

~ I'm Too Old for Trick-or-Treating ~

CHAPTER 10

Sun's thoughts churned nonstop. It was as if she was back in the pure darkness of unconsciousness, her feelings threatening to drown her. It was suffocating.



Was the kiss real, or had the Relic's power compelled him, making her nothing more than a means to an end? She pressed her palms against her temples, trying to block out the barrage of questions. She wanted to trust him, to believe there was more to their bond than the Relic, but how could she when the lines between truth and manipulation felt so blurred? Did he truly like her,

or was it just the allure of the power within her? The mere idea made her sad.

Who was she, really?

She couldn't shake the image of the fiery bird from her memory, and the understanding that it hadn't been just a dream. Phoenixes were legendary for their abilities against dragons and their strong telepathic skills. She couldn't comprehend how that creature now dwelled within her little body. She understood now that the battles in her unsettling dreams reflected her struggle to merge her magic with the phoenix's ancient power - a battle that had almost cost her everything.

Phineas' betrayal cut deep, a jagged wound that refused to heal. How could he hide the truth from her, even after she'd confronted him? He had brushed off her concerns, telling her not to dwell on it, but how could she ignore the fact that her very being was bound to a creature of legend?

There was so much she didn't know. The tingling sensation that had rippled through her body when Phineas' Command brought the blue dragons to the ground... had he been drawing power from her?

She was a mess. Her eyes roamed the room, once alive with shared laughter and easy conversation, now haunted by silence. It felt hauntingly empty, the quiet a stark reminder of the

void that had opened up between her and Phineas. This room, once her home, now felt cold and foreign and the memories that used to warm her heart clawed at her insides.

A sudden noise cut the silence in the house short, jolting Sun back to reality. The steady thud of footsteps sounded below, each step bringing them closer and closer. With a racing heart, Sun got up from the edge of the bedside table and hid herself behind a nearby lamp. Her breathing quickened as the footsteps grew louder, each creak of the wooden floorboards echoing like a warning bell. She held her breath, bracing for whoever—or whatever—was about to step through the door.

Light footsteps ascended the stairs, each groan of the floorboards making her retreat further into her hiding spot. The door creaked open, and a figure stepped into the room. Sun's breath caught in her throat, her heart pounding in her chest as she braced herself.

"I know you're here."

Sun's jaw clenched as Claudia's voice pierced the silence of the room. Sun felt trapped between relief and regret, her silence a plea for the moment to end and for the room to be hers again.

Of course, there was no such luck.

Claudia sighed. "I might be injured, but trust me, I can still flip this room like a pancake if I need to," she threatened.



With a resigned grumble, Sun emerged from her hiding spot, her hands on her hips. "What are you doing here?"

Leaning against the doorframe with her good arm, Claudia's expression was almost bored. "Monika said to take the bed and rest," she replied, her gaze meeting Sun's evenly. "She also said you might be here."

Sun's frown deepened. "How did she know?"

"You put those guards to sleep, didn't you?" Claudia replied, her tone laced with a hint of amusement.

Wow. Sun crossed her arms over her chest as she plopped herself down by the lamp. She hadn't expected the guards would be the ones to give her away, to reveal where she'd run off to.

"Yeah. I didn't think you would come after me." More sounds echoed through the house, and Sun's curiosity got the better of her. "What's all the racket?" she inquired, her gaze flickering towards the door.

Claudia walked over to the bed and sat down, her injured arm cradled gently against her chest. "The boys evacuated the students from the Academy." There was a crease in her forehead that denoted both her pride and concern. "The rescued are coming here while the rest are preparing to fight."

Despite Claudia's innocent intent, her words hit Sun like a punch, leaving her drowning in guilt. The conflict was evolving faster than she'd thought. She knew she should be there, fighting alongside Phineas and the others when it mattered most, but the idea of being reduced to nothing more than a tool for his power made her stomach churn.

An awkward silence hung between them, thick with all the things they weren't saying. Sun shifted uncomfortably on her spot, her mind reeling with the new information, with what the boys had accomplished and what they were about to face.

Hoping to steer the conversation elsewhere, she mustered a small smile and gestured to Claudia's arm, "I suppose it's my turn to bring you flowers until you recover." Claudia looked confused, as Sun continued, "The ones you brought to my room in your house? I never thanked you for those, but it was so sweet."

"Oh, that wasn't me, hon," Claudia chuckled softly, a wince of pain crossing her features as she

laid down. "That boy spent every minute by your side whenever he wasn't training or pestering my scouts for information."

