*" Or "*I am far behind.*" You can never be sure with these French.

JOUPREDOU: (TO HIMSELF) Shit. Shit. Shit.

VAV: (TO **JOUPREDOU**) We chase the Peloton.

JOUPREDOU: (TO **VAV**) *Je chasse le peloton.* (BEAT) *Seulement.*

VAV: This time he is very clear. "I chase the peloton. Alone."  
(TO **JOUPREDOU**) Then chase.  
(BEAT)

VAV: (CONT) (TO AUDIENCE) But he does not.  
Like all things in this life – a cyclist’s greatest enemy is never the rider behind him or in front. It is the one sitting on his own seat. Himself. And his fears.

JOUPREDOU: *Bientôt. Bientôt.*

VAV: “Soon” he says. “Soon.”  
His name is Joupredou. They call him “*Le Grand*” – “The Great One” because he is France’s great hope. *Only* hope. They may have started this race, it may be through their country, but when they come to winning it – the French are less of hope. Hopeless. They have not won the The Tour of France since 1985. Twenty three years. Since that time we – *L’Espagnol* – the Spanish – have won it nine times.  
(LOOKING TO JOUPREDOU) Count them. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine.  
(TO AUDIENCE) And they have not won it once. Americans have won it, a Dane has won it, a German, an Italian, even an Irishman has won it. But the French – zip. *Le fat circle*. Zero. Nought.  
But all that was about to change. Joupredou wore the Yellow Jersey. Joupredou was leading by two minutes and forty one seconds on Stage 17. Joupredou was going to win *Le Tour de France*. Then Joupredou fell.

JOUPREDOU: (TO AUDIENCE) I was pushed.  
(LOOKING AT SPECTATORS AS HE PASSES) Look at the way they look at me. Me - Joupredou. *Le Grand*. I am the hope of France. I carry all their dreams. They have come out from their houses to cheer me - to victory. And now they see me - at the back of the race. With The Spaniard. Vav.

VAV: He rides for Team LNC, the best team on the tour. He has a three year contract. He is paid a squillion dollars. His girlfriend is the most beautiful girl in France. She *is* Miss France. He rides for the Yellow Jersey. I ride for my life.

JOUPREDOU: (SEEING A SIGN) Five kilometres to go. Six minutes and *thirty two* seconds behind. Shit shit shit.

VAV: I am Vav. I am from Spain. I ride for Team Cokalart. We are the worse team in the tour. Even our name sounds like last place. “I came in Cokalart.” I have a one Tour contract. A contract that must pay for my family back in Spain. My beautiful wife and three children. My mother. And her brother. My next contract is depending on me finishing the tour. They are depending on me finishing the tour. “Easy” you say. “Keep pedalling you say.”

VAV: (CONT) "Calf or no calf – you will finish." *Le tour* is not so easy. I am *le Lanterne rouge*.

**JOUPREDOU LOOKS AROUND.**

JOUPREDOU: I would have helped them.

VAV: You know this term ? "The Red Lantern". They call it this because *le Lanterne rouge* was found at the end of the train. I am the last rider. It used to be the last rider was given much sympathy and he could even be the cause of celebrity, given high fees to appear in other races. But that tradition – like all good traditions – is now dead.

JOUPREDOU: I would have dropped back for them.

VAV: The same tradition that you help your team mates. That is what Joupredou is doing now. Looking around for his Team LNC. Wondering where they are.

JOUPREDOU: I would have thought about – at least.

VAV: He expects them to fall back. To pick him up and together mount a charge for the peloton. And they would have. If he had stopped for *un besoin naturel* – "a natural break" – they would have slowed down. Waited. But not when he is so far behind. Six minutes behind. And getting further. To drop back now they would kill all their chances. Now they just kill him and tonight one of them will take his place and wear the Yellow Jersey for Team LNC. And what happens to *le Lanterne rouge*. He is eliminated, if he falls ten percent behind the overall time of the race leader. The Yellow Jersey.

JOUPREDOU: (SEEING SIGN) Six minutes and fifty seconds.

VAV: I was 9 percent behind the Yellow Jersey at the start of this stage. I could not afford to fall one more percent – and I had. I was good as gone. My calf had ended my race. I was waiting for the *voiture balai* - "broom wagon" - to come and sweep me up. But then I look beside me and see the *Maillot Jaune*. I am saved. But no ! Joupredou may still wear the Yellow Jersey but he no longer owns it. It now belongs to another rider, probably from Team LNC, someone much further up the road whose combined time is now much better than The Great One. And he will be ten percent ahead of me. He sends me to the "broom wagon." So I must ride. I must chase the peloton. One calf or no calf.

**VAV BEGINS TO PEDAL FASTER.**

VAV: (TO **JOUPREDOU**) *Nous devons chasser le peloton.*

**JOUPREDOU** SEES HIM. HE LAUGHS.

VAV: Is he laughing at me ? Does he laugh at me ?

**JOUPREDOU** LAUGHS LOUDER.

VAV: (TO **JOUPREDOU**) At least I try.

JOUPREDOU: And you fail.

VAV: But I will fail trying.

**VAV** CYCLES FASTER. HE GETS AHEAD OF **JOUPREDOU**.  
**JOUPREDOU** CYCLES FASTER TO CATCH HIM.

JOUPREDOU: I do not need to chase the peloton. I am not the Red Lantern.

VAV: And you are no longer the Yellow Jersey.

BEAT.

JOUPREDOU: I will catch it up tomorrow.

