

DOMESTIQUE

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FADE IN:

EXT. US NARROW PAVED ROAD GOING UP MOUNTAIN - DAY

MIKE, 21/22 yo professional-level bicycle racer, is going up the steep hill. Trees are flashing by and the sunlight and shade roll over him. ANNOUNCER (e.g., Phil Liggett) and COLOR (e.g., Bob Roll), voice over, are describing the action as if it were the ending of the penultimate stage of the Tour de France.

ANNOUNCER

Look at Mike go! He's dropped all the other race leaders as he charges up the hill.

COLOR

This guy is amazing. His rookie year, just out of university in the US, and he's been dominant in all his races.

ANNOUNCER

At the last time check, he'd have to crash out to keep from winning it all today.

COLOR

It's almost like he wanted to give the rest of the G.C. contenders a chance. He hovered just a few seconds back the whole race.

Mike puts in a further burst of speed as he stands up and rounds a corner.

From no spectators, now there are throngs. Held back by barriers, they lean over and cheer him on.

Gaining even more speed, even though the road is pitching further upward, he blazes around the corner to see the finish line.

He sprints forward, crosses the line and the crowd cheers as he throws his hands up.

The crowd loses none of its energy, but fades to quiet, then starts to dissolve to just another day along the road.

Mike smiles to himself, then shrugs as he grabs a bottle of water, drinks some and pours more over his head.

MIKE (V.O.)

This is a story about what it means to be the hundredth best
(MORE)

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
professional road bicycle racer in
the world. Notice all those caveats?
Not BMX bikes, not dirt or road
motorcycles. No. This is all about
professional road bicycle racing.
And what it means when someone was
better than everyone around him, but
those people weren't the very best.

INT. MIKE&LIZZY DINING ROOM - DAY

A middle of the road apartment. It's clear there's an athlete who lives there, and he's into road cycling. Bike parts and gear here and there, water bottles, posters, etc. At the table, with finished dinner elements scattered around, Mike and LIZZY (Elizabeth), a plain Jane, just barely pretty, arrives home from college.

MIKE
(big sigh)
I got a 'no' from the last team on
the list today.

Lizzy puts her hand out to hold Mike's.

LIZZY
I'm sorry babe. Maybe consider
cycling's minor leagues?

MIKE
(shrugs)
Then there'd be no career for you to
manage. I need to be a leader on a
big-league team for there to be any
endorsements.

LIZZY
I dunno. I bet I can still make
something out of that.

MIKE
And the pay. Even as team lead I
doubt I could get enough to even
cover my half the bills.

LIZZY
What about some up-and-coming team?
Get in early, then grow with them
into the elite level.

MIKE
Nothing like that's on my radar.

INT. MIKE&LIZZY DINING ROOM - DAY

Mike sits in front of his closed laptop at the table. He sighs, shoulders slumped.

He opens the laptop, goes to Google and types in "us pro continental cycling."

MIKE (V.O.)
OK, let's see now... U.S. pro
continental cycling.

He's looking at the UCI Men's page
(<https://www.usacycling.org/resources/uci-and-domestic-elite-teams/uci-mens-road-continental-teams>) and sighs further when he sees "Placeholder image."

He goes back to Google and adds "salary" to the search.

MIKE (V.O.)
Now for the really depressing part,
let's add salary.

He looks at the top results.

He slowly shakes his head, closes the laptop and leans back in the chair.

He studies the ceiling.

He opens the laptop, hunches forward and begins to type.

INT. SHARED APPT - DAY

Mike enters with his bike and with a practiced move gets it inside without struggle.

He places it in a rack, takes off his helmet and undoes his shoes.

He stretches.

He sits, with slumped shoulders and with a depressed sigh, in front of his closed laptop.

Resigned, he opens it.

The screen shows his email with one unread message. It's from FRANÇOIS (speaks with French accent), the late 40's director sportif of team Domo-DoMenOx (Dough-moe Dah-Meh-Nox).

Mike's face freezes.

He looks around the room.

His finger hovering over the touchpad to open the email.
The mouse pointer hovers over the message.

Mike leans forward and mouths the director and team's name.

The mouse pointer hovers again.

Mike stands up and walks around the room and circles back to the laptop. Without sitting, he peers at the screen.

He cautiously sits down.

He moves the mouse pointer around in circles.

With sudden determination, he double clicks and opens the message.

The message is revealed:

FRANÇOIS (V.O.)
*Hello Mike, if you're still
interested in racing...*

MIKE
(muttering)
Like I've thought of anything else
all this time.

