

my parents
are sex
Maniacs...

by
Robyn Harding



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Sienna and I are sitting cross-legged on my lavender bedspread while our parents are downstairs having after-dinner drinks. My mom cooked a special meal to celebrate Sienna's mom, Sunny, winning Sifton Realty's salesperson of the year award. As soon as we'd finished our beef bourguignon and roasted potatoes, we absconded to the privacy of my bedroom. I'd wanted to hang around for the raspberry cheesecake, but Sienna doesn't really do dessert.

"So," I say to my best friend, who is staring at the tips of her French manicure, "do you want to work on our designs?"

Sienna and I are going to become fashion designers when we finish high school. We're going to move to New York, where she'll attend Parsons School of Design (she has a flair for fashion) and I'll go to the School of Visual Arts (I have natural artistic ability). We'll share a small apartment until we get our degrees, then we'll move into some enormous loft space in Nolita and launch our empire.

Sienna shrugs. "I'm not really in a very fashion design-y mood."

"... Okay. Do you want to look at some of the designs I did for our label instead?" We'd spent many hours trying to find

the right name for our business. Since we are about to become the next Dolce & Gabbana (except, obviously, we're not gay Italian ex-lovers), I'd suggested Harrison & Marshall. But we'd both agreed it didn't have much cachet. My next idea was a combination of our first names: Louise and Sienna—LouSi. I still think this is kind of clever, but Sienna prefers Sienna Lou. She thinks it has a sort of Daisy Duke appeal.

I kneel on my off-white carpet and extract the large sketch pad I keep hidden under my bed. It's not that I'm ashamed of my drawings; I'm actually quite proud of the work Sienna and I have done. It's just that we've decided to keep our fashion empire plans from our parents and classmates so it will have more impact when we make it big in New York. I also don't want my younger brother, Troy, to find them. He'll totally make fun of our designs, and I don't need him messing with my fragile artist's ego.

Flipping through the sketch pad, I stop at a brightly colored page. "These are the Sienna Lou designs," I explain, handing the pad over. "And I threw in a few LouSi's... just for fun, I guess."

Sienna glances briefly at the curlicues of the first logos, her eyes flitting over the more angular, modern versions. There is an unmistakable expression of indifference on her lightly tanned, flawless face. She pulls her blue eyes away and looks at me.

"What do you think of Dean Campbell?"

The question is somewhat jarring. I mean, we're talking about our *label* here—our life's passion, our calling, our *future!* With some effort, I mentally conjure the swarthy, weather-beaten face of Dean Campbell. What do I think of him? The

short answer is: I don't. Dean Campbell is *old*. I'm not sure how old, but his dark stubble gives the impression he could grow a full Santa Claus-style beard if he wanted to. I also have a feeling that the Von Dutch trucker hat he always wears is hiding a receding hairline.

"Why?" I ask, troubled by Sienna's interest in him.

She shrugs. "I don't know. I saw him at McDonald's last night and we kind of had a . . . thing."

"A *thing*?"

"Like a look. You know . . . a *moment*."

Ewww! I don't say this out loud, however. Instead, I say, "Isn't he going out with Tracey Morreau?"

Sienna shrugs again. "I hear they're having problems."

"How old is he?" I ask as nonchalantly as possible. I don't want to sound childish. Despite the fact that Sienna and I are both sixteen, she seems at least a couple of years older. This is probably because she's had a body like Pamela Anderson's since she was about twelve. I've recently developed smallish breasts, but let's face it: no one is going to be hiring me to jog in slow motion in a bathing suit any time soon.

Sienna says, "I think he's, like, twenty-four or something."

"God! That's practically thirty!" Oops. My cool facade has slipped. I try to cover. "That's like . . . just a *little* bit old for you, don't you think?"

My best friend rolls her eyes. "Tracey Morreau's only seventeen and she's going out with him."

"Yeah, and Tracey Morreau is a total skank!"

