

~ I Got NO Money ~

CHAPTER 4



Phineas dreamed of a battle. The dreams were like a portal, transporting him to a realm where legends were born, and the echoes of battles fought long ago reverberated in his heart. He dreamed of creatures he'd never seen before, all coming after him. He felt so small as he ran through tight

corridors and hid underneath a small creaky bench, unsure of what he was hiding from.

When he awoke, he still felt scared, his heart drumming fast with nail marks in his palms from fisting his hands tightly. And when he looked at the night table, he found it empty. The clock marked three in the morning, so he went back to sleep, trying to forget about the off feeling.

When he slept again, he dreamed of a man that carried him in his arms, but it wasn't his father. He dreamed of a voice, soft and gentle, that sang him to sleep. But it wasn't his mother.

He woke up feeling sad and nostalgic, as if he'd lost something, like he missed a chapter of his life. His emotions were like a bittersweet symphony, each note a brushstroke of sadness and longing, painting the canvas of his soul in shades of wistfulness. He felt empty, with no love, no hope, no money, and no answers. And there, on the matchbox by the bed, was a pixie with pink hair looking straight at him with eyes more gentle than he'd ever seen.

"Are you real?" he asked, taking a hand to his hair to keep it off his face. His eyes were deeply sad. He thought his life was like a piece of a puzzle that has not yet fallen into place.

Sun jumped off the box and sat on the edge of the table, her feet dangling.

“As real as I can get,” she replied, her voice low but powerful. “I know what you’re thinking, but everything that happened last night... It was real. And I think it might be time for you to remember a bit more about your past, to know where you really come from.”

Phineas sat on his bed without emotion, mimicking the pixie’s posture while leaning on his knees to look into her soft eyes. Then his face got red.

“What are you talking about? Are you finally going to give me answers?”

In her smile, there was a story untold, a narrative of strength and fragility coexisting, like a tapestry woven with threads of both joy and sorrow. Sun’s smile was so sad that Phineas wished she was bigger so he could hug her to make her feel better.

“No, Paul and Monika are.”

Phineas had never heard her parent’s names on Sun’s lips. It felt wrong. He didn’t shift. He stayed strong, looking at her, unsure of how to react. The last day had been so weird, and now this? He just couldn’t process what was going on fast enough.

“Come on, get changed. I’ll wait for you downstairs.”

With that, Sun flew out of the room, leaving him alone with his thoughts. As loud and messy as they were, he tried to keep them quiet. To keep

them contained. Scared of what was to come, he dressed slowly. He put on shorts and an old torn T-shirt. In the mirror's reflection, he saw a portrait of apprehension, as if the looking glass itself mirrored the trepidation in his eyes. He went to the bathroom upstairs and brushed his teeth nonchalantly. Why was he procrastinating? When there was nothing else left for him to do in the bathroom, he walked down the stairs.

Sun waited for him at the bottom and jumped on his shoulder the moment he was close enough.

"It's okay, we've got this," she murmured as Phineas walked into the kitchen like a bomb about to explode.

There, he found a room he was very familiar with but now somehow seemed different. A room where he'd had countless breakfasts with his parents. Only this time, no one was eating breakfast. The breakfast table stood like a deserted island amidst a sea of chairs, with plates of untouched food resembling unexplored landscapes waiting to be



discovered. His eyes swept the room. His parents were both sitting at the table, pancakes going cold on their plates and fruit turning yellow on the edges.

“Morning,” he said, his voice small.

“Good morning, Phineas,” his father said.

“Morning, sweetheart.” His mother stood and planted a quick kiss on the top of his head when he sat down. “Feeling better?”

“Yeah... Kind of. I’m... confused.”

“I’m sure you are,” his father replied.

There was silence after that while all three Harts looked at each other, Phineas not knowing how to break the ice or what to say. Sun sat strangely silent on his shoulder, until finally jumping onto the table, glaring at each of them in turns before speaking.

“If you don’t start speaking, maybe I will,” Sun said, directing the words at Phineas’ father.

To his surprise, his father’s eyes which had been locked onto the table peered directly to Sun.

And then he looked back up to him, “There are a few things we’d like to speak with you about,” his father started, and for a moment, he wasn’t sure if he’d seen Sun or he’d imagined him looking at her. “I’m sure you know everything we’ve ever done was done with your best interests at heart. But I believe you saw something yesterday that might have turned your world upside down.”

