

~ Let's SuMMer ~

CHAPTER 6



After making sure Sun was fully recovered, the group continued their journey. Sun played the role of the steady lighthouse, reassuring them, but Phineas wasn't taking any risks. He'd insisted on staying at the village a little longer than Sun

had probably liked—which she mentioned to him many times over. But delaying their departure for her was a simple decision. Phineas gladly spent the currency of time, though valuable, in the pursuit of her well-being, each moment of delay a testament to the profound depths of his compassion, a deliberate pause in the relentless rhythm of their journey.

Eventually, they'd moved on. They'd been following the winding course of the river that stemmed from the lake for days. The days were long and hard. They'd fallen into a tempo that felt

comfortable, almost normal. Phineas wasn't sure what to make of that. His thoughts were adrift in the wilderness's quietude, a place where he felt more acutely the weight of his unusual circumstances.

Foraging had always been natural for him when he was living on the farm, but this situation now—sleeping under the stars, traveling day and night, fighting the surrounding dangers—was far from what he'd thought his life would be like once he left the farm.

He was so far removed from the life he had once envisioned as normal; from anything he'd ever wanted. At this point in life, he thought he would study for a career, not traveling along unknown roads with friends. With every step, it became increasingly apparent to him that normalcy was a distant dream.

How could someone like him ever be normal again?

Days continued to pass. With every new morning, the surrounding terrain shifted subtly. The verdant woods showed signs of healing as fresh growth emerged from the charred remains of burnt plants, but the more they travelled, the more destruction they saw. It was a poignant reminder that the scars of war extend far and wide, touching every corner.

The dragon's reach sprawled across vast stretches. Witnessing its aftermath firsthand was akin to standing amidst a canvas of sorrow, each stroke of devastation a painful echo of its far-reaching grasp, a visceral reminder of the scars carved into this once-vibrant tapestry of existence.

How did Lukas feel, seeing all of this? Chee had explained that the dragons were divided into clans, and Phineas knew not all the dragons were responsible for the war. It'd been the black dragon clan that had started everything, and they'd even decimated the other clans in their quest for power.

To Phineas, the appetite for more seemed a foreign tongue, an insatiable hunger that spoke a language he couldn't comprehend.

Before the war, the dragons hadn't been a unified force. There had been several clans, each with its own territories and customs but, in their search for dominance, the black dragons had reshaped their world.

Phineas glimpsed over at Lukas, who'd been walking beside him. The question gnawing at him ever since he'd joined their group resurfaced.

Which clan had he belonged to?

It was still unclear what Lukas' motives were. Why was he even helping them? What could have made him decide to leave the safety of the school and follow them here? Phineas doubted it was mere

curiosity or an appetite for adventure, but he'd grown to trust him, for now.

With each step, their journey unfolded like an ancient manuscript. Phineas turned his attention to Sun. She was walking well ahead of them, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say she was skipping. Phineas couldn't help but smile. It was a relief to see her in good spirits after the ordeal she'd been through.



The sparkle in her eyes and her glistening pink hair were a welcome sight for his heavy heart. Phineas couldn't shake the memory of how close she had come to being taken away from him, of how pale she'd looked and how still she'd laid.

He had become a sentinel of concern, a constant presence tethered to her bedside. Hours stretched like eons as worry etched lines upon his face, his heart a prisoner to relentless anxiety, fearing the worst. He couldn't picture a life without her, not after everything they'd been through.

The color was fully back on her cheeks now, though. Phineas studied her face, checking for signs she was ok. Was the danger was gone?

The forest was quiet, their crunching steps echoing in the silence until a quiet song started hovering over their heads, like the chirping of a bird. It was only because Phineas had already been staring that he realized it was Sun, with her lips pursed as she whistled the soft tune.

Phineas' gaze lingered on her mouth, longer than he would normally allow himself to. In the heart of this wild odyssey, his mind was a prisoner, bound by the madness of the moment. He found himself unable to think of anything else, unable to turn away. He imagined the warmth of her smile on his neck and his imagination unfurled like the petals of a blossoming flower, wondering how it would feel to sip from that cup of possibility. *Would her flawless lips feel as soft as they looked?*

She had felt so small in his arms those times he'd hugged her, but there was something in how she fit so perfectly in his embrace, in how her nose touched his chest, directly over the spot where his heart was. It felt like destiny.