Sienna laughs. "True. But there's something kind of *exciting* about an older guy, don'tcha think?"

“I guess,” I say, completely unconvinced. Though Sienna and I have both spent our entire lives in the suburban community of Langley, she seems to have a maturity and sophistication I lack. This could be because of her enormous boobs—or maybe it’s my mother’s dictatorial supervision of my television and movie viewing? Whatever the reason, I guess I’m still too juvenile to see the appeal of a guy who is already going bald.

Suddenly, my bedroom door bursts open and I quickly flip my sketch pad over to conceal our logo designs. Troy is standing in the doorway with Sienna’s kid brother, Brody, slightly behind his stick-thin form. Troy addresses Sienna. “Your parents are leaving.”

“Kay,” she says, staring at her manicure.

“Okay!” I yell as my fourteen-year-old brother lingers in the entryway. “We heard you. Good-bye!” It’s revolting how Troy takes any opportunity he can get to ogle Sienna.

Troy’s eyes narrow as he glares at me. “Fat bitch,” he says venomously.

“Get lost!” I shriek, hurling a tissue box at him. Troy closes the door in the nick of time. “God,” I say to Sienna, “brothers are so annoying.”

“Yeah.” She gets off my bed. “At least my brother’s practically mute.”

Slowly, Sienna and I make our way downstairs to where our parents are gathered near the front door. My mom is handing plastic containers of food to Sienna’s father, Keith. My dad is helping Sunny into her white rabbit-fur coat. “Just heat the meat up right in the wine sauce,” my mom is instructing. “You can microwave it, but I find it tastes

better if you put it on the stove and let it simmer for a while.”

“Are you getting all this, Keith?” Sunny says to her husband. I can hear the gin and tonics in her voice. “You know my talents don’t lie in the kitchen.”

“Oh, really?” my dad asks suggestively, hands on her rabbit-covered shoulders.

“Why, Len Harrison,” Sunny says, slapping at him playfully. “I had no idea you had such a dirty mind. I meant my talents lie in the *office*, of course. Get your mind out of the gutter!”

Sienna shoots me a look and rolls her eyes. We hate when our parents get tipsy and make these sorts of pervy comments.

“Of course... the office...” My dad plays along.

“That’s a good idea.” Sienna’s dad gives his wife a randy wink. “We should try out some of your *talents* in the office.”

“Well,” my mom says a little awkwardly (thankfully, she is not as depraved as the rest of them), “you don’t get to be the number-one salesperson for Sifton Realty without talent.”

“Why, Denise Burroughs! What are you saying?” Sunny gasps. “Every real estate transaction I’ve done was based on my sales skills alone. My *talents* never came into it.”

“They better not have!” Keith booms. All the adults are laughing now, although my mom looks kind of uncomfortable.

Sienna leans over to me. “Would you go and get me a bucket, please? I think I’m going to spew.” I give her a knowing smile.

Sunny's frosted blonde head swivels in its fur collar. "Where are my kids? Sienna? Brody?"

"We're right here," Sienna snaps. "Geez!"

"Oh, there's my precious girl!" Sunny cries, planting a bright pink kiss on her daughter's cheek. Sienna makes a face.

"Okay, let's get you home," Keith says, grabbing his wife's arm. He is this huge, bearlike man, and I've always thought he and Sunny look weird together. She is just so freakishly tiny. Keith turns to my mom. "Thank you for a wonderful dinner, Denise. And thank you for taking pity on us and giving us these leftovers."

"Right," Sunny says, "so now you want me to be Betty frickin' Crocker! I didn't hear any complaints last night when I—"

"All right, all right," my dad interrupts, thank god. "You'd better get home to bed now. See you at the office tomorrow."

We stand on the porch as the Marshalls' minivan backs out of our driveway. I can see my breath in the cold February air as I wave at Sienna, sitting somewhere behind the darkened windows. When the taillights have disappeared, I follow my parents back inside.