FRANÇOIS (V.O.)
*I'd like to arrange a time to meet
with you and discuss working with
team Domo-DoMenOx.*

Mike sits back in his chair.

MIKE
(mouthing)
FFFuuuucccckkkkk.

Mike goes on a mad scramble to find his phone.

Which is plainly visible on the table next to the computer.

He finally sees it, snatches it up and dials the number on the email.

MIKE
(rushed)
Hello! My name is Mike and François
asked me to call.

SECRETARY (O.S.)
Please hold.

Mike fidgets and can't sit still. There are some BEEPING and CLICKING sounds.

He jumps to his feet and starts to pace.

FRANÇOIS (O.S.)
Hello Mike?

Mike clears his throat and with a small squeak,

MIKE
François?

FRANÇOIS (O.S.)
Yes. I take it you'd like to meet?

MIKE
Yes, of course.
(pause)
I mean, yes sir.

FRANÇOIS (O.S.)
Relax Mike, we're just exploring at this stage, no reason, yet, to get excited.

Mike looks disappointed and slumps into the chair.

FRANÇOIS (O.S.)
You still with me?

MIKE
Yes. It's just that it's been so long.

FRANÇOIS (O.S.)
That's one of the things we need to talk about. I think it's best if it's face-to-face.

Mike nods, then realizes he can't be seen.

MIKE
OK. I'm available any time.

FRANÇOIS (O.S.)
As it happens, I'll be in your area in a couple of days. Would you prefer to meet in public or shall I stop by your apartment?

MIKE
Uh, my apartment would be fine, if it's all the same to you.

FRANÇOIS (O.S.)
OK, I'll contact you soon with the
specific time.

Mike disconnects and starts to rush around ineffectively
cleaning things up.

INT. SHARED APPT - NIGHT

Lizzy gets in after a long day studying and working. Mike
meets her at the door.

LIZZY
You're practically bouncing. What's
up?

MIKE
I took your advice and started to
research U.S.A. pro teams and guess
what?

LIZZY
(finger to lips)
Hmm. It's hard to imagine, you've
given me so few clues.
(pause)
I know! You got some interest!

Mike nods, with a silly smile on his face.

MIKE
The director sportif is a guy named
François. I can't find anything
about the team he's working for now,
but he has a great reputation. Maybe
this is the ground floor you
mentioned.

Lizzy gives him a big hug.

LIZZY
See, just needed a little more time.

EXT. SHARED APPT - DAY

In the parking lot of the apartment complex a sedan pulls
up and stops in front of the walkway. In the back is
François talking on the phone.

An assistant gets out of the other side of the car and
walks around to open the door.

A very distracted François steps onto the sidewalk.

FRANÇOIS

Yes, I'm here now, about to go talk to him.

(pause)

Can we finish this later?

François disconnects the phone, tosses it to the assistant who hands him a folder of papers.

He starts toward the apartment.

INT. SHARED APPT - DAY

Mike opens the door for François.

They shake hands.

Mike gestures for François to sit at the table.

FRANÇOIS

Thanks for seeing me.

MIKE

Very much my pleasure.

FRANÇOIS

How much do you know about me and the team?

MIKE

Everyone knows you! All those teams you've taken from obscurity to the top of the podium!

FRANÇOIS

I'm glad you're a fan. I aim to do this again with Domo-DoMenOx. Know anything about them?

MIKE

(shrugs)

Must be some small-time team, I haven't been able to discover anything.

FRANÇOIS

We've worked hard to keep the team a secret, so we could build it without everyone looking over our shoulders. That's changing now. We have a... patron... who is - and this is in his own words - "a man with more money than sense." He wants to indulge his fantasies of being a pro cyclist.

(pause)

We're the benefit of that largesse.

MIKE

Can you just buy your way into the grand tours?

FRANÇOIS

No, not normally. But political connections go a very long way in any business, and pro cycling is a business like any other, so some horse trading happened and we'll be fielding teams.

MIKE

(cautious)

And you want me for the team?

FRANÇOIS

Yes.

Mike's face lights up.

He sits straight and leans forward.

FRANÇOIS

But,

(Mike's face gets cautious again)

We're not looking for a team lead, we're looking for a domestique.

Mike tries to put on a brave face, but is clearly disappointed.

