

Orien's final night with the Ferreiras was a little different. Since it was his final day in Rio before the race, they decided to invite him to their home. It was across the street from the store on the second floor, above the power line webbing. The apartment, like most other buildings in Rocinha, was old, but was in pretty good condition. A little worn and run down, but well taken care of. The apartment had two bedrooms and a kitchen-living room-dining room all in one big open space. One of the bedrooms belonged to Joao and Lucha while Andre, Paulo, Fernando and Lazaro slept in the same room, with four sleeping bags on the floor. Orien was at the dinner table with Joao and Lucha while the four boys were eating near the TV. For dinner, they were having Farofa, a smokey, salty dish where bacon is mixed with cassava flour. Lucha added rice and beans to the meal to help with the texture. The table was a little small, but it got the job done. Orien just had to bend his knees in order to fit. He took a bite of his Farofa. It tasted a lot better than he expected. The salt complimented the smoke.

Lucha and Joao looked at the four boys. They were excitedly watching a replay of the Toronto race two weeks ago on another channel.

"Our sons get to be a part of a professional racer's pit crew tomorrow," Joao admired, nodding. Orien just waved them off.

"I wouldn't say I'm a *professional*, this is my first real time in the big leagues." Orien denied modestly.

"We mean it! The boys have been watching the Grand Prix since it started! Especially after the last race." Lucha insisted. Orien put down his fork. Something about his week here bothered him. Why would the Ferreiras like him so much even though he was the guy who busted his engine on purpose for a few extra positions in a race. He decided to ask.

“Why do you... like me so much?” Orien asked as he picked his fork back up, trembling in his hand slightly. Joao and Lucha looked each other in the eye.

Paulo shouted, his attention still glued to the TV, "Because you're awesome! You're one of the best racers around!"

“Am I, though?” Orien continued. “I haven’t scored higher than a seventy this whole Grand Prix. Hell, I ignored my teammates and willingly drove with a faulty engine. I’m no pro. I’m just a Colorado boy who got lucky and won the qualifier.”

Joao raised one eyebrow. “We were watching the New York race together. That must’ve been a humiliating loss for you.”

“Doesn’t even begin to describe how it felt, knowing your whole country is treating you like a clown, an outsider.” Orien chuckled sadly, drinking some of his chimãrrao tea from a cup.

“But you’re still in the Grand Prix, right?” Lucha pressed, giving a narrow smile.

“Of course I am,” Orien responded, putting down his cup. “Someone’s depending on me back home. I can’t back out now.”

“*That’s* what we like about you so much. You made a dumb call, made fun of by everybody. But you took that embarrassing loss and you stayed in the Grand Prix. And we’re glad you did, because you’re the sweetest young man we’ve ever met.” Lucha told him, patting his forearm. Orien blushed.

“We can relate as well,” Joao spoke up. “You’ve seen our shop, it’s not the greatest. It’s small, boring, stuck in the middle of a big favela, something always has to be broken, and it smells weird. Many customers pass by without even looking in our direction. Lucha and I have thought about quitting many times over 20 years. Exhausted from coffee, staying awake, waiting even hours for a customer, sometimes even breaking down into tears,” He explained while

shaking his head sadly. He pointed to their sons, eyes still glued to the TV. “But we push through it all for them. The moment we quit, we can’t put food in their mouths. So we keep going. For them.”

“And look where not quitting got us!” Lucha exclaimed. “We got to sponsor an IRC racer and make our first commercial! This past week for us has been a very great reminder of where your struggle has gotten us.” Lucha clasped one of Orien’s hands with both of her hands. “Obrigado.”

Orien looked at Lucha deep in her brown eyes. He couldn’t tell if it was the dust, the mold, or the moment, but he could feel his eyes get a little misty. These complete strangers employed him, made him food, sponsored and made a commercial with him, and let him meet and be friends with their sons, all without expecting anything in return. At a time where the world either turned their backs on him or laughed in his face. They didn’t do it for greed. They didn’t do it out of pity. They did it out of the kindness of their hearts. Just to help him. Just to give him a little push. All because he touched their hearts by even stepping on Brazilian soil when most others would’ve dropped out and went back home.

