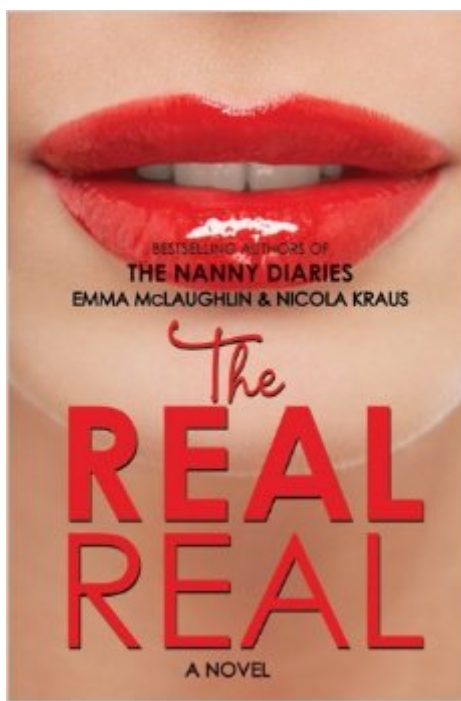


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The Real Real



Synopsis

The bestselling authors of *The Nanny Diaries* introduce a new heroine to root for: Jesse O'Rourke, coffee barista, high school senior, and unwitting reality TV star. Imagine there was never a Laguna Beach, a Newport Harbor, the shimmering Hills. Imagine that your hometown "your school" is the first place XTV descends to set up cameras. Now imagine they've trained them on you. When Jesse O'Rourke gets picked for a "documentary" being filmed at her school in the Hamptons she's tempted to turn down the offer. But there's a tuition check attached to being on the show, and Jesse needs the cash so she can be the first in her family to attend college. All she has to do is trade her best friend for the glam clique she's studiously avoided, her privacy for a 24/7 mike, and her sense of right and wrong for "what sells on camera." . . . At least there's one bright spot in the train wreck that is her suddenly public senior year: Jesse's crush has also made the cast. As the producers manipulate the lives of their "characters" to heighten the drama, and *Us Weekly* covers become a regular occurrence for Jesse, she must struggle to remember one thing: the difference between real and the real real.

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Fiction > Humorous

Customer Reviews

There are certain cliches one comes to expect after reading YA novel after YA novel: the gay best friend, the designer labels, the outcasts and mean girls. *The Real Real* takes a topic that is perhaps too ripe for satire (and is now getting play in real life with NYC Prep) and lends it an edge, humor and heart that makes it worth picking up and taking to the beach, Hamptons or not. There are, of

course, some things I've seen before (the autistic brother, the housecleaner mother), but there's plenty here that makes *The Real Real* deliciously dishy. Jesse is one of six high school seniors cast for XTV's *The Real Hamptons Beach*. She is not exactly classic reality TV material (she's not part of the It crowd, she has a boring part-time job at a muffin shop, she doesn't wear the latest designer gear), and had never expected to be chosen, but her and Drew are the non-wealthy cast members, lured in by the \$40,000 scholarship being dangled before them. She's thrilled to have the chance to be alone with her crush, but not so thrilled when her best friend Caitlyn doesn't get cast and she quickly finds that she's signed over a lot more than the right to film her. Instead, "reality" becomes a carefully scripted fiction that McLaughlin and Kraus coyly nail, especially the sleazy, over-the-top producer, Fletch and his beleaguered assistant, Kara. The XTV overlords give these high school students the star treatment, including luxury meals and trips and glamour, but it all comes to a head on their big pre-spring break spring break. Yes, some of the characters here are little more than caricatures of high school types, like Jase, the annoying frat boy, and Trisha, the overly plastic surgeried young starlet, but they are so fun to hate that the authors are forgiven. The twists and turns of friendship, not to mention the lengths XTV will go to make their show a hit, or the lengths Jesse will go to win back her reputation, make this a winner that manages to indulge a bit in the flashy materialism of *Gossip Girl* and its ilk but also stand above it. The ending is especially divine, and offered one of my favorite lines, with Nico, who starts out a spoiled brat but winds up being more than just a pretty, label-clad clone, exudes her charm. "'Oh, look!' she says, pointing at the poster like it was a kitten wrapped in puppies sprinkled with ducklings." These kinds of witticisms, mostly aimed at skewering the supposed glamour and hype of reality TV, make *The Real Real* a cut above the average teen chick lit. I hope there are more YA novels in McLaughlin and Kraus's future.

I am going to tell you all a secret. I am addicted to a certain reality show that features men and women who keep the bronzer making people in business. *The Real Real* gives a peak into what the lives of these so called "reality TV" stars might be like. Jesse is a character who has her life turned upside down by the TV industry. Her and her parents are drawn in by the money that will allow her to go to college and they are basically "owned" by the TV station until her contract is up. During this time she makes questionable decisions, but she is a teen who is thrust into these manipulative situations. Through the authors' writing it was amazing to see how quickly and without provocation people who both know and don't know these teens turn on them. I really enjoyed this book and it made me at least, kind of feel sorry for people of celebrity. The only thing that I found questionable, or just thought didn't jive was the reaction of Jesse's best friend when she doesn't make the show

and Jesse does. Maybe I hold people to a higher standard, but when your best friend in the world gets the chance to pay for college you don't hate them for their good fortune. The other thing is the lack of her parent's involvement. They seemed close at the beginning of the book, but they sort of drop off until the ...crap hits the fan. There is a letter/message that the mom writes to Jesse that I just couldn't believe. I am a huge defendant of Jesse and felt so sorry for her. I absolutely loved this book.

THE REAL REALEMMA McLAUGHLIN & NICOLA KRAUS Contemporary YA HarperTeen Rating: 5
Enchantments Jesse O'Rourke is the typical average girl at her Hamptons high school. She's not the most glamorous or the most beautiful and she definitely doesn't hang out with the A-list crowd, but her and her best friend Caitlin really don't care that much about any of that. Then suddenly XTV shows up at school, auditioning every single student to be one of the stars for their soon-to-be hot new reality hit, and Jesse gets cast as one of the leads, leaving her in the bright glare of the spotlight with her best friend on the outside looking in. I loved Jesse, finding herself thrown in with the kids who've always been more popular than her. While her and Drew are the outsiders in the group, they're forced to play friends with the others in front of the cameras, following the directions of a crazed cinematographer which results in some truly hilarious scenes. All the while, Jesse's 'reality' is anything but as they shoot a Saturday at the spa in the middle of the night and her friendship with Caitlin starts to fade as the two barely have any time together. Soon, Jesse finds herself trying to wrangle a deal to get her best friend on the show...something that doesn't turn out how she expected. Hands down, my favorite scene is when the cast is whisked away to Mexico to film the spring break episode, a week before the actual spring break and are surprised to find themselves almost the lone inhabitants of the hotel. Everything is perfectly choreographed on film, while off camera, things get chaotic, leading to a scene where a drunk Trisha brings the party downstairs up to the penthouse where things get quickly out of control, leaving the entire cast huddled together in the bathroom trying to keep the parties out. What didn't I love about this book? If I could have given more than five enchantments, I would have. THE REAL REAL is the perfect summer read. From the moment I picked it up, I was immediately pulled into Jesse's world and didn't stop till I reached the final page, where I seriously hoped there was going to be a teaser of a sequel. Trust me, once you get to the end, you want to know there is more of Jesse and these characters in your future. Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus are the authors of the New York Times bestsellers *The Nanny Diaries*, *Citizen Girl* and *Dedication*. They live and work in New York City. [...] Lisa Enchanting Reviews July 2009

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