



Isabella for Real

Margie Palatini , LeUyen Pham (Illustrations)

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When Isabella Antonelli becomes an overnight YouTube sensation in a documentary detailing her REAL, non-royal Italian American family, she needs to figure out a way to tell everyone at her fancy new school the truth about her family—or come up with some better lies. Brimming with offbeat humor, *Isabella for Real* sets the scene for an eccentric, multi-generational family drama that will have readers laughing out loud and giving Isabella's performance a standing ovation.

Isabella for Real Details

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Author : Margie Palatini , LeUyen Pham (Illustrations)

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From Reader Review Isabella for Real for online ebook

Peg says

Isabella learns that fame is not all it's cracked up to be when she allows an honest misunderstanding to become reality in the minds of her classmates. She's an average, white, Italian girl from a New Jersey town who has recently entered a private school. A rumor has led to the belief that she is the daughter of a contessa. When her cousin's college film project becomes a YouTube sensation, Isabella does indeed become famous. The videos show her wittily narrating real life, complete with her eccentric, mostly older, extended family and illustrating many stereotypes about New Jerseyites and Italian-Americans. Isabella worries about her new friends' reaction to her deception and unsuccessfully undertakes some damage control with the help of some neighbors. Fortunately for Isabella, her somewhat wacky family keeps her grounded and her school friends aren't as snobby as she fears. Quirky characters of all ages, many food and Sinatra references, and a lot of humor populate the narrative, which is written as diary entries. It's all a bit far-fetched, yet relatable to middle school-age readers who are trying to find themselves and make their way at home and school. The impact of social media on one's life and reputation is integrated well without being didactic. Pham's cartoon illustrations, formatted as comic strips, propel the story along. There are times that the narrative goes on too long with conversations filled with references the intended audience won't be able to appreciate; but the overall humor and relevance will draw readers.

Thanks to Net Galley for a review copy.

Mark Buxton says

My name is Isabella, and my life is out of control. It's all my cousin's fault. All I did was agree to let him make a video of me being myself. How bad could that be? I didn't expect him to post the videos on YouTube, and I certainly never expected them to get eleven million views! I now find myself hiding from reporters and cameramen all around my house. And what am I going to do when school starts again next week? I kind of let my friends believe my mom is Italian royalty, and the school elections are next week. I know I should have told the truth in the first place, but I just couldn't find a way to change their minds. Now, with the real me all over YouTube, what am I going to do?

The beginning of the plot started a bit slowly for me, but the whole book was less than one-hundred pages. I guess the "slow" start was just the result of vague events. Isabella was hiding out, hinted at her problems, but didn't clearly share why the reporters were lurking outside her house. The plot skipped around a bit as it mixed the present problem with the paparazzi with flashbacks to how the video and school problems started. Actually, the whole book could really happen to someone. Home videos posted on YouTube that become viral sensations? Potential friends at a new school with misinformation about the new kid? The new kid wants to be accepted, so she keeps quiet? Far-fetched series of events, but it's all possible. Overall, it was a fun story based on today's technology. Young readers should be able to identify with the problems and should enjoy the whole story.

Tamara (Tamaraniac) says

This was cute! A nice little middle grade romp intensely focused on one huge Italian-American family in

New Jersey. It all starts with a ridiculous case of mistaken identity, and you meet a lot of interesting characters. It's also written sort of like a script, (with takes and scene changes) and has a couple of scenes in a comic book form.

What I Liked:

- Isabella's eccentric relatives.
- The food talk. Mmm. I want to eat it all.
- Interesting concept with unexpected internet stardom being the think to actually CAUSE the problems.

What I Didn't Like:

- Changing from the comic book parts to the written parts felt very abrupt. I enjoyed the illustrated parts the most, so I almost wanted the entire thing to be a graphic novel?
- It was very confusing at the beginning. It was a while before anything was actually explained.
- Not very exciting. The conflict was there but didn't feel like a big deal.
- It ended up being a sort of full circle situation with not much resolution.

Abby G says

I feel like a lot more background information would have helped this book a lot.

Ekta says

A sixth grader gets caught up in a tangle of lies in her new school after failing to tamp down a set of rumors. When the rumors get exposed for what they are, the girl must figure out how she will keep her new friends and save face while navigating her enriching but sometimes frustrating family relationships. Author Margie Palatini offers middle grade readers a lighthearted, simple read in the pleasant book *Isabella for Real*.

Isabella Antonelli has a big problem. Within minutes of arriving at her new fancy private school, she meets Emory, Oakleigh, and Anisha who think she's the daughter of a contessa. They have it from a reliable source that Isabella's family has a villa in Italy and flies around on a private jet. Their eyes shine in awe as they approach Isabella and initiate a friendship, and they reassure her they will keep her secret so she's not overwhelmed by the other students.

Even though she tries to set the record straight, Isabella finds herself eventually agreeing with the girls. The trouble is that Isabella's family doesn't own a private jet or a villa. The connection to Italy is real, but that's because her family is Italian. And there is a contessa in Isabella's family, but she isn't a real contessa. At one time Isabella's Aunt Kiki was the star of the popular soap opera *Search for Truth, Lies and Love*, and on the show Aunt Kiki played a rich contessa who lived in the lap of luxury.

