

~ Will YOU MArrY me? ~

CHAPTER 2



Shrouded in a veil of darkness and silence, it was as though time itself had come to a halt, leaving the world frozen in place. Sun looked around, but all she could see was pitch-black. She felt adrift in an infinite emptiness, untethered and lost. Blackness surrounded her like a thick, tangible fog, pressing against her from all sides. The air, if it could even be called that, felt thick and oppressive, weighing down on her lungs as though she were trying to breathe through tar. Each step sent faint echoes rippling outward, but they only emphasized the vast emptiness around her. The silence was absolute, an oppressive and ominous weight that rang in her ears and threatened to crush her.

At her feet, a delicate streak of silver glimmered, a fragile breach in the vast abyss of darkness. As Sun moved through the ebony expanse, each step caused ripples on the unseen floor beneath her, like water being disturbed. Time was elusive in this desolate place, leaving her to meander through the abyss.

At first, Sun did not know why she was walking. *Was there somewhere she was supposed to go? Something she had to do?* She wasn't sure, but something told her she had to keep going, and so her footsteps echoed in the empty space.

For a brief stretch, everything was fine, but as the minutes blurred and she couldn't tell how long she'd been moving, getting nowhere, she started getting anxious. She quickened her pace, only to discover that the nothingness stretched infinitely, denying her any signs of progress. Her limbs tingled as panic crept into her veins. She broke into a full sprint, the soundless void amplifying the pounding of her own heart.

A scream built up in her throat, but she couldn't find her voice. With each ragged breath, her fear grew.

Then, amid the bleakness, a change stirred. A delicate scent wafted through the dark, a fragrance of blooming flowers that disrupted and instantly shattered the suffocating stillness. The realization

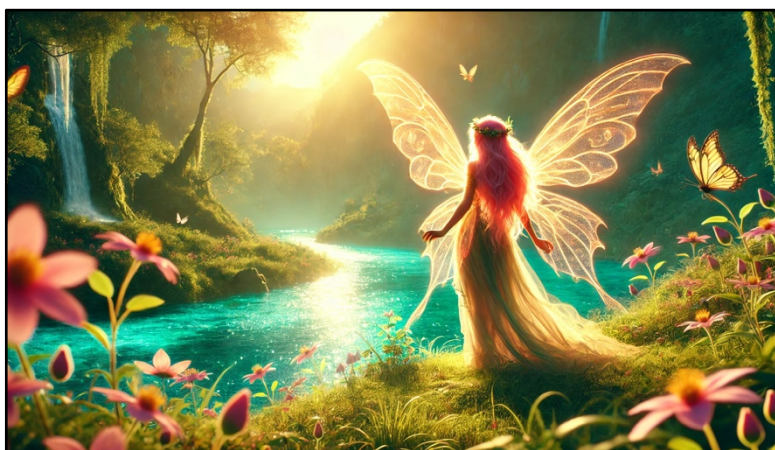
brought Sun to a halt. It was a subtle change, but in a world of nothingness, even a hint of fragrance was as overwhelming as a wave of blossoming spring.

Standing still, she tried to pinpoint where the scent was coming from. It was then she noticed something else. Unintelligible murmurs reached her like distant whispers, a low hum that echoed within the vast emptiness. Craving a change, Sun chased the hauntingly beautiful notes through the air. Whatever they were, they had to be better than this darkness.

The buzz rumbled like a river coming to life as she approached. A glimmer of light materialized. It started as a minuscule dot, flickering in the distance. Sun exhaled in relief and sprinted toward it, the light growing steadily larger the closer she got. The brightness cascaded like liquid gold, drenching her in a warm glow. Her breath caught as the faint dot of light flickered on the horizon, a fragile promise against the suffocating dark. Her legs trembled with both exhaustion and relief as she sprinted toward it, the golden glow growing brighter with each pounding step, like the first crack of dawn breaking through a storm. Sun ran faster until it engulfed her entirely. Shielding herself with her right arm, she closed her eyes against the brilliance and waited for it to subside.

After a few seconds, she let her arm drop and squinted her eyes open a bit. It was slightly painful. Gradually, her eyes acclimated to the blinding radiance until she could see again. When she did, Sun stood on the lush grassy banks of a river.

