

The Italian countryside was warm and bright on that Saturday afternoon. The stands were full of Italian and international fans waving a multitude of different national flags in support of their favorite racers. Meanwhile in the pits, Andre was changing Orien's tires with an impact drill. Fernando was fueling up his car while Paulo and Lazaro sat on a stack of tires. Parker and Grant were exchanging worried looks. Everything was in place. The only thing missing was Orien himself.

"The parade lap starts in 10 minutes. Where the hell is Orien?" Grant asked, antsy.

"I don't know. Even when he sleeps in late, he'd be here by now." Parker said, twirling a gloved finger in her long brown hair.

The crew wondered to themselves, many sounds wafting in the air. Impact drills changing tires, the crowd's Italian cheers, each 48 racer speaking with their pit crews in their native languages. After a couple of minutes, Tetsuko and Jabari come by the pits.

"Oh, hey." Grant greeted, hinted with some worry.

"Ave you 'eard anything from Orien yet?" Jabari asked.

"Radio silence." Parker sighed.

Tetsuko's eyes darted slightly as she tried to press further. "What does he usually do before a race?"

"Normally he just hangs with us, and we make sure he sleeps extra early the night before a race, so we have time to grab breakfast and stuff, but..." Parker explained.

"*But?*" Tetsuko pressed.

Parker hesitated. After a few moments, she said, "He was at Romano Vineyard yesterday evening."

"Romano Vineyard?"

“Yeah, Gianna Romano’s family owns it. They were ‘er first sponsa if I rememba correctly.” Jabari added on, nodding.

“How long was he there?”

“We don’t know. He wasn’t in the room yet when Parker and I went to bed. But he was there when we woke up.” Grant explained.

“So he should still be in there?”

“Should be.” He confirmed.

“Ryan likes to sleep in sometimes, but usually he still wakes up in time for the race. This isn’t like him.” Parker fretted, twiddling her fingers around her impact wrench. Tetsuko walked over to her and opened up her palm.

“Parker, give me your hotel room key.”

Parker grabbed her keycard and gently placed it in Tetsuko’s palm. Tetsuko ran out of the pits, out of the circuit and ran up to the hotel, which was in the city on top of the hill overlooking where the starting line is.

“What room is Orien Santiago in?” She asked a man in a black suit at the front desk.

“He’s in room 425.” The man said in a refined, slightly Italian-accented tone. Tetsuko bowed before running over to the elevator. None of the elevators were on the ground floor. Even if she had access to them, there were crowds of people, both with and without luggage, and she couldn’t chance stopping at every floor or missing an elevator entirely. So she ran up three flights of stairs to reach the fourth floor. Craning her neck to look at the room numbers, her eyes foraged to find 425. Finally, Tetsuko found the door. She could hear a muffled alarm blaring from behind the door. She pounded on the door with great force, her knocks sounding like shotguns. No answer. She tried once more, even harder to where ripples of pain flowed from her knuckles. Still

no answer. With no other choice, she took out the keycard Parker gave her and swiped it across the black sensor on the doorknob. With a beep, the light turned green and a click rang out. Tetsuko barged into the room. The alarm was now screeching at full volume. At least before Tetsuko pounded it with her fist, silencing it. She might have broken it. Ah well. There was Orien, sprawled out on the bed. He barely moved, so he was knocked out. His racing jacket was zipped open, exposing his plain white T-shirt he wore to bed. Tetsuko pressed against the mattress to try to jiggle him awake. As she got closer, she caught a whiff of something.

“Alcohol.” She spat. No wonder he was sleeping so heavily. Tetsuko knew that she needed something stronger to wake him up. She surveyed the room, finding anything that could jolt him awake. Then her eye snagged onto something: A mini-fridge underneath the wooden desk. She crouched down and swung the fridge door open, the cooling aura kissing her face. There were some high-grade Italian mineral waters. Perfect. She swiped one from the fridge. It was nice and cold, a little bit of water condensing into her gloves. She walked back over to Orien’s bed, unscrewed the cap, and launched the water all over Orien’s sleeping face. It bounced off his face and into the white pillow and sheets.

