

Nigel was in a red telephone box on the side of the street in Westminster. He was still extremely sweaty from what happened after the race.

“A penalty?!” Nigel screamed, his voice bouncing off the walls of the box. “You said you would cover me!”

“I said I would cover you *if* you won. I can’t take the fall for someone who came in fifteenth place. And if it was a minor or discreet move, perhaps. But for a near collision, that’s too risky for me, and I’m not going to even try to bring it up with the IRC .”

Nigel groaned. “Fine, then. What kind of penalty are we looking at?”

“You’re looking at a grid penalty, and not a negligible one. You have to start at the back of Paris. 60th.”

“Are you kidding me?!”

“Don’t get smart with me, Nigel. Most rookie and small-time racers would’ve been disqualified for the stunt you pulled, so even a back-of-the-line starting position is lenient. Personally, between your conduct at the press conference and your brutish race performance, I think you deserve much more than that, but since I’m your agent, I had to help you out in some way.”

“You’ll at least help me with cleaning up, right?”

“No, lad. There’s a PR storm coming, and I do not want to be here when it hits. You’re on your own. Good luck!”

“No, wait—!” Nigel screamed. His agent already hung up. He angrily slammed the phone back in his position. 15th place. Just saying the number made the taste in his mouth go sour. He was so worried about Tetsuko snatching his record that Orien completely slipped his mind. The

same man who had his engine blow up in New York was the one to beat him in his own home country. It was like the thought itself mocked him.

Nigel walked through the now-drizzling streets of London by himself. He passed by the same electronics store Orien passed on the way to the bakery. It was a Bonds commercial. But something about it seemed off. When Nigel paid attention to the commercial, his lid blew. Orien was the sponsor. But instead of the casino with the women and money, Orien was wearing a t-shirt, shorts and sneakers. He was in Hyde Park, surrounded by children, couples and old people in various places of the park as the camera followed Orien. All of the extras were wearing Bonds clothing.

“You know, Bonds has a reputation for being only for the elite, the rich, the beautiful. But it’s actually much more than that. Bonds started a new mission. Now, the lovely people of England have the right to good quality clothing at a moderate price. Now matter how old, who you’re with, what job you have. Bonds is for everyone, and we’ll make sure of that. The common people need to have access to fashion. And that’s just what I, Orien Santiago, plan to help with.”

Nigel grabbed his iPhone and put in the number to call Bonds. After a few rings, the commercial director picked up.

“Good day, Nigel. How—”

“What is this travesty of a commercial?!” He yelled. The director sighed over the phone.

“I knew you’d be calling about that. Can’t people greet each other first nowadays?” He said sarcastically.

“What about the one you filmed with me?”

“We had Orien Santiago take your spot, considering he’s been gaining tremendous traction. We would be fools not to capitalize on that.”

“You’ve been my sponsor for 3 YEARS! Santiago wasn’t even on the map until the International Grand Prix! His engine blew up because he ignored his pit crew! Is that who you want to be your sponsor?!”

“Well, the lad’s performance had improved significantly since then. It’s quite marvelous how he managed to turn his career around. And coming in first on his fifth race as a rookie? We’re proud of him. And besides, we’d rather him be our sponsor than a London-bred racer who let fourteen foreigners beat him in his own home country. Consider our third year of sponsorship the final one.”

“Come on, he completely defeated the point of my original commercial’s creative decisions!”

“That’s the point. We have to distance ourselves from you, or else we’d go down with you. Anyway, best of luck. Cheers!” The same tones buzzed in his ear. Nigel slammed his phone onto the concrete, shattering it. He picked his phone back up and saw the shockwave of cracks in it.

“I’ll have to buy a new one, I guess.” Nigel muttered. He had enough money for one, so it didn’t matter. A young girl was walking with her mother holding her hand. She stopped when she saw Nigel.

“Mr. Thorne!” She said excitedly. “I have a question!”

“Why yes, little miss. I love engaging with my English fans.” He said, switching up immediately. He pulled out a pen and paper, preparing an autograph.