The gentle melody of flowing water filled her ears, and she relished it after enduring that crushing fury of darkness. The river's gentle melody seemed to hum a lullaby just for her, soothing the frayed edges of her mind. For the first time in what felt like an eternity, Sun's chest loosened, and she allowed herself to hope that she might finally be safe. The vibrant colors of a landscape she had never seen before now bathed her surroundings, water flowing gently, flowers blooming everywhere the eye could see, and butterflies dancing peacefully in the warm breeze. The river was shallow near the shore, but further in, it deepened into a stunning teal pool that



shimmered in the sunlight. Birds were flying overhead between the trees, their song drifting happily through the air.

Sun rubbed her eyes, but the landscape didn't change. The surreal beauty was a stark contrast to the ominous void she had just escaped, so she took a moment to absorb her surroundings, feel the grass beneath her feet, and listen to the soothing lullaby of the river. She remained in a daze until a voice calling out shattered her trance.

"Sun, c'mon! What are you waiting for?" The familiar voice, tinted with playfulness, drew her attention, and her heart skipped a beat. Turning, she saw a guy with his back to her. His hair danced in the sunlight. He stood on the riverbank, his feet immersed in the cool, crystal-clear water below. A genuine smile spread across his face like the first rays of dawn as he looked back at her. The reflection of the summer scape in his eyes was so warm that she felt the coldness leave her body completely.

"Phi?" Sun's voice carried a mix of disbelief and joy as she approached him. The enchanting landscape seemed to come alive as Phineas laughed, the sound slipping into Sun's soul. Sun's heart swelled at his laugh, but doubt still whispered at the edges of her mind. "How can you always look so carefree?" she asked, her voice trembling slightly.

“Don’t you ever feel... like the darkness is still chasing you?”

Phineas tilted his head, his golden eyes softening. 'Not when you're here,' he said simply, the weight of his words grounding her at the moment.

"Is it really you, Phi?" Sun asked.

"Who else, silly?" he teased, turning to face her. His pants were rolled up to his calves so they wouldn't get wet, and he smiled. His golden eyes, kissed gently by the sunlight, locked onto hers. Extending a hand in her direction, he beckoned her forward. "Come with me."

Sun's heart fluttered with a blend of emotions, but there were no questions in her head as she waltzed towards him. Her feet felt light. Her dress floated behind her as she reached him and laced their fingers together.

Looking into the clear stream where he stood, Sun dipped her toe in carefully, only to pull back out immediately. The brief caress of water set her nerves on edge, reminding her too much of the endless dark.

"It's cold," she remarked, trying to put some distance between herself and the river, but Phineas' hold on her hand stopped her as he tugged gently.

"You'll be fine," he reassured her. "I'm here, with you. Always and forever."

Their eyes met, and she could see a sincerity that resonated deep within her. Encouraged by his confidence, Sun took a deep breath and waded in the water, gradually acclimating to the temperature. With time, she embraced it wholeheartedly, finding joy in the experience. The river's touch sent ripples of warmth through her, a soothing flow that washed away her tension. Together with Phineas, they stood hand-in-hand by the water's edge, enjoying a world that felt both magical and comforting. It was as if she had stepped into a fairytale.

"This place is beautiful," she breathed. She was so enchanted by its charm.

"Yeah," Phineas agreed, "it's great for your head."

Sun raised an eyebrow. "Even that stubborn head of yours?"

"Hey!" His playful kick sent water splashing in all directions, prompting the Sun to chuckle warmly and playfully shield herself.

Their banter was like a friendly duel, a lively exchange of teasing remarks and witty repartee that kept them both on their toes, each jest delivered with a twinkle in the eye and a shared sense of camaraderie. The worries that lingered from the dark void dissipated. Sun felt a renewed sense of peace. The beauty of the meadow and the warmth

of Phineas' presence enveloped her in a calming embrace.

They spent hours enjoying the quiet elegance of the landscape, their laughter blending seamlessly with the symphony of nature around them.