Sun's heart stuttered. Phineas had been the one to leave her flowers? Her chest tightened, warmth and guilt swirling together in a confusing storm. She'd told herself over and over that he didn't care, not after all that had happened between them. But this one simple gesture shattered that assumption, leaving her grappling with a truth she hadn't even considered: he might actually care.

Claudia observed carefully, her gaze penetrating. "I can only imagine what you're thinking. I can't tell you what to do," she began, her voice gentle yet firm. "But I can tell you this. No one would have acted how that boy did if he didn't care for you deeply."

Her cheeks went red, and her brain was suddenly running, her feelings a tangled mess. She didn't know what to do with this information. Not that she thought Phineas wanted to take advantage of her, but that he'd lied about the Relic made her uncomfortable.

Perhaps this was karma for the way she'd treated him when he was young, for allowing him to believe his friends were just his wild imagination, that he was crazy. Did her anger make her a hypocrite, refusing to forgive him for lies she was

just as guilty of telling? Was she wrong for feeling hurt?

Her gaze drifted to the small matchbox still sitting on Phineas' bedside table. He'd always been thoughtful, and he'd always taken such good care of her, even when she had pushed him away. She'd watched him suffer and yet, he'd forgiven her, time and time again.

During Sun's swirling thoughts, Monika entered the room.

"This was not how I pictured Phineas' first school party would go." Her light-hearted joke fell flat in the tense silence that followed. "What is...? Oh, Sun, you really are here! Are you ok?"

"I..." *Was she okay?*

With a little exhale, Monika crouched in front of Sun, her expression soft with understanding. "He was wrong for not telling you." She said gently, her voice a soothing balm to Sun's frayed nerves. "And it's okay to feel mad about that."

Sun's heart clenched at Monika's words, her anguish palpable in the strained tremor of her voice and the unshed tears brimming in her eyes. "I... I don't know," she whispered, her eyes searching Monika's for reassurance. "Am I still... me?"

"Oh, honey." Monika smiled warmly, stroking Sun's hair with one finger. "The Relic is just the Phoenix's essence. It was a heavy burden they put

on you, and you've handled it beautifully. You've gained control over its powers, but this doesn't change you. You are still you. It doesn't affect who you are."

Relief hit her hard and fast, crashing over her like a dam giving way under immense pressure. She could breathe a little easier, with at least one of her worries put to rest. For a second, all the confusion eased up, and she finally felt like she could see things clearly.

Perhaps it was foolish, but the idea of a force within her so vast it could command kingdoms had fractured her sense of self, leaving her feeling like a stranger in her own skin. Monika's words gave her a small reprieve. She still had to sort through her feelings, to come to terms with everything that had happened, but for now, she felt composed enough to know what she had to do.

"Thank you, Monika," she said softly, her voice filled with gratitude. With a determined nod, Sun pushed herself to her feet, gathering her courage.

"What are you doing?" Claudia asked.

"I have to go to them." Her pulse raced as she imagined the battlefield, her friends fighting without her, risking their lives while she hid. No matter her doubt, no matter her fear, she couldn't let them face this alone. A sense of urgency propelled Sun into action. Without waiting for a

response, she zoomed out of the room and down the stairs, flying over the heads of surprised students.



As Sun glided through the night air, her thoughts churned with the chaos she knew awaited her on the battlefield. She understood her responsibility—to stand and fight against the darkness that sought to enslave them all. Pushing aside her own tumultuous emotions, she focused on the task at hand.

Reaching the shed where the portal waited, Sun moved quickly through, her thoughts clouded by images of the countless times she'd made this journey with Phineas. The familiar rush of magic enveloped her as she emerged on the other side, but something was wrong. The forest she'd left behind and this one was way too different, so much so that, for a moment, she thought she'd somehow ended up in the wrong place.

But then she recognized the area and the people fighting, too. The battle raged around her in full, and the forest was ablaze, the acrid scent of smoke filling her nostrils.

Sun's heart pounded in her chest as she shifted to her full size, her eyes scanning the chaos. Students and teachers fought bravely against the

onslaught of dragons, their cries of battle mingling with the roar of flames.

Sun immediately plunged straight into the fray, her wings beating furiously as she flew among the fighters, lending her strength to the ones struggling the most. She avoided looking at the wounded kids, knowing their pain would hit her too hard if she let it. She couldn't stop now, not when so much was at stake.

Somewhere among the clashing bodies, she caught sight of Chee and Lukas, the latter in his dragon form, fighting side by side. "Where's Phi?" Sun screamed, her voice raw with urgency. She needed to find Phineas to know he was safe.

Chee didn't seem surprised Sun came. He opened his mouth to reply, but a sudden attack forced him to conjure a protective barrier while Sun turned and blasted a dragon that had lunged at them from behind.

