

The Somewhere Aching Series

A DAUGHTER TO DIE FOR



book one

Tanya Madsen

TANYA MADSEN

A Daughter to Die For Sample

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Chapter 1

Judith

Judith Monroe was an angry girl, and she wouldn't deny it. She despised her pathetic mother, her dirtbag father, her bratty sister, and all nine of her ex-boyfriends and nineteen hookups ranging from reasons like excessive nerdiness to excessive drugginess. She even hated the smart one. What was his name, Lance? For being too damn smart.

Everyone had the same effect on her. They tried to make her feel like the losers they were. She wasn't a loser, she was a victim. A survivor of a future wrecked by parents who put themselves first and left her to come in last for the rest of her life. At almost twenty years old she had plenty of life left in her. What was she supposed to do now that her whole purpose for existing was gone?

"Judith" was another reason she hated her mother. Seriously? Judith? What a terrible name to curse a beautiful girl with, regardless of whether it once belonged to some war heroine way up in the branches of her family tree or not. It was damn ugly! And a constant embarrassment for her at all the beauty pageants her parents thrust her into for years then abruptly cut her off when the divorce drained all their resources.

Judith used to be a perennial queen. No one could match

her allure. Now, thanks to her parents, her attributes were all going to waste. Growing up, there were dancing and acting classes, voice lessons and martial arts—the works. Judith was their prize and she loved that it was she and not her stupid sister who kept her parents together. When the world could see, they were about as compatible as pickles and ice cream, her dad being the ice cream. Who was she stuck living with? The pickle.

Judith glared at her gorgeous reflection. Time to slip on her bridesmaid's dress and look stunning. Too bad she couldn't wear it to a competition and take home a trophy instead of to this bullshit wedding. Her new stepmom was like gooey chocolate syrup. She drowned out all the best parts of ice-cream dad with her loud voice and lewd jokes, to which he replied by turning red and playing dumb.

While Judith appreciated his need to rebound as far as possible from her mother in personality and appearance, she couldn't understand why he had to marry the hag. Lori wasn't worth the hassle and spent all her time smothering any hopes of an inheritance for his daughters with her insatiable lust for shopping.

After high school, her dad refused to pay for her modeling career. He suggested that she get a job instead. Now she worked as a server in a restaurant and it sucked. Mom was trying to relive her twenties by returning to college and there was no money anywhere. She sighed in despair. Life was so unfair. She stared at the long shelf covered in beauty pageant trophies and feared they meant nothing now. Which meant she meant nothing now.

Judith watched the curtains start to blow wildly at her window. It smelled like rain, which was good for her current

mood and bad for her gown. This whole thing was a farce. Dad had been shacking up with Lori ever since he left mom. Why the marriage facade? To appease the guilt for what they did to his family? And then there was her mom. Still hung up on a guy who treated her like shit. It was embarrassing.

“Judith? Do you need help with your hair?”

Her mom knocked then shook the handle. Was there no end to the irritation? She still pretended she was a pageant mom waiting with the curling iron and hairspray.

“No mom. Of course, I don’t!”

“What about the dress? Does it still fit?”

“Yes!” What was she trying to insinuate? Bitch.

“Okay, we need to leave in less than ten minutes.”

“Fine mom. I still don’t know why we are doing this.”

“I know. It seems ridiculous, even to me. Now hurry. Lizzy and I are waiting.”

Perfect little Lizzy. A straight-A student who graduated from high school a year early and was now a college girl, mom’s bestie, so sweet and good, got everything she wanted and everyone loved her best—little brat.

Life was hell with her mom and sister. Her only hope was that her dad would relent and take her to live with him once the honeymoon ended with psycho-shopping Lori, or she’d move into a homeless shelter. At this point, anything was better than this.

Judith listened to her mom walk away then plopped down on her bed, considering her place in life. She was beautiful but that was useless these days. Sure, people stared at her and guys lusted after her but that meant nothing. Secretly, she wanted to find someone who could rescue her from her stagnant life. That seemed impossible. All the guys she had met sucked. A

bunch of losers partying it up on their daddy's dime looking for a free whore. Not their soulmate.

She had a ton of unresolved pain from her childhood. Being a perennial trophy winner wasn't all rainbows and sunshine. Too many maelstroms were eager to cast their shadow on innocent things like pretty young girls. Worse, it wasn't she who enjoyed the accolades but her parents. Mainly her dad. The same one who dumped her for Hag-Lori.

It was all too much. She couldn't cry. She wouldn't cry. She hadn't seen her dad in months and didn't want to witness him marry that bitch. It would kill her. Her eyes burned as she tried not to think of all her dad memories. He was such a wonderful dad before Lori. Why had he changed? If only she could read his mind.

One thing was clear. It would take a perfect man to incite her to fall in love. She would never let a man do to her what dad did to mom. She would bring down all her considerable pent-up wrath on any man who hurt her. Burn him into dead meat. She'd turn into Black Widow or even Harley Quinn and make him regret it.