In this day and age of information overload, the fact that anyone could believe that Aunt Kiki really is the contessa stymies Isabella. Clearly Emory, Oakleigh, and Anisha must have stumbled on one of the websites set up by a hardcore fan of the cancelled soap and assumed the fictional world presented by the fan is real. As all the girls begin developing their friendship, it gets harder for Isabella to tell the truth.

It seems like Isabella's plan to keep up the charade will pan out, until her older cousin, Vincent, asks her for

help. Isabella likes her new friends, but her family comes first and she will do anything for them. Vincent is working on a project in one of his college filmmaking courses and wants Isabella to host a series of web videos about their extended family. Despite her initial reluctance, Isabella agrees and talks to Vincent's camera as the two of them visit different relatives up and down their street. The visits reveal homes that are a far cry from fancy villas, but they also show loving family members who are loud and gregarious and fiercely loyal to one another.

The videos go viral on YouTube, and Isabella instantly realizes her mistake. With her home life on display for anyone to see online, it's clear that she's not the daughter of a contessa. Far from it. So what happens now? Will Emory, Oakleigh, and Anisha want to continue their friendship? Has Isabella killed her chances of fitting in at her new school? And why won't Frankie Domenico from down the street just leave her alone already?

Author Margie Palatini has created an incredibly likeable protagonist in Isabella. Readers in Palatini's target audience will definitely identify with Isabella's problem and her insecurities in going to a new school. Isabella's endearing family will draw in readers like a warm hug.

Adults might complain that some of Palatini's plot devices reinforce stereotypes, but any stereotype fulfillment is benign. The bigger problem, from a writing standpoint, comes in a story question that Palatini raises a few times in the book. An event in the final scene closes the loop created by that question, but the event feels forced. It also contributes absolutely nothing to the larger story on hand.

Overall, however, Palatini's book reinforces positive messages and a strong lesson for target readers and does so in a plain way. Where other books try to dress up teachings in fancy words or plots, Palatini comes straight to the point in a way that ends up being refreshing. The final scene aside, I believe Isabella for Real is Bordering on Bookmarking it.

(I volunteered to review this book based on my objective reading of it.)

Cindy says

I liked this book, but it could be improved upon. The concept is great and very engaging. However, I felt the book could have been more polished. I noticed a few proofreading errors. Also, the beginning was a bit confusing to me. Overall though, it is a great book, and I can't wait to recommend it to my students. They will love it!

Rachael says

Wavered between two and three stars. Definitely a middle grade that leans more towards landing in the teen section? I don't know, it's hard to say. Here's the main issue with the book: Isabella makes note that she's not too good with the pronouns, is decent in spelling, and grows up in a family of nonnative English speakers. By her own admission she doesn't know what assumption means, but her are three words/phrases that she (an eleven year old sixth grader) uses: perjury, hermetically sealed, and corpuscle.

So, the book itself is cute, the addition of comic sections is nice, but man did those words seem completely

out of place.

Jay G says

Want to see more bookish things from me? Check out my Youtube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfer...>

I received this book from a Goodreads giveaway in exchange for my honest review

1.5 Stars

Isabella Antonelli is caught in a big lie. The friends at her new school believe she is the daughter of a countess. When the truth about her real identity comes out after her cousin posts videos of her real self on YouTube, Isabella needs to figure out how she is going to come clean about her lies to her new friends.

The book is very fast paced and easily read in one sitting. I liked the inclusion of the comic strips and the story was funny at times. I felt the story was a bit boring and nothing really happened in it. There was a good message in the end, but this will not be a memorable book for me.

TJL says

This was just...

This was just *not* good.

There was no coherent plot here. We're jumping back and forth *constantly* and unnecessarily to explain something that could have been explained in one sitting. It took so many more pages than was necessary to get to what it was that had Isabella so upset about the videos going viral. The plot bounces around so much that it's hard to keep track of what's going on.

And that's saying something, because *not much is going on here*.

It was just completely incoherent. Glad I didn't buy it.

Jessika Santulli says

I wanted to like it, but the writing was all over the place and choppy. Sometimes I couldn't understand what was going on. Isabella's Italian family was cute but more of a caricature and not that funny. Give it a try if you like middle grade humor, maybe you will think differently.

Kristina Jean Lareau says

3.5 stars

An amusing and energetic book about an Italian-American family and how complicated lies can become. Hilarious and fast paced dialogue. Unfortunately, the plot dragged a bit.

Cindy Hudson says

Isabella is in a pickle. When she started at a fancy new private school her new friends thought she was secretly someone rich and famous, and she went along with their misperception. Then videos her cousin took of her family's real life went viral, and her friends discovered the truth. Over the course of one day she will try to make things right while dodging the media, relying on her old best friend, and getting help from her crush.