“GAAAGGGHH!!!” Orien sputtered. His face was now dripping. His hair was now drooping over his forehead. Immediately after realizing he was awake, a splitting headache assaulted him. It felt like someone was personally ripping his brain apart with their bare fingers. The light beaming from the window practically blinded him, no different than actually staring directly into the sun. His stomach was also as rocky as an ocean storm. He saw Tetsuko standing over his bed with a stone face. “Tetsuko...? Why are you here?”

“Get up.” She said curtly. Orien put fingers to his forehead.

“What time is it anyway?”

“1:55.”

Orien sat there in a trance. His eyes widened as realization struck him. “Oh, crap! The race is in 5 minutes? How the hell did I—”

“Shut up and let’s go.”

Orien sloppily zipped up his racing jacket and prepared his gloves. He stood up like a rocket before being anchored back down by the pricking sensation inside of his head, causing him to crumple back down onto the bed. Tetsuko rolled her eyes. She grabbed Orien’s arm and slung it around her own neck to where she was carrying most of his weight. Together, they trudged out the room and headed to the hotel exit. Passing by the receptionist desk, Tetsuko stopped to pull out a few euros. She slapped them on the table.

“I broke your alarm, this should cover a new one.” She said quickly before actually dragging Orien out of the hotel. The receptionist looked at the Euro bills confusedly.

Back in the pits, Nigel and Gianna were waiting in his garage. Nigel had his arms crossed, impatiently tapping his arms with his gloved finger. They called a delay to the race due to Orien’s late arrival about 15 minutes ago. Gianna was standing next to him, seemingly unbothered by the schedule change.

“Do you always have that constipated look on your face?” She yawned.

“How long is this delay going to take?” Nigel grumbled to himself.

“They can only delay the race for 30 minutes. Half of that time is already up.”

Nigel just sighed in resignation. He hoped this was his moment to regain his career, the way it was before. However, something caught Nigel’s and Gianna’s eye. On the giant screen hovering over the stands, the camera showed Tetsuko carrying Orien’s hungover body, guiding him back to his pit.

“Damn, he still came.” Nigel stomped. But his frustration subsided as he looked at Orien. The normally spunky and energetic racer could barely keep his eyes open. He had dark circles around his eyes and frazzled hair. Without Tetsuko, it looked like he struggled to even walk on his own. “Something’s off about him. Is he ill or something?”

Gianna patted Nigel’s shoulder with a little too much force, causing him to rock a bit on his legs. “He had a little late night at the vineyard.”

“Vineyard?” Nigel mumbled, trying to piece everything together. His eyes slowly expanded as the realization hit him. “No. You didn’t.”

“Looks like our baby has his first hangover. A pretty nasty one, from the looks of it,” Gianna commented, not taking her eyes off the screen. Nigel glanced between Gianna and the screen before his face faded into a wide grin.

“You are a GENIUS! Santiago’s finished! The poor bloke won’t even be able to reach 50 kilometers an hour.” Nigel cackled to himself before putting his helmet on and entering the GT car, racing off to the grid to prepare for the parade lap. Gianna walked back over to her pit to get into her Formula.

Tetsuko and Orien finally reached his pit. She set Orien down on the hood of his stock car. He groaned, clutching his head. He could only keep his eyes open for a couple seconds before the Italian afternoon sun blinded him. Parker and Grant rushed over to him.

“He looks terrible!” Parker shouted.

“Parker, not so damn loud...” Orien moaned, closing his eyes. Grant leaned forward a little, sniffing the air.

“Is that booze?” He asked incredulously. Parker whipped her head to Grant.

“Ryan doesn’t drink. And besides, even if he did, how come we couldn’t smell it off him this morning?”