To make herself feel better, Judith mentally relived all the many competitions where she heard those words "And the winner is!" Why was life so cruel? It wasn't for all her friends who were now partying it up at out-of-state schools or making wedding plans. Judith had no idea where she was going in life. She had always focused on beauty pageants instead of academics, convinced it would be looks that took her places. It turned out that beauty wasn't enough. You also needed money—lots of it.

Judith wanted to curse, scream and throw one of her usual fits but contained herself. Now wasn't the time to vent but

to pretend. Time for competition mode. Smile prettily and prance down the aisle in front of the sleaze her dad chose over his favorite daughter who was once affectionately known as his *one and only weakness*.

Presently, she had even more pressing matters—a matching sandal to find and her cell phone to charge and not forget. She had fistfuls of lustrous waves to scorch into bridesmaid curls and layers of carbon-black mascara to apply. Followed by dozens of tears to blink back from leaking past her rigid barriers and ruining her dry-clean-only pale-pink satin.

Chapter 2

Martha

Every relationship has a moment where a couple must decide if their devotion can last forever. After deliberation and sleepless nights, sometimes the result of passion at other times the aftermath of a quarrel, they must weigh their emotions against their memories and decide. Is the fighting worth the making up? Are the debts worth the purchase? Does the laughter cancel the tears? At that moment, the lovers commit no matter the cost or call it quits.

For Martha, that call-it-quits moment came twenty years and two months into her marriage. It was an unremarkable winter day and she was on her way to school when the text from Craig popped up.

I'm sorry, love. We're done. I'm leaving you. I met someone else. Let's talk more about it over dinner tonight. Meet me at the Bongo Lounge at six.

Martha pulled into a gas station and reread the text. She should have seen it coming. Two months earlier, on their twentieth anniversary, she pledged her heart and soul in a lengthy addition to a soppy card that he was her one and only. She should have taken his apology for losing the card as a sign. He probably threw it out since she learned later that he had

been sleeping with Lori for a year. Why had her heart deceived her? Convinced her that, despite appearances and a history of incompatibility and loneliness, they were meant for each other? So much for gut instinct. So much for gut instinct.

Martha had struggled for years to become a psychologist. Then, three years ago, she decided to return to school for her doctorate and to try for a professorship. Now, she was a broke post-grad student living on loans and spending all her spare time writing a one-hundred-thousand-word thesis. Ironically, marriage counseling was her specialty.

Her colleagues thought she was insane for attending the wedding ceremony of the man who cheated on her. She tried to explain to them that it wasn't to provide moral support to Craig or vainly try to win him back but to prove to everyone she was stronger than she was. She needed to appear over it and moving on. Whatever that looked like, that's how she wanted to seem.

He left her for Lori but it had little to do with her, she told herself a dozen times a day. At least that's what everyone said. Her therapist, her mother and even Craig swore she was the picturesque wife and perfect mom—just not for him.

Martha dug around in her small jewelry case for her rhinestone bracelet and earring set and slipped on heels. She tried not to study her reflection in the mirror as she applied eyeliner and a dash of mascara to accentuate her hazel eyes. She chose classic colors to blend with her olive skin, which was once flawless but was now starting to wrinkle like crêpe paper. Pretty like a wilting rose—one you pressed into a book. She was an antique. No wonder Craig replaced her. She left the best of herself behind in her twenties.

Martha re-spritzed her chignon, which lopped to one side,

tucked her curls and secured them with bobby pins. Her dark hair was a hopeless wavy mop. She compared it to Lori's straightened blonde mane and laughed. Other than helping him build his concrete-pouring empire in the community what did Craig ever see in her?

She exited her cluttered bedroom and, in the hallway, gathered her thoughts. Why was she doing this again? Oh yes, to prove to herself that she was strong. Because the girls needed closure, which Craig's marriage would provide. He left them as much as he did her and they were equally devastated. So why did the right thing feel like the wrong thing to do?

There were so many combustible moments before making it to the car that it was like maneuvering through a minefield. Judith was wearing too much makeup, but when Martha tried blending the smudges from her mascara, Judith swore under her breath. Lizzy had gained a few pounds since the dress fitting and the seams were so close to bursting that Martha had her slip into sweats for the ride at the last moment. Lizzy's change led to a fight in which Judith begged to change. Martha refused. She couldn't handle getting both daughters dressed and ready at the venue, and they were out of time. If they didn't leave now they'd be late. Only two years apart in age, the sisters weren't enemies but they weren't friends either. Lizzy was laid-back and needed her mom to stick up for her and Judith was chronically antagonistic.

While waiting at the light to enter the freeway, Martha suddenly sensed the gravity of her decision. Sometimes it was impossible to live up to her own sweet nature. How could Craig demand this? He offered to compensate her for the gas but she declined. Too proud to let the only man she ever loved know how deep it hurt to be thrown a few twenties as he rode off into

the sunset with Lori.

When Lori asked to have the girls be her bridesmaid and flower girl, Craig wouldn't stop begging. Probably because she had no relatives willing to walk down the aisle with her for the fourth time. Martha didn't relent for Lori. She did it for Craig. He still had that effect on her. That lopsided grin and wild energy had always won her heart and he knew it. Lori had stolen everything from her and the last thing she wanted to do was make her wedding dreams come true, but here she was.

