

# Strike it RICHELIE

She's FRIENDS with EVERYONE from the Kardashians to Cara Delevingne, was Michael Jackson's GOD-DAUGHTER and is Madonna's new MUSE. Say hello to Lionel's MODEL daughter Sofia Richie

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“**T**here are parents with wealth who just want their kids to be wealthy and then there are other parents with money who want to teach their kids how they got it. That's what my dad was like.” So says Sofia Richie, the youngest child of Grammy-winning soul music legend Lionel Richie and his second ex-wife Diane Alexander, reflecting on the nature of privilege.

It's a subject the 17-year-old model — younger sister of reality star turned fashion designer Nicole Richie — is well qualified to discuss. Her father has sold more than 100 million records, with hits like ‘Hello’ and ‘Three

Times a Lady’, and is worth a reported £150 million.

When I arrive at the Richie family home in a quiet, leafy enclave of Beverly Hills, the housekeeper lets me into the 1920s Renaissance-style villa and leads me to a golden-hued sunroom overlooking a pool and a large, terraced garden full of olive trees and bougainvillea. On the grand piano by the window, alongside a bust of civil rights leader Malcolm X, there are photos of Lionel with heavyweights from the worlds of entertainment and politics, such as the Obamas, who Sofia says ‘he loves’, Nelson Mandela and Leonardo DiCaprio.

Curling up on a powder-blue brocade sofa looking as though she's just tumbled out of bed, Sofia is petite and wildly pretty, her blonde hair accentuating her almond-shaped brown eyes. She's wearing a black Topshop T-shirt over loose, striped, pyjama-style cotton trousers, with delicate Cartier gold bangles jangling on her wrist.

DIOR jumper, £80 (dior.com)  
GRACE LEE petite baguette necklace, £540, at barneys.com. Earrings throughout, Grace Lee at barneys.com





PHILOSOPHY dress, £1,398,  
at barneys.com  
ALICE AND OLIVIA jumper,  
POA (aliceandolivia.com)  
CONVERSE Chuck Taylor  
All Star sneakers, £65  
(converse.com)  
GRACE LEE ring (on little  
finger), \$485, at barneys.com

Lionel Richie is on tour in Brazil; his daughter is home alone, apart from various members of staff. She's just had breakfast (egg whites and toast), and as we chat, the housekeeper delivers a mug of herbal tea.

Home-schooled for the past four years, Sofia started modelling on the recommendation of family and friends. She signed with a model agency at 15, clocking up assignments for *US Elle* and Italian *Marie Claire*, and was recently hired to be the face of Material Girl, Madonna and her 19-year-old daughter Lourdes Leon's fashion line. 'I'm obsessed with Madonna, so it was insane and overwhelming for me,' says Sofia. 'I have met her several times with my dad. I think she is a good role model because she is independent and strong.' She hasn't met Lourdes yet: 'We have a lot of mutual friends and they think we should link up, because we are so similar.'

Her family is exceptionally well-connected. Friends of the Richies include Diana Ross, who 'comes over to the house a bunch; she is super-cool', and Pharrell Williams, while Sofia's own friendship circle includes the ubiquitous Jenner sisters, Kylie and Kendall, and the entire Kardashian clan. She is close to Kyra Kennedy, great-niece of the late President John F Kennedy, and she says Talita von Furstenberg, the fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg's granddaughter, 'is one of my best friends in the whole world'. And the connections don't end there — she's also good friends with Paris Jackson, daughter of Michael, who's the same age: 'She is a great girl and has the best heart ever.'

### *When Michael Jackson died, "I got picked up from school early and didn't go back for a week. No one saw it coming"*

The pair have known each other since childhood. 'When we were little kids, Paris and I would be hanging out here with both of our dads.' The King of Pop, she says, was 'very soft-spoken, so sweet, my dad was really close to him'.

'I remember, when my parents were still together, I walked into their room and Michael was wearing a sparkly jacket. I was like, "Why are you wearing my mum's jacket?" Everybody died of laughter.'

