

Orien was now armed with two pieces of knowledge he could try out in Rio. He couldn't wait to test out his advice. The only thing he needed now was a proper crew. His shoulders sagged as he remembered. Parker and Grant still weren't speaking to him. In fact, he only sees them at their hotel every night. In Toronto and New York, they toured together, tried different cultural lunches and dinners together while joking about the things they saw on their tours. Now it was mainly Parker and Grant eating their food in another part of the hotel room. Meanwhile, after Orien's shifts at the Ferreira market, he would find some cheap hotel snacks from the vending machine to eat by himself, which he was at least able to afford with the few reais he earned from the nice couple. He had to fix this. Once he left Rio, he'd be all alone again without the Ferreiras to treat him like family.

Orien looked up as he saw a lone mechanic during a tire change swear in Portuguese after accidentally dropping the tire on his foot. Andre and Paulo looked at each other before running over to the man. They conversed with the man in the language, asking questions as the man nodded and explained. He pointed to a stack of tires. The two boys walked over and brought the tire to the man and held it up in position as he took his wrench to tighten the bolts. That gave Orien an idea. A pretty unusual idea. But if it worked, he may have found a way to mend all these things up. Lazaro and Fernando helped with the other tire, and the man thanked them while waving his cap. Orien went to the four boys, kneeling to speak to them.

"How would you like to help Senhor Santiago with his next big race?"

Parker was by herself in the garages where the racers' cars were being held. He was holding her power drill. She took deep, rhythmic breaths, caressing her finger against the trigger of the drill. In her other hand, she held a digital stopwatch. After a few seconds, she clicks her

timer and begins quickly changing the tires on Orien's car, trying to be as fast as she could. She changed the first tire in about 9 seconds and then moved onto the second rear tire. As she unbolted the second tire, she tried to grab onto it, but accidentally dropped it.

"Dammit!" She screamed, slamming her fist on the hood of his car. She checked her digital timer. Not even 14 seconds in and she already screwed up. What was the point? Even one professional pit crew member could've changed two tires in that time. And here she was fumbling to change even one tire. She gave up, resting her head on the car. Why did she agree to this? She should've just told Orien no to his offer back at home. She felt something warm touch her bare shoulder. A hot cup was hovering next to her.

Orien was holding yet another cup filled with his favorite Brazilian drink, as well as a foil-wrapped cheese bun. "I brought you something."

Parker lifted her head off the window and accepted the cup and bun cautiously. "What is this?"

"That is pingado. It's a milk drink mixed with a bit of coffee. And some pão de queijo, it's like a cheese bread bun."

"Thank you," Parker sniffed, sitting on the hood of his car. Orien followed suit, sitting next to her. "How did you know I was here?"

Orien shrugged, smiling. "I was at the practice track nearby. Heard drilling."

"Oh," She laughed half-heartedly. She sat the bun down and grabbed the pingado cup with both hands. Some steam was still coming from it. It smelled really good, like it was from a fudge shop back home. She pursed her lips and slowly brought the cup to her mouth and took a sip. Instinctually, she hummed. "This is really good."

“I know, right?” He chuckled, playing with his fingers. “My favorite mom-and-pop shop here makes them. They’re sponsoring me, actually.”

Parker looked at him, smiling. “So you went ahead and got yourself a sponsor while you were gone? Wow, look at you.” Orien simply gave a quiet chuckle before his smile faded. The two of them sat there in silence, Parker quietly enjoying the Brazilian drink. After a while, she spoke up. “Ryan, can I tell you something?”

“Mhm?”

“I’m sorry for what happened in Toronto.”

“No, no,” Orien waved off, trying to make her feel better. “It’s not your fault.”

Parker took a deep breath before speaking again. “Honestly, when you told me you qualified for the Grand Prix, I wasn’t surprised. I knew with your talents, you’d get it no issues. But when you asked me to be your pit crew, I didn’t know what to think. On one hand, I was excited. I got to tour the world, meet new people and get to work on a real life race car. But I’m just a mechanic. I’m used to working on cars for a few hours, but under 30 seconds? I didn’t think I could do it. And Toronto proved me right. I froze up. The thought that you and Grant could’ve done everything perfectly, and if I was the only one who screwed up and it still would have cost you the race. It’s just...”

Orien grabbed her wrist gently. “Don’t worry, we all screwed up in Toronto. It wasn’t just you.”

“I still let you down. If only I did it right the first time, the New York incident wouldn’t have happened.”

Orien sighed. He took both hands and placed each of them on one of Parker’s cheeks. “Look at me. You are perfectly fine. You are perfectly capable. Stop worrying.”

“Okay.” Parker said, teeth clench as Orien was holding onto her cheeks.

“Say it.”

“I can do it?”

“Yes, but with more confidence.”

“I can do it.” She said again, fixing her gaze. Orien moved his hands away walked over to the garage door.

“But you know what, it’s unrealistic of me to place so much pressure on you alone. Which is why I got you this.” He declared, presenting the garage door and waving towards it. Nothing happens. Orien looked behind him.

“I SAID ‘WHICH IS WHY I GOT YOU *THIS!*’”

This time, Andre came in, surveilling the garage. Fernando and Lazaro came in after, immediately looking for something to touch. Paulo trudged in last, muttering swears.

“Senhor Orien, when you said we could help you out, we have to work on cars?” He complained.

“Well, yes. That’s what a pit crew does.” Orien explained. Paulo sighed.

“I thought you’d let us drive your car or some—” He argued before he froze, shutting up completely. He saw Parker sitting on the hood, unwrapping her pao and taking a bite. Paulo approached her and leaned on the hood of Orien’s car.

“Bom dia, senhorita. Are you enjoying Rio?”

Parker paused, looking the 13-year-old in the eye. A shimmer gleamed in her eye.

“They’re adorable!” She cooed.

“No, *you*’re ado—”

“Paulo, quit hitting on the white girl.” Andre scolded, slapping Paulo upside the head. Paulo rubbed the back of his head, growling. Orien smiled, looking over to Parker.

“Little charmers, right? But watch this,” He said. He prepared two fingers and brought them to his mouth and let out a sharp whistle. Andre and Paulo quit their Portuguese arguing and turned to Orien. Lazaro tripped while being chased by Fernando chin-first. Both of them shot up, saluting. “Fernando! Lazaro! Front left tire!” As he barked those orders, the twins rushed over and stood on opposite sides, grabbing onto an end. Orien waved his hand towards them, signaling Parker to try her hand at changing it. She sat the bun down and quickly wiped the milk mustache and bread crumbs off her mouth with the length of her arm and grabbed her yellow drill. Kneeling, she prepared the stance. Orien grabbed her stopwatch, hovering his thumbed glove over the button.

“Go!”

Parker quickly pressed her drill against the five bolts with both hands. After all the bolts came loose, the twins set the tire down and grabbed a new one from the nearby stack. They set the tire in position while she secured the bolts into place. Orien stopped the watch.

“7.8 seconds.” He read off. Parker sighed, high fiving the two boys.

“Ryan, thank you. The boys and I have a lot of work to do.”

Orien walked closer to Parker. He extended a fist. “Can I count on you to be Team Santiago again for Saturday?”

Parker looked at Orien’s fist. He slowly brought hers up and fist bumps his. “Team Santiago.”