

~ Happy Axxidents ~

CHAPTER 7



During the weekend before the talent show, Phineas went for dinner with his family. As they shared stories and laughter, the dining room became a theater of warmth and joy, with each member playing a unique role in the unfolding drama. Phineas was talking excitedly about what was to come and what he was planning on doing. He could not stop talking. His parents were not ready for him.

The show would take place in a ginormous stage that was already set on the grounds of the school. With each heartbeat, Phineas felt like a conductor, orchestrating the symphony of his desires, longing for the applause of his father's love. Phineas hoped his father would be there to watch him.

"You probably won't see me with how many people will be there, but I'll be around," his father said, sounding dismissive.

Both his parents were pretty distracted during dinner. Phineas kept looking their way, noticing how they weren't their usually cheerful selves. His dad was known for his wisdom, his mom for her fairness, and both of them for their charitable nature. They seemed different now. They hadn't kissed the entire time he'd been here, which was something they did often — despite how much he usually hated it. It made him think something was wrong. Maybe his parents were fighting again? It wasn't something that happened often, but he remembered a time when he was young, around the same time he'd started ignoring Sun, when his parents seemed very tense. Scared they were going to break up, he asked them about it.

"Parents aren't always happy," his mother had explained. "We have feelings too, but those feelings

are wounds that can fester. We have to heal those wounds, and that can take time.”

After some time, everything had all gone back to normal, and Phineas had been so excited that he’d run off to tell Sun he’d seen his parents kissing again. Today, he expected the same happy ending. He hoped they just needed some time alone without him around to heal.

“I’ll do the dishes,” Phineas said once the dinner was over as he jumped out of his chair.

“Thank you, darling.” His mother kissed his cheek and went to the adjacent room, where he saw her pick up her knitting — something she only did when stressed.

Sun hovered for a moment and then left the room too. Sadly, the timing wasn’t right. He was alone since his father had long left to go check on something in his study. Ignoring problems leads to bigger problems, but Phineas let the situation breathe a bit.

The wind was whistling outside when Phineas finished the dishes. After drying his hands on his mom’s favorite purple towel, he went looking for his father. The study was a small room on the ground floor where his father mostly kept idle paperwork. He was about to knock when he heard arguing inside. Instead of waiting, he leaned closer to

eavesdrop. He grew tired of always being the last one to find things out.

“He can’t be in the tournament,” his father was explaining. He sounded agitated, but also commanding.



For a moment, he wondered if Principal Xhe could have entered the house without him noticing,

but when the accomplice answered, his blood ran cold.

“You can’t keep protecting him his whole life.”

It was Sun, sounding annoyed.

“I can, and I will. Because that’s what I promised to do. Do I need to remind you that you made a promise, too? You can’t let him take part.”

There was silence for so long that Phineas worried Sun would barge out of the room. He was about to turn around and leave when he heard the small voice again.

“Okay. I’ll deal with it.”

His blood chilled, froze solid. His ears played a trick on him, as if they were mischievous jesters, whispering a distorted message that left him questioning reality. He couldn’t have heard that right, could he? Sun had been training him, helping him be good enough to excel in the tournament, to get past the talent contest and show Lukas that he was actually worthy of being at the Academy. Sun was the only one that knew and understood how important all of this was for him. They hadn’t openly talked about this, but he’d hinted at it, and he was sure Sun understood.

Until now.

Now he didn’t know what to think or feel. Once, the world fascinated him and he longed to see more of it but now he wasn’t sure. His heart was missing

from his chest. He wasn't sure he could even trust Sun anymore. *How could he?* After everything they'd gone through this week, after how close they'd gotten, how could she do this? Phineas thought of Sun's hand on his shoulder, of her soft touch. Of how close they'd been. Of how he'd looked at her lips and almost...

No. This was Sun. It couldn't be possible. In the realm of possibilities, this notion seemed like a mirage, a shimmering oasis of hope in the desert of disbelief. He was sure he'd heard wrong and when he'd asked Sun, she'd explain. The world would make sense again. He would not give up hope. Phineas saw no reason to hide from reality.