The girls were thirsty, so Martha pulled off the freeway to gas up and please her darling brats. Martha gave them cash for fountain drinks and smiled as they scampered across the parking lot. It brought back memories of road trips to Judith's beauty pageants and the occasional vacation.

Judith wasn't in the least bit embarrassed to be traipsing around in her skimpy formal. Martha watched her preen and prance, basking in the attention of every human in the parking lot, always the beauty queen.

The girls returned with ICEEs instead.

"Isn't it a little too cold for those?"

Martha noted the goose bumps popping on their forearms as they sipped greedily in the cooling late March afternoon. It had rained all day, and although there was a break in the downpour, it would start up again at any moment.

"You cold mom?" Lizzy asked.

"No, but I will be hitting this place on the way back for a coffee. Come on. We're gonna be late."

"Hey, mom, will you make Lizzy let me use her phone since you refused to return and get mine?"

Martha sighed and rolled her eyes.

"Can we just let it go? You can't survive one night?"

“How am I supposed to survive a sixty-minute drive to the middle of nowhere, a long boring ceremony, a corny reception and a tiresome ride home without my goddamn phone? You know how I hate doing this wedding thing. Without a distraction it will be unbearable.”

“I’ll let you borrow mine. Good enough?”

Martha watched Judith decide. It wasn’t quite the triumph of watching Lizzy surrender her phone, but a close second.

“Sure, I guess.”

Martha smiled like a super mom—a genius at compromise.

“Can I use it now?”

Martha reached into her purse and handed Judith her phone.

“Here are my AirPods too.”

“Thanks!” Judith flounced into the back seat.

Back on the freeway, Martha glanced in the rearview mirror. Judith found a blanket and cuddled up despite her heels and curls, making her look like the spoiled little girl her father had once been so proud of.

Martha loved her daughters. They were her life. Her reason for getting up and going to work, cleaning, cooking and holding on. If it weren’t for them, she would have crumbled when Craig left. She would be worse than alone, more like the people she helped and the patients she read studies on. Quite likely, she’d be traumatized for life.

Chapter 3

Nicolas

What am I looking for?

A woman who will love me, who I can make happy, who will never leave me.

What's it gonna take?

Seducing her with my mad Casanova skills.

Who's it gonna be?

A perfect replica of the one who abandoned me.

You can do this, Nicolas!

Nicolas recited this to himself in the bathroom mirror.

This is what it took to make your dreams come true. Constant self-talk.

He dressed and groomed himself carefully for another grueling night of working as a server for Lazique Catering. His beauty was his secret weapon and he never knew when lightning would strike. He had to remain vigilant.

His soulmate was out there and she was the reason he was still hanging on, trying to survive this lonely life. Maybe he'd meet her tonight. He certainly hoped so.

Nicolas was sick of sleeping around. Seducing women was expensive, time-consuming and heartbreaking. But he had no choice. He needed to find the Replacement, fix the past or die

trying. Why was his quest for love so difficult? He was a near-perfect guy. A little crazy but mostly perfect. Where the hell was she hiding, this girl of his dreams? Every time Nicolas seduced a lady, he felt like he was betting on the roulette wheel, watching it spin and spin and land on every number but his.

Nicolas swallowed all his pills with disgust. Why couldn't he be a normal person? Why did he have to be mentally ill? Why couldn't his good looks and excessive charm win him his soulmate? He was desperate and lonely and obsessive was his middle name. At this point, he'd settle for anyone as long as they were even a bit like the one who abandoned him.

He returned to invoking *The Secret*. He had read the inspirational book *The Secret* when he was twelve years old and knew instantly it was the answer to all his prayers. He believed in self-talk and knew it was his only option because, so far, no one in his twenty-five years had stepped up and shown him even a glimmer of love. Still, he was determined to get some love and all it took was making a single woman fall for his ample charms.

I am irresistible, I am sweet, I am loved.

Not "I will be loved." That suggested something that would happen in the future.

No. "I am loved." He had to psych himself out into believing he deserved it right now. That was invoking *The Secret*.

He tucked in his white shirt and coiffed his thick dark hair. Applied cologne and stared at his beautiful reflection. There wasn't a single reason he wouldn't find love. Over seven billion people out there, half of them women! Someone had to have a heart compatible with his.

Nicolas wandered through his dad's house and wondered if he should stop by to say hello. Na. Later. Then he headed out

CHAPTER 3

to his dad's car. Time for work. Game on. Hopefully, tonight was the night. His soulmate would walk right out of his dreams and into his arms. Where he eagerly waited to carry her away to his own private universe.



About the Author

Tanya Madsen has a BA in English and a passion for emotional drama. When she's not working her day job as a technical writer, she writes novels, plays computer games, cuddles with her fur babies, or relaxes in the mountains. She lives in Northern Utah with her husband and four grown children.

You can connect with me on:

🌐 <http://www.tanyamadsen.com>