"He's just ahead!" Chee shouted over the din of battle, toward the Academy.

Sun's heart pounded in her chest as she raced through the battlefield, helping wherever she could, trying to keep away from the sudden slash of dragon's tails.

And then she saw him.

Phineas was facing three dragons and a half-transformed Cadmus. With those scales covering

parts of his torso, hands and feet just like a dragon's, and eyes as black as coal, he was scarier than ever.

Sun's mad dash faltered when she saw him. Headmaster Xhe was fighting by Phineas' side, but both of them were hurt. Phineas' arm was slashed, his lip torn, and blood dripped steadily from his chin, evidence of the relentless battle.

Diving straight for him, she dodged attacks and wove through the frenzy of combat like a graceful dancer. The distance between them felt insurmountable as the dragons closed in on him. She was too far away—there was no way she'd reach him in time.

"Phi!" Sun screamed, her voice raw and desperate. Phineas' muscles locked in before he turned at the sound of her voice, his eyes meeting hers with a mixture of wonder and relief. At that moment, she couldn't believe she'd ever doubted his feelings for her.

"Do it!" she screamed, her voice echoing across the battlefield. Phineas hesitated for only a second before his expression hardened. Whipping around to face the dragons, he raised his arms.

"Shift!" Phineas commanded, his voice ringing clear through the chaos. Sun felt the same tingling sensation coursing through her body, stronger than before. As Phineas' power surged, all the dragons close to him shifted back to their human forms, their

eyes growing wide and confused. The other fighters took advantage of the moment, quickly moving to restrain them.



Cadmus stood unbothered, his eyes narrowing as he watched with a dark intensity, his anger simmering like a storm about to break. His wings unfurled like a storm cloud bolting out of the sky, and with a roar that shook the battlefield, he launched himself. The ground beneath her seemed to shudder as she turned to flee, her heart pounding in time with the thunderous beats of his wings.

"How..." he muttered. Then his eyes landed on Sun, and understanding dawned on him. "You!"

"Crap." Sun's heart clenched as Cadmus took flight in her direction, his enormous black form bearing down on her with lethal precision. She didn't think—she just turned and fled.

"Sun!" Phineas' voice rang out behind her. He tried to help using tree vines to go after Cadmus, but the black dragon was too fast. He reached for Sun and caught her in his clawed, scaly hand, lifting her by the neck with ease. Sun struggled against his grip, feeling the sharp claws digging forcefully deep into her skin.

"So this is where the Relic was hiding all this time," Cadmus sneered, a manic glint in his eyes. "That old queen of yours was always so cunning."

"Leave her alone!" Phineas bellowed. When their eyes met, Sun saw the fear behind his rage, and it hit her harder than she expected.

"Look at you, trying to order us around when you have no power," Cadmus taunted, his grip tightening around Sun's throat as she gasped for air. "It's always been like this. We're the stronger race. Why should we subject ourselves to the likes of you?"

Each breath felt stolen as darkness crept like a slow tide, dimming the fragile light of her fading sight.

“I achieved all this with just one tiny bit of your father’s blood,” Cadmus continued, making Phineas’ head snap to him. “Imagine what I’ll do with all of you. Surrender, and she’ll live.”

Sun tried to tell Phineas not to do it, to fight back, but the words caught in her throat as the air started failing her. When their gazes found each other again, a myriad of feelings passed between them. In his eyes, she saw a storm of emotion—anger, fear, and an unspoken promise. He wouldn’t let her go without a fight. And in that moment, she realized that despite everything; she believed in him. She always had.

Was this the last time she would see him? The fiery bird within her stirred faintly, as though sensing her despair. She hid her fear to be strong for him, refusing to let him succumb to Cadmus’ ploy. But the thoughts rushed in, unstoppable and cruel. Would she never get the chance to make things right with Phineas? Would her final memory of him be that of her harsh words cutting him down?

The possibility struck her like a blow, and she wavered, her resolve teetering on the brink. Was this truly the last time she would see him? The fiery bird stirred faintly within her chest, a pulse of heat that pushed back against her despair. It was a reminder of the power she carried within, a power she hadn’t yet fully understood—and one that had

never been unleashed. It might be her only chance. Its warmth reminded her of the power she now carried, a power as fierce and untamed as the storm raging in her mind—a force she still didn't fully understand.

And yet, in that moment, clarity emerged through the chaos. If this was to be the end, she would not let it be written in fear or regret. She would face it head-on, even if it meant embracing the flames that waited, dormant but ready.



She straightened her back, her gaze hardening. The fire within roared in response, a silent promise that she wasn't done yet. Whatever lay ahead, she would

burn brightly.

For Phineas. For herself.

For everything they still had to fight for.