

MADE IN HEAVEN

by Lizette Clarke

[Context + whose story is it?]

Michael Andante is a former prodigy who feels more comfortable using his talented hands to pick pockets than play the piano. He steals professionally, but also because he legitimately can't help himself. Born a triplet and abandoned at birth, Michael, his sister and identical brother have spent their entire lives at St. Alban's Catholic orphanage. Despite this, Michael is narcissistic and entitled, believing that his cute face and lack of parents allow him to take and do whatever he pleases. But when his arrogance leads him to overlook and miss out on all viable financial aid options for college, he realizes he may not be able to attend the school of his dreams. Without some way to pay for school, he'll be stuck—another St. Alban's orphan who never amounted to anything.

[Context + what does the character believe/want?]

Because he doesn't believe he should have to pay for anything in life—including higher education—Michael jumps on the chance to cheat his way into free tuition when he discovers a diversity scholarship for married minority students. Michael knows he can convince the scholarship committee to award him with four years of tuition, but he needs to find someone to marry him before the application deadline in 30 days.

[What's standing in his way?]

That's where Dinah DiMinuendo comes in—the one other person of color Michael knows who'll be going to the same college in the fall. An overachiever with a high IQ, Dinah lives with a rare form of hemophilia and sees her entire existence as a challenge—and that's not a bad thing. She lives for competition and loves beating the odds, and few things please her more than outsmarting Michael Andante. She looks forward to graduating high school, leaving the orphanage, and starting college, where she believes she can become her own person, living beyond the shadow of her mentally ill mother. Dinah wants Father Teddy—the sexy Greek priest who she has crushed on for years—to love her, but more than anything, she wants someone to love her. She wants someone to choose her and make sacrifices for her for once, the way her young mother—an orphan herself—never could.

[This happened and BECAUSE OF THAT this happened + why it matters]

Michael and Dinah hate each other, but Michael still expects her to put their stormy history aside and help him out by getting married for the scholarship. Relishing that she has something Michael wants, Dinah teases him and strings him along, even convincing him to work the kissing booth at her fundraiser in exchange for her hand in marriage. Even though kissing strangers—kissing anyone—is not something the intimacy-averse Michael is comfortable with, he agrees to the deal. So when she reveals she never had any intention to marry him, Michael feels betrayed by his foe yet again. With no other ammunition for retaliation, he passionately kisses her. The kiss leaves them both conflicted. He hates Dinah and she hates him, but damn if that kiss wasn't hot.

[This happened and BECAUSE OF THAT this happened + why it matters]

Despite the wave of clashing emotions that follow the kiss, Dinah still takes joy in rebuffing Michael—at least until she finds out that Father Teddy, the man she has lusted after throughout all of adolescence, is actually her father. Realizing that all these years, the attention Father Teddy gave her had nothing to do with sexual tension—but was simply his taking care of her without compromising his vows of chastity, poverty, or obedience—hits Dinah hard. Angry and irrevocably damaged by the news, Dinah’s entire sense of identity is completely crippled, and her resentment for both parents becomes twofold: not only did they both lie to her, but their genes have literally been a lethal combination for her. Impulsively, Dinah decides to marry Michael, hoping she’ll wound her father by marrying someone he hates.

[What happens externally and internally + why it matters]

Dinah tells Michael she wants to marry him and win the scholarship, and relishing the role reversal and his new position of power, Michael rejects her out of spite. But Dinah won’t accept defeat, and blackmails Michael into letting her follow him on an illegal breaking-and-entering job. For Dinah, going with him while he steals from someone’s home has as much to do with irritating Michael as it does with simply wanting to be bad. She’s seen Michael go through life cheating and stealing with nary a consequence, while her hard work has only rewarded her with illness after illness and a crush on her own father.

[This happened and BECAUSE OF THAT this happened + why it matters]

After Dinah helps him on his stealing job, Michael realizes that they actually do make a good team. They decide to partner up and win the scholarship, knowing there are only a few weeks left to become legally married. As the plot and plan together, they soon become able to spend time together without fighting. While being fake fiancés, they start to trust each other and actually become friends, and Michael finds himself falling in love with his worst enemy. Meanwhile, Dinah finally has Father Teddy’s undivided attention, as he is desperate for her to stay away from Michael. Her goal is still to hurt her father, but she’s starting to fall for this side of her rival that she’s now only seeing for the first time.

[This happened and BECAUSE OF THAT this happened + why it matters]

But Dinah doesn’t want to fall for anyone—not after the heartbreak she suffered with Father Teddy. So while at a dinner with a member of the scholarship committee, a tipsy Dinah fools around with someone else, and Michael unwittingly catches them in the act. Though their engagement and marriage are a sham, he hates the thought of Dinah with someone else and feels incredibly betrayed. This leads to an ugly, long overdue, no-holds-barred fight between them, where Dinah astutely points out that the only reason Michael steals everything is because he doesn’t believe he deserves to be given anything by anyone—including love. Instead of giving her the satisfaction of being right, Michael hits Dinah below the belt emotionally, implying that she’s just like her mother. Storming away after their fight, she drives away in Michael’s (stolen) ride and crashes into a ditch, losing consciousness and a lot of blood very quickly.

[This happened and BECAUSE OF THAT this happened + why it matters]

Michael gets her to the ER just as she’s going into shock. Things aren’t looking good, and he spends the night freaking out that she might not survive. He feels guilty for blowing up at her and realizes that everything she said about him during their fight was true—that his kleptomania and penchant for stealing stems from the belief that he doesn’t deserve love. He also realizes that he does need Dinah more than anything.

[This happened and BECAUSE OF THAT this happened + why it matters]

Dinah survives her incident, and Michael confesses that he seeing her with another guy made him jealous, but more than anything he was afraid that she would die and that he'd lose her forever. Dinah is overcome with affection for him, and they almost consummate their relationship—or whatever it is—before she puts a stop to it. Her newfound feelings for Michael overwhelm and frighten her, and she won't risk getting her heart broken ever again. On the other hand, the aborted hookup makes Michael see clearly how much he really wants to spend his life with her, scholarship or no scholarship.

[This happened and BECAUSE OF THAT this happened + why it matters]

Michael accepts a job that's as shady as all his other work, but he requests being paid as an actual employee with health benefits that he can extend to a spouse. Once he has this, he presents the information to Dinah and proposes to her before a large group of people. When he proposes—this time with sweetness instead of arrogance—she accepts, seeing him as someone she needs and trusts, and no longer as an enemy. She accepts the marriage as a pure business transaction with no feelings involved, and with a new last name, she hopes she can create a new identity for herself. She marvels over how authentic that proposal looked, blissfully unaware that Michael meant every word of it. [Resolution] So Michael gets what he wanted—a marriage that can help him win a full-paid scholarship—but he wishes the marriage was real. He wishes Dinah loved him, but has no idea how to tell her how he feels. Even so, Dinah no longer believes in love, and this blinds her to her true feelings for Michael—which becomes a major problem as we head into Book #2 of the series.