Not wanting to get caught, especially after these thoughts, he hurried up to his room. He picked up a few things he wanted to take back to school and then went loudly down the stairs, taking the steps two at a time.

"Sun, I'm going back! Are you coming?"

Sun flew to him, her expression neutral, as if nothing weird had happened. She fluttered her wings and clapped her hands, a motion he knew meant "come on, hurry."

And so they exited to the warehouse, where his father worked all his life, and went through the portal, hidden there all that time without Phineas knowing. He held his tongue until they crossed.

“Anything new?” he asked.

Sun shook her head. “No, about what?”

“I don’t know... Did you talk with mom or dad about anything?”

Sun shook her head again, looking down at the forest floor as they walked toward the school. She kept her eyes off him and since he was much taller, he could only see a curtain of the pink bob.



“Nah, didn’t talk much at all. I was tired.”

It was partly true, because she hadn't said a single word at dinner. But it also wasn't true, because he was sure of what he'd heard. Now one hundred percent sure it was her voice. And her denying it only proved to him he heard it right - that his father and best friend were plotting against him. It stung. Reality doesn't leave a lot to the imagination, after all.

And it hurt. It hurt so much.

The rest of the weekend, the vibe between Phineas and Sun felt off, but he didn't know what to do about it. The anger kept him alive. She'd been his best friend since he had memories, always there for him. He didn't know how to live now that he couldn't trust her. Somehow, her lying almost felt like his fault. But he also had no tangible proof, so he tried to pretend he had heard nothing. He tried to carry on as normal - or as normal as he could, until the thought grew so big inside his head, it burst. Like petrol on a bonfire, there was nothing he could do to smother the uncontrollable rage of his emotions. He decided the only sane solution would be to just think about the talent show.

On Sunday, Sun, Chee and Phineas had dinner in the dorm, as they often did. When Sun fell asleep curled up at the foot of his bed like an angelic kitten, something he was growing used to, he just curled his legs up to give her more room even though he knew

when he awoke, she'd be gone, just like every other morning...

It was time. As Phineas ascended the steps to the stage, his heart lunged into his chest, but he was ready. He'd been waiting for his turn since three in the afternoon. So far, there had been some skilled contestants, but he was supremely confident in his newly gained skills. He was ready.

It was almost five now, the sun slowly descending behind the massive building that was the Otherworld Academy. People and possibilities surrounded him. It was time to give them what they wanted.

Phineas took in his surroundings: the endless rows of seats filled with students, so many of them that their faces merged. The battle-tested building was in front of him, imposing as always. The thick forest behind him stretched from the edge of the school as far as he could see. All the trees whispered his name and reached out to him as much as he was reaching out to them.

This was it, his moment.

"And now," Principal Xhe said, "Phineas will showcase his abilities for the Exalted Board of Judges."

He'd known of the judges for over a week. Principal Xhe was one of them, then Mr. Bumputy who was his Tree Language Professor, and lastly Ms. Harrowhold, whom he didn't know, because he wasn't part of her class.



He nodded his head at the two professors sitting down at the front. Then, he was alone on stage as Xhe joined them.

Phineas wasn't sure if he should say something and couldn't even remember if any of the other contestants had. *Had they said what they were going to do? What had they actually done?* When he tried to think of the previous contestants, he realized his

mind seemed blurry, blank like an empty canvas. He lapsed into reactivity.

You're stressing, he told himself. Just concentrate on the trees and everything will be okay.

Then there was a calming voice in his mind, one he felt familiar with, and he let go of the stress by concentrating on the friendly trees. The air became still. He asked the trees to make the leaves dance, to come alive with everything that they were. The trees indulged him.

The leaves danced like never before. Yellow leaves immediately surrounded him and danced all around as Phineas guided them like a conductor with his flailing arms, savoring the moment and wearing a wide smile.

Cheers erupted. He tried to find Chee or Sun among the crowd. But again, faces blended one with the other and he couldn't focus on any of them.

Something was wrong.

He felt it in the pit of his stomach, like an odd feeling of something he'd experienced before. He couldn't fixate on faces, couldn't remember the participants before him, and if he thought about it... He couldn't even remember getting up out of bed that morning and getting ready for the talent show.

Something was *very* wrong.

