

Nigel was having his car examined after coming in at an embarrassing 18th place finish. His crew had his car propped up on a jack while Nigel sat in the corner and sulked. To think five weeks ago, he was heralded as one of the best racers in the world and the champion of Britain, reduced as a mere joke in the eyes of racing fans. Every news program just made fun of him, and every chance he had slipped away from him. Twice, he tried to sabotage Orien Santiago, and both attempts failed spectacularly. At this point, he wondered if he ever could recover from these failures. He even began to worry that this much stress would cause his beautiful blonde hair to fall out.

“Hey, mate.” One of the men in his pit crew called out to him. Nigel lifted his head, his face partially obscured by his drooping hair.

“What?” He sulked.

“Come take a look at this.” The crew member beckoned. Nigel slowly got up and walked over to the car. The crew member pointed to the exposed bottom of the car near the rear tires. A dark brown liquid was dripping from a pipe.

“Is that... my fuel line?” Nigel asks.

The crew member nods his head. Nigel examines it more closely. He was right, that was the fuel line, and it was leaking.

“But at least one of us would’ve noticed if his fuel line had a hole in it, yeah?” Another crew member pointed out. The first one glanced at the hole.

“It’s a very tiny hole, only a few millimeters in diameter. It must have leaked in very small drops at a time, otherwise there would have been a clear trail of gas on the track.”

Nigel thought to himself. That would explain how he kept running out of gas every five laps. With how clean the hole was, it was very unlikely it punctured on accident. It was almost

like someone had done this intentionally, on purpose to prevent him from staying in a lead position long enough.

“Hey, Nigel. Sucks to hear about your fueling situation.” An Italian lady’s voice called out to him. Gianna was standing at his pit entrance, her hands in her pockets. Nigel stood up from kneeling.

“Did you do this?” He accused. Gianna smiled blissfully, not removing her hands from the pocket.

“Do what?”

“Don’t play coy with me! It’s way too suspicious the way I kept running out of gas during that race! Someone had to tamper with it, and the only other person who entered my garage other than me and my crew was you.”

Gianna rolled her emerald eyes at the angry Brit. Then she folded her arms as if she was impressed with something. “I may or may not have jammed a hole in your fuel line.”

“The deal was to go against Santiago!”

“Yeah, I still got Orien Santiago,” She said, looking away from him. “But why take out one opponent to help another one win? If anything, I can just sabotage both and improve my own chances.”

Nigel pounded the side of his car with his face, sounding like a rocket. “You bloody backstabbing, cheating WENCH! I’ll see to it that the IRC knows of your—”

“And tell them *what*, exactly?” Gianna cut in. “That you told me to sabotage Orien Santiago?”

Nigel relaxed his posture a bit. “What?”

“For such a ‘champion’, you aren’t very smart. Don’t forget the IRC already has their sights on you for your aggressive driving in London two weeks ago. One more slip up from you, and they’ll be sending you back to England where you belong. There’s no way to take me down without destroying yourself in the process.”

He glared at her, squinting. “What’s your aim here?”

Gianna still kept her smile. But this time, it wasn’t one of bliss and levity. It was one full of deceit, mockery and belittlement. It was one full of deceit, mockery and belittlement. It made his skin crawl.

“It’s simple. You disgust me, Nigel Thorne.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me. You’re a pathetic excuse for a man. You truly do not know how worthless you are.” Her voice dropped, but the venom remained. It was sharp and biting, and it stung Nigel deeply. Nigel felt a lump of spit catch in his throat, keeping him from speaking.

She continued, pacing away from him. “I remember you saying you joined the International Grand Prix to prove yourself as the best racer in the world. That you wanted to prove that Britain was the best. Right?”

“That’s right. Since I was 16, I’ve never lost a single race. For 8 years, I’ve done nothing but make my nation proud. I’ve earned the respect, I’ve earned the fame, I’ve earned the sponsorships, I’ve earned them all.” Nigel announced, proudly.

“And your ego inflated as a result. You always hide behind that shield of *my country this* and *my country that*, but all you talk about is YOUR accomplishments and how they benefit YOU. Prancing around England with your hands in the air like some sort of god, you and your

henchmen, spitting on the faces of everyone you thought beneath you. Even resorting to bullying your competitors on national television.”

“Like I said, I worked hard to reach that point, I earned the right to revel in my accolades.”

“And what did your precious country of Britain do after you lost? They all abandoned you, turned you into a joke amongst themselves. They never supported you in the beginning. They didn’t care about you at all. They simply used you because you were a ‘prodigy’. You got them good results. But the moment your record got snatched away, they turned their backs on you. To think you sacrificed everything for them, only for you to wind up as nothing but an afterthought.”

The taste in Nigel’s mouth went bitter, like the taste of a dirt-covered grape skin. His name was truly erased off the map of motorsport. Failure after failure, he just sank deeper and deeper into the sea of the collective unconscious. Gianna wasn’t done picking him apart.

“I know from experience. The fans, the sponsors, the friends. They’re all fake. My family laughed behind my back when I was still new to racing. They said I’d be crawling back to the vineyard. When I raced Monaco, they were on their knees begging to be my sponsor. I’ve had Italian news networks look down on me behind my back, but as I grew more popular, they all were singing my praises. So I gave those leeches what they wanted. All that money and support can only benefit me in the long run, and they would *kill* to keep me around for their own exposure. In sports, there are no such things as friends. People are just meant to be used.”

Nigel was disgusted by what he was hearing, but at the same time, somewhat scared of Gianna. Throughout his life, Nigel was taught that only results matter. No hobby is worth

practicing unless you're the very best at it. But this woman. What could her motive possibly be? Why was she telling him all of this?

"Now that we've ended this boring partnership, I'm feeling generous. So we'll part ways, but I won't sabotage you again unless you strike first," She teased, poking Nigel on the nose. "So be a good boy and behave. Capito?"

Gianna began to walk away before stopping. She held up one gloved finger. "And I went easy on you this time. I can do a lot worse to you than just a punctured fuel line."

With that, Nigel was left to marinate in the acidic monologue she just delivered to him.

Orien climbed out of his stock car after coasting into his pit. He managed to finish at a not-to-shabby seventh place position. One thing was clear. Driving with a hangover was NOT fun.

The moment he hopped out of the car, he got assaulted by a hug from Parker. She clung onto him tight, burying her nose in his neck.

"NEVER do that to me again. I was worried sick." She snapped at him.

"Look, Orien's here, he's alive, he has all of his limbs and body parts intact. Just be glad we have him back." Grant tried to calm her down. It worked, and Parker let go of him. Jabari's rally car pulled to his pit lane. He stumbled out of the car. He was propping himself up on the hood of the car, since he could barely stand.

"Mr. Jabari, thank you so much again." Orien smiled.

"No... It's really..." Jabari wheezed, trying to catch his breath. The helmet made it hard for him to breathe.

"Are you okay?"

“Yeah... I...” Jabari labored to even get the words out. His whole body was rocking, like he was standing on a rickety boat stuck in a stormy sea. His faint words melted into delirious mumbling. He leaned into his right side. A loud metallic bang rang out as his head hit the hood of his car, before he finally landed on the asphalt.

“Senhor Jabari!” Lazaro cried out, and Fernando ran over to his body.

“What do we do?!” Paulo cried out.

“Call someone!” Andre responded, running off to find a phone. Parker and Orien sat by his side. Parker took off his helmet to help him breathe. They sat with him until the Italian ambulances arrived and carried him off to the hospital.