“You mean the portal?” Phineas blurted out.

His mother flinched at the mention, but his father remained steady.

“What did you see?” he asked.

“I... I thought I might be losing my mind—” he started.

“You’re not,” Sun whispered, back on his shoulder.

“I went to the warehouse. I’m sorry. I saw a light, and I was worried, and I... I touched a boulder on the back wall, and suddenly I was in a forest.” As the story spilled forth, Phineas talked faster and faster, wanting to get it over with. It scared him to look at his parent’s worried expressions, so he kept his eyes focused on the table instead. “I saw a man there, an actual Minotaur, and he told me there was a school, and Sun was there with me, but she was big, and I, I came back. I think I’m losing my mind.” He shook his head, his words as messy as his feelings.

It was as if the world had held its breath, waiting with bated anticipation for the next verse of the symphony of life to begin. Phineas finally found the strength to look up. His parents were holding hands and facing him with such concerned eyes. Phineas’ heart was working too hard. He was confused and tired.

“I...” His father took a deep breath and then tried again. “I’m sorry we kept this from you for so long.”

Phineas’ eyes opened up so wide that the light hurt.

“What? Are you telling me this is real? I’m not crazy?”

“You’ve never been crazy!” Sun interrupted again, sounding pissed off.

“Sun, please,” Paul said.

And it was then that Phineas realized his father was actually looking straight at the pixie. And he’d just said her name. After years of ignoring her and... what? Pretending she wasn’t there?

“You can see her?”

“Of course he can, they both can,” Sun replied again, not letting his parents answer.

His mother’s eyes filled with heavy tears as her son looked at her, unable to believe what he was hearing. With each tear that fell, she seemed to share a part of her soul, like a bridge connecting their hearts in a sacred embrace. Suddenly, Phineas started feeling hot inside, anger building up and bubbling as if he was a volcano about to erupt.

“You. Can. See. Her!” He said every word as if it was its own sentence. He said it as an affirmation, not a question anymore.

“Phineas, please...” His father reached out to him, but Phineas moved back.

“You’ve been lying to me? All this time?”

He had never felt so hurt in his life, so startled and enraged at the same time. So bewildered.

“I’m sorry, we did it to protect you,” his mother choked out.

“There’s a dangerous world out there, Phineas. And we didn’t want you involved in it,” his father added, as if trying to excuse the lies they’ve

enlivened for years. A small part of him could almost understand. He wanted to understand. He really did.



And he had so many questions that he didn't know where to start.

"All those creatures I saw when I was a kid. Were they real?"

His father nodded.

"The dwarves?"

"They help me in the workshop. They work the wood."

"The nymphs?"

“They take care of the forest, provide for us,” his mother replied.

“The trolls?”

They both nodded.

“Not the best thing to have around kids. So I asked them to stay away,” his father explained, sounding as if he was giving him facts about the plants that grew in the forest rather than talking about any magical creatures. Creatures they’d repeatedly said were imaginary, until now.

It couldn’t be true. None of it could be. Could it?

“Sun?” he asked a minute later, his voice so tiny he wasn’t sure they heard him.

“She’s been with you since birth,” his mother replied in a tender and soothing voice. “It’s a long and complicated story.”

Sun placed a hand on his neck, like she used to do when he was a little boy and nervous. It used to pacify him, but now, the gesture almost annoyed him. Everything was wrong, so wrong.

“The portal?” he asked next, unable to put more than two words together.

His parents exchanged a look, and then his father finally spoke.

“The portal has been there for a very long time. I.. I’m a Professor at the Otherworld Academy, and the portal is a gateway and how I get there for class.

A mage friend of mine created it, and it's activated by touch."

It was so straightforward, yet so unbelievable. Phineas had known these things were real his entire life. Real magic existed all around him but he'd denied it for all those years.

"Why?" he asked, the word a broken whisper. "Why did you let me believe I was crazy?"

His mother was the one to reply now, a single tear running down her cheek. "We were so sure you thought they were imaginary friends from your childhood. We didn't know it was still affecting you. And Sun, since you never spoke to her again, we thought... We thought you couldn't see her anymore. It.. It can happen."

"*What* can happen?" He didn't mean to be rude, but he was so bitter and incensed that he had almost spat the words out.

"Some of us deny magic for long enough that we stop being able to see it," Monika explained. "We lose sight of it."

