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# UNSADDENED

Steel and Desire - Book Four

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.  
Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's  
advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

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## Chapter 1

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**T**he door burst open, smacking the wall. “Mommy, Mommy!” Justice pried Molly’s eyes open with her tiny fingers. “Wake up, Mommy, please wake up.” Molly groaned and turned onto her back, focusing on the ceiling. She envied her daughter’s enthusiasm for each new day. If she had even a tenth of that energy, she might make it out of bed.

“Sorry,” the nanny said from the doorway. “I told her not to bother you but... should have locked your door.” The nanny opened the blinds and Molly squinted, shielding her eyes from the morning.

Justice struggled to get on the bed and Molly grabbed her arm and helped. Justice straddled her waist. “Are you still sick, Mommy?”

“A little bit.”

“You should go to the doctor. She can fix you.”

If only. In the three months since Sam died, she’d been a hot mess. Her best pals and fellow FBI agents, Alyx, Jamie, and Laura had all visited, offering sympathy and encouragement. They begged her to go out to lunch, or a movie, anything to get

her out of the house. The nanny came full-time now because she couldn't keep up with Justice, the poor kid would probably starve if it weren't for Colleen. "I'll be better soon," she said to Justice. "I just need to rest a little longer." She ran her fingers through her daughter's curly onyx locks.

"Okay, but feel better soon. Daddy's mad at you."

Molly's eyes stretched wide.

"He says time's up. Get outta bed."

What an odd thing for a four-year-old to say. But why couldn't an imaginary friend look like her father? Unless. Molly glanced at Colleen, who shrugged.

Molly searched the room for some sign of her husband's spirit. She'd heard children were more susceptible to *certain* influences and she didn't entirely reject that souls from the *other side* could reach across the divide, but... Children made up pretend friends and embraced worlds of fantasy. Justice insisted her furry unicorn, which she'd named Sparkle, was alive and Molly had made it a peanut butter sandwich more than once. Yeah, just a child's crazy imagination. Maybe that's why she was coping better than Molly.

"Come, honey," Colleen said, extending her hand. "We'll be late for school."

Justice put her hands on the sides of Molly's face and leaned in, nose-to-nose. Molly inhaled her sweet baby breath.

"Daddy means it. Get up."

Molly flinched. "Okay, baby, I'll try."

"I'm not a baby."

"Of course you're not."

Justice kissed her on the lips and smiled. "Bye, Mommy." She shimmied off the bed and ran to Colleen, circling the nanny's knees with her arms. "Mommy's getting up today," she said, gazing up.

"What day is it?" Molly asked.

"Wednesday," Colleen said.

Huh, *Hump Day* and Molly sorely wished she could get over the hump of her depression. Maybe today, perhaps tomorrow.

The nanny grasped Justice's tiny hand and turned toward the door. She glanced over her shoulder and said, "At least take a shower."

*Ouch.* But Colleen was accurate in her assessment. How long had it been?

With Colleen and Justice gone, she leaned back against the spindled headboard of the king-sized bed. A bed unbearably large for one person. Maybe she should get something smaller so she wouldn't feel so lonely. She remembered the nights she and Sam made love in this bed, especially the night they conceived Justice. What a perfect evening, what fire-tinged romance. Sam often joked they made a baby in one fell swoop because he set the mood so well. Candlelight dinner, dancing in the living room to Nina Simone. Molly sighed, her eyes welled and she pinched them shut, forcing back the never-ending deluge of tears. She had no idea a human body could manufacture that much water. Especially since she was probably deficient in every crucial nutrient known to mankind, since she barely ate. She feared stepping on the scale; she could already see her own ribs bulging out in the mirror, and her gaunt face.

The doorbell rang, followed by a pounding. Heavy footsteps trod the stairs. She'd surrendered her service revolver while on leave and her personal weapons were locked in the gun safe. Molly sat erect, pulling the covers up to her neck. His muscular body filled the doorway. Molly exhaled slowly. "Jesus, you scared the piss out of me."

"You look like shit, how long is this going to continue?" said Rob Scarborough, Bureau Chief at the New York City FBI Office, and her boss. Alyx, Laura, and Jamie followed him into her bedroom dressed in their usual garb... dark suits paired with white or blue blouses.

She'd asked for a three-month bereavement leave and Rob agreed but she was nearing the end. "How did you get in?"

Alyx dangled her front door key. "We have each other's keys and alarm codes, remember?"

Molly didn't respond. Rob came to her bedside, hands on his hips. "I'm not walking in your shoes but people go through what you're going through every day. And they somehow find the damn strength to move on. Look, I'm starting a new task force and I want you to head it."

"If you ever get the chance to be a motivational speaker—*Don't.*" Molly ran her fingers through greasy hair. Never had Rob seen her in such a state.

"I'm not taking no for an answer. I'll expect you in the office." He turned to his agents. "How long will it take for you to make her presentable?"

"About an hour," Alyx said.

"Okay, then I'll expect you in the office before ten."

"I can't, I won't."

"Yes, you will," Jamie said. "With a little help from your friends."

Laura chimed in. "Think of your daughter. She needs you, and Sam wouldn't be happy if he saw you like this."

How profound. First Justice, now Laura. Was Sam sending her a message? More like shoving it down her throat. Strange coincidence that her fellow agents and boss show up at her door. Maybe.

"What's the task force charged with?" she said.

"We're targeting sextortion perps. We have several cases in Suffolk County. They've called us in. I've scheduled a meeting this morning at eleven so you can introduce yourself to the task force. You'll need to get up to speed yesterday because you have to go toe-to-toe with the Suffolk County Chief ADA later today at three."

*Three?* That didn't give her much time.

The term sextortion had recently been coined by the Bureau and agents had been volunteering to track perps when they were off duty. Pedophiles befriended kids on social media or gaming sites, pretending to be the same age and professing a sexual attraction. They got them to send naked pictures, then turned it into blackmail, threatening to expose them online and to their parents. Kids kept sending more pictures to prevent their discovery. Several suicides had been credited to the perverse practice.

Rob turned and mumbled, “Don’t be late.”

Her friends surrounded her bed with a collective don’t-give-us-any-shit expression. Alyx tore back the bedcovers and yanked Molly toward the bathroom.

Showered, dressed and groomed, they shoved organic peanut butter toast and French roast coffee down her, then headed for the door. Molly snatched her purse from the hallway hook. A glint of gold stopped her mid-step. “Wait,” she said. “I’ll be right back.”

“Don’t you dare go back to bed,” Alyx yelled as Molly sprinted upstairs. “Don’t make us use our weapons.”

Molly faced her dresser mirror. A pale replica of her old self stared back. Examining her hand, she considered the gold band. Her diamond engagement ring sat nestled in the velvet jewelry box on her dresser. She never wore it on the job. The wedding band either, only on the weekends, yet since Sam’s death it had remained on her finger constantly, unwilling to sever their bond. Reminding herself... of what? She wasn’t married anymore.

She opened the box, slipped the gold ring off her finger, and placed it beside her engagement ring. Snapping the box shut, she sighed, then started for the stairs.

“Good girl,” Jamie said. “Good to know we still have some intimidation factor left.”

Molly frowned. “Seriously? You three don’t intimidate me in the slightest.” They shared a laugh.

“The Four Horseman ride again,” Alyx quipped.

Molly shook her head. “You’re an idiot.” Alyx stuck her tongue out. “One more thing, I need to text Colleen.”

She glanced over her shoulder as she left. *Happy now, Sam?*