My mom makes her way to the kitchen. "He's got his hands full with that one," she chuckles, shaking her head.

My dad follows. "I get a kick out of her," he says, going to the counter and pouring two fingers of scotch into a tumbler. "If I had to lose out on salesperson of the year, I'm glad it was to her."

My mom is busily putting food into the fridge. "Sunny and I have been friends since college, and I love her dearly,

but, frankly, I don't know how she does it all. I mean, the career, the children, the marriage... Something's going to suffer, and I just hope it's not the kids."

I could point out here that Sienna and Brody don't appear to be suffering at all. Sure, Brody is weirdly quiet, but he seems perfectly happy. And Sienna is flourishing despite growing up in a household with two working parents who share very permissive views toward the media, fashion, and makeup. In fact, I think her parents' leniency contributes greatly to Sienna's incredible popularity at Red Cedars Secondary. But I don't bother. I already know that my mom is completely unconcerned with my lack of social status. And I'm not in the mood for another lecture on how "developing self-esteem and becoming a strong, self-actualized adult is much more important than winning a popularity/beauty/fashion contest."

My dad takes a sip of his scotch and flips open a real estate magazine. "Well, not every family is lucky enough to have a mom like you. We'd fall apart without you. Isn't that right, kids?"

"Yup," Troy says. He is trying to bounce a tennis ball off his puny bicep and catch it with the same hand. I swear he has ADD, but my parents would rather live in denial than have him tested.

"Yeah," I agree. "Can I have some of that raspberry cheesecake?"

Troy makes an oinking noise. My mom says calmly, "Yes, you may have some cheesecake, Louise. Troy, your sister is not fat. She just has the Burroughs build. Look at your Uncle Leon. He's a very large man."

“Louise is a very large man too,” Troy quips, accidentally sending the tennis ball flying toward the dining room wall.

“And you’re a scrawny midget!” I yell.

“Enough! Both of you!” my dad bellows. “Troy, put that goddamn tennis ball away and get ready for bed. Louise, eat your cheesecake if you think you need it and get off to bed too.”

All the criticism and strife have taken some of the enjoyment out of the long-awaited cheesecake, but it’s very good nonetheless. I eat in silence as my mom wipes the counters, keeping a running monologue about how, of course, some outside validation would be nice, but being a homemaker is a legitimate career choice and not to be dismissed like some part-time hobby. My dad is still at the breakfast bar, nursing his scotch and flicking through the magazine.

When I’m finished, I put my plate in the dishwasher. “That was delicious, Mom,” I say. “Seriously, it was like a famous chef made it or something.”

While I am trying to provide her with some validation for her stay-at-home mom role, she responds with a rather indifferent, “Thanks, honey. Off to bed now.”



The next day at school, Sienna finds me at my locker right before lunch. As usual, she is flanked by Jessie Gray and Kimber Bentley. While they don't look particularly alike, there is something similar about the three of them. They're all pretty, stylish, and tiny. Obviously, none of them has a very large Uncle Leon, and if they do, they certainly don't take after him.

"Coming?" Sienna asks.

"Yeah, I'll just grab my lunch," I reply, digging in my locker.

"Ugh," Kimber says, eyeing my burgeoning lunch bag. "I am so not eating today. I was, like, a total pig last night."

Sienna smirks. "What did you have?"

"Only a whole tub of Ben & Jerry's Half Baked."

"Get out! The whole tub?"

Jessie says, "I believe it. Have you seen this girl? She eats ice cream like a mia."

Kimber gasps. "I'm no puker!"

We all laugh, though I can feel my cheeks getting warm. I'm fairly sure that to these three Nicole Richie look-alikes, eating anything more than carrot sticks and diet soda

qualifies as binge-eating. Girls their size just don't understand what it takes to sustain a large build like mine.

