

Orien started to feel nauseous at the sight of New York. Each building he saw was a painful reminder of possibly the biggest blunder of his racing career. If he even will have one after this. There was no way his engine exploded on international TV and people would just let him be.

He forgot which hotel the IRC had paid for the racers to stay in. And he always kept his wallet in his jeans. His jeans, which he left in the hotel. He couldn't ride the bus, take the subway, or a taxi. Even if he could, he still couldn't navigate his way through this bustling metropolis by himself. Hell, even back home, Denver seemed like a jungle to navigate through.

"Hey! Orien!" A voice called out to him. The voice was jolly, as if they could make words dance. It was an African accent, but he couldn't pinpoint exactly where. He turned around and saw a black man with very dark skin. He had short black hair and no facial hair. He was smiling, and his teeth would be perfect if not for the gap in between his front teeth. It's not a large gap, but it's big enough to notice. He had on a Grand Prix racing suit, decorated with a party of black, red, and green. In the center of his chest, the tricolor map of Africa was printed on his chest. He held his helmet with one arm to this side.

"Oh, you're in the Grand Prix, too." Orien blurted out.

"That's right. Jabari Njoroge, Kenya number 26," Jabari cheerfully introduced, sticking out a hand. Orien hesitantly accepts the handshake.

"I'm trying to get back to the hotel, but I kind of forgot where it was." Orien lamented.

"I'm headed there too, actually. Want to come with me?"

"Sure." Orien accepted, softening his pain a little.

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Orien flicked on the light switch to his hotel room. Neither Parker nor Grant were there. The room looked the exact same as the afternoon before they left.

“Guess they’re still mad at me.” He said to himself. He slithered to his bed and plopped onto his belly, his feet dangling off the end. He laid face-down for a minute, feeling the warmth of the pillow on his face. He flipped over to his back, his eyes staring at the ceiling. He really should’ve listened to Parker and let her inspect his engine. Dirk probably would’ve pulled some strings and postponed the race. He sat up and slapped his temples. No point in thinking about what already happened. He grabbed the remote, and like a wild west gunslinger, prepared to let corrosive blue waves melt his brain. The first channel to pop up was a sports news channel.

“With the conclusion of the International Grand Prix’s second race in New York City came a rather explosive incident. American Racer Orien Santiago suffered an engine malfunction right before the race’s conclusion, which involved his engine exploding, causing his car to stall and roll to the end of the track. He finished in 79th place, leaving him just one place above the disqualification threshold. What was surprising was that Santiago’s engine was making weird sounds, but he allegedly refused pit stops multiple times throughout the race.”

Orien groaned. The last he wanted to hear about was his blunder. He smothered the next channel button on the remote. It was yet another show related to the Grand Prix, this time being a tabloid show.

“Recent television numbers suggest that Americans, arguably one of racing’s largest audiences, are tuning out to the first annual 2009 International Grand Prix, possibly due to Orien Santiago’s engine failure after refusing multiple times to get it checked. The 22-year-old is America’s sole rep in the Grand Prix, but fans back at home are not supporting him in the least, some fans actively campaigning against him. Santiago was selected to be a part of the Grand Prix

after winning a qualifier race following American racing legend Harvey Jameson's retirement. Let's see what the people at home say."

The first interviewee is a woman with a burning tire cap.

"Do you support Orien Santiago?" The reporter asked, shoving the microphone into the woman's face.

"Honestly, no," The woman admitted honestly. "Usually in sports, when I see the American in any sport, I think, 'Yeah, America!' But I just don't feel... Inspired by this guy. there's nothing to cheer for."

The show cut to another interviewee, a man in his 40s or 50s with a shirt with a picture of the American flag and the caption, 'USA! USA!'

"A lot of people are houdin' Santiago for his dumb as hell engine fiasco, but what I wanna know is why did this kid refuse a proper pit crew? He just grabbed two buddies of his from Colorado and thought they'd be even half as good as a full team of professionals. You saw Toronto, the poor gal had to change four tires by herself in forty seconds!"

The show cut to a female correspondent talking to a man with a beard and trucker hat.

"This kid is supposed to be the face of America in this race? I say send his ass back to Mexico and let a true patriot take his place."

The correspondent glanced awkwardly at the camera and looked back at the man. "Orien Santiago is Puerto-Rican."

The trucker guy paused, then leaned back into the microphone. "Same difference."

Orien's hands trembled as he flipped through the channel again. The whole country saw him as a laughing stock. He was their representation. Their supposed idol. And he fumbled in front of the world's eyes. His fingers gripped the remote so tight he could snap it in two. It

displayed the after-race press conference where the top ten racers answer questions. It was being held in the hotel conference room downstairs. Orien had to pass the traffic jam of conference goers just to get to the elevator. And who else was on the TV screen? Nigel Thorne. Orien blanked out details from the race, but he remembered seeing Nigel finish first again. His demeanor at the table was so much different than his run in at the Toronto hotel the week before. His back was straight and his face was blank. He had his UK-themed racing suit still on and his gloved hands laced on the table. Orien nearly didn't recognize his face with humility on it.

"Congratulation on your second first place finish in the Grand Prix, Mr. Thorne." A female reporter's voice told the young Brit.

"Thank you very much." Nigel said quietly, leaning into the microphone as he spoke.

"Now, are you aware of the engine malfunction that happened in this evening's race?"

"Yes, I'm very aware." Nigel nodded, answering quickly and concisely.

"It's said that Orien Santiago refused to get his engine checked. What are your thoughts on this?"

A small smile crept its way on Nigel's face as he readjusted himself in his seat. To the masses, it was a charming smile. To Orien, it was a little smug.

"I would rather not speak ill of my fellow racers," He began, speaking louder and away from the microphone. "But I believe that was a rather foolish decision on his end. What professional would undermine the importance of a pit stop, especially something as critical as an engine failure? With a mentality like that, I'm shocked he even made it this far." Orien could hear the audience chuckle at that comment of his. Ugh.

"Now, Orien is actually the son of well-renowned Puerto-Rican racer Mateo Santiago.

Nigel raised an eyebrow at that. "Is he?"

“Yep. He said he became a racer to honor his father’s legacy. What do you think?”

“I would like to preface by saying may the soul of Mr. Mateo Santiago rest in peace. I didn’t know him personally, but I’m sure he was a fine racer. Now, I only have one word for Santiago: If he truly wishes to honor his father’s memory, he would drop out of this Prix right now.”

The crowd murmurs at his unexpected comment. “What do you mean by this?”

“Too many people in this world just follow what mummy and daddy did without thinking for themselves. But talent is not genetic, you earn it. I’m sure your father rolled in his grave upon watching what transpired tonight, and your foolish conduct dishonored him more as a racer than anything. I’m sure you’re a talented young lad, but racing simply isn’t that talent,” Nigel said before looking back at the audience and bowing his head. “Thank you.”

The crowd got a chance to clap for about three seconds before Orien threw the remote at the TV. The TV had a neat little crack in it, sparking a little.

“Crap.” Orien sighed, rolling off the bed and onto the floor.