

befall you. If it really makes you uncomfortable to start, you can tie me up first, and I can show you how I escape.”

Eila tilted her head, considering him from head to toe and back again. Her shoulders relaxed. “How do you want me to tie you?”

He chuckled. “How ever you wish. Make it as difficult as you like.”

She came after him with a wicked smile, but then halted. “Wait. Will you be tying me the same way?”

Wells shook his head. “Oh no,” he said, and she released a held breath, her hands moving to his wrists. “My bindings are nearly impossible to escape.” Her fingers fumbled, as she crossed his wrists. She used the entire length of rope to bind him, and then stepped back to watch him.

Wells grinned to himself and tested the bonds. They were the work of an amateur, and he detected several flaws in the bind he could use to his advantage. Nevertheless, this was a lesson for her, so he made his motions far slower than they needed to be and explained his moves as he made them.

In less than two minutes, he turned to face her, rope unwound and in his hand. “Did you watch closely?” Her mouth was open in surprise, but she nodded. “Good, because I’m not doing that again for a while. Your turn.”

When he approached her, she backed up, shaking her head. “Eila,” he said. “Remember, here I am *Vrai’ell*. Please put your trust in me; you know I will allow no harm to come to you.”

After she studied him in silence for several minutes, she allowed him to approach. Leaving her arms loose at her sides, their eyes met. Wells saw the unfamiliar surge of emotion behind her eyes. It resembled fear. It resembled excitement. She pressed the tip of her tongue against the back of a tooth. He glanced at her hands, lifting one gently and moved it behind her. He began to tie her wrists.

He’d thought she might try to bind his legs and arms as well, but she’d left him no opening to do the same to her.

With as much skill as a seasoned horseman, he worked swiftly to twist and wind the rope around and between her