As I close my locker, our laughter is interrupted by the appearance of Aaron Hansen. Aaron's locker has been beside mine for the past two years—Hansen, Harrison—ever since Mandy Hapwell moved to San Diego. “Hey, Louise,” he says, maneuvering his slight frame through us to open his locker.

“Oh . . . hey, Aaron.”

He works at his combination lock. “Are you going to stagecraft after school today?”

I try to ignore the looks exchanged between Jessie and Kimber. Obviously, stagecraft club does not qualify as a cool after-school activity—not like going to the mall or flat-ironing your hair. I clear my throat. “Uh . . . yeah, maybe.”

“You should come,” Aaron says, yanking open his lock. “We're blocking scene four of *Rent*.”

“Right.”

“Ohhh,” Jessie says. “Blocking scene four? That sounds way cool.”

“Totally,” Kimber adds with a malicious giggle.

Aaron reaches into his locker and pulls out his lunch bag. As usual, he's completely unfazed by their catty comments. He looks at me. “See ya later, maybe.”

“Maybe,” I say with an indifferent shrug. Any show of enthusiasm in front of Kimber and Jessie would be highly uncool.

Aaron walks away, nonchalantly whistling, “Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes . . .”

Watching him go, Jessie says, “Steven Spielberg called. He wants his job back.”

Kimber laughs. “I know what you mean. He’s so, like . . .”

“*Serious*,” Sienna finishes with a roll of her eyes.

“Yeah. He’s so *serious*. Like, what is with that?” Kimber says.

“Hello?” Jessie says. “You’re in, like, eleventh grade. You’re not going to win an Academy Award for your stupid play.” They all laugh.

“A Tony Award,” I say.

“What?” Three pairs of eyes turn to me.

“Uh . . . he’s not going to win a *Tony* Award for his stupid play. Academy Awards are for movies and Tony Awards are for plays.”

Jessie snorts derisively. “Whatever. He’s not going to win anything for a stupid high-school play.”

“*Totally*,” I agree with a mocking laugh. At least I’m trying to sound mocking, but I’m afraid I just sound lame.

As we walk down the halls to the cafeteria, I wisely keep from expressing any further thoughts on the subject. They would only make fun of me if I told them that I think Aaron Hansen is a really talented director. Besides, Kimber, Jessie, and Sienna are of the opinion that all extracurricular activities are lame. And stagecraft club, in particular, is extra lame. The only reason I’m not ostracized for my attendance is that Sienna supports me honing my artistic abilities on set design. This will only help us when we launch Sienna Lou. But as uncool as it is, I really enjoy painting sets and organizing props. I even think it might be a good career choice, you know . . . just in case things don’t quite take off with the fashion design thing. I wouldn’t be my mother’s daughter if I didn’t have a backup plan.

Seated at our usual table, Kimber cracks open a can of Coke Zero. “So, Audrey’s party’s going to be awesome.”

“I know. I can’t wait.” Jessie adds, “I’ve got to get something new to wear.”

Sienna says, “Me too. Let’s go shopping!”

“I want to lose three pounds first,” Jessie says, nibbling a cucumber slice.

With practiced indifference, I bite into my ham and cheese sandwich. My casual air is meant to conceal the fact that this is the first I’ve heard about the party of the year. While Sienna’s popularity has given me a free pass into the in-crowd, times like this just reinforce how tenuous my position really is. I would never be here, at this table, surrounded by the most popular girls at Red Cedars, if not for my friendship with Sienna. Thankfully, our moms have been friends forever and we’ve practically grown up together. While I can’t deny that I’m lucky not to be relegated to one of the loser tables, my exclusion from Audrey’s party just reminds me I don’t really belong.

But my blasé attitude doesn’t fool my best friend. Sienna can read me like a book. “Didn’t you get Audrey’s text message?”