A sense of unease settled over him like a heavy fog, shrouding his thoughts in a cloak of uncertainty.

He struggled, fighting against the voice in his mind. There was a familiar voice telling him everything was okay, that the judges were clapping and congratulating him because he'd passed onto the next stage. Instead, he tried to think of the last genuine memory he possessed: falling asleep with Sun curled up by the feet of his bed. He envisioned the bed, the feel of it... And there it was. Phineas could feel it. He could feel his body stirring, his mind telling him it was all a dream and that if he opened his eyes, he'd find himself in his room again.

Open your eyes. Open your eyes.

He tried but failed. Phineas knew he had to. It was important. One last try, with all his might, and...

His room. The bed he'd fallen asleep on was rigid under his body. Phineas sat up groggily, his eyes focusing on everything around him a bit too slow.

"Sun?"

She was sitting at the foot of his bed, the same place she'd been curled up the night before. Only now, she was wide awake and looking at him with a shameful burden of guilt. The same one she'd had after pulling on his hair for weeks to make him realize she was real. It was as if a dark cloud loomed above her.

"Phi..."

Sun bit her bottom lip and stood, taking a step back.

“What in Hell is going on?”

They were alone in his room, no sight of Chee. Sun shook her head with remorseful eyes, but said nothing.

Then everything fell into place. The time of day, with the sun shining outside the window. The sound of people cheering that came in through the window, the clock on the wall marking the time. *Late. Too late.* And Sun, surrounded by an aura of magic, standing there, saying nothing. His mind flashed to the conversation with his father. The one they didn’t mean for him to hear.

“Sun. What have you done? Why?” The words choked him, pain squeezing his chest and begging for it to be a misunderstanding.

If Sun explained herself, if she made sense of it, maybe... Maybe not that bad? Maybe she had a credible reason. Perhaps it wasn’t what he thought. Maybe his only friend and the person he trusted the most in the world hadn’t just betrayed him. Maybe not everyone was lying to him over and over, again and again? Like a home in the ocean, trust evaporated as the burden of lies led to a wave of destruction, once again.

Sun just stood there, looking at him, saying nothing.

“At least tell me why,” he muttered. Tears flowed like a river, carrying the weight of emotions that words could not express. Then, his eyes went down. A bitter taste of acid on the top of his tongue. He couldn’t even look at her anymore, staring into the dark where everything was coming from.

Sun had been his everything. His only friend. The one he trusted the most. And lately, he’d allowed himself to even think of her as something more. As a potential partner, lover, for a lifetime of even greater things. Together, he thought they could do anything. Seeing Sun in human form, seeing her eye to eye, it had been refreshing. Like knowing you’re not crazy after doubting yourself for so long.

But now it was all broken. He was broken.

“Phineas, I’m sorry, I did a terrible thing, but I swear I’m not a terrible person. I...”

“If what comes out of your lips next isn’t an explanation, I don’t want to hear it,” he snapped.

Like a weary traveler on an endless road, he had grown tired of the constant deception that had become a part of his journey. He was tired of being lied to. Tired of always being the one in the dark, the one people toyed with. He would not waste his days on people that weren’t truthful to him anymore. Phineas would not spend the rest of his days wondering if people were speaking the truth or not.

He'd find his own truth. Make it on his own as he moved on with his life.



He was done. Done with the lies and the hiding and people looking down at him.

Not wanting to hear any more of her lies, he stormed out of the room, pushing past Sun and

ignoring her as she yelled apologetically while running after him.

He was done wasting his energy on people that didn't care for him. That couldn't even talk to him with honesty in their eyes.

Phineas rushed down the stairs and out into the grounds, hoping with everything that he was still on time, that he could make it. The clock marked that the show should be over, but he could still hear people cheering in the distance and believed in his heart he could make it. Hope was the only thing he had left, so he clung onto it.

As he burst out through the big double doors, he saw that it'd been raining, petrichor strong in the air. Looking up towards the stage, he saw a faint rainbow behind it; the sun shining down on the crowd. This was a good sign. It meant there was still hope. And hope was all he needed.

The future will take care of itself. Hope is powerful. In the theater of life, hope takes center stage.