



Sun-kissed

By Melissa De La Cruz

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Third time's the charm as Mara, Eliza, and Jacqui head back to the Hamptons. This summer the au pairs are doing it right: in style, in step, and "in" everywhere.

Mara has the VIP hookup at all the new clubs -- not to mention sweet digs living with bf Ryan on his parents' yacht. Eliza's nights are steaming too, since she and Jeremy are in total relationship bliss. Too bad she's spending her days at a fashion internship where the hot new designer goes all *Devil Wears Prada* on her. Jacqui is newly single, and on the prowl, with three boy millionaires next door competing for her affections.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 8 Up—Eliza, Mara, and Jacqui are back in a third installment in the series. Jacqui continues to be an au pair for the spoiled Perry children and faces the additional task of trying to hold together her employers' tumultuous marriage in the hopes of keeping her job. She also finds herself part of a complicated foursome as three vastly different but equally dazzling young Internet moguls move in next door and attempt to woo her. Eliza has high hopes for becoming the next big thing in fashion by working for Mikael Lappin, a washed-up designer attempting a comeback. Her dreams are interrupted, however, when Mikael's assistant, who happens to be her boyfriend's ex, sabotages her and gets her fired. Mara finds herself deep in drama as well, as her plans for a relaxing summer with on-again fling Ryan Perry are dashed, as she is always on the go in her new job as junior journalist with *Hamptons* magazine. As always, the girls' foibles are fun but trite. Just like the young starlets they are modeled after, the Au Pairs are fad characters who will soon be forgotten.—*Jane Cronkhite, Cuyahoga County Public Library, OH*

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About the Author

Melissa de la Cruz is the bestselling author of The Blue Bloods series and *The Witches of East End*. She also wrote The Ashleys novels and *Girl Stays in the Picture*. Her work has been translated into several languages. She writes regularly for *Marie Claire*, *Gotham*, *Hamptons*, and *Lifetime* magazines, and has contributed to *The New York Times*, *Glamour*, *Allure*, and *McSweeney's*. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and daughter.

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in seat 12A, mara hopes that all good things come to those who wait

As the pilot circled LaGuardia Airport, Mara Waters switched off her iPod mini and put away the Dartmouth College catalog she'd been reading. She looked out of the tiny airplane window down at the Manhattan skyline -- a luminous vision of steel and glass obscured by a late-afternoon haze. She'd made the forty-minute shuttle trip from Boston to New York several times now and was familiar with the commute. It was a pleasant enough journey that included stacks of complimentary magazines at the terminal and the company of crisp-looking professionals in worsted wool suits or crumpled corporate khakis, twinkling Bluetooth headsets discreetly curled behind their ears.

It was the first week of June, and barely forty-eight hours ago, she had officially graduated from high school. The ceremony itself had been a relatively straightforward affair, with a dull speech from the myopic valedictorian and the halfhearted singing of the class song (Kelly Clarkson's "Breakaway" -- chosen by the administration after the class's real choice, Green Day's "American Idiot," was banned). The only excitement had come when a member of the marching band flashed the stage, showing he was wearing nothing underneath his gown as he accepted his diploma. (His brightly uniformed colleagues quickly struck up a sassy bump-and-grind version of "The Strip.")

Mara had won the English prize, along with a two-thousand-dollar college scholarship. Her mother cried and her father took way too many pictures with his new digital camera while her sisters cheered from the stands. To the hearty beat of "Pomp and Circumstance," she'd joined the three hundred other Fighting Tigers in tossing their cardboard hats into the air. Afterward, over watery punch and stale Mint Milano cookies at the

gym, she'd watched as her classmates exchanged new college e-mail addresses and promised to visit each other the next fall.

If only she had been able to do the same.

Mara frowned at the Dartmouth catalog, feeling envious of the cable-knit-clad coeds photographed studying on the lawn. *Wait-listed*. That was what the one-page letter inside the slim white envelope had said. Not "yes" or "no", but "maybe".

She could find out she'd been accepted in a week or even a few days before school started. Or she could never be accepted at all. Luckily, she'd been offered a place at Columbia with a generous financial aid package, and she'd put down a deposit to hold her place just in case Dartmouth didn't come through.

So now her whole summer stretched out in front of her, filled with anxiety and dread, since she didn't know where she would be in the fall. It was just so unfair. Dartmouth was her first choice, her *only* choice -- as far as she was concerned. Ryan, after all, was going to be a junior there.

Ryan. When she thought of his name, she couldn't help but smile. Ryan Perry. Her *boyfriend*. It had finally happened -- the two of them together at last. They'd met two years ago when Mara was working as an au pair for his younger siblings, and they had immediately hit it off. But other things and other people quickly got in the way. That first summer, Mara still had been with Jim Mizekowski, her high school steady. Mara finally gave Jim the boot the week before she was leaving, and she and Ryan had spent a blissful week together in the Hamptons. But later that winter, Mara broke up with Ryan after feeling totally insecure about the whole background-incompatibility thing -- Ryan being one of those boys born to everything, while Mara was a girl who had to work hard for everything in her life.