“You know Mr. Orien, right?” She asked.

“We’re both racers, so yes.”

“If you see him, can you get him to sign my autograph?” She said with innocent eyes.  
Nigel’s face deflated.

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“PARTAYYY!!!” Grant shouted, popping a champagne bottle. They were at the same bakery Jabari took Orien and Tetsuko to. The banner had “Congratulations, Orien!” on the wall. Everybody except Tetsuko had a smile on their face. She sat at the edge of the table next to Orien, still being as stoic as ever.

“Gotta say, buddy,” Dirk chuckled, holding an ice cream cone. “I feel like I owe *you* an apology for nearly giving up on you in New York. If only I knew you’d be a champion.”

“So, if I won the London race, does that mean you’ll forgive me for everything?”

Dirk crossed his arms and chuckled. “I’ll *consider* it.”

Tetsuko was poking a crepe with her fork. “Aren’t you afraid this is too expensive, Jabari-san?”

“Don’t worry about da price, I’m payin’ fo everyding. Eat anyding ya want!” Jabari said cheerfully.

“I’m glad to see you doing better, Mr. Jabari.” Orien commented.

“I remembered to take my meds dis morning. I’ll be a-ok! That, and if I don’t push myself in any of the races, dat is.”

Everyone was laughing in the background. Orien invited some fans to join their little celebration. Grant was flushed from the amount of alcohol he was drinking.

“Hey everyone, look at me, I’m Nigel Thorne!” Grant slurred before clearing his throat. “I am England’s best racer. The absolute best, because my mummy said so! I love you all, but kiss my arse!”

Dirk joined in on the mocking. “Oh no, my tires! Now the Americans are going to defeat me! My racing career is dead and I’m still a virgin!”

Parker was the third to but in, also faking a British accent. “WAAAAHH!!! I hate everybody and I want to die! My career peaked at 22 years old! I will never be relevant again!”

The whole venue burst into laughter again. Grant especially was laughing hard, falling out of his chair and holding his stomach from laughter. Orien looked over and noticed Tetsuko not engaging as much with the others. Jabari also noticed. Tetsuko glanced up at Orien.

“Why do you keep inviting me to these?” Tetsuko asked. “You know I’m terrible with these things.”

“That’s easy. You helped me become a better racer. We’re friends.” Orien told her confidently.

“But I don’t want to make friends. I can’t make friends. Especially with other racers. That was a mistake I made a long time ago.”

“Mistakes are made in da past,” Jabari butted in. “No matta how much you look at dem, dey will neva change.”

“But I’m always improving from my mistakes.”

“But you’re also letting da past control you. ‘Ave you truly learned from dat mistake, or are you lettin anoda one control you now? It’s up to you, but I tink you truly do want friends deep down,” Jabari explained. “I want ya to do somethin for me. I want you to let out a cheer. Right now.”

Tetsuko glanced left, then right. She closed her eyes and meekly raised a fist.

“*Omedetou*” she mumbled, not wanting to be heard.

“What was dat? One more time.” Jabari egged on.

“Omedetou.” She said louder, but more at a normal volume. Jabari put a hand to his ear.

Tetsuko shot up, closing her eyes and breathing deeply.

“OMEDETOU GOZAIMAAAAAAAASU!!!!” She screamed, possibly louder than Big Ben. Dirk clutched his earpiece, Parker nearly spilled her wine, and Paulo accidentally choked on his cake, Andre giving him the heimlich. Tetsuko blushed, noticing all the attention she just drew to herself. She quietly sat back down. Jabari, without saying a word, patted her on the shoulder while Orien patted her on the back.

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Nigel was flipping through TV channels back in his hotel room. Orien was everywhere. No matter what he changed the channel to, Orien was there. He was in so many commercials, some of them Nigel’s own sponsors. He switched to an interview with Londoners.

“I think Orien Santiago is so cool! He’s both an amazing racer and he’s so good-looking! If he doesn’t win the Grand Prix, I’m knifing someone!” A secondary school girl said on the microphone.