“There was an air freshener plugged in,” Tetsuko pointed out. “I smelled the alcohol on him when I got close.”

Parker shook her head. “I don’t want him in that driver’s seat. It’s too dangerous and he’s too unwell.”

Grant rooted through Orien’s pocket and grabbed his phone. “Hang on, I can call Dirk. He can probably have them delay the race again.”

Meanwhile, Dirk was having drinks with the Italian businessmen who were organizing the circuit amongst other things. Dirk was laughing heartily while cracking jokes in Italian. His earpiece started ringing. He excused himself to answer it. After stepping into the quiet hallway, he pressed the button.

“Dirk Kennedy.”

“Dirk? It’s Grant. Grant Kang.”

“I know who you are, Mr. Crew Chief. I take it this isn’t a social call.”

“Can you postpone the race?”

Dirk stayed silent for a moment. “Why? Orien already made it to his car, they can start already.”

“Well, I don’t know how to tell you this and you’re probably not gonna like this, but Orien might be a *little* hung over.”

Dirk didn’t move. He didn’t say anything. In fact, he still had a big grin on his face as he blinked a couple of times. He took his index finger and tapped on his earpiece a couple of times. “My bad, my headset must’ve cut out or something, can you say that again?”

“Orien has a hangover.” Grant said, much more forcefully this time. Dirk pinched the bridge of his nose.

“I’m gonna kill that—” Dirk threatened without thinking. He cleared his throat to keep himself from saying something extremely vulgar.

“Please, he’s too sick to race properly like this.” Grant pleaded. Dirk took a deep breath.

“You want me to postpone the race because the kid decided to experiment the night before?!” Dirk demanded through clenched teeth.

“You said you could hold them up for 30 minutes.”

“Okay, first of all, I’m Orien Santiago’s *agent*. I’m not in administration, I’m not an officiator, I’m just a guy with connections. So technically, I don’t have the power to do JACK. I’m just pulling some strings to do you guys favors. Secondly, who do you think called them to postpone the race when Orien was MISSING?! In fact, if I did nothing, they would’ve started the race on time without him.”

“So how do we deal with his hangover?” Tetsuko asked, leaning closer into the phone Grant was holding out.

“Nothing. Absolutely nothing.”

“What do you mean ‘nothing’?” Grant asked.

“He’s not going to be able to recover from that hangover in time, not by a long shot. The best thing to do is to give him meds, and even then they’re not going to kick in by the time the 30 minutes are up.”

“And when the 30 minutes are up?”

Dirk shrugged. “He’s disqualified. Simple as that.”

Grant rooted through his pit crew uniform pocket. He had some aspirin on him. He tossed two tablets to Parker, who caught them. Orien took the tablets. Parker had Lazaro toss her a drink from the cooler. She grabbed Orien's jaw and helped him drink his orange beverage.

"I hafta go, gotta shmooze the Italians some more, but whatever your plan is, figure it out. Dirk out." He said, ending the conversation. He handed Orien his smartphone back.

"Ryan, what happened? How did you get drunk?"

"I asked Gianna for some grape juice. I thought it tasted funny since they grow their grapes fresh. Then I felt dizzy, she walked me home."

Tetsuko put everything into place at that moment. She thought it was strange someone as straight-edged as Orien would knowingly try alcohol before a big race. As naive as he could be sometimes, Tetsuko knew he wasn't that stupid. She looked over to Gianna, sitting in her Italian flag-themed Formula 1 car at the grid. She had her helmet on, but Tetsuko bet she was smirking under it. Then she remembered she was hanging with Nigel Thorne.

"Yappari," Tetsuko cursed under her breath. Everyone in Orien's pit turned to her. "I get it now."

"Get what now?" Grant questioned. Tetsuko turned around to look at all of them.

