

~ The day I stopped, I won ~

CHAPTER 6



Phineas watched with a sense of awe as Sun gracefully soared into the sky, her wings cutting through the air like delicate strokes of a painter's brush. They'd gone in for lunch an hour ago, but she'd wanted to return to the skies as soon as possible. The village below seemed to shrink compared to the vastness of the open sky, and for a moment, all was peaceful.

As Sun looped and twirled in the air, Chee joined Phineas by the riverbank. Lukas was practicing his swordplay, still brooding from his conversation with his mother, while Chee wore a thoughtful expression. The two friends watched

Sun's aerial display, barely able to believe she'd been bedridden just the day before.

"So, what's the plan now?" Chee asked, his gaze fixed on the fairy godmother.

Phineas tore his eyes away from Sun's flight to address the half-minotaur. "I've been thinking about Cadmus' actions and how he found Lukas at the Academy. There's something more at play here."

Chee nodded in agreement. "The relic, right? I was thinking about it, too. Maybe it's acting as a beacon."

Phineas hesitated, his mind a swirling storm of half-formed thoughts and unanswered questions. Every possibility felt like a puzzle missing its edge pieces, frustratingly incomplete. He ran a hand through his hair, the motion a futile attempt to untangle the chaos within. "Even though I've gotten better at using my skills, there's still much I don't understand. How does the relic work with Command? Would it even be possible for Cadmus to use it?"

"It's a possibility we can't ignore," Chee admitted, his eyes still up in the sky. "But we need to learn more about the relic itself. What it can do, and how we can control it."

Phineas often marveled at Chee's ability to strip problems down to their bare essence, like a sculptor chipping away at marble to reveal the truth

beneath. Where Phineas found himself tangled in doubts and what-ifs, Chee saw only the path forward, unburdened by unnecessary complexities. It was a talent that Phineas envied, though he rarely admitted it, even to himself. “I hate thinking about it like that when the relic itself is attached to Sun.”

“Which is why you should tell her,” Chee insisted.

“No. The fewer people who know, the better. It’ll be harder for Cadmus to find out then.”

Sun descended gracefully, landing beside the duo and ending the discussion. She staggered slightly on the landing, her knees bending more than usual, a faint reminder of how recently she had been confined to bed. Her hand brushed against Phineas’ shoulder for support, the touch brief yet grounding, as if she were reminding herself that the earth beneath her feet was real. “Heavens, that felt so good.”

Her smile was so big that it seemed to chase away the shadows lingering in Phineas’ thoughts, lighting up his own face in response. He couldn’t help it—her joy was infectious, a spark that reminded him how much he’d missed seeing her like this. For a moment, the weight of their struggles felt lighter, almost manageable. He couldn’t imagine what it must have been like for her to not be able to fly, and he was glad that she looked so strong now.



She'd been a bit weird since he'd found her by the window that morning, her gaze distant, as though she were looking at something far beyond the horizon. He hadn't been able to put his finger on what it was—a faint tremor in her voice when she spoke, or the way her fingers lingered on the windowsill like she was grounding herself—but then again, she had been through a lot. Maybe she was just gathering the pieces of herself back together, one fragile moment at a time.

Her gaze lingered on the horizon, as if searching for something only she could see, and when she spoke, her voice held an unfamiliar distance. There was a weight in her eyes, one that made Phineas wonder if some part of her was still flying, far beyond where he could follow. Maybe she just needed more time?

Sun threw herself on the grass next to Phineas, and almost instantly, Chee got up, brushing grass blades from his buttocks.

“I'm going to stop Lukas before he accidentally cuts his own hand.” He rolled his eyes but smiled as he left, leaving Sun and Phineas to chat about everything and nothing, just like old times.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting the dragon village in a warm, twilight glow, Phineas cooled his feet in the water beside Sun. A stray strand of her pink hair clung to her cheek, and before he realized it, Phineas reached out to tuck it behind her ear.

She glanced up at him; her smile lingering longer than usual. Every time he thought he'd looked away for good, his eyes betrayed him, sneaking another peek when he wasn't paying attention. The pink hues of her hair, illuminated by the fading light, mesmerized him. Her smile, now free from the burden of pain, radiated a joy that had been absent for too long. Phineas reached out without thinking, brushing a stray blade of grass from her hair. Her laughter came soft and easy, a sound he hadn't heard in far too long. It was a sight he had missed more than he'd realized.

Chee had successfully convinced Lukas to leave the training for another day. The peaceful surroundings echoed their lighthearted splashing in

the river nearby and their banter. Having now transformed into carefree teenagers, Lukas and Chee engaged in mock fights, and occasionally, water fights erupted, sending sprays of water into the air.

"You're getting slow, Chee," Lukas teased, the rare lightness in his voice catching even himself off guard. Chee responded with a laugh, grabbing him in a headlock before they both tumbled into the river.

Phineas turned his attention back to Sun, enjoying the tranquility of the moment. "Chee and Lukas seem to have formed quite the bond," he remarked, watching their antics.

Sun's eyes followed the playful duo, a fond smile on her lips. "They do. It's nice to see them so carefree, considering everything that's happened."

