

Made to Last

Melissa Tagg

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Realistic characters bring levity and heart to a charming love story of compromise and forgiveness.

This entertaining and light-hearted Christian fiction novel, *Made to Last*, by Melissa Tagg, follows Miranda “Randi” Woodruff, host of the home improvement reality show *From the Ground Up*, and Matthew Knox, a reporter once nominated for a Pulitzer. His writing career has since stalled, though, since authoring an inaccurate story. Freelancing but striving to return to political reporting, Matthew is assigned to write a serial blog about Miranda and her reality show. When they meet, Miranda and Matthew are both in a state of professional crisis; nothing seems more important to them than salvaging their struggling careers. A major theme of the narrative is what each is willing to compromise and sacrifice—for their careers, and for love.

Matthew considers the blog about Miranda’s reality show to be nothing but fluff, but he agrees to take the assignment because he believes its high-profile nature will help revive his career. He also needs the money so he can help pay for cochlear implant surgery for his deaf niece. And while Miranda is thrilled Matthew’s blog will bring much-needed publicity to her show, which has recently been struggling in the ratings, she also fears he will discover her long-held secret. If the secret is revealed, it could end her career.

The characters have complex backstories, with a host of past mistakes, fractured family relationships, and career missteps, all of which make them interesting and endearing. It’s their flaws that make them most relatable and realistic. The secondary characters, including Matthew’s brother, sister-in-law, and niece, and Miranda’s coworkers are also fully developed and add humor, levity, and heart.

One area that is less believable is the premise that Miranda’s personal life would have such an influence on the success of her show, and that it would draw so much interest from the tabloid press. Miranda’s wholesome reality show focuses on her home-building skills and draws an audience comprised of families watching the program together. Matthew’s young niece, Celine, is a loyal fan of the show and serves as a representative of Miranda’s fan base. But the tabloid attention on Miranda’s personal life is more akin to characters on a reality show like *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* or *The Real Housewives* franchise. In any case, the likability of the characters, and Tagg’s fast-paced storytelling, which is also full of emotional angst, holds the reader’s interest throughout and overcomes the somewhat implausible basis at the center of the narrative conflict.

Made to Last is a sweet love story that asks poignant and universal questions about truth, faith, and forgiveness.

MARIA SIANO (Fall 2013)

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