So they'd spent the second summer apart as well. Mara had found solace in the arms of Garrett Reynolds, the rich, tomcatting heir-next-door, while Ryan sought comfort even closer to home -- hooking up with Eliza, one of Mara's best friends. But that was all in the past now. Garrett was forgotten and Eliza forgiven. Over the past year Mara had often visited Ryan in New York and New Hampshire, and Ryan had finally made the trek to Sturbridge.

All her fears about what he would think -- that her house was too shabby, her parents too weird, her sisters too loud -- had been immediately dismissed once Ryan arrived. He'd bonded with her dad over football and polished off a record four helpings of her mother's chicken-fried steak. Megan pumped him for celebrity tidbits from New York ("Your friend did a body shot off Lindsay Lohan? Are you serious?") while Maureen declared Ryan was a great name for a boy as she patted her pregnant belly. And he hadn't said a word about the unfinished bathroom with the piece of cloth nailed to the window that substituted as a curtain or the fact that her parents kept the house at a chilly fifty-eight degrees in the middle of winter to save on heating bills.

This summer was going to be the best one yet -- she didn't have to au pair anymore since she'd gotten a job as an intern at *Hamptons* magazine through a connection of Anna Perry's. It was a standard entry-level post -- fetching, faxing, and answering phone calls for the editor in chief, but it tantalizingly promised a few -- few -- writing opportunities. "We need someone to caption all the party pictures," her boss had told her. Mara got the impression the job required the ability to accurately distinguish one Fekkai-blond socialite from the other rather than real writing talent, but at least it was a first step on the journalism ladder.

It didn't pay as much as the nannying gig (irony of ironies), and she would miss the kids and the girls -- Jacqui was the only one left working for the Perrys, since Eliza had something else planned, as usual. But the best part of the job was that she would be free to live with Ryan on his dad's yacht. They were going to live together, like a real couple. It was going to be the most romantic summer *ever*.

Mara sighed, dreaming of sailing on the bay, Ryan at the helm while she lounged on the deck, suntanning. The two of them kissing while the sun set behind them.

The plane glided into the gate, and Mara turned on her phone, which immediately buzzed with Ryan's signature callback ring tone: John Carpenter's *Halloween* theme. *Doo-do-do-do doo-do-do-do...*

She smiled as she flipped open her phone. So what if she was wait-listed? She was still spending her third summer in the Hamptons with the boy she loved, who was waiting outside the terminal for her arrival.

And no one could take that away from her.

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in soho, eliza is stuck in the fashion trenches

"Eh-lie-zuh!"

"Eh-lie-zuh!"

"Are you listening to me?"

Snap.

Eliza blinked. Someone was talking to her. More specifically, someone was talking down to her. She put aside her chopsticks and tried not to look too irritated. Couldn't she even eat dinner in peace?

It was half-past midnight. She had been at the showroom since nine o'clock that morning and couldn't wait to get home for a shower. She was, for the first time in her perennially Fracas-perfumed life, seriously "funky." She took a discreet sniff of each armpit and grimaced.

"Eh-lie-zuh. Hello. Earth to Eh-lie-zuh!"

Eliza rubbed her eyes and finally focused on the person who owned that voice. Paige McGinley. Otherwise known as a Paige-in-the-ass. Her so-called boss and slave driver for Sydney Minx -- famous fashion designer and all-around diva, owner of the showroom and the reason she'd had barely half an hour of sleep in the past forty-eight hours.

Sydney Minkowitz was a gay Jewish dress designer from the Bronx who'd changed his last name to the more intriguing and less ethnic "Minx." Early in his career, he'd befriended a coterie of New York socialites through vigorous ass kissing and with their support had launched a line of chic, casual, yet expensive sportswear that had grown to include licenses for accessories, perfume, housewares, candles, and linens. If you dressed, dined, or dreamed, you could bet there was a Sydney Minx product that catered to it.

The histrionic designer was opening his first boutique in the Hamptons in two days, and the whole office was buzzing with frantic activity to get all the details for the grand-opening party and fashion show completed. Like everyone in New York, Eliza had been a devotee of Sydney's early work -- the waffle-knit "poor boy" cashmere sweaters that came with enormous price tags, the sexy drain-pipe trousers, the artfully graffitied logo handbags. But the designer had been slipping of late. The latest collections had veered wildly from sex-bomb attire one season to starchy, covered-up pretension the next as the label tried to connect with an ever-more-fickle audience of high-fashion buyers. You could only have so many bad collections before you were

considered fashion roadkill, and with this opening, Sydney had a lot at stake.

The place was so tense that if the notoriously difficult-to-please Sydney summoned the group to yet another meeting in which he called all of his design associates, production assistants, runway models, and office interns an untalented bunch of idiots, someone was going to burst into tears. Already, one of the pattern makers had left her sewing machine in a huff after Sydney had called the dress sample she was making "a two-dollar schmatte, an eyesore of epic proportions, an insult to the name of couture!"

"Can I help you?" Eliza asked belligerently as she wiped her mouth with a paper napkin.

"Why aren't all the T-shirts folded yet?" Paige demanded. She was a dark-haired, sharp-featured twenty-two-year-old, a recent F.I.T. graduate who had ascended quickly from being Sydney's personal assistant to being de facto creative director of the label. "I told you, all the shirts need to go in boxes so the messengers can take them to the stores tomorrow morning!" The T-shirts, silk-screened with the designer's Photoshopped and ma...

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