"Nigel Thorne's plan. Think about it. Since he was 16, he's never lost a single race. He placed first in three Prix races before Orien beat him in London two weeks ago. Then in Paris, two of his friends tried to mess with his racing line. Gianna also hangs out with him. He most likely planted her there just to sabotage him."

Orien tried to stand up before the splitting headache made him stumble back down. Parker was able to catch him and sat him back down on the hood.

"No way. Gianna and I love each other. She wouldn't do that to me."



“Orien, don’t you think that relationship was a little too easy?” Grant questioned. “You guys didn’t have arguments or complain about each other’s flaws and all?”

“Well, yeah. But—”

“She played you. She never cared about you.” Tetsuko said to him bluntly. Orien blinked rapidly. Tetsuko looked toward the grid, squinting her eyes. “But I’ll make damn sure she doesn’t get away with it.”

Orien stood up slowly and limped over to the driver’s seat. Parker jumped off the hood and looked him in the eye.

“Ryan, what do you think you’re doing?!” Parker demanded, her hand gripping Orien by his racing jacket.

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m going to race.” Orien announced, showing off his teeth. His voice was still a bit unstable as he pushed through the bright lights and the pain.

“Nuh-uh. No way. It’s too dangerous.”

“I promised my mom and the Ferreiras I’d win the ten million. I’m not going to be DQ’d over a little hangover. Besides, the meds’ll kick in soon enough.”

Parker looked down. “But…”

Tetsuko looked over at Jabari. “Jabari-san, can you do me a favor?”

“Anyting for my children.” He shrugged, a huge smile on his face.

“Stay close to Orien during this race. The Italian countryside track is dangerous, so he could easily fly off or crash his car. Just be there.”

“Sure ting. He’s safe in dese ‘ands.” Jabari nodded. He made sure to wire his helmet to where he can communicate with Orien during the race in case he needed something. As Tetsuko

walked away to her LMP, he looked over at Parker, who was looking at him with puppy dog eyes. Her eyes were like little blue ponds.

“Please, just... Keep Ryan safe.”

He smiled warmly at her. “I will.”

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After the parade lap, the racers locked into the grid. Tetsuko was in the front grid position, but something about her felt different. Normally when she was about to race, she was calm, her mind clear of any thoughts. Her breathing would be steady, her eyes focused on only the road. This time, something was different. She wouldn't forgive herself if she lost this time. She kept thinking of Gianna, and various Japanese insults floated in her head. She couldn't see her, but her mind had a laser scope on her. That lying, cheating formula driver could NOT win this race. Tetsuko was going to do everything in her power to stop that from happening. She was angry, not because Gianna targeted her, but because she used Orien. It was almost like... she wanted to avenge him. As if she hurt a family member of Tetsuko's.

Gianna was in the third place grid position, directly behind Tetsuko. Underneath her helmet, she had a small smile of relief. Two weeks of meticulous planning and acting have finally paid off, and one opponent was no longer in her way. All under Nigel's nose.

Nigel was in the very back. He was bouncing in the driver's seat like a child hopped up on sugar. The man who bested him, the man who snatched away his perfect record and turned his own country of England against him was not only too sick to perform, but hung over as well? Such a scandal would deal a major blow to his career's image. All Nigel had to do was take Italy, and he was back on track to restoring his prince image. Nigel Thorne would finally return while Orien would be on a passenger plane back to the U.S.

Jabari was in sixth place next to Orien. He saw the map of the Tuscany course. It was full of hills and chicanes, making it very easy for Orien to fly right off the track and get into a very nasty crash. But that wasn't what he was worried about. He recalled his incident in Rio. To where he was lightheaded, dizzy and could barely walk after the intensity of the race. According to the doctor, as long as he took his treatments, he would be just fine. However, that was *if* he didn't push himself too hard. And looking at the map and the quick reflexes it would take to protect Orien, he was hesitant on actually saving the young racer. Who knows what would happen to him if Jabari pushed himself too hard on his medication? But all he cared about was Orien's safety. His own life didn't matter to him right now.