"Us?"

It was as if every door opened to a room of infinite corridors, each corridor leading to more doors yet to be opened. Every new revelation brought new questions, and Phineas kept asking question after question for so long that the sun was

almost all the way up when he finally left the kitchen. He needed some air.

Magic was real after all. There was a whole other world out there he knew nothing about. His parents, as well as him, could see all of it because they had some sort of magic running through their veins. He hadn't even started asking what kind of magic it was. How many kinds of magic existed anyway? What creatures were real, and which were fantasy? It was all a lot to take in, so Phineas went to the forest to sit under the trees in silence, concentrating and meditating until they came back to life. He heard them murmuring again. For years, he had blocked out that odd sound, but he found it almost soothing today. He felt like he belonged here. This felt like the center of everything. The stillness was no more.

The forest had always been his home. It filled the hole in his heart with love.

The forest had always listened.

The forest had always been there, never abandoning him.

Through the tapestry of trees, he wandered like a ghost, his footsteps whispering secrets to the soft moss beneath his feet. The forest cradled him like a loving mother, its ancient arms stretching wide to embrace him with the comforting scent of earth and pine. Amongst the trees, he found solace,

a sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of the outside world, where time seemed to slow to the rhythm of nature's heartbeat.

It must have been hours that he simply sat there, breathing it all in, yet trying to make sense of it. Talking to the trees and listening to their whispered wisdom. A big burden had been lifted off his shoulders. He was suddenly surrounded by a world of possibilities.

And then, he finally had his answer—a resolution.

When he walked back into the house, he found his parents still in the kitchen, quietly drinking tea trying in vain to fight off exhaustion. As he walked in, both of them left the cups on the table and looked up at him, expecting something, waiting patiently.

“I have decided,” he declared. “I want to enroll in that school, not asking for permission. I’m an adult now. And no matter what you say, you can’t change my mind. I will go to the Otherworld Academy.”

His mother turned white. His father looked crushed.

Still, after a long exhale, they shared a look and then both nodded slowly.

“If that’s your decision, then we will support it,” his father said, even if it sounded more like a lie than anything else.

It had been a full week since Phineas first put a foot on the ground at the Otherworld Academy. And let's just say, it hadn't been easy.

After his father agreed to let him go to University here, then came the rules—the compromises. He would get a full scholarship for being the son of a Professor, but his parents didn't want him to go on full boarding. They wanted him to at least spend the weekends with them, or to sleep at the cottage a few nights a week. Begrudgingly, he agreed. He was still angry because of the river of lies, and it was hard spending time with his parents now, knowing the truth, but he also knew it was the only way he'd get used to being himself around them again. And after all, he was only a portal away. He could always go back to school if he needed to get away from them.

At the Otherworld Academy, they had given him a room, which he shared with Chee, a wizard.

Yes, a wizard.



“Tell me again why we’re here and not at the library,” Phineas asked on his fifth day of school, when they were both studying in their dorm.

Phineas had been so eager to see everything, but Chee kept a bit to himself. They had a rough first few days, neither of them liking the idea of sharing a room or being friends with someone so different. Phineas had never shared his room with anyone else, and apparently, neither had Chee. It felt like they had nothing in common. Eventually though, things worked out between them. Slowly.

“Because they all go weird when the son of the headmaster is around,” Chee replied, looking at him over his book.

Chee was a whole character on his own—even after being Xhe’s son. He had been born and raised in a world Phineas still knew almost nothing about, Leith. He was Xhe’s son, which meant he had two small horns on his forehead that he often hid with beanies, even when it was too hot outside. His mother was a witch, which was where his magic came from—even if he wasn’t too good at it yet. His skin was the darkest color Phineas had ever seen, even if that wasn’t a lot to say from someone that was white as paper and had never met many people. Contrastingly, his hair was almost the color of fresh butter. His eyes were the closest he’d ever seen to his own: a green so light that it was almost yellow.

But, Phineas’ eyes had changed and almost turned gold since he’d been here, something he was eager to ask Sun about.

Sun.

A knock at the door and Phineas was already rolling his eyes as Chee got up so fast that he knocked his book to the ground.

“Coming!”

As he opened the door, Sun strutted in without waiting for an invitation. She was wearing big combat boots and a black dress, a contrast to the green shoes and simple pants and T-shirt Phineas was used to. Since starting school, she had changed a bit, probably adapting again to her own style

rather than trying to tone it down for Phineas. Honestly, he liked the new style; it suited her.

