

Chapter Nine

Tempe

For a second I thought I'd repeated myself, but my *windsense* warned, *human male in the room*. I started to turn holding on tightly to my brother's bottle.

"I. Said. Freeze."

The menacing voice was familiar so naturally I ignored the command, and spun slowly on my heel to face Sheriff *Whathisname*, his gun aimed at my chest in a classic two-handed grip.

"Um, I know this looks bad." *Oh yeah, very bad*. "Don't you have something better to do than turn up everywhere I go, Sheriff," I asked, pulling my cheeks up into a half smile and pretending confidence I didn't feel.

He didn't return the smile. This man has no sense of humor. So I appealed to his sense of duty. "How could you just walk past that dead..." *Careful...* "Aren't you goin' to do somethin'?" I waved my free arm in the direction of the door, and landed against the lockers.

"Put down the vase," he said, pointing at it with his gun.

"Not—" I shook my head. "No." I said, gripping the amphora tighter.

“What happened here, Ms. Pomeroy?”

“Uh-oh, yer mad, huh?” One polyester clothed hunk blurred into two. I blinked quickly.

“Are you...” His eyebrows crashed together into downward dogs as he stepped closer to me, put his face next to mine and sniffed.

“Jesus, you’re drunk.”

He looked over at the wet bar, his eyes hardening to unfriendly gray steel. “What’s the matter? Murdering someone a little too much for you?” He grabbed for the vase and got a hand on it.

I clasped it tighter as his words sank in. “What are you talking about?” I shrieked.

“Let. Go.”

“No,” but I dared not tug too hard. “It’s mine—well, River’s.”

“Who’s River?”

“My brother.”

At the risk of damaging the irreplaceable vessel, I relinquished it. “Please, please, be careful with it. It’s...” I shook my head. *Sober up, Tempe*. I willed clarity to return. It ignored me.

“Is this what you hit the guy with?”

“What guy?”

“You know, the nude dead guy in the other room? The one with his face smashed away? Ring any bells?”

“Oh, him.” My head spun worse now that I’d given up the amphora. “I gotta siddown.” I did—hard, on the bench in front of the lockers. I pressed my fingers to my temple and closed my eyes. *Bad move.* I opened them again. “I remember now...”, the fae, the blood... the smell. “I think I’m going to throw up.” Gagging, I bent over and a plastic lined trashcan appeared in front of me.

Think of something else—River, on his first day as a Djnni, Phoebe on my ninth birthday, Dutch... I stifled a whimper. I would not lose it in front of this man. He’d already seen me in too many compromising situations today. It would be one embarrassment too many.

He placed his gun into its holster and reached for my elbow. “Come with me.”

I rested my forehead in my palm as he pulled me up. My words kept getting tangled around my tongue. If I just concentrated harder, I could prom-pron- proolly...figure out what to say. I waved a hand toward the door. “Why don’ you jus’ go do what you have to do? I’ll be here... when you get back.” I looked up at his narrowed eyes and grim face. *Mad again.*

“Nope. You’re coming with me.” With one hand

wrapped around the neck of the bottle and the other grasping my elbow, he pulled me along with him to the entryway, stopping by the man on the floor. This time the stench was more than my roiling stomach could handle.

“Ag—” I turned just far enough away from the body in front of me to let loose in the direction of the sheriff’s trousers and shiny black work boots. *So much for pride.* Only his strong arm around mine kept me from collapsing on top of the body. Which was probably what he was trying to protect.

He looked at the ceiling for a good five seconds, then led me through the dining room toward the restrooms. He pushed me down in a chair and pulled a handkerchief from his pocket. “Here.”

What a swell guy, I thought as I closed my eyes, the world spinning behind my lids.

The snick of metal caused me to look up but not before he’d handcuffed my wrist to the seat back and walked out the front door, taking River’s amphora with him, leaving me sitting eye level with the long silver utility handle on a door marked, “Men”.

My sentiments exactly.