

## ~ Another Surgery ~

### CHAPTER 3



The light quickly dimmed and then Phineas' world came back to focus. It was as if he had crossed a threshold into a realm untouched by the modern world, a sacred realm where the spirits of the forest whispered in the wind. He found himself in the

woods—but it was clear as day that it wasn't the woods he was used to. Because, for one, it was daytime. His senses became attuned to the symphony of nature's melodies, the chorus of chirping birds, the soft whisper of the breeze, and the occasional distant call of woodland creatures.

“What in Hell is going on?” he said aloud, unable to keep his emotions bottled in. His mind felt busy and distracted.

His neck whipped one way then the other, quickly scanning what was in front of him: a forest not as dense as the one from his homeland, with a pale grayish green moss covering the trees and a unique woody-earthy scent flooding the forest. There was a clearing up ahead, which was obvious from the amount of light coming from it.

But none of it mattered when his head turned and in the spot he usually found Sun hovering over his shoulder, he found... well, Sun.

The scream that came out of his lips wasn't something Phineas was proud of, and he scrambled back so fast that he tripped over a root and fell on his butt, looking at Sun from below for the first time in his life.

“Sun?” It was obvious. Yet, it wasn't.

Who he was used to seeing as a small two-inch pixie was now almost five feet tall. *Almost.*

“Hello, Phineas. This isn’t how I wanted this to go, but, oh well. Hi.” Sun waved a hand in the air as if dismissing her own thoughts. “I guess you never liked to listen to my advice. You always do what you bloody want to, anyway.” As she said this, she crossed her arms over her chest, looking as miffed as he’d ever seen her.

Sun’s hair was exactly the same, short and spiky and of a bright pink color that wasn’t natural on humans. Her eyes were metallic green, something he’d never noticed before, and her wings—even though they were tucked close to her body—were still visible behind her back. And damn, now that she was talking, she wouldn’t stop.

“I told you not to go. I told you no, but no, no, no, Phineas always does whatever the hell he feels like doing. Don’t listen to the pixie, not like she knows what she’s talking about.”

Phineas did not know how to avoid being trapped under the waterfall of her emotions.

She continued her frantic rant, ultimately executing her short fringe dance in the air. She’d done this so many times before so Phineas was used to the expression. Still, it was shocking to see it at human size. And almost comical, but he knew laughing wasn’t among his list of viable options if he wanted to keep his head attached to his body.

“And now you won’t speak, just perfect!” Sun grunted after a second of silence.

She looked right then left, as if assessing where they were, finally lending Phineas a hand so he could stand up. He did. Damn, holding her hands was as weird as expected. It was still small compared to his, but it was human size. It was...



“You’re real? Is this some kind of hallucination? Did I hit my head and I’m dead or dreaming?”

“Wish I’d been the one to hit you on the head, but no, you’re not dreaming,” Sun replied, her tone softening.

“Where are we, then? What happened?”

“What happened is that you didn’t listen. Come on, we should head back before we get in more trouble.”

Sun turned around and took a giant step forward, but Phineas didn’t move, crossing his arms over his chest instead. He knew he looked like a little kid throwing a tantrum, but he didn’t care. He wanted answers, and he was going to get them right now. Like a detective on a trail, he followed the breadcrumbs.

“No, no, no,” he said. “I’ve been talking alone for over a year, waiting for you to give me some answers, wondering if I lost my mind or if you’re fucking real, and now you want to go back!? What? So you can be a tiny pixie that doesn’t speak a word again? I’m not moving.” He spoke so fast that he almost resembled Sun.

“Don’t think I like that for a minute! I do it for you!” Sun interrupted, her cheeks going bright red.

“Yes, everybody is doing what’s best for me, right? But what would be best would be to know where in hell I am. The unknown is uncomfortable!”

Sun opened her mouth to reply, but a rustling sound behind Phineas made her stop. He turned,

hearing someone coming, and when he looked back at Sun, the pixie was gone.

“What?”

Before he could call her over, the foliage burst open, revealing a person sprinting directly towards him. Well, maybe not a person. If it wasn't for Phineas spending all his childhood playing with imaginary trolls and dwarves and being very used to odd creatures showing up unannounced, he would have probably run. Because there, in front of him, was now a Minotaur. Even if his face was human-like, Phineas was sure that was what he was. He was almost eight feet tall, with hardy horns in his head and a hooped nose ring. He was wearing a white shirt and broad under the knee-shorts, but the rest of his legs were clearly animal-like. He was wearing no shoes. After all, it'd be pretty hard to put shoes on those hooves.

“Hi, are you lost? I don't think I know you,” the man-bull said.

Phineas was so surprised by his gentle voice that for a second, he forgot how to speak.

“Um... No, well... I think so? I don't know where I am,” he stammered.



The minotaur smiled broadly and acknowledged the woods with a wave of his arm. “Well, then let me welcome you to the Otherworld Academy. I’m sure if you found yourself here, it’s because this is the place for you. Fate never makes mistakes. I am Xhe, the headmaster of the school.”

“School?”

His eyes were like a kaleidoscope, absorbing the colors and patterns of the world, creating a mesmerizing mosaic in his mind. Phineas looked around once again, as if wanting to check if he’d missed something, like a vast building, for instance— a welcoming school. But there was nothing. And then, as if on cue, an eerie wind picked up, and the

trees unlocked around them, revealing an enormous castle in the distance.

“This is the Otherworld Academy, a University for gifted teenagers and all those that want to know the world around them better. Care to walk with me?”

Still at a loss for words, and not knowing where Sun ran off to, Phineas followed when Xhe started walking towards the immense building.