Isabella for Real by Margie Palatini is a cute look at how a little fib can spiral into something larger, especially these days when home videos can go viral and the whole world can see what's real. Isabella is part of a large Italian-American family of several generations that lives on the same block in New Jersey. The eccentric characters are endearing, if sometimes hard to follow. The cast of characters illustrations at the end help readers keep everyone straight.

Graphic novel-like scenes with illustrations by LeUyen Pham provide fun breaks to the narrative while keeping the story moving along. Isabella for Real is a quick, fun read for ages 9 to 12. And don't be surprised if it leaves you wanting to try all kinds of eggplant dishes, perfect for planning a book club meal.

The publisher provided me with a copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

Matthew says

Review copy provided by NetGalley

This had a rough start in that it was difficult to discern what was going on in the early stages, but it got a lot better after the first twenty pages when everything slowly became clearer. Isabella is living a double life, one where she is the daughter of a famous countess at school with her new friends, but the rest of the time is a normal adolescent girl with a quirky family. The trouble is, since the countess life is a complete fabrication built around misinformation and a lack of redirection on Isabella's part, she has to pedal hard beneath it to keep it up, and it's not going so well. Unfortunately, her real life just got a lot of unplanned attention in the form of a viral sensation YouTube documentary that showcases Isabella being real and describing her family's many peculiarities. The documentary was never intended for broad public consumption, and as her other (fake) life comes apart because of it, we meet Isabella for the first time.

The story follows Isabella as she tries to avoid the inevitable or at the very least subdue it long enough to let go of the facade at her own desired pace. It's no easy task, one that is almost certain to fail, but through her efforts to prolong doing the wrong thing, Isabella finds herself extending to trust to new people and reexamining the implications of her decisions over the past few months as she comes to grips with herself

and just what she has allowed herself to become. Ultimately, this unintended self-examination allows her to make decisions that neither she nor the readers would have expected when the story began.

Laid out in an unusual format, this is a combination of movie storyboard and comic strip, though the heart of the story is presented in a traditional narrative chapter book style. It does drop you right into the heat of the worst of moments for Isabella at the beginning, which will certainly leave readers confused at the start, but hopefully intrigued enough to continue because the story does gradually all come clear if readers simply hang on long enough.

By its end, I ended up liking this a lot more than I thought I would at the beginning. It reads like it's middle grade, though it might have appeal in the tweens group as well as the plot seems to be more for that age group. Though I'm a big Palatini fan due to her picture books, this is not a bad book with another audience in mind. I'll bring it to my library when it's available.

Christine H says

I bet we've all wondered how our lives would change if we were all of a sudden famous, right? *Squinks*, here's a great story about a little girl named Isabella who suddenly finds fame ... and finds out that it's not quite what she expected it to be.

1. I don't know that I've ever truly wanted to be famous. As the eldest child, I know what it's like to have siblings watching and copying my every move, so I don't think I would've enjoyed being in the limelight much. One of the biggest reasons I liked *Isabella for Real* is that Isabella's expectations of fame change very quickly once she finds it. I know she doesn't really ask to be famous, but I loved the struggle she has with figuring it all out.
2. My family is pretty kooky, so I completely enjoyed meeting all of Isabella's eccentric relatives. Plus, they keep her grounded, which is what all good families should do, so I'm glad she can count on them (even if they are sometimes sources of potential embarrassment).
3. I first fell in love with LeUyen Pham's illustration when I read the *Alvin Ho* stories. The drawings are just wonderful, and the comic strips in this story really propel it along. To be honest, I wonder why the entire story wasn't written in comic strips.
4. I like epistolary novels and diary stories. There's something about the first-person perspective that just works with certain books, and this is one of them. I like that *Isabella for Real* combines movie storyboards, comic strips, diary entries, and traditional narrative. That's kind of how my mind is.
5. I'm glad that this book tackles the highs and lows of social media. Smart phones and social apps weren't really around in my day (dinosaur times, I know), so the problems that arise from them have only begun to find their way into MG and YA stories. For this reason alone, I think *Isabella for Real* would be valuable in any elementary library or classroom. (And for when the kids are older: Sophie Kinsella has a very funny take on Instagram in her novel *My Not-So-Perfect Life*.)

Lola says

3.5 stars. I think we've all wondered, at least once, what our lives would look like if we were to become famous.

Well, Isabella's wondering – had she any – has ended, for she is the newest little star on YouTube!

She didn't ask for the fame that came with having millions of people watch her brother's videos in which she is featured, but she got it anyway.

The funniest thing is that the double life she is living at school is not even regarding all that.

I truly enjoyed myself with "Isabella for Real." It's not a very long novel, but even knowing that, I wasn't planning on finishing it in one sitting.

But it's just so fast-paced and... energetic! The characters are lively and light and a delight to read about.

And kudos to the illustrator for creating such fun comic strips. They definitely added originality to this book and kept me invested in the story.

With that sudden ending, I am to assume that there will be a sequel. Hopefully, my assumption is right, otherwise, the ending is a very bad one.

"Isabella for Real" is a must-read for middle graders!

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