As though feeling the weight of his stare, Sun turned to him. Phineas quickly looked away. A rush of warmth painted his cheeks in shades of crimson because he was caught staring. For the rest of the

walk, he surrendered himself to the wisdom whispered within the rustling trees and leaves, immersing in the silent dialogue between man and nature.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, the group established their haven by the riverside, their camp a sanctuary cocooned within the night's embrace. Phineas went for a walk to check the area and perhaps find some alone time to untangle the threads of his thoughts. The air was warm and fragrant, and the moon cast a silvery sheen over the water's surface. Sitting alone by the shore, Phineas closed his eyes for a moment, enjoying the grumble of the water under the gentle glow of the night sky.

After a while, he wasn't sure how long, the sound of nimble footsteps danced through the silence, drawing his attention back to the trail behind him. Sun was fast approaching, arms behind her back and feet graceful like a ballerina. There was nothing different about her or the way she looked tonight compared to any other day, but on this perfect summer night, Phineas had only one solitary whisper of a thought, its resonance echoing across the stillness like a solitary bell tolling in the night.

Wow, she's beautiful.

She filled the hole in his heart with love. Her presence was like a radiant star in the tranquil woods, but then she looked at him. Her eyes held a

mixture of worry and something else, something deeper.

"What's wrong?" Phineas asked, sensing the urgency in her expression. Something was weighing on her.

Sinking to the earth beside him, she folded her legs into a comfortable position and stared up at the moon. Her voice was hushed when she spoke.

"Phineas, there's something I need to tell you."

Phineas' heart quickened as he met her gaze, his curiosity piqued. "What is it?" he asked, his voice a mere whisper, the world around them blurring into the background.

Sun hesitated for a moment, her eyes searching his. "I had a dream," she began, her words slow and deliberate, "back when I was unconscious after the fight. But it wasn't just any dream. I... I think it had something to do with the relic we're looking for."

Phineas sat up straighter, his attention sharpening like a blade. "Tell me," he urged her, a sense of excitement and foreboding settling over him.

Was this one of Sun's abilities? While she wielded some sway over the realm of dreams, how was it possible for her to gain information like this? Every time he thought he had a grasp on Sun's powers, she turned around and surprised him.

Questions swirled within him like restless spirits. His curiosity brewed like a storm on the horizon, but the unsettled look in her eyes had him biting his lip to hold back.

“It was a memory of something I’d forgotten,” she continued. “There was so much going on, and so much has happened since, that I never really thought about it again. I was too young back then, and I didn’t fully understand what it meant. We’ve had no need for it before now, so I guess I just buried that piece of information deep inside me.”



“Sun, you’re losing me,” Phineas said gently.

She gave him a shy smile. “Sorry.” She fiddled with her hands in her lap, and Phineas had the sudden urge to grab them and give them a reassuring squeeze. “In my dream, your mother was showing me a book.”

Phineas inhaled sharply at the mention of his mother, but he nodded at Sun to continue.

“There was something written in the book, though I couldn’t understand the language,” she explained. “Miranda said it would help us if we ever

needed it. I could sense its great potential, a palpable vibration echoing whispers of ancient magic. But your mother also warned me about its dangers. She said to use it only as a last resort." She looked back at him, curling her lip. "Do we need to use it now? Are we that desperate? What do you think it does?"

Phineas turned to follow the course of the nearby stream, its waters racing like the thoughts and questions lurking in his mind. "I've read something about it in the University library." He focused on remembering those scripts and the information he'd gleaned from them. "Objects like this are often imbued with both great power and great danger. It said nothing about its potential use or what it could do, only that it was believed to be the key to defeating the dragons."

A pause lingered between them, a suspended moment pregnant with the weight of revelation. It was as if time itself had taken a breath, allowing the shared revelation to sink into the fabric of their understanding. In that heartbeat of silence, Sun let out a small sigh. "I think she hid it in the forest."

"You know where it is?" Phineas asked breathlessly, turning his face to hers.

A fleeting flutter cascaded through his chest, a seismic shift in the steady rhythm of his heart. Big,

round eyes met his mere inches away. When had they gotten so close?

The distance must have vanished as they'd spoken because Sun was all he could now see—the wisps of pink hair framing her face, the long lashes that cast soft shadows under her eyes, and the flush that warmed her cheeks as they both froze.

Their breaths mingled in the tiny space between them and tickled his skin. Phineas lost track of time. Every other thought left his mind. All he could think about was Sun, Sun, Sun.

Sun's expression shifted, a sea of doubt dancing in her eyes. "Phi..." she began to say, though she didn't move away from him.

In that stolen moment of pure perfection amidst the golden embrace of summer's eve, their lips inched closer, the forest around them falling away as Phineas' world tilted on its edge.

But just as their connection deepened, a blood-curdling scream that sliced through the tranquil atmosphere shattered the night, ripping them away from their perfect summer night.

