

On the Friday night before the Tuscany race, Gianna invited Orien to her family's vineyard. The Romano family had a ranch, a large house, and a private lake. And behind the house was the rows and rows of grape vines, tended to by their loyal and hard-working staff. Orien had never seen so many grapes in one place. It wasn't like a small farm either. This was an operation that required dozens of people and machines. It was actually visible from the hotel they were staying at, but the view wasn't really that good. Up close was a whole other ball game.

Orien and Gianna sat in a study room, which was decorated with warm colors spotted with black diamond tiles. The fireplace was emanating tons of heat, even though it was the end of April and the weather outside was already warm enough. Both Orien and Gianna sat in the study alone, watching the Monaco Grand Prix from 2004.

"You know, this was my first major racing event in my career." Gianna pointed out, watching herself race.

"How did it feel racing in Monaco?" Orien asked, leaning over.

Gianna laced her fingers together. "As cliché as it sounds, the moment I got in the car I was on cloud nine," She began. "It felt like I was dreaming. The adrenaline running through me made it feel like everything was moving in slow motion. Then the second I hit the track, everything sped up and I knew I had to fight for first place."

Orien nodded. He felt it was refreshing to hear another racer talk about their process. It helped him be more confident in his own flow.

An Italian teenage girl, who looked similar to Gianna, peeked through the doorway. Orien couldn't understand what the two were arguing about, but the younger girl was speaking with a cheeky smirk across her face and an accusing finger. Eventually, the sister left the doorway,

“Who was that?”

“My sister, Rina.”

“I thought the girls picking the grapes were your sisters.”

“Them, too.”

Orien cocked his head to the side. “How many siblings do you have?”

Gianna tapped on her fingers, counting “Fourteen.”

“E... Excuse me?”

“Wait, let me count. Dominico, Alessia, me, Giovanni, Luca, Luna, Aurora, Daniela, Emilia, Dario, Dante, Gemma, Angelo, Enzo, Rina.”

Orien simply nodded along, not understanding at all. “I see...”

“She was just telling me the wine was ready. You want some?”

Orien held up a hand, politely declining. “We really shouldn’t be drinking the night before a race.”

“A few sips won’t do anything.” Gianna argued.

“I still wouldn’t risk it. I’ve never had alcohol before.”

Gianna stood up, preparing to get some drinks ready. “Is there anything you *do* want?”

“Some grape juice is fine. Might as well take advantage of Romano's fresh grapes, right?”

“Sounds good.” She replied, before going off to the wine storage. She grabbed two wine glasses and set them on the table. From the cooler, she took two bottles. One of them was a fine red wine. The other was just some grape juice, both of them freshly squeezed from the Romano Ranch’s vineyard. She poured the grape juice in the left glass and the wine in the right one. She took both wine glasses back to Orien.

“Here you go.” She said, handing him the right glass. Orien accepted the glass with a silent smile and nod. The two sat in silence for a while, the fireplace warming them both up.

“You know, I don’t regret it.” Orien said, breaking the silence.

“Regret what?” Gianna asked.

“Our relationship. The others don’t trust you. None of them are happy for me. But you know what? The only person who should have any validation over my own life is myself.”

“People are just like that,” Gianna nodded, drinking from her glass. “I used to work in the vineyard like my brothers and sisters for the longest time before I went to university and eventually racing. After I covered that F1 story and told them about my new dream to become a racer, you want to know what they did? They laughed. They said there was no way a grape picker would be able to make it in motorsport. All I had to do was prepare the grapes for the juice and wine and make sure one of my siblings didn’t wander too far from the vineyard.”

“So they don’t get lost?”

“No, we have a crazy neighbor who lives in a lone house on a field. He shoots anything that moves. We almost lost Angelo to him once.”

“Oh...” Orien looked down before looking back up. “I mean, family is one thing. But these are my friends, and... I know they’re worried about me, but why aren’t they happy for me?”

“Sometimes, the people you think you love won’t support you at all.” Gianna replied simply.

“Ah well,” Orien shrugged. “You’re all I need. I feel confident in myself, I love this relationship, and I take pride in being Mateo Santiago’s son. And if people have a problem with that, that’s on them. You helped me embrace my identity and show the world Mateo Santiago.”

Gianna simply beamed at him. They drank their glasses in even more silence. But as Orien sipped his glass, something felt... off. The taste was kind of different. Maybe it was just the way the grapes were prepared. And as he took more and more sips, it felt almost as if his body was becoming lighter. His body became warmer, and his head felt empty as he began to slowly sway from side to side.

“Woah... Did the room just get warmer?” Orien asked. He sounded less confident in his voice.

“Are you okay?”

Orien looked at his hands. “I feel... really great. It’s like how I feel from racing, but different somehow.”

Gianna stood up, offering him a hand. “Should I take you back to your hotel room?”

Orien giggled as Gianna pulled him up with her hand and guided him back to his hotel room. On the way there, Orien kept mumbling stuff about how much prettier Gianna has gotten. After a bit of walking, Orien found enough balance to at least walk on his own. He still couldn't seem to string together a complete sentence, but at least he could now walk without almost tipping over every few steps. They walked through the trees now sprinkled with lights here and there like a galaxy on ground. The stars were shining brightly upon the two. When Orien got back to his room, he patted down every pocket he had for his room keycard. But no matter how much he lightly patted, he couldn't find it. Gianna sighed and reached into his back pocket, hovering the key over the door until the light flashed green and letting out a beep. Orien ran back inside like a child who has been promised candy after eating all their veggies. He flopped on his bed, the mattress jiggling under him as he landed. Gianna could smell an air freshener wafting

across the room, masking Orien's foul alcoholic stench. Satisfied, she slipped out, closing the door behind her.

Nigel was in his garage, sitting on the hood of his UK-themed GT. He was rubbing his fingers together, now with his gloves off. The garage door rang out and Gianna entered.

"It's done." She told him.

"Santiago is out of the picture now?" Nigel asked, hesitantly. He instinctively pinched his fingers.

Gianna walked over and sat down on the hood next to him. "He might not even show up tomorrow."

"Wonderful," Nigel sighed. "So how did you do it?"

"You'll see." She blurted out cryptically. Nigel began to get a little uneasy. He's been left in the dark the entire time in Italy. Gianna kept telling him that she'd make sure Orien Santiago couldn't perform at his best to help him win, and without knowing HOW was starting to get to him deep down. But his excitement at hearing that Orien Santiago was now unable to compete filled him with too much joy to be worried.

"Regardless, now that our mission is done, how about we have some victory dinner? My treat."

"Sounds good."

Nigel hopped off his car hood and walked over to the garage door. He looked behind him and saw Gianna was not moving.

"Are you coming, or...?" He fished for an answer.

"Yeah, I'm coming. Give me five minutes."

“Alright, I’ll be in the area, just lock up when you’re done.”