Phineas nodded in agreement. "Chee has been a great friend to Lukas. He stood by him even when things got tough."

Sun tilted her head, studying Phineas' expression. "Lukas has finally grown on you, hasn't he?"

Phineas chuckled. "Yeah, I'm glad to have him around. It's comforting to have friends you can rely on."

They sat in companionable silence for a while, the distant sounds of the river providing a soothing

backdrop. Phineas gazed at the stars beginning to twinkle in the darkening sky, hoping that they could stay in this carefree moment for a long time.

Of course, that hope was short-lived.

"I know you're hiding something from me," Sun said quietly, breaking the silence.

Phineas' heart skipped a beat, caught completely off guard by her words. He looked into her eyes, trying to gauge her thoughts. "What do you mean?"

Sun's eyes were firm and clear. "I can sense it, Phineas. There's a weight on your shoulders, something you're not telling me. I thought we promised no more secrets between us."

Her piercing stare locked onto his, demanding answers he wasn't sure he could give, but knew he couldn't hide. The weight of her trust hung in the air, making the silence between them uncomfortable. He fought against the urge to open up, the temptation to share the truth warring with the fear that doing so would only make her a target.

"I just don't want you to get hurt," Phineas confessed, his voice laced with a sincerity that mirrored the conflict within him. "I promise it's not something you need to know right now."

Sun's expression shifted, caught between understanding and a hint of reluctance. Phineas braced himself for her reaction, unsure of how she

would take his refusal to share the full truth. The bond they shared, forged through countless trials, felt fragile in that moment.

After a beat that seemed to stretch into eternity, Sun's features softened, and she offered a genuine smile. "Okay. I trust you, Phi."



Phineas felt a mix of relief and guilt. The weight of his unspoken secret still hung heavily between them, and Chee's voice resonated in his head. But Sun's trust provided a momentary respite. He couldn't deny the warmth that surged within him, knowing that she believed in his decision, and he had to make that count. The twinkling lights above bore witness to the unspoken complexities of friendship and the silent promises that bound them together.

The river's gentle melody and the distant laughter of Chee and Lukas became a soothing backdrop to the quiet moment shared by the two of

them. It was a bit more before the two boys came back to Phineas and Sun, pushing each other's shoulders. Their skin was glistening from their excursions in the water, their clothes clinging to their damp bodies. The smell of dinner reached them, signaling it was time to refuel and regroup after an exhausting day of highs and lows.

Lukas called out to them, "We're heading in to grab some food. You two coming?"

Phineas exchanged a glance with Sun, who seemed hesitant to leave the peaceful riverside. "We'll stay here for a bit more," Phineas replied, and Lukas and Chee nodded, racing back to the house.

The cool water lapped at their feet, its gentle rhythm a quiet counterpoint to the unspoken thoughts they carried as they stared at the endless sky above. As Phineas and Sun leaned on their hands, looking up at the sky, the tranquility of the dragon village enveloped them, a stark contrast to the tumultuous events that had led them there.

Sun broke the silence, her voice a soft murmur against the river's melody. "Isn't it strange—and amazing—to see the dragons and clans walking among us like this? I never thought I'd see something like this again. It makes me think of how imposing they were back in the day."

"I can't imagine how that was. They're all hiding now, and it's hard to believe people once held them

in such high regard." Phineas sighed, watching the ripples in the water. "No one here knows who I am, except for Claudia," he added, a hint of bitterness in his tone. "And I don't think they would even care if they knew. It's just like Lukas said. I've only been a part of this world for a few months."

Sun turned to face him, her expression gentle. She took his hand in hers, fingers intertwining as she looked deep into his eyes. "He's wrong, Phineas. You've always been a part of this world."

Phineas met her gaze, the sincerity in her words reaching places within him that no one else could reach. He'd always felt this special connection with Sun, something that surpassed a simple friendship. He was always running but now, he wanted to stop running.

The surrounding atmosphere changed, as though they were in their own bubble. Sun sensed it too, and she looked across the river, as if searching for something.

"What is it?" Phineas asked.

Her eyes were slightly blurred, but she shook her head, as though getting rid of an annoying fly. "Nothing. I was just thinking about a bad dream I had."

Sun turned towards Phineas, her eyes reflecting the myriad of emotions that had transpired throughout their journey. The silence

wrapped around them as their fingers entwined, the steady grip a silent pledge that they would face whatever came next together.

“But after everything that's happened, I don't think holding back has exactly worked for me,” she added. “It's actually made it worse.”

Phineas wasn't sure he understood everything she was saying, but he had an idea. He thought back to the unfinished moments between them, to all the times he'd looked at her and Sun had turned away.

She wasn't turning away now, though.

As the river sang its timeless melody, Phineas felt a subtle shift, a new moment full of possibilities. He eyed the glow of Sun's face, her features bathed in the silvery glow of the night. Perhaps it was the fear of having almost lost each other, or the joy of being reunited. Whatever the case, Phineas would not question it.

Without words, a silent agreement passed between them, and in that delicate dance of understanding, they closed the gap.