“This subject is so boring,” she said, slumping to the ground and sitting next to Phineas.

Sun had taken her role of being by Phineas’ side at all times very seriously and had enrolled in school with him. Except that she had wanted no one to know they knew each other previously, so she’d taken a couple of days to pretend to get to know him before becoming friends. She had approached Chee first, who now seemed to be smitten by the pixie.

“So good to have you here,” Chee said, sitting close by and looking like he’d forgotten everything about the book he was reading before she joined them.

“So, are we doing this group assignment or not?” Phineas interrupted, not wanting his new friend to make a fool of himself.

Both his friends nodded. They opened a few more books on the ground, and all three of them slid into the narrow space between the two beds. The books were like portals, each cover a door leading to a myriad of worlds waiting to be explored, beckoning them with whispered promises of wonder. The room wasn’t huge, but it was bigger than Phineas would have thought. There was plenty of room for the three of them to be comfortable, and

Chee was so close to Sun that it was hard not to laugh.

“Why are you smirking?” Chee asked.

Phineas simply shook his head.

“Nothing, it’s nothing.”

He could get used to this. To life in the Academy. To accepting the reality of magic.

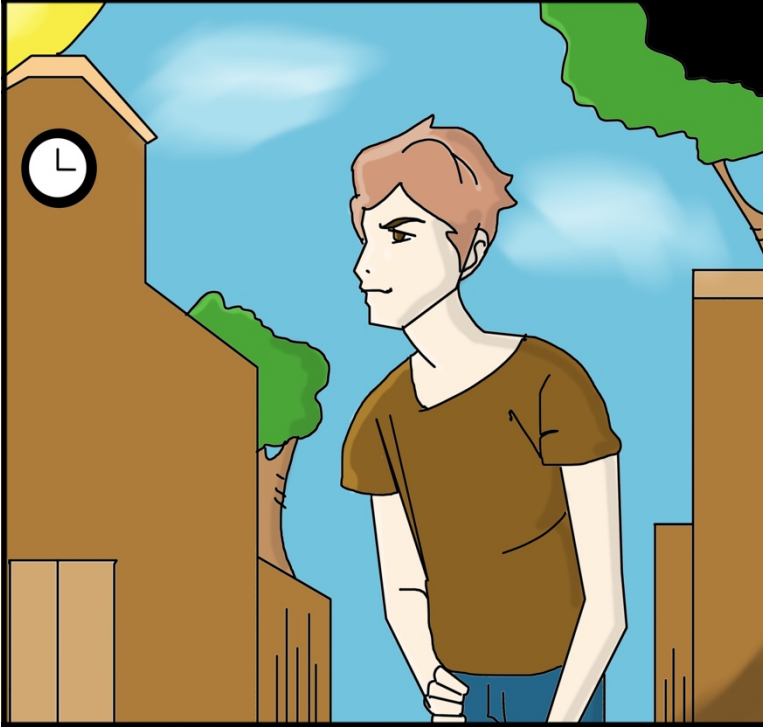
It hadn’t been easy, and he had a feeling things were only going to get harder before they got easier. But at least he still had Sun by his side. And he had his new friend, Chee.

And his father. Even if their relationship had been tense, he still saw him in the halls and they had tea in the afternoon twice a week. He’d also visited his mother often, who seemed weepy every time he was around.

But he was sure it was only a matter of time. She’d get used to it. It was just the way mothers are built, always worrying about their kids. Same with his father.

It wasn’t effortless, but Phineas was working towards forgiving his parents for the lies. He wanted to believe they’d done it for him. That they’d really thought it was what was best for him.

After all, that was what the magical barrier around the Academy was for: keeping danger out. Right?



He was inside, where it was safe. Same as the island. Safe. His parents had panicked. Their response seemed like an avalanche of emotions, cascading down the mountains of reason, burying any semblance of calm in its wake. They clearly overreacted for no reason but he could get over it with a little more time. He could forgive them. They could all move on and get used to this new fairy-tale life, to the magic and everything fantastical that came with it.

And finally, finally, Phineas was at a University. His dream had become a reality. Like a magical tale come to life, he had stepped into the pages of his own storybook, the protagonist of his grand adventure.

What could go wrong??