

EXTRACT

Chasing the Peloton

a ten minute play

by

Alex Broun

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abroun@bigpond.net.au

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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) *Merde. Merde. Merde.*

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: *Merde. Merde. Merde.*

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: *Merde. Merde. Merde.*

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: *Merde. Merde. Merde.*

VAV: They are often drunk. These French.

JOUPREDOU: (TO AUDIENCE) I was pushed. I did not fall. It was the American. They are always pushing, these Americans. 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 the *maillot jaune*. (WITH AMERICAN ACCENT) 'Yellow Jersey'. (BACK TO FRENCH ACCENT) I have held it since the 14th stage. *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) *Merde. Merde. Merde.*

VAV: He says this a lot. (BEAT) (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. Joupredou. *Le Grand*. I carry their dreams. They have come out from their houses to cheer me. And now they see me - *arrière de la course*.. With The Spaniard.

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. *Merde. Merde. Merde.*

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.” “Calf or no calf – you will finish.” *Le tour* is not so easy. I am *le Lanterne rouge*.