FRANÇOIS

We've looked very closely at your college career. It's outstanding. In isolation. You're above average as a time trialist, sprinter and mountain climber. Way above average, if you look at professional cyclists in general. But if you look at GC contenders, you're just below the top ten in each category. Based on our ranking, that makes you the 100th best rider in the world. That means finding a team that'll consider you as a leader is going to be a challenge. With what you've invested so far, you're not likely to improve enough to move to the top.

Mike sighs, looks down and leans back in his chair. He looks like he wants to object, but then nods.

MIKE

OK, if that's what it takes to get me on the team.

(mumbles)

It's not like anyone else has been interested.

FRANÇOIS

It may not mean much to you right now, but I absolutely feel for you. My dreams were for yellow and my stats weren't as good as yours.

Mike looks up and meets François's eyes.

FRANÇOIS

But everyone's strengths manifest in different ways. It turns out I have a head for strategy.

François hands Mike a packet of papers.

FRANÇOIS

And for picking team members.

(pause)

You should find everything you need in here, but call me, anytime, if you have questions.

MIKE

Let me think about it for a few days.

FRANÇOIS

(nodding)

I wouldn't have it any other way.

INT. MIKE&LIZZY DINING ROOM - DAY

Mike meets Lizzy at the door.

LIZZY

(eagerly)

So, how'd it go?

MIKE

(face neutral)

He wants me for a domestique.

Lizzy's face falls a little.

MIKE

Yeah, well, at least it's a UCI world pro team with actual salaries.

LIZZY

Well, some domestiques have gone on to be team leads.

MIKE

(shrugs)

It'll be more of a challenge for you, turning a domestique into something marketable.

LIZZY

I'm looking forward to take that on.

INT. MIKE'S PARENTS HOUSE - DAY

Mike's parents, DENNIS and LOUISE, mid 40's to early 50's, live in a typical middle-class house, nothing special. The three are sitting around a dinner table with the meal finished, but not tidied up.

MIKE

So, after all this time, I've finally been approached.

Dennis and Louise look on with interest.

MIKE

The director sportif is François. He has a long history of building powerful teams that go on to win big.

The couple nod.

MIKE

The team is a new one: Domo-DoMenOx.

DENNIS

Does the name mean anything?

MIKE

Pro teams are expensive. Usually there're a couple of major backers that share the name, then sometimes dozens of other sponsors, until the jersey gets filled up with logos. In this case, Domo and DoMenOx are the two major sponsors and somehow Domo won out for the first spot.

LOUISE

At least it has some alliteration.

MIKE

(smiling)

Perhaps that's what won out.

DENNIS
So you've been hired as the leader,
then?

Mike's excitement dies and he heaves a sigh.
Looking down at the table he mutters,

MIKE
No, I'll be a domestique.

There's dead silence, causing Mike to look up.
Dennis' face is getting red.
Louise has her hand to her mouth in shock.
When Mike's expression begs the question,

DENNIS
(growling)
No son of mine is going to be a
dominatrix!

Mike stares at his dad with open-mouthed confusion.
Behind her hand, Louise' eyes start to crinkle.
Dennis starts to guffaw.
Mike realizes he's been had.

DENNIS
You should have seen your face!

LOUISE
Why didn't we record it?

MIKE
Lizzy.

The couple nod.

LOUISE
She was surprised that you hadn't
told us already.

DENNIS
Yeah, if you want to keep a secret,
you need to tell people.

Mike looks sharply at his dad, then shrugs.

MIKE
I'm still thinking about it.
Domestique isn't what I was dreaming
about all these years, you know.

LOUISE
What's a domestique, anyway?

DENNIS
Yeah, it sounds like a french maid
or something.

Louise smiles at her husband, then turns her attention to Mike.

MONTAGE

Should I have some sort of VO?

- A domestique collecting water bottles from the team car.
- Handing out water bottles to the rest of the team.
- Collecting feedbacks along the side of the road.
- Cutting the wind in front of the team leader.
- Leaning against other riders to protect the team lead as the race heats up.
- Handing his bike off to the leader when his has a flat.
- Leading a greatly reduced peloton [main body of riders, including the overall leaders] up a steep hill.

END MONTAGE

DENNIS
Why do you coddle the leader like that?

MIKE
Two thousand mile long, three week races are often won by seconds. The leader has to be able to respond to attacks at critical points in the race. If my leader can't, we don't win the race.

LOUISE
So it really is a team sport then.

MIKE
(nodding)
Just like everyone hears about the quarterback or the pitcher, but neither would exist without the rest of the team, the leader gets all the press, but would be nothing without the domestiques.

