

# **Encala**

Book 3 of the Heku Series

Published by T.M. Nielsen

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**Chapter 1 - Freedom**

“Damnit,” Allen said, smiling.

“Want to go out today?” Emily asked, and took his hand.

She grinned at the name of Allen's horse. It had fit when he was an unbroken colt, but now as a gentle stallion, he was the perfect horse for a small boy.

She led him out to the hallway and frowned, there were no guards at her door. She knew the Cavalry was out on a mission and off her bodyguard duty for two more days, but she'd had random guards posted outside of her door since the Cavalry were made lieutenants.

Emily walked Allen through the palace, feeling a sense of freedom. She didn't pass any heku on her way out and then she remembered the Council was meeting today. They were swearing in a new Chief Enforcer, someone named Damon. All she knew about him was that he was another one of the 'old ones' and Chevalier had known him for a long time.

Emily picked up Allen and threw him onto her shoulders as he giggled. He loved to ride up there. She walked the short distance to the stables and looked around, still no heku. The stable was also empty of horses, except for Patra and Damnit.

Emily slipped a bridle on Patra and let her out of the stall. She kept glancing behind her as she put on the saddle, cinched it, and then put Allen up by the horn. Emily slipped her foot into the stirrup and swung herself up behind him. She wrapped a hand around Allen's waist and

held the reins with the other and then clicked her tongue, heading the mare out slowly.

She had seen the rolling hills to the west of the city, but hadn't had time to explore yet. She tapped her heels against Patra and the mare broke into a trot. The city was quiet during the day. Most of the business was done in the protection of the night. She could still hear people talking from behind their doors, and once in a while, she caught sight of a curtain pulling to the side. She was a little irritated by the peeking, but knew she was an odd sight for them.

After many turns and several dead ends, she finally found her way to the green hills. She grinned and broke Patra into a gallop. She loved the way the wind felt through her hair, and she could hear Allen laughing. It was good to get the painted mare out on the open grass. She'd been working hard getting the Cavalry ready, and hadn't gotten to stretch her legs in a while. The afternoon passed slowly as she explored the hillside and talked to Allen.

As she topped one of the hills, Patra reared angrily and Emily tightened her grip on Allen. She calmed the mare down and then saw what spooked her, someone was walking toward them. She watched as he got closer and her brow furrowed.

“Emily?” she heard him ask, and she tightened her grip so hard on Allen that he began to complain.

“Tim,” she said, watching him. She hadn’t seen the man since her time as a prisoner of the Valle, when he was sent to break the bond she had with Chevalier. The last time she saw him, he was fading in and out of consciousness and in pain from her torture.

He stopped a few yards from her and smiled, “I see you had a boy.”

She nodded and pulled the reins, forcing Patra to take a step back, “What are you doing here?”

“I’m a donor, didn’t you know?” he asked casually.

“For the Equites? What happened to the Valle?” She didn’t trust him at all.

“I’m a donor for whoever needs me. I’m making a call in Council City.”

He slid his hands into his pockets and ran his eyes over her.

“I suggest you go back where you came from.”

He frowned, “You aren’t still mad, are you? That wasn’t my fault! They forced me to do it.”

“I don’t care who forced whom, you don’t belong in this city.”

“Don’t be mad, Emily, please. I’ve wanted to apologize for a while now, but didn’t know where to find you,” he said, taking a step toward her.

Emily pulled Patra back another step, “Come near me, and I’ll have this entire city on you in an instant.”

“I don’t doubt that. I’ve heard that your husband became an Elder.”

“You heard correctly.”

“I really cared about you, you know that right?” He smiled slightly.

“Oh sure, you let them torture me.”

“No I didn’t. They would take me away until it was time to let you go, I had no say in it.” He desperately wanted her to believe him.

“But you knew, the entire time you were helping them.”

“It’s true, I knew, but I wasn’t helping them.”

“So you weren’t trying to break the bond with Chev?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Ok, so maybe... but I cared about you and I fought to get back to you when you were in restraints.” He slipped his hands out of his pockets and reached out for the mare.

“Get back,” she said, warning him.

He pulled his hands back, “Don’t be like this. It’s been a long time, and now that I’ve found you, I want to apologize.”

“Get lost, you aren’t welcome in the city,” she said again.

“I am welcome. I have a donor appointment with some heku,” he said, taking a step to the side.

“I’m pretty sure I outrank whoever it is your appointment is with, and I say you aren’t welcome.”

He looked toward the city and then back to Emily, “Don’t be like that, Em. I won’t be in the city for more than an hour.”

“Then what? Return to the Valle with information on the Council?”

“I told you, I’m not with the Valle.”

“Oh right... and I’m supposed to trust everything you say.”

Tim smiled and looked at Allen, “He’s beautiful, Emily.”

“I’m not kidding, go away, right now,” she warned again.

“I’ll do what I want. You may be the wife of an Elder, but you’re still mortal, which means to them... you are nothing.” He grinned and winked at her.

“Emily?” she heard from behind her, and turned just as Tim peered around her.

Tim’s eyes grew wide when he saw the seven mounted heku. He glanced to the sides, unsure which way to run, but soon found he and Emily surrounded.

“Are you ok, Lady Emily?” one of the Cavalry asked.

“This man, I know him... he works for the Valle, even helped them kidnap me once,” she said, smiling at the terrified expression on Tim’s face.

“That’s not true! I... well... ok so I was there... when the Valle had Emily, but I don’t work for them,” he said, fidgeting nervously.

“Let’s see what the Elder has to say about that,” one of the Cavalry said before moving his horse toward Tim, and slipping out of the saddle.

“That’s not necessary, I was just leaving,” Tim told them, moving away from the advancing heku. Tim felt a strong hand on his shoulder and he gasped, “Please, I didn’t come to hurt anyone.”

The guard looked at Emily, “What do you want us to do with him?”

She smiled, “Take him to Chevalier, and see if he can talk his way out of that one.”

The heku nodded and pushed Tim ahead, walking back into the city. One of the other heku took the reins from his horse and the Cavalry followed them. Emily watched them go and then sighed when they turned around.

“We’ll need you to come with us,” one of them called to her.

She figured it was useless to try to get more time out of the city, and followed them in, talking to Allen about anything he pointed at.

One of the guards fell back and matched Emily’s pace, “Where’s your guard?”

She shrugged, “I didn’t have one today, apparently.”

“Did you not have one, or did you skip out on him?”

“Hey, I don’t need the attitude,” she snapped. “I didn’t have a guard when I left my room, so I decided to take Allen out for a ride.”

He nodded, his eyes straight ahead.

“I suppose you are going to tell Chev that you found me out here.”

He nodded.

“Great”

Emily and the guard by her fell behind the others. She wasn't in any hurry to get back into the stuffy palace. When they arrived at the stables, the other horses were put away and the rest of the Cavalry was gone. She took her time putting Patra away, and helped as Allen carried the bucket of oats to her feeding trough.

“Welcome back,” Sam said, peering around the corner. Allen ran into his arms.

“Are we all set for the training next week, Sam?” she asked, shutting Patra's stall.

“Yes, we are,” he told her, and threw Allen into the air, catching him as Allen laughed. “We have those new horses coming in tomorrow.”

She nodded, and then watched Sam and Allen until she heard the heku clear his throat, “Let's get inside, the Elder wants to speak to you.”

She frowned, “I hate that.”

“What?” he asked as he ushered her toward the front door.

“How you all can talk to one another from far away. It's kind of annoying.”

He smiled, “It comes in handy.”

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