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## Louise Kean

**The Perfect Fit**  
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**Q: You've spoken publicly about your experience with losing weight. Did you put a lot of personal experience into Sunny?**

A: Absolutely. I had been trying to write my third novel, a very different novel, for a while, but it just wasn't working—it didn't feel real, or true, or honest, and the characters felt two dimensional. The experience of losing lots of weight—of physically and emotionally changing so dramatically in quite a short space of time—was so overwhelming it was like a rollercoaster, and it simply took over my life, and I wanted to shout about it, but also understand for myself why I felt the way I did. I began writing my feelings down just to get a handle on what I was doing and thinking, and that writing seemed so much more valid than the other stuff I was writing, I thought, why not do both?

Looking back on it now, I don't understand how I got myself into a situation where my only motivation was 'how much will I lose this week?' I honestly don't know how I managed to become addicted to losing weight, but I guess if you have a certain kind of personality an addiction can easily creep up on you, much as my addiction to using food as a comfort had in the first place. But as Sunny notes, the response from those around me—not even the people I knew well but my newsagent and the lady at the train station who sold me tickets each morning—was so positive, that it proved addictive. I felt right, instead of wrong, for the first time in years. Now I can put it in to perspective, and understand that it wasn't just being thinner that they applauded, but the effort it takes to do something like that, but at the time it just felt like: lose another pound! Get another round of applause! I got caught up in it for a while, and the only way I could find to understand my feelings was to write about it. Sunny's therapy sessions were my therapy sessions in a way. I talked it through with myself to be able to understand it better, and it proved hugely cathartic.

**Q: Why do you think it is that being thin has assumed such a high level of importance for women in our society? It hasn't always been that way in history. Do you think that standards of beauty change in history due to other factors, such as economics for instance?**

A: Good question, but I have no real idea! Ultimately I think anything that is deemed 'unobtainable' is what is most desired. A suntan was considered crass and common and a by-product of being working class—working outdoors as manual labor—for many years, until Coco Chanel made it popular with her breaks on the Riviera, and all of a sudden it became a thing of aspiration, and a byproduct of sitting around all day in the sun with well-to-do friends! By this time most people worked inside, in factories or offices, and being able to sit in the sun was an expensive luxury, so then it became the thing that proved you had enough money not to work but to sit around all day in the sun, and it became unobtainable, and then it became desirable!

Plus, the way we eat has changed, of course—portion sizes are ridiculous, the amount of added sugar and fat in our meals is deplorable, and the choice on the supermarket shelves has exploded! There is just so much nice food to eat, and it is all attainable, which I guess is due to changes in economy, in the first world at least. Today it takes huge amounts of will power to resist all that food and all that choice, especially when you are having a bad day and food is such an easy crutch, and willpower can prove elusive for a lot of us, compared to the wonderful short term fix of a loaf of buttered bread, or a bar of candy. Being thin just proves you have willpower, i.e., the ability to deny yourself. It's a little twisted.

**Q: Do men, in your opinion, also have issues with self-esteem keyed to the way they look?**

A: Yes, but it's a recent phenomenon, and I don't think they rate themselves, or question themselves, or hate themselves, in the way women do if they are having a fat day, or a bad hair day, or an ugly day. If a (heterosexual) man looks in the mirror and questions what he sees, it's a brief nod of acknowledgement that they 'need to start running again' or 'lay off the beers for a couple of weeks' . . . and then they invariably go to the pub! That's what happens in the UK at least!

Historically women have been judged, and thus chosen, and thus supported by men, based on their looks. Of course the gender divide in employment and status is nowhere near as wide as it used to be—although of course it's still there—but men are still culturally programmed to look at women first, and talk to them second. And while the list of criteria that women judge themselves against has got longer, 'how do I look?' is still on the list. While women have gained more power in the last thirty years, we have also reached a situation where they have to be all things to all people—intelligent, successful, a domestic goddess, and attractive to the opposite sex. It's often said that a man can laugh at a woman into bed, but how often do you hear it said the other way around? As a woman if you choose to disregard your physical appearance altogether you can be choosing a very lonely road . . .

**Q: Do you enjoy the actual act of writing? What inspires you, and what sort of thing might hold you back?**

A: There are times that I love it and it's all I can think of doing. Then there are days when I would rather break my own toes with a hammer than sit in front of my computer . . . Getting started is often the hardest part, before you know your characters, and when you've just had a hint of a wisp of an idea, but you don't really know where to go with it, or whether you should even bother with it!

I like to read a lot of sociology books, and psychology books, as well as dipping in to some philosophy for inspiration—I like theories, I always have. I like 'here's an idea, what if . . . ?' so theoretical questions can get me started. But then also, as Sunny proves, it's the things that you go through to day to day that can end up just spilling out on the page as well. I like to be honest; I think people react to it. Plus bottling things up, as we Brits are known to do, can obviously just make issues seem bigger and more important than they are. The minute you spill the beans, be it on the page or to a friend or your mum or whoever, that issue that's been keeping you awake at night suddenly seems so trivial, or at least manageable.

However, I do still put off writing chapters with lots of different character voices. I am rubbish at getting my head around eight people contributing to one conversation. *Killing Love & Sex Over Dinner* is a case in point—I put it off for literally months!

**Q: Do you plan the whole plot of a novel in advance, or do you discover things about the characters and their behavior as you go along?**

A: I write a story arc, and map out who is going to do roughly what and where, and then I like to let it happen. It's more fun that way, for me at least! And I'm all about enjoying myself—writing a book takes me about a year after all, you've got to enjoy it along the way!