And finally in fifth was Orien. He tried his best to assume his normal racing posture, but the sun reflected off his hood and into his visor. The sunlight to him was like having his eyes be stabbed with a hundred tiny needles. He closed his eyes for a bit, hoping the darkness could soothe his headache. But they rip back open when the sounds of engines zip past his car. He looked up and saw the light already turned green, and the cars behind him began passing him. To make up for lost time, he shifted into gear and floored it, catching up and merging with the others in the middle of the pack.

Orien struggled throughout the beginning of the race. He had many problems other than just a sun in his visor. The Italy track was full of twists and turns, sloshing his already sensitive stomach into waves. It took all he had to not throw up in his helmet. The sound of his roaring engine reverberating through his helmet felt like planes screeching right into his ears. If this is what a hangover is like, he swore to never even THINK about alcohol again. In the first lap, while going down onto a flat portion of the race, Orien spun out and ran off the track, causing multiple cars to pass him. Jabari patiently waited for him to drive back on the main track. He

carefully trailed Orien, making sure the rookie wouldn't be severely injured. After that, Orien had to drive slower than usual and didn't have as good reaction time. He sank down to the bottom ten with Jabari fairly quickly. He had 49 more laps to go, he needed to save his energy.

Nigel, on the other hand, was ecstatic throughout the entire race. His nemesis was not only doing so much poorer than normal, but he couldn't even bring himself out of the bottom ten. His face was red and sore from the amount of joy he showed, albeit most of it being obscured from his helmet.

"I almost feel sorry for the greenhorn," Nigel bragged to his crew chief. "Lad couldn't drive a golf cart in this condition."

"And here we were worried your career was coming to an end," His crew chief replied. "That Gianna lass did an excellent job."

"All that's left is to humiliate Ohama. Shouldn't take me long to catch up with her."

Five laps passed and Nigel was now at second place. The only person in front of him was Tetsuko Ohama and her LMP. Nigel, being a GT racer, knew that Tetsuko's top speed was by far her greatest asset. However, he had the advantage of gaining momentum through technical turns. And Italy was full of curvy tracks. Ample opportunity to overtake Tetsuko and take back the win. His eyes locked onto nothing but her tail lights. He was a shark sliding down the asphalt, waiting for a chance to pounce on Tetsuko and snatch her lead right out of her hands. Nigel's eyes just happened to glance down at his dashboard.

"WHAT THE—?!" Nigel screamed. His crew chief could still hear him screaming even after removing his headset.

"What is it mate? You don't have to yell."

“Did you sodding incompetents forget to refuel last night?! If you did, I’m going to have your HEADS!!!!” Nigel demanded.

“Of course we didn’t! We did it every night, just like always!” The crew chief defended. Nigel wasn’t having any of it.

“Then how the bloody hell am I nearly out of gas?!”

“Doesn’t matter, just come to the pits.”

Nigel rolled his eyes. He slowed down and moved to the side to let other cars pass him. He couldn’t believe this. Right as he was about to regain traction, he had to go and run out of fuel. He could sense the other drivers laughing at him as they overtook his slow, coasting vehicle. He managed to reach the pits where his team refueled and changed his tires. All while Nigel could only pout in his seat.

Gianna, now around eighth place, saw Nigel was pitting. Her crew chief came in through her helmet, speaking to her in Italian.

“Nigel Thorne’s in the pits.”

“Good.”

“Now’s your chance.” He sneered. Gianna looked forward, putting both her hands in a 9 and 3 o’clock position. She slammed onto the gas pedal, pushing her formula car to its full limit. On the asphalt, she could see her optimal racing line pulling her car like a stringed toy. This was her moment. The cars she passed, going hundreds of miles an hour, looked like they slowed down to a coast as her Formula weaved through them all. The LMPs, the touring cars, the GTs, none of them stood a chance on the twisty track against Gianna. People noticed her sudden climb in power. She never got this high of a place the whole Prix. Suddenly, she was climbing up the ranks faster than anyone else.