I shoot her a look. Sienna knows perfectly well I don’t have a cell phone. My mom has a number of reasons for banning them, the top three being

1. She doesn’t want me to get a brain tumor.
2. She doesn’t want me to be distracted by the phone while driving/walking/eating, thus crashing/being run over/choking.
3. Being in constant contact with my friends will nega-

tively influence the bond I have with my parents, leading me to search for positive role models within my peer group, resulting in uninformed and pressured decision-making, not unlike *Lord of the Flies*.

“Oh, right,” Sienna says, “the no-phone policy. Well, that’s why you haven’t heard about it. Audrey sent everyone a text. But you’re totally coming! We’ll go together.”

I give her a small smile and my heart surges with gratitude. With Sienna around, I never feel left out for long.

As if on cue, our future hostess approaches the table, a nearly ubiquitous lollipop held in her manicured hand. “Ladies,” Audrey says, taking a seat next to Kimber, “can you tell me—what comes before Part B?”

“Partaaay!” my three companions cry in unison. Luckily, they drown out my questioning “Part A?”

“We were just talking about it,” Sienna says, taking a bite of her carrot stick.

“It’s going to be sooo fun,” Kimber gushes. “I don’t think I can wait three whole weeks.”

“You’ll have to,” Audrey says. “My parents aren’t going away until then.” She puts the lollipop in her mouth rather suggestively. “Besides, I’m not having a party until I get my highlights done.”

I look at her auburn hair. I’d never noticed before, but there are definitely some copper tones there.

“I want to get highlights too,” Sienna says, although her hair is already made up of several shades of blonde: honey, caramel, and wheat. I swear every strand of my hair is the same mousy brown.

“But your hair’s so gorgeous already!” Kimber says.

“I know!” Jessie agrees. “I totally hate you!”

Everyone laughs, but then Audrey wisely counsels. “It’ll have a lot more body once you get it done.”

“Yeah, I just have to ask my mom if she’ll shell out two hundred bucks for it,” Sienna replies.

For the second time in three minutes I feel out of my element. Whenever Sienna and her cohorts talk about beauty, fashion, or dieting, my contributions are few and far between. It’s not that I don’t care about my looks; I’m just not *consumed* by them. I could blame my mother for this. You can’t be constantly bombarded with female empowerment messages without some of them sinking in. But more likely it’s because I’m not really in the same league as these girls in the looks department. It’s not like I’m a complete ogre, but all four of them are utterly gorgeous. Okay, Kimber isn’t quite as pretty as the rest of them, but she makes up for it by spending hours flat-ironing her pale blonde hair. But since I will one day be one-half of the straight female version of Dolce & Gabbana, I should probably make more of an effort.

“I’m going to ask my mom about getting highlights too,” I say.

There is a moment of surprised silence, broken by Audrey. “That’s good, Louise.” There is something slightly condescending in her tone. Or maybe I’m just being paranoid.

“It would brighten up your face, for sure,” Kimber adds.

Sienna nods. “It would.”

“And while you’re at it,” Jessie contributes, “you should get some layers around your face.”

“It definitely needs some shaping,” Audrey says, picking up a dull strand of my shapeless hair.

Kimber furrows her brow. “I’d normally recommend a flat iron, but with the shape of her face, I think she needs more body.”

“There’re always hot rollers,” Jessie says.

The conversation continues in this manner for the entirety of the lunch hour. Really, they have all become quite passionate about my hair makeover. I know I should feel flattered. I’ve never had this much attention from Sienna’s friends. But while their comments are all well-intentioned and constructive, they’re making me feel even more insecure about my looks. By the time the bell rings, I realize that if my parents won’t pay for some highlights and shaping, I will have to commit suicide! Either that or join a convent, where my hair will be safely covered by one of those nun hats.

As we head to our next class, Sienna walks beside me. “Good for you,” she says. “I’m glad you’re making more of an effort with your hair and stuff.”

“Oh . . . well . . .” I laugh awkwardly, unsure how to respond.

She gives my arm a squeeze. “See you after school.”