“University, you say?”

Like a celestial conductor orchestrating a symphony, the universe seemed to have played its magical notes, guiding him to this precise intersection of time and place.

*Was it destiny that brought him here? And where was his father? Was he also in there? Would he run into him somewhere in this magical land?* Phineas had so many questions without answers that he didn't know where to begin.

When they were halfway to the building with only a few mostly human-looking people around the gardens, he heard a familiar buzz and looked over his shoulder. There, hiding behind him, was Sun in her small pixie form again. She made a sign that clearly meant: “You better come with me right now if you don't want to lose a limb,” and then she disappeared back into the thick forest.



Scared to lose his only connection to what he'd known all his life, Phineas made a quick decision. He might come to regret it later, but everything around him was too much to take in.

“I’m so sorry, Xhe, but I have to go.”

Without waiting for an answer, he bowed his head and ran back into the strange forest, following the sound of Sun’s wings.

Before he was out of sight, though, he heard Xhe yelling back cheerfully, “We’ll see each other again soon. Until next time.”

Phineas ran through the forest. As he ran, the forest seemed to envelop him in a mystical embrace, guiding him along the hidden trails and secret passages known only to its inhabitants. His breath was a rhythm, syncopated with the beating of his heart, propelling him forward like a drum urging him to keep going. He ran until he spotted Sun (back in human size) standing against a weathered tree with her arms crossed over her chest wearing a very irritated expression.



Still, she was gorgeous, like strawberry lemonade, part sweet, part tart. She had very delicate features and was still so small that she barely got up to Phineas' chest. He couldn't help but think of her as cute and adorable—something he knew he'd lose a limb over if he admitted out loud.

“What was that about? Why did you hide?” Phineas asked.

“Phin, I get that you have a lot of questions, but this is not the time. If your father returns before you’re back, everything will change forever. I don’t think you’re ready for that, are you? Everything your father has ever done was for you. To keep you safe. To help you. I need you to remember that. Now, let’s go back and I promise I will answer some of your questions after dinner. Deal?”

Phineas bit his bottom lip, unsure of what to say—but it was hard to say no to Sun. He’d always struggled to go against her advice as a kid, and it was even harder now that she was full-sized and he could clearly see her stern expression.

“Okay... But will you be able to talk if we go back? Isn’t this all a ruse?”

Sun smiled kindly for the first time since they’d crossed the portal. Her lips curved like the crescent moon, as if mirroring the sky's embrace of the rising sun, a celestial dance of light and warmth. Like a shy star peeking through the veil of night, her eyes twinkled with a hint of bashful enchantment, like a secret she was finally ready to share. “Not a lot, but yes, I’ve recharged enough to speak for a while. Now, let’s go.”

Sun extended her palm and drew a circle with her wrist. With the other hand, she reached out,

waiting for Phineas to grab her hand. The moment he did, a big circle of light opened up and swallowed them. Within a blink, they were back in his father's warehouse.

And Sun was a small pixie again.

She went straight for the door and, this time, Phineas rushed after her without hesitation. If his father found him here, he would be in so much trouble.

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After the adventure, Phineas excused himself to his room without dinner, claiming he was tired. In truth, he wasn't ready to face his father.

Sun excused herself too, promising she would be back shortly—it wasn't something she'd done often through the years. Leave him, but it wasn't the first time either.

So, Phineas lay in his bed, staring at the ceiling and thinking about everything that had happened so far. In the stillness of the room, his mind became a painter, splashing vibrant hues of imagination onto the blank canvas of the ceiling. It was hard for him to wrap his mind around the fact that there was, what? A portal in his father's warehouse? And one that led to a University, at that? All he'd wanted for so long was to go to school, and it almost seemed like a joke that there was one so close by. That's why

he was sure it all had to be a hallucination. He was sliding again, descending into madness. Minotaurs, pixies that grew into full size, mystical portals... None of it could be real. Could it?

After reasoning back and forth about everything he had seen, Phineas resolved to do his best to forget about it. The next day, he'd go to his father again and ask to go to University in America. He'd get away from the woods that were driving him mad as fast as possible, and go get a normal education, like any other guy his age. That was it. The harder you look, the more you see, so he vowed not to look any further tonight.

As the light outside dimmed and he fell asleep, he remembered what Sun had said: that his father had always done everything that was in his best interests. And he had, hadn't he? No matter how busy he was with orders and work, his father always made time for him. He was there to teach him how to identify poisonous plants, to show him how to shave, to listen to him when he had doubts. Both his parents had always done everything they could for him, and what did he do in exchange? Leave? Be ungrateful?

From now on, until he left for college, he'd be the perfect son. He'd repay their kindness and give them back everything they'd given him, show them

he cared deeply for both of them. And he'd promise to come back, obviously.

Yet when Phineas finally fell asleep, it wasn't a peaceful slumber. No. Doubt and uncertainty tortured his dreams that night. The ice he stood on was cracking all around him. In his dreams, he was an angry young man. Fear but also despair, anxiety and a great sadness filled his heart with panic.

Next, his dreams were full of faces he didn't recognize, and a voice that talked to him so softly that he woke up shivering. In the cocoon of his



blankets, he sought solace from the cold, like a bear curling up for hibernation, seeking warmth in the midst of winter. Every shiver was a reminder of life's delicate balance.

It was as if a projector had been set in motion, casting images onto the screen of his

consciousness, each frame a snapshot from his past. The sea of strangers stretched like an uncharted horizon, each face a mysterious island waiting to be explored, yet unfamiliar to his gaze.