Their lips met in a tender and sweet embrace, a kiss that spoke of shared struggles, enduring bonds, and the profound connection that had blossomed between them. Time seemed to slow, and in that suspended moment, everything else faded away—the village, the dragons, the challenges that lay ahead.

For Phineas, it was an explosion of emotions, a wave that washed over him with relief after so much longing. The taste of her lingered on his lips, a sweetness he was sure would stay with him forever. As they pulled away, their eyes met, and in that silent exchange, Phineas couldn't help but think, "Finally" as he lean in to kiss her again.

With every touch of her lips, the weight of the world slipped away, leaving only the two of them in a universe of their own making. For a moment, Phineas could even imagine they were back at the farm, basking in the sun, before problems like princes and dragons had gotten in the way.

Ever since he'd learned about this new world, he felt as though he'd been running to catch up to everyone else, making up for lost time, always falling behind. Right now, in her presence, the world slowed, and he could finally embrace the freedom of just being himself.

The moon hung above, bearing silent witness to a bond forged in adversity and tempered by time. Phineas' hands threaded through Sun's hair, marveling at the softness of it. After a while, they had to come up for air. They rested their foreheads together, their breaths mingling like whispers exchanged in the night's stillness.

A serene hush enveloped them, as if the world itself had paused to honor the moment, and Phineas

took the chance to enjoy the feeling of her under his hands. Sun watched him, hand brushing his arm, and it appeared she was on the verge of expressing something important. However, before the words could find their way out, approaching footsteps shattered the tranquility.

Turning, Phineas spotted three scouts striding swiftly toward Claudia's house, their grim expressions hinting at trouble ahead. One of them supported a cloaked figure, their features hidden by the dark fabric and the shadows of night.

Sun's questioning gaze met Phineas' concerned expression. "What's going on?" she inquired.

"I don't know," Phineas admitted, his intuition warning him of the gravity of the situation. "But we better go find out."

Extending his hand to her, he guided her forward, their steps quickening as they trailed the group, footsteps echoing in tandem with the unsettling atmosphere. The scouts were way ahead of them, and by the time they reached the front door of Claudia's house, someone had left the door ajar. The flickering light from within cast eerie shadows on the walls.

As they entered, the air inside felt heavy with unspoken tension. Claudia stood at the center of the room, her gaze fixed on the cloaked figure being

supported by the scouts. Lukas and Chee stood nearby, their expressions a mix of concern and curiosity.



"What is the meaning of this?" Claudia asked, her tone grave though her face was slightly pale. That, more than anything else, had Phineas' hairs standing on end. In all of his time here, he'd never seen the woman make an expression like that.

"We found her near the border," the scout holding the cloaked person said. With the hood up and looking at the group from behind, Phineas couldn't tell who it was. "She doesn't seem to be injured, but she's exhausted and shaking."

Leaning in, the scouts began their story, their subdued voices drawing everyone closer in anticipation, detailing how they had been doing their rounds when they came across the hooded woman in the nearby woods. They had seen no signs

of attackers, but it was clear she had endured hardships during her journey.

Watching in silence, Sun's eyes betrayed a quiet apprehension, as if she were contemplating what this meant for all of them. Phineas squeezed her hand reassuringly, even though his stomach felt queasy.

The scouts exchanged grim expressions as they helped the woman take a seat on a nearby chair. Phineas felt like the shadows of the past were reaching out, threatening to disturb the fragile peace they had found here. Lukas' mother crouched in front of the hooded guest, her hands squeezing her knees.

"Why did you come all the way here?" Claudia nagged, but then hugged the person tightly. "You should have told me! I would've had someone pick you up sooner."

"There was no time," the woman said, and Phineas' chest tightened as his heartbeat faltered, a rush of unease surging through him. He froze and watched as if in slow motion as the woman removed the hood from her head. Long wavy hair tumbled down her back, a color that filled Phineas with nostalgia. He hadn't seen her in months, and the urge to be held by her protective arms was so strong that it pulled him forward. Next to him, Sun was just as astounded as he was.

The woman looked up at Claudia, light falling over her and revealing a face that was a mix of exhaustion and relief.

Phineas' breath caught as he whispered, "Mom." The last image of her in his mind—a reassuring wave goodbye at the Academy gates—clashed with the trembling figure before him now, her strength eroded by something he couldn't yet name.

The woman stilled and then, slowly, turned around. Her eyes found his, and the tears welled up instantly, unchecked and overwhelming. She covered her mouth with a trembling hand, steadying herself against the flood of emotion, her body trembling as though it might collapse under the weight of her emotions.

Her frame seemed so small, and the tremors that shook her body were so severe that Phineas could see them. He frowned, torn between wanting to go to her and not knowing how to react.

"Mom, why are you here?"

"It's Cadmus." Monika looked up, eyes blurry with tears. An oppressive silence settled over the room, the weight of anticipation thick as they watched her struggle to find her voice. Her eyes locked on Phineas, brimming with emotions so raw they hit him like a blow. But it was her next words that truly shattered him.

“He attacked the Academy.”