“Obrigado.” Orien replied, secretly trying to use his gloved knuckle to wipe his eye. He was almost ready to tackle the Brazil street circuit tomorrow. *Almost* ready. He just had one thing left he had to do.

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Grant was in their shared hotel room alone. He was sitting on the couch, which he usually slept on in hotels whenever there were two hotel beds. In his hands, he had a pencil pad and a black ink pen. On the TV was a rerun of some race in Sao Paulo a few years back. His eyes carefully stalked the cars. A sharp turn was coming up.

“Stay inside.” He said to nobody in particular, trying to give advice to something that’s already in the past. The car didn’t decelerate while turning, causing it to oversteer and slam into the guardrail. All the other cars just passed by. Grant took the pen and began scribbling a note. “AVOID OVERSTEER”. The door rattled, and Orien entered the room. Grant heard the weird noise and nearly flung the pen at the unsuspecting racer, but once he saw it was just Orien, he put the pen down.

“Oh, it’s you,” He sighed, putting a hand on his hand. “Don’t scare me like that. Where’s Parker?”

“She’s going to be busy for a while. I gave her a ten o’clock curfew, she needs her beauty sleep.” Orien explained. Grant noticed there was something rolled up in his hands.

“Whatcha got there?” Grant pointed out. Orien went to one of the beds and put it down on the blanket and mattress. He rolled out the poster, revealing a map. It was a map of Rio, with a defined line drawn through some of the roads.

“This is the street circuit for tomorrow,” Orien pointed out. “I want you to give me some advice.”

Grant’s eyes widened a bit. “You... *want* my advice?” Orien furrowed his brow.

“Well, yeah! Didn’t I personally appoint you as my pit chief?”

Grant scratched the back of his neck. “Looking back on it, I’m sorry about messing up the call in Toronto. I don’t even know what happened. You were not in a good spot, I knew EXACTLY what to say in my mind, but then my mouth just said, uh, not that, but—”

Orien turned his body to face Grant. He lifted up an arm and then plopped it down on Grant’s plump shoulder. He looked at him with a deadpan look on his face. “Less yapping, more nagging.”

Grant looked at the map, then back at Orien. He turned back around to closely analyze the map, tracing his pudgy finger against the track.

"You're looking at three major obstacles here," Grant started. He traced his finger around the map, showing the circuit. "The first one is that within the first third of the race, you have to drive up Corcovado Mountain. The roads are narrow and you're dealing with a lot of uphill. Once you hit the peak, it's all downhill from there, so you're going to be going a lot faster. You can't make any mistakes."

"Got it. What's the next obstacle?" Orien inquired. Grant put his finger on the second third of the map, on the base of the mountain back in the city.

"There's a section where you have to cut through Rocinha, the favela. Now, the problem with that is the roads are narrow, it's even more hilly than the first third, and it's also full of twists and turns, not to mention the road is in horrible condition, so there's a possibility that the road might be cracked."

"That's no problem," Orien insisted, crossing his arms. "The last one?"

"After that is the final leg of the race," Grant explained. He was pointing at Ipanema beach. "You have to drive on sand in order to get back to Copacabana. You're driving on beach sand, so be extra careful about your tires and your breaks, or else you're going to end up with lock-up."

Orien raised an eyebrow. "So... there's nothing too crazy?"

"Not that I can see, no."

Orien patted Grant on the back. "Thanks, crew chief. I knew I could count on you."

Sliding his arm off of Grant's back, who was still studying the map, Orien went back to the hotel room door.

“I’m going to go grab a drink from the vending machine. But I promise, I’m going to win the Grand Prix!”

Grant looked back up at Orien, who was already outside and slowly closing the door.

“No.” He said simply. Orien cracked the door open some, hearing Grant’s outburst. Grant smirks, flexing one fist. “*We’re* going to win the Grand Prix.”

Orien smiled slightly. “I’ll bring you back a gatorade.” He said before finally closing the door.