Tetsuko, still in the lead, was coming up on her eleventh lap in first place. She focused on nothing but the road ahead of her, maintaining her top speed. Then she heard the squeal of a formula engine. Looking in her side mirror, she only caught a glimpse of Gianna's car before the wind scraped her side. As she looked up, Gianna already passed her and was gaining distance. Tetsuko had to register what even just happened.

"Tetsuko." Jabari's voice called out to her through their comms.

"How's Orien?" She asked him. A small pause.

"E's still sick, but 'e's 'oldin' up a lil betta," He replied. "But 'ow is Romano in da lead?"

Tetsuko glared down the track to Gianna. From a quarter-mile away, Gianna noticed it. She could feel it from Tetsuko; it wasn't the cold stare she gave other opponents. It was one filled with malice, directed completely at her. She glared back.

"She was averaging between fifth and tenth in every race. Even with a home track advantage, her being so high in the standings makes no sense. And on top of that, she sped past everyone to steal the lead from me."

"It seems like," Jabari's voice now held a grave tone to it, uncharacteristically serious. "Dis is her true skill."

"True skill?"

Jabari inhaled deeply. Then he released slowly. "Gianna is Italy's best Formula racer, making her one a' da best racers in da whole world. But for whateva reason, she's been holding back. But outside of Italy, nobody really knows how good she is."

"So I underestimated her..." Tetsuko admitted solemnly.

“We all did.” Jabari sighed. Tetsuko wasn’t going to let this stop her. She locked in on her target, the corrosive malice stare not leaving the back of Gianna’s helmet. A new kind of fire burned within her. Every race, she focused on her strengths and weaknesses. That not one race in this Prix was about winning or losing, but rather how she could improve. This time, losing wasn’t acceptable. She had a goal. A target. And it was Gianna Romano. She couldn’t look Orien in the eye if she let that lying saboteur go.

For the next ten laps, Tetsuko was right on Gianna’s tail. Every time Tetsuko was on Gianna’s bumper, a chicane, hairpin or corner slowed her down. Up, down, and around the hills and through the warm-colored city, Tetsuko was just out of Gianna’s range. Tetsuko had the better top speed and her LMP would actually fare pretty well for technical turns. But Gianna’s ability to hug the corners and stick to her racing line was simply unmatched. Any little mistake would cost Tetsuko precious seconds. She had to press on. Gianna had to choke at one point. And Tetsuko had to be ready to take full advantage.

On the eighteenth lap, Orien was beginning to recover somewhat. He could keep his eyes open for a few good seconds at a time, enough to actually see where he was going and to safely go faster while keeping up with Jabari’s rally car. Jabari could feel his lungs get tighter as he breathed, as if someone took a fist and slowly crushed them like a stress ball. They were going through a downhill chicane, which had a giant S shape to it. Jabari was on his left side, making sure he didn’t drift too far near the railings. At the speed they were going, Orien would’ve flown down the hill if he rammed directly through the railing. As he tried to speed down the hill to gain places, another wave of fatigue sloshed through his head, momentarily breaking his focus. He eased off the steering wheel and felt the car drift. Right as he braced for impact, something stopped him. A loud scraping noise vibrated the side of his car. As he looked over, Jabari used

his own car to shield Orien from a fence collision. Orien realized he was clashing with Jabari and steered back onto the main road. Jabari didn't expect the impact to be so hard on his body. The seatbelts sliced right into his chest, taking all of the wind right out of him. He hacked forcefully, desperately trying to regain oxygen underneath his helmet.

"Mr. Jabari, I'm so sorry!" Orien immediately shouted. Jabari, finally able to breathe a little easier, wheezed.

"It's okay, Orien m'boy," His static-y voice came in. "I'm just glad you're safe."