"What were you doing here?" she asked finally. She had the nagging feeling they were supposed to be doing something important, but everything was so easy here. Remaining here seemed simpler.



Instead of replying, Phineas embraced her. "I was waiting for you, my love. I've been waiting for a long time." Pulling back, he brushed a strand of hair behind her ear and Sun smiled, content with the moment.

His words, however, took an unexpected turn. "You know, I've been thinking long and hard about this, and after everything we've been through..."

Sun's heart quickened at the change. She chuckled nervously, unintentionally escaping the

intensity of his gaze. "Why are you suddenly so serious?"

She waited for an answer, but her concentration faltered as her gaze flickered, drawn toward the tantalizing distraction that beckoned from the periphery of her vision, and she looked behind Phineas. Her eyes widened. The surrounding meadow had ignited. Flames were devouring everything in their path. The air thickened with heat, suffocating and acrid as smoke curled around her. The meadow's vibrant colors bled into fiery reds and oranges, the flowers withering under the onslaught of relentless flames. Her chest tightened as the serenity shattered, replaced by pure chaos.

"Phineas!"

But Phineas noticed nothing was wrong, and Sun struggled to comprehend what was happening. It was as if reality had taken a detour. The flames were relentless, closing in on them with an unnatural speed. Fear gripped Sun as she watched the fire consume everything in its wake while Phineas just kept smiling, as he held her hands and looked into her eyes.

"I can't imagine ever being apart from you," he continued.

Desperate, Sun looked around them. The fire was closing in on them from all sides, making a perfect circle of hell that killed the grass and

flowers. The walls of fire were so tall she couldn't see past them.

"Phineas, we have to move!" Panic laced her voice as she tugged at his hand, but he didn't budge, still smiling, still oblivious to the danger.

Phineas didn't seem to mind the fire reflecting off his golden eyes. He squeezed her fingers.

"Sun, will you marry me?"

"What?" Surprised, Sun stopped struggling and gawked at him. He looked like the same Phineas she knew, her best friend, but what was he saying?

Her heart ached for him to say those words. She wanted to reach out to him. Despite her best efforts to resist, her eyes were drawn like magnets to the memory of his lips, each glance igniting a spark of desire that had smoldered within her since that one night.



Sun opened her mouth to reply, though she did not know what she was going to say, but then her

eyes shifted to a dark figure standing behind Phineas. The face was familiar but at the same time completely unknown to her. Her reflection stared back at her among the flames. There were deep, dark circles under her eyes. Her skin was so pale it was almost transparent. She looked angry. It was a grotesque version of her, gaunt and cursed, but it was different. Sun flinched. It was her mother!

“You don’t know your place,” her mother’s accusation struck her like a bolt of lightning, though her voice was colder than Sun remembered.

“Mom?” Sun asked in a trembling voice.

“Have you no shame?” her mother spat out. “Does your duty mean nothing to you?”

“No! I—”

“Sun?” Phineas interrupted, bringing her attention back to him. There was a sad downturn of his lips now, and he gripped her hands so tightly it hurt. “You don’t...”

“No, Phi, I didn’t mean you! We have to...” Her gaze fixated on the horrific sight behind him again, and when she looked over his shoulder, her mother was even closer.

“You’re just an *aid*,” she said with disdain. The fire closed in, the heat intensifying. Sun’s chest tightened in misery. “You’re asking for more than you deserve.”

Sun's heart broke in a million pieces hearing her mother's words. Especially because she was right. She shouldn't be with Phineas. She couldn't have Phineas. The notion squashed her spirit with the heavy weight of duty and responsibility, the understanding that she was not meant for love or companionship. She was supposed to help him grow up, stay alive and become the best version of himself. No fairy godmother had ever stepped over that line, and she didn't want to be the first. She longed to unleash a torrent of words, to vocalize the injustice that gnawed at her soul like a relentless beast, threatening to consume her from within. Her chest hurt with the crushing reality, and Phineas' touch burned her hands as he still held her. She needed to tell him, say the words out loud.

She tugged at his hand, her voice trembling. "Phineas, I can't. We can't be together."