Phineas and Sun's eyes locked, panic etched on their faces, and they wasted no time in rushing back to their campsite.

"Was that Chee?" Sun asked, breathless.

"I think so," Phineas answered, pushing himself to run faster as the blood in his veins went cold, all

sense of calm from mere seconds ago gone. If something happened to Chee, he didn't know what he'd do.

As they reached the clearing, their eyes widened in terror as they bore witness to a sight that seemed ripped from the darkest recesses of their nightmares. Lukas had his back to them, but he had Chee by the neck, his fingers squeezing as their friend fought in vain against his grip. Chee's face was contorted in agony, his breaths coming in desperate gasps as he struggled for air.

"What do you think you're doing?" Phineas screamed, his voice raw with anger and disbelief. "Have you lost your mind?"



Like the slow unveiling of a forbidden secret, Lukas turned, his gaze locked onto theirs like a hunter tracking elusive prey. In that charged moment, Phineas and Sun found themselves ensnared in the gravity of his stare. Something was horribly

wrong with him. His features were twisted, like a grotesque mask of the boy they'd gotten used to seeing. A sinister smile corkscrewed across his lips,

making Phineas shiver. He was half transformed, scales sprouting on his face, while sharp teeth dangled awfully close to Chee's neck.

"What is going on?" Sun mumbled, but all Phineas could do was shake his head.

His relationship with the dragon shifter had certainly gotten better, but while he and Lukas hadn't exactly become close friends during their journey, it was confusing why he would unexpectedly betray them. Especially Chee, who'd been the first of them to accept Lukas and with whom he'd seem to have formed an actual genuine friendship.

This was the first time Phineas had seen Lukas overpower Chee in such a manner.

Lukas, his grip unyielding, smiled wider when his red eyes met Phineas'. Finally, he released Chee and flung him onto the ground in his direction. As Chee struggled to regain his breath, Lukas took a step in their direction.

"Phineas," he whispered softly. His voice sounded unfamiliar. It was colder and devoid of any warmth or familiarity. It was as if a ghostly finger traced an icy path along Phineas' back, sending a quiver through his being, an enigmatic touch that whispered secrets of both unease and anticipation in equal measure. Lukas' smile grew wider, his

clawed fingers flexing at his sides. "I've been waiting so long to meet you."

"What are you talking about? Have you taken a tumble and misplaced your wits along the way?" Phineas cast a quick glance at Chee, desperate to make sure his friend was okay. "Was this your plan all along? Why here? Why now?"

Lukes let out a shrill laugh. "Oh, you sweet, naïve child. You do not know what you've gotten yourself into. What you've gotten your friends into," he hissed. "Those who have power will do anything to keep it! You're a fool, just like your parents were."

"What did you just say?" Phineas clenched his fists, sculpting determination into the sinew of his hands. Each finger became a monument to resolve, the pressure of his grip a testament to the coiled strength simmering beneath the surface. He was mad. His fists became a symbol, a silent promise etched in the tension of tendons, ready to unleash a torrent of revenge. His vision was going blurry with anger, but then Lukas clicked his tongue, annoyed.

"Seems like my time has run out. Such a shame. I was just starting to have fun." He rolled his neck, and a spasm distorted his features, but his smile never faltered as his eyes bored into Phineas'. "I'm sure we will see each other again soon, Prince Phineas. I can't wait to meet you in person."

"What are you talking about?" Phineas yelled.

But Lukas didn't reply. His eyes had closed, and the scales were disappearing, the claws retracting. His entire demeanor shifted, and he stumbled forward, taking a hand to his head. When he opened his eyes again, they weren't red anymore, and they didn't seem so evil, just disoriented.

"What?" he asked when he found Sun and Phineas staring at him.

Chee grunted. Sun rushed to his side, her concern for their friend overriding her confusion and fear. When Lukas turned, his face paled as he saw Chee sprawled on the floor.

"Did I...?" He looked down at his own hands in horror, but something like understanding dawned on his face as his expression grew somber.

Phineas, still grappling with his own shock, took a step toward Lukas. He didn't know if he should try to overpower him and get him tied up or try to talk things through. He knew, deep down, that he didn't really have a chance in a fight, which was why he'd try reasoning with him first. His voice quivered against his best judgment as he said, "Lukas, what just happened? Why did you—"

But Lukas interrupted him, his eyes now fixed on the moonlit horizon. His words were measured and laden with an air of gravity.



"I guess there's no hiding it anymore. We need to talk Phineas. So, which do you want first, the bad news or the really bad news?"