“Orien has come so far from New York. I’m proud of him and his accomplishments.” A man in his twenties said.

“Honestly, I’m just supporting him to spite Nigel Thorne.” An older gentleman said. Nigel changed the channel again. The same talk show Nigel was invited to was playing, Orien casually sitting in his guest seat.

“How did it feel to finish first in London?” The host asked, this time very open to Orien.

“When I saw Nigel’s tires give out on him, I saw my chance. But it felt so good to beat him.”

“To be honest, lad. We were glad it was you and not him. The kid’s attitude had become insufferable over the years, but today was a true embarrassment. Poor conduct *and* a fifteenth place finish? He was supposed to make Britain proud, but instead he shamed our whole nation on an international level. If I were Prime Minister, I’d revoke his citizenship just for that.”

The crowd laughed at him. They went from laughing with Nigel to mocking him publicly. He switched the channel, and a British sports network was speaking about the incident.

“Well, his career is dead, innit?” The first man said.

“Sure thing. For a little boy talking so much smack, I’m shocked at how he felt the need to nearly kill a Japanese woman to beat her.”

“And the craziest part is that she STILL beat him by thirteen places. The whelp basically received a free penalty.”

“He deserved it, I’ve been sick of his attitude for the longest time. At the very least I held respect for the young man due to his record. But as low as he scored? If any of my children were fans of his, I’d kick them out of the house.”

“Look on the bright side. At least he can get his perfect record back by racing in the primary school circuit.”

“You rude bloke,” The co-host elbowed the other one. “That’s extremely disrespectful to the primary schoolers. They would run circles around him.”

The co-hosts laughed heartily before Nigel shut the TV off. He buried his face in his gloves. He could hear their laughs in his head. The whole country was treating him like some sort of clown. He grabbed a water bottle and tried to drink it, but he couldn’t even bring himself

to unscrew the cap. Thoughts of Orien Santiago circled his head. He clutched his bottle until it exploded, his glove soaking up the water. He tossed the bottle on the ground and repeatedly stomped on it. He took every single small object he could find in his hotel room and flung them at various walls, knocking over chairs and stuff off tables, screaming bloody murder. After he got tuckered out from his rampage, he had a crazed look in his eye. His hair was frazzled, his face was completely red and his left eye was twitching.

“Fine then,” He conceded to himself. He looked dead in his eyes, and a look of pure malice was in them. Not a thought in his mind floated except for thoughts of revenge. Everything fell apart in front of him. But he sure as hell wasn’t going to watch his career go down the toilet by himself. He pulled out his broken phone and called three people to his room.

French racer Jacques Montreal, German racer Felix Schroeder and Italian racer Gianna Romano were sitting on his bed. Nigel was pacing around the room.

“Why did you call us here?” Gianna asked, somewhat annoyed.

“In case you haven’t realized yet, I got 15th place in my own bloody home country! And to Orien Santiago, no less! All this time, I was afraid Ohama would be the one to best me. I tried so hard to break her morale for me to take the lead, only for the ENGINE FAILURE GREENHORN to swoop right in and steal my record, leaving me in fifteenth! FIFTEENTH! The Prince of British Racing receiving such a score, it’s mortifying! I’m losing sponsors, I’ve shamed my country, my own parents kicked me out of my home, I’ve never felt more humiliated in my life!”

“So what’s your plan?” Jacques added.



“We are going to PERSONALLY make sure that Orien Santiago never makes the top ten for the rest of the Prix again. I’m going to stomp out the embers of his fame and attention before it even has the chance to grow.”

“I asked what you needed us for.” Gianna bit back. Nigel stopped pacing and looked each of the three the eyes.

“If you do something for me, I will give all of you the ten million dollar prize, assuming I win, of course. I’m already rich, I don’t need it.”

Felix, looking uneasy, gulped. “So what is that something?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Nigel smirked deviously. “You’re all going to help me cheat.”