DENNIS
What's a domestique get paid?

MIKE
(shrugging)
Not much. I've been offered a
one-year contract for fifty-five K.

LOUISE
That's more than your father's first
job!

MIKE
Well, it's about twice the usual
starting salary for a rookie nobody.

DENNIS
Can it go up from there?

MIKE
(shrugs)
Oh, sure. Even domestiques can make
several hundred thousand.

Both parents nod in satisfaction.

EXT. US NARROW PAVED ROAD GOING UP MOUNTAIN - DAY

Mike is on a training ride, hustling up a hill.

He's deep in thought.

FRANÇOIS (V.O.)
If you work for us, you need to
train exactly the way we tell you
to, eat what we tell you to, ride
the bike we tell you to. This is
critically important, as we have
training and nutrition professionals
working to optimize conditions
specifically for you, specifically
for the races we're targeting and
even specific stages. Even though
you're a great all around rider now,
we don't need that from you. If you
work for us, you're working to
support our team lead, so need to be
strengthened specifically to help
his weak areas.

INT. LIZZY'S PARENTS HOUSE - NIGHT

Lizzy's parents are also solidly middle-class. CHUCK and
DARLEEN, late 40's to mid 50's, sit on one side of the
table while Mike and Lizzy sit on the other. Mike's being
particularly picky at what he eats.

Darleen looks on with disapproval.

Lizzy notices,

LIZZY

Relax mom, he hasn't suddenly stopped liking your food. He's on a diet.

CHUCK

Diet? He's skin and bones already!

MIKE

(sheepish look)

I've hired on to a team and they've got me doing everything by their book. Including eating.

DARLEEN

Aren't all calories the same?

LIZZY

Oh mom, of course not. Even I know that. Some foods go straight to fat.
(patting hips)
Others can be coaxed into muscle and others still will work as short-term fuel.

MIKE

(nodding)

François actually wants me to put on some fat. He says that'll be critical to recovery on the mountain stages.

INT. SHARED APPT BEDROOM - DAY

With dawn's early light, Mike rolls out of bed, Lizzie sleeping next to him.

INT. SHARED APPT KITCHEN - DAY

Lizzie laid food out for him. He glances at diet instructions, then digs in.

MONTAGE

- Mike eating a big bowl of oatmeal.
- Eating a big bowl of granola cereal with whole milk.
- Scrambling a big plate of eggs.
- He leaves a small bowl for Lizzy.
- As well as a sink full of dishes.

END MONTAGE

INT. SHARED APPT LIVING - DAY

He stretches.

Gets his gear on.

Grabs his bike.

Heads out.

INT. SHARED APPT LIVING - DAY

Lizzy, in a comfy robe and furry slippers, yawns and stretches as she walks out of the bedroom.

She comes to a complete stop mid stretch when she sees the sink full of dishes.

She may be cursing as she stares.

EXT. US ROAD, VARIES - DAY

MONTAGE

- Speeds averaging 25 mph and on the flats getting up to 30.
- When he's going up a steep hill, it's at 15 mph.
- Waving to people from time to time.
- Sprinting past a dog chasing him.
- Slamming on brakes due to traffic.
- Mike's trip odometer going up to 150 miles in 6 hours.

MIKE (V.O.)

This might seem like an extreme training day, and for an average rider it would be, but for the professional cyclist this day is like a thousand others.

END MONTAGE

INT. SHARED APPT KITCHEN - DAY

On the counter are several bananas, a couple of avocados. He pulls out a large salad from the fridge as well as a platter of grilled chicken.

INT. SHARED APPT BEDROOM - DAY

Mike is asleep, the clock showing it's early afternoon.

INT. SHARED APPT LIVING - DAY

Late afternoon, Lizzy elbows open the door as she brings in bags of groceries.

She looks around the empty room and carries them toward the kitchen.

LIZZY

Oh, don't mind me, I've only been at school, interning and shopping, it's not like I've worked hard today.

INT. SHARED APPT KITCHEN - DAY

Lizzy enters the kitchen and sees the sink is yet again filled with dishes.

She sets the bags of groceries down with a little more thump than is necessary and might be cursing.

INT. SHARED APPT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lizzy and Mike preparing a big meal of pasta and salmon.

As they begin to carry the plates to the dining area, Lizzy points at the sink, takes Mike's plate and walks off.

Mike looks at her walking away, looks at the dishes, looks back at Lizzy, slumps his shoulders and goes to wash the dishes.

FADE OUT.

The End.