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An Excerpt From: HERO UNLEASHED

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“Dance with me.”

His eyes widened and he actually jumped a step backward. “What?”

Laughter welled in her chest at his reaction. One would think she asked him to drown kittens. “Dance with me. You have made me sad with this news. Make it up to me and dance.”

“I don’t dance.”

To her surprise, the great General Lucianllanos actually looked terrified. Her inner devil jumped with glee at the opportunity to needle the stalwart soldier. Why should she be the only one to feel as if her skin was peeled back, leaving her exposed and raw? Besides, if he was insisting on treating her like a princess, then he could follow her orders.

She sashayed up to him and placed her hand on his chest, leaning into his rigid stance. “I’ve seen you during training exercises. You are very graceful. Pretend you’re holding your sword.” A quirk of naughtiness touched her grin. “And do what comes naturally.”

The pink in his cheeks darkened. “I. Don’t. Dance.”

“Then I. Won’t. Listen. It’s obvious you wish to be gone from here post haste and as unobtrusively as possible. Do you realize you’re a head taller than everyone here? And you are so stiff. You’re like a giant tree in the midst of swaying reeds. How can you not be noticed?” She dug her fingers into the thick muscles of his shoulders and was immediately lost in the heat of his skin. Ah, what it would be like to feel that warmth without the barrier of fabric, perhaps even slick with

sweat.

Focus. Focus.

“Relax. Drink in the energy around you. You give me one dance and I’ll give you my complete attention.”

His frown deepened as his hands landed on her hips and pushed her back enough to leave plenty of distance between their bodies. With a frustrated grunt, he began a step-touch, step-touch beat that reminded her of a youth at his first social dance.

“Bend your knees a little, Lucian. Follow the music. It’s a dance, not a military march.”

“I don’t remember you being so disagreeable,” he grouched as he relaxed enough to soften his stance.

“I wasn’t allowed to be. Demureness at all cost was the mantra I was expected to live by.”

“Is decorum not something you adhere to here as well?”

“When it suits my purpose.” She laughed. Had he always been such a... What did they call it here? A branch in the muck? Yes, that was Lucian. He needed a serious shot of excitement. “I find Earth-men like it when I behave contrary to what is expected. It keeps them on their toes.”

His fingers flexed on her hips and a thin bolt of indignation burst through his controlled shell. “And what is it that these men expect from you?”

“Everything and anything.”

“As a princess—”

“Do not even think of taking that tone with me, General. This isn’t Skandavia. The old rules no longer apply.”

“Be that as it may, but in some cases I will insist that they be. Princess, you are in danger.”

“Unless it is from boredom, that is highly unlikely.”

“Listen to me.” He squeezed her tight, drawing her gaze to the intensity blazing in his dark-green eyes. “Hamerkind has the throne, but not the people. If you were to return, he would lose his control. He has sent an assassin to make sure you, my brother and myself do not

return. I will not let him succeed.”

Amaryllis melted at the command in his tone. The show of strength pushed all of the submissive buttons she tried to deny possessing. She licked her dry lips and shoved aside the desire to kneel at his feet and await his instruction. “That’s ridiculous. As if I have any intention of returning. How can this man even think the people will accept my leadership after the way they treated me like an abomination?” She snapped her teeth together and squashed the anger that flared at the reminder of her past. “I will tell this assassin that his services are unnecessary and he will go.”

Lucian’s bark of laughter was so loud, it startled them both. “Now who is being ridiculous? Bale is a cold-blooded killer. He will not let you live long enough to draw a breath, let alone form an argument.”

“I do not know this Bale.”

“I do. And he’s dangerous. You need to come with me. I will protect you.”

“And why should I trust you? You’ve completely ignored me.”

“That is not true. I told you I’ve kept track of you. I’ve even dined in your restaurant a time or two.”

“A time or two?” Now that was surprising. Why monitor her whereabouts without letting her know? “Then why haven’t you spoken to me?”

“Because I couldn’t—” He paused, his throat working hard as he swallowed. “I...didn’t want to intrude on your new life. You’ve done quite well for yourself, Your Highness.”

“Despite all the odds?”

“Yes.”

“Yet you don’t approve of all my endeavors.”

He glanced around the club again and at the mass of undulating bodies crowding ever so closer. His lips pressed into a firm line and he drew her into the curve of his body as if to shield her from their touch. “Not all of them. You let others take too many liberties where you are concerned.”

“Liberties?” She laughed and rubbed her cheek against his slightly stubbled jaw. The scrape sent tiny chills across her skin. “You make it sound so pedestrian. I like liberties. Come on, General. Haven’t you ever done anything just for the pleasure, for the pure excitement of feeling your blood race?”

He opened his mouth to argue but paused when she raised a brow. “Maybe. In my youth. But never as a mature member of society.”

“Poor Lucian. What is the human saying? All work and no play makes a man limp and feeble?”

His nostrils flared. “I am neither.”

“One dance, Lucian.” She barely contained her smile. “You promised me one dance. Don’t do anything but feel the energy around us.”

Amaryllis drew his enticing scent of pine and musk into her lungs then released a sigh of possibility. Lucian was so uptight, so formal. What a magnificent sight he would make if he unleashed the primal male she sensed lurking beneath the layer of responsibility.

The deep throb of bass pounded behind her chest as she let the music take her over. Lucian easily supported her weight, swaying and rolling with her movements and the driving primal beat. His steps were smooth, graceful and in perfect tempo. Liar, he did know how to dance.

He was so warm, his body generated enough heat to make a fine layer of sweat gather in her cleavage. A drop of perspiration slipped under the silk of her dress and tickled her skin as it slid down her belly. With each bob and weave their bodies fused together, surging in a gentle cadence. She stifled a moan when his thigh slipped between her legs and pressed against the ache growing in her core.

Oh if only they were naked. She snorted with repressed laughter, if only they weren’t who they presently were.

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