VAV: Stage 18. *Bourg-d'Oisans to Saint-Étienne*. You are now four minutes behind the Yellow Jersey. How much can you catch up then ? A minute. Maybe ninety seconds. And you will have to ride alone. It is likely another in your team will now wear the Yellow Jersey. If you ride with them you catch up nothing.

JOUPREDOU: The day after tomorrow.

VAV: Stage 19. *Roanne to Montluçon*. A short stage. Only just over 150 kilometres. How much will you catch up then ? Then Stage 20. The time trial. That is not your speciality. You are not a sprinter – like the Russian or the American. And that just leaves Stage 21. The ride to Paris. No one attacks on the *Champs-Élysées*. That is one tradition that they can not kill, because it belongs to us – the riders – and we will not allow it to be killed.

JOUPREDOU: Look at the sign. Four kilometres to go. There is no time.

VAV: Some time is not no time.

JOUPREDOU: You ride on one leg.

VAV: That is one more than none.

JOUPREDOU: You are the Spaniard.

VAV: You are *Le Grand*. You have four kilometres to catch your rivals. To keep your *Maillot Jaune*. To make all of France proud.

JOUPREDOU: You are trying to flatter me. It is not working.

VAV: Then I will chase. And you will ride alone. *Suelement*.

JOUPREDOU: And I will enjoy the view.

**VAV PUTS ON A DETERMINED BURST. JOUPREDOU WATCHES HIM CYCLE OUT IN FRONT OF HIM.**

**AFTER AWHILE JOUPREDOU BEGINS TO CYCLE FASTER. HE CATCHES VAV.**

JOUPREDOU: You are in pain.

VAV: I am brave.

JOUPREDOU: You are stupid.

VAV: I am alive.

JOUPREDOU: Only for three more kilometres.

VAV: Then I will ride those three kilometres as fast as I can. Even if I am the Red Lantern. Even if my race is over. Even if I am for the Broom Wagon. I will ride.

JOUPREDOU: Why ?

VAV: Because it is in my heart.

BEAT.

JOUPREDOU: Why should I help you ?

VAV: Because I need help.

JOUPREDOU: Not enough.

VAV: Because I would help you.

JOUPREDOU: Not enough.

VAV: Because I will push over who ever wears the Yellow Jersey tomorrow.

JOUPREDOU: You wouldn't ?

VAV: I would.  
(BEAT)  
I wouldn't.

JOUPREDOU: Two kilometres.

VAV: (SEEING SIGN) And look ! Down to four minutes and sixteen seconds. Two more minutes and you still wear the Yellow Jersey.

JOUPREDOU: And you will not wear the Red Lantern.

VAV: You must lead. I will follow in your slipstream.

JOUPREDOU: You won't be able to stay with me.

VAV: I will try.

JOUPREDOU: You are mad.

VAV: I am The Spaniard.

JOUPREDOU: I am *Le Grand*.

VAV: Then ride. Ride for us both.

JOUPREDOU: Here I go.

TOGETHER: *Alp d'Huez – we are coming.*

JOUPREDOU: (SLOWLY BUILDING PACE) *Joup – re – dou.*

VAV: *Vav.*

JOUPREDOU: (GETTING FASTER) *Joup – re – dou.*

VAV: *Vav.*

JOUPREDOU: (FASTER STILL) *Joup – re – dou.*

VAV: *Vav.*

JOUPREDOU: (FAST NOW) *Joup – redou.*

VAV: *Vav.*

JOUPREDOU: (VERY FAST) *Joupredou.*

VAV: Vav.

JOUPREDOU: (FASTER) Joupredou.

BOTH SPRINTING NOW. TOGETHER. BUILDONG IN VOLUME:

JOUPREDOU: Joupredou. Joupredou. Joupredou. Joupredou.  
Joupredou. Joupredou. Joupredou. Joupredou.  
Joupredou !

VAV: Vav. Vav. Vav. Vav. Vav. Vav. Vav. Vav. Vav. Vav. Vav !

BLACKOUT. SILENCE.

SPOTLIGHT UP ON **JOUPREDOU**.

JOUPREDOU: (TO AUDIENCE) I made up two minutes.

SPOTLIGHT UP ON **VAV**.

VAV: (TO AUDIENCE) I lost five more.

JOUPREDOU: I lost the *Maillot Jaune*.

VAV: I kept the Red Lantern.

JOUPREDOU: But I regained it the next day.

VAV: That night the Broom Wagon swept me away.

JOUPREDOU: And I wore it as I rode down the *Champs-Élysées*. *Le Champion de Tour*. The King of France.

VAV: By the end of the tour – I was back in Spain.

JOUPREDOU: But *Le Grand* is good. *Le Grand* is kind. *Le Grand* remembers the little Spaniard who helped him that day. Reminded *Le Grand* to ride with his heart.

LIGHTS UP.

**VAV** NOW WEARS A DIFFERENT JERSEY.

VAV: And the next year I rode for Team LNC.

JOUPREDOU: And I still wear the *Maillot Jaune*.

VAV: Now I have a three year contract enough now for my wife, my three children -

JOUPREDOU: His mother

VAV: And her brother.

JOUPREDOU: (TO VAV) *L'Espagnol* – it is your turn to lead.

VAV: You won't be able to stay with me.

JOUPREDOU: I will try.

VAV: You will fail.

JOUPREDOU: I will fail trying.

THEY BEGIN TO CYCLE FASTER.

SUDDENLY **VAV** CLUTCHES HIS LEG.

VAV: Shit ! My other calf.

BLACKOUT.