Orien nodded and looked back to the course in front. He had to make sure that didn't try to gain back traction too quickly.

Meanwhile, Gianna and Tetsuko were still going at it. Tetsuko was communicating with her pit crew in order to reoptimize her strategy. She observed how Gianna seemed to gain the most traction going straight through the curves in the track, which was a common strategy for F1 racers. But Tetsuko had a plan. They were at lap twenty two, and Gianna hadn't pitted at all during the race. Her tires must've begun to lose grip, as Tetsuko was able to get close to her bumper more often.

"She most likely has about two more laps before she has to pit," Tetsuko said to her crew chief. "So she's going in at lap 25. There will be my chance to overtake."

The two reentered the starting line down underneath the city, where they were about to reach lap 23. However, as they made the downhill turn, Tetsuko noticed Gianna drifting off to the right side of the road. She entered the pit lane, which shocked Tetsuko and her crew.

"She's pitting? Why now?" Tetsuko speculated. Her entire plan just skipped forward.



“The good thing is now you have your opening.” Her crew chief told her. Tetsuko looked at her steering wheel for a second before deciding to take advantage. From the pit lane, Gianna simply looked at the giant screen, showing Tetsuko’s lead, waiting.

Many more laps had passed. Orien’s hangover had gotten to a pretty manageable state, and he and Jabari were gaining much more ground, the both of them entering the top fifteen again by lap forty. He still felt a little groggy in the head, but he could push past it for the remainder of the race.

Tetsuko kept her lead up until lap 48, coming up on lap 49. Gianna was in second place behind her for most of the race. But for some reason, she wasn’t trying to pass Tetsuko ever since the pit stop. Even though Tetsuko saw many opportunities, Gianna took none of them. It was a little too convenient for Tetsuko. Why pull a stunt like that only to submit? As Tetsuko and Gianna were racing through the hilly streets of the Italian city on top of the hill, Tetsuko’s LMP wasn’t at its top speed. She was still going really fast, but it was just *below* what she was capable of. When she made a turn, her car slowed down like a twitch. That was the moment Gianna’s F1 was parallel with Tetsuko.

“Ciao.” She said sweetly before speeding off, leaving Tetsuko in the dust. She knew something was off. Gianna knew Tetsuko was onto her, so she pitted earlier on purpose to throw off her plan. It was a textbook undercut. And now with the penultimate lap coming up, Tetsuko’s car couldn’t outlast Gianna’s car. Not with her ratty tires. Tetsuko’s last chance had to be the final lap. She couldn’t just leave the pits at full speed because she needed the out-lap for her tires to regain heat and traction. One lap. That was her last chance. Lap fifty.

Tetsuko’s pit stop was swift, as her crew promptly changed her tires and fueled up the LMP. Lap 49 was her out lap. If she drove too fast, her tires couldn’t perform at full capacity

without the proper heat. She kept a steady pace throughout the course until she came across the finish line for the final lap. Tetsuko shut her mind off completely only to focus on the road in front of her. She gained speed as the trees lining the countryside blurred into green walls closing her in. Near the base of the hill is where Gianna's F1 finally reappeared in her sights. With her fresh tires, she slowly crawled closer and closer to her car. The two cars weaved through the city streets, spectators cheering from their balconies. Tetsuko reached her bumper. Downhill on the same chicane where Orien nearly crashed into the railing, Tetsuko's front matched the center of Gianna's body. Turning back onto the finishing road, Tetsuko's car, bit by bit, becomes parallel to Gianna's, their front bumpers only centimeters apart. Just a few seconds left in the race. Just a little more. Tetsuko was almost there. Just a little more time to reach her top speed. Even just five more seconds.

The two of them crossed the finish line. The result was written clearly on the jumbo screen.

1st - Gianna Romano - #14 (ITA)

2nd - Tetsuko Ohama - #7 (JPN)