Phineas' eyes widened with confusion. "What do you mean? Sun, we can—"

"No! It's no use, I—"

But before she could finish, the ground beneath Sun's feet crumbled. She plummeted into the water, her vision distorted by the churning waves. An unseen force dragged her under, the echo of Phineas' voice above the surface fading fast.

As she descended, the flames surged forward, an explosion of red and orange consuming the

meadow and engulfing Phineas in its fiery embrace. The water silenced Sun's scream, and all that escaped her lips were bubbles. She fought against the pull, desperately trying to swim toward the surface. Toward Phineas.

The air in her lungs waned. Sun looked up to see the explosion growing smaller as the darkness consumed her on all sides.

The struggle against the force dragging her downward intensified. Sun couldn't distinguish up from down, left from right. Panic set in as she pushed against unseen currents, her lungs burning for air. Just when it seemed impossible, she somehow breached the surface, gasping for breath.

But she was back in the eternal blackness! The meadow, the river, and Phineas were all gone. Sun found herself in the same desolate void, suspended in the shadows once again, except this time she couldn't stay afloat.

It seemed impossible to walk on this surface now. How had she done it before? The weight of the darkness pressed against her, as a yawning sense of isolation gripped her heart.

Determined, Sun continued to fight against the currents that sought to drag her down once again. She struggled to regain her strength, to find her bearings in the suffocating nothingness. The darkness wasn't just a physical force—it whispered

cruel truths into her ears, echoing her deepest fears. 'You'll never escape,' it taunted. But somewhere deep within her, a spark of defiance flared. She had to keep moving, even if every step felt like dragging her soul through quicksand. Yet every effort seemed futile, as if something or someone conspired to keep her submerged.

Amid her many attempts, Sun's instinct urged her to spread her wings and fly, but they were bound to her body. She couldn't. It was the worst kind of trap. It felt like being in a cage to have such an important part of her, her essence, restrained. The once potent magic that defined her, that ran in her veins, seemed to have abandoned her. She felt weak. She felt useless. Lost. Alone.

Suddenly, something closed around her ankle and tugged at her feet, pulling her straight down. Sun peered downward. A purple glow emanated from the depths, an otherworldly aura that weighed on her like an anchor, pulling her deeper into the dark depths. She fought against it, her body contorting with effort, but whatever had a hold on her persisted. It was too strong for her.

This was it. She was going to drown.

With a renewed effort, Sun desperately swam upward with all her remaining energy. She tried to balance her body and stay afloat, but every single time she got a taste of fresh air, she was pulled down

once again. The emptiness consumed her, again and again. As her strength waned, the cold pushed into her body relentlessly, freezing her to her very core.

Her fight continued for what felt like days. All she wanted to do was give up, but something made her keep going, no matter how futile it seemed. Limbs growing heavy, Sun finally became numb, but kept fighting to escape the drowning darkness that wanted to claim her.

In the watery depths, Sun's surroundings dissolved into disarray, with swirling currents and turbulent eddies converging in a frenzied dance of disorder, leaving her adrift in a sea of confusion. It was pure chaos. She was ensnared, submerged in a world of shadows, suspended in the depths of an endless ocean. Desperation fueled her as she pushed against the weight holding her down, striving to break free from the relentless pull. Her lungs burned louder. The need for air intensified.

Suddenly, from the depths below, a push of raw energy surged forth, lifting her from the darkness and driving her toward the light above with a powerful momentum that seemed to defy the constraints of the underwater world. Gasping for breath as she finally broke completely through the water's surface, she coughing violently. She stood on the black floor shaking, like a fragile leaf teetering on the edge of an abyss. The echoes of the

underwater struggle still resonated in her ears as she fought to keep herself upright.

Gradually, the echoes of noise faded into oblivion. The oppressive weight of silence descended once more, enveloping everything in its suffocating embrace, like a heavy shroud draped over the world.

She crumbled like a fragile porcelain doll, her tears flowing like a river unleashed from a dam.

Was she destined to drown in the black forever?



Her tears blurred into the endless void, vanishing as though they'd never existed. The silence stretched on, and for the first time, Sun wondered if there was anyone—anything—left to hear her cries. Was this all that remained for her? A perpetual struggle against nothingness...