



Skinny-dipping (Au Pairs)

By *Melissa de la Cruz*



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Same Hamptons,

all new games

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Your favorite bikini-clad au pairs are back. But this summer, if it's possible, they will have more fun, more sun, and more romance than they know how to handle.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Hot Beach Reading!"

-- PW

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 Ashley's* 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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Chapter One: Eliza discovers fire & brimstone is a new cosmo flavor

It didn't look like much, but then that was probably because it was three o'clock in the afternoon, and Seventh Circle, the newest, soon-to-be-hottest club in the Hamptons, wouldn't get going until after midnight. A potato barn in its former life, Seventh Circle was a large, brown-shingled, rambling wood building set back in the Southampton woods. Only a discreet sign off the highway (seven circles posted to a tree, natch) let the initiated know they had arrived at their destination.

Eliza Thompson steered her black Jetta into the parking lot, feeling at once pleased and apprehensive. She examined her makeup in the rearview mirror, applied a thick layer of lip gloss, stuck two fingers inside her mouth, and pulled them out slowly, just like *Allure* suggested, in order to avoid a grandmother-esque lipstick-on-teeth situation.

She checked for detritus of Chanel Glossimer. Nothing. Perfect.

Eliza grabbed her bag -- the season's covetable metallic leather Balenciaga motorcycle clutch. Eliza had bought it in Palm Beach, during the week she'd spent as a vacation au pair for the Perrys last winter. Inside was a rolled-up resume that listed her sparkling attributes: a Spence education (up until her parents' bankruptcy last year and their subsequent move to Buffalo, that is), an internship at *Jane* (which had entailed fetching nonfat soy lattes and alphabetizing glitter nail polish), and a reference from her longtime friend and Manhattan boy-about-town, Kit Ashleigh.

Life was almost great again for Eliza. Okay, sure, the Thompsons were still living in Buffalo -- a far, far cry from the posh life they'd left behind in New York City -- but they had moved from a sordid little rental to a proper three-bedroom condominium in the only luxury high-rise in the city. With a little help from some old friends and loyal clients, her dad was slowly getting back on his feet, and there was money for such things as thousand-dollar handbags again. (Well, there was credit at least.) With her grades and SAT scores (top 99th percentile -- Eliza was no dummy), there was a good chance she would be able to wing financial aid and get into Princeton after all. This summer her parents were even renting a little Cape Cod in Westhampton. It had the smallest pool Eliza had ever seen -- it was practically a bathtub! -- but still, it was a house, it was theirs (for the summer), and it was in the Hamptons.

The only thing keeping Eliza off balance was the Big Palm Beach Secret from last winter. Something had

happened while she was there that she'd rather forget, but news traveled fast in the Hamptons and Eliza knew she'd have to come clean soon enough. She brushed aside the thought for now -- it was time to focus on the task at hand: getting a job in the hottest new club in the Hamptons and recapturing her title as the coolest girl in town.

Before Buffalo and bankruptcy, Eliza had been famous for being the prettiest, most popular girl on the New York private school circuit. Sugar Perry, who now ruled in her stead, had been a mere wannabe when Eliza was on the scene. Eliza was the one who set the trends (white-blond highlights), knew about all the best parties (Tuesdays at Butter), and dated the hottest guys (polo-playing Charlie Borshok, who was now Sugar's boyfriend as well). Being "outed" as a poor au pair last summer had changed all that, but this was a new year, a new summer, and a new Eliza -- who just happened to look a lot like the *old* Eliza, the girl everyone wanted to know and all the other girls wanted to *be*.

It was still drizzling, the end of a typical early June East End rainstorm, as Eliza slid quickly out of her Jetta, which she'd begged her parents to lease her for the summer, and checked her cell phone for any missed calls from Jeremy. Last summer, Eliza had fallen in love with Jeremy Stone, the Perrys' hunky nineteen-year-old gardener, but they'd broken up over the winter since they lived so far away from each other. Now that summer was here, Eliza was dying to see him again. She wasn't exactly sure where Jeremy would fit in with her plans for getting back on top of the social scene, since he wasn't rich or famous (although he was very, very cute), but she did know her plans *included* him, and she hoped that would be good enough. With no missed calls or new texts, Eliza stuffed her phone back in her clutch and headed toward the club.

The door was hanging open, so she let herself inside. Seventh Circle was supposed to be *the* place to be this summer, but here it was, a week after Memorial Day, and it hadn't even opened yet. There was a thick layer of fresh sawdust on the floor, and a full construction crew was barking orders at one another. The barn had been retrofitted to accommodate a U-shaped zinc bar, and against the back wall stood a built-in glass liquor cabinet almost twenty-five feet high. The guys looked up when they spied Eliza. Several whistled at the sight of her tanned legs underneath her pink smocked Juicy tube dress. It was the kind of dress that made everyone else who wore it look fat or pregnant, but on Eliza it looked cute and sexy.

"Hi, I'm here to see the owners -- Alan or Kartik?" Eliza said, pulling her long blond hair into a high ponytail.

One of the hard hats grunted and pointed a finger toward the back of the club. Eliza stepped over a paint tray delicately, picking her way past the sawhorses and a couple of dusty potato sacks, toward two guys yammering into their cell phone headsets.

They were the self-styled kings of Manhattan nightlife, and while their press clippings might reach to the ceiling, neither was taller than five-five, and Eliza towered over both of them in her four-inch Louboutin platforms. Alan Whitman was balding and dough-faced, but he'd been legendary since ninth grade at Riverdale, when he'd begun his career selling pot at the Limelight. He'd oozed his way up a string of downtown hot spots until he'd raised enough money to open his trio of celebrity playgrounds -- Vice, Circus, and Lowdown. He liked to say that before he'd gotten his hands on Paris Hilton, she was just a cute little Dwight sophomore in a rolled-up uniform skirt. He'd been the one who'd waived Paris past the ID check and had personally alerted gossip columnists when she was dancing on the tables -- or falling off them -- on any given night. His partner, Kartik (one name only), a Miami transplant, had been friends with Madonna back when he was still a teenager and she was still a dog-collar-wearing pop icon, not a dowdy children's book author who answered to the name Esther.

"What do you mean the liquor license is delayed? Are you serious?" Alan whined into his receiver.

"Babycakes, of course we've got the permits in hand," Kartik smoothly promised on his cell. "We're ready to roll. We're all set for the after-party, no problem!"

Eliza stood aside patiently, watching the guys tell two different stories on their phones. It was inspirational, really: If Alan Whitman could transform himself from some geeky kid who sold oregano dime bags out of his Eastman backpack into New York's most sought-after nightclub promoter, then surely she, Eliza Thompson, could find a way to reinvent herself from fallen Manhattan It Girl into Hamptons royalty. After all, Eliza had always wanted to be a princess.

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Users Review

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