Some of Sofia's most cherished memories are of visits to Jackson's Neverland ranch: 'It was like Disneyland.' His death 'was heartbreaking, a terrible time for my dad,' says Sofia. 'I got picked up from school early. My dad and Michael had the same manager at the time. I didn't go to school for a week. I feel like no one saw [it] coming.' She says she's proud that 'when he was here he changed the world — and music'. How is Paris? 'It was hard for her, she has been through a lot, but I think she is fine now.'

Sofia's parents split up when she was four and her brother Miles was eight, and she's a frequent visitor at her mother's house, 25 miles away in Calabasas. Diane, a former dancer, made the children do chores like

sweeping the patio, before they got their allowance. Her father, who was raised in Tuskegee, Alabama, was equally strict: 'He grew up in a small house and they didn't have much, so he is like, "You guys are way more blessed than I was." We go back to Alabama all the time. He still has the same house that he grew up in.'

Perhaps because of her parents' reluctance to spoil her, she's endearingly vulnerable, at times childlike, enthusing about her passion for baking cupcakes and spinning at LA's fashionable SoulCycle studio. She tells me excitedly about a starstruck moment meeting her idol Beyoncé, who was performing with her husband Jay Z at a concert in London. 'She came off the stage and talked to my dad and I couldn't breathe. I have a picture of Jay Z putting his chain round my neck.' What did they all chat about? 'I can't even remember, it was too surreal.'

**S**till, she's well aware of the downsides of growing up in the spotlight. Inevitably, Sofia and her celebrity pals are stalked by the paparazzi on a 24-hour basis: 'If they see my car they are just going to follow.' They can, she says, become 'aggressive'. 'One time there were so many of them I couldn't move. I am a small girl and it scared my dad a little. Another time the same person would follow me over and over and over again and it turned out that someone had put a tracker under my car.' She shrugs. 'There is a negative side to everything, but I don't let that get to me.'

How does it affect her? 'I didn't know anything different,' she says. 'It is very chaotic... there are people all over my dad all the time. Dinners out are dinner/meet and greets. Everyone in the restaurant will come over, there's paparazzi everywhere.'

One time, she says, 'I was at dinner in Paris with my dad, my sister and my brother and there were so many people waiting outside... My dad is like, "Listen, I will never be negative to someone who supports me and you shouldn't either."'

She confesses that navigating Hollywood's social scene, specifically knowing who to trust, can be particularly tricky: 'I have been able to read into people's intentions by things they say or ways they act when they come to my house.' She has learned to be wary of potential boyfriends. 'I'm not the kind of person to jump into a relationship with a guy, I do a lot of figuring out about the person and his background, what he wants and why he is interested in me.' For the past 18 months she's been dating 21-year-old fashion designer Jake Andrews; they met through friends. Part of the attraction, she says, is: 'He genuinely didn't care that I was in the room, so that intrigued me.'

She often turns to her sister Nicole for advice. Despite the 17-year age gap, the pair have a strong bond. Nicole is the adopted daughter of Lionel and his first wife Brenda Harvey and was given the responsibility of babysitting her: 'She was crazy and fun. She would take me to places I wasn't supposed to go to, like fairs, and she would let me have foods that



Left: with Cara Delevingne, Stella McCartney and Zhu Zhu at last year's Met Gala in New York. Above: with boyfriend Jake Andrews in NYC



I wasn't allowed to eat, like cotton candy.'

She would have been too young to be aware of Nicole's battle with heroin addiction. 'People look at me thinking: "Oh, you are probably going to go through the same thing."' In fact, Sofia says she has avoided drugs: 'I have been pretty straight.' Her sister, now 34, long sober and drug-free, a mother of two and married to Joel Madden, lead singer of the band Good Charlotte, dishes out sound advice.

'She says: "Don't let people pressure you to do what they think is cool, like taking drugs. Be true to yourself."'

Growing up, it seemed likely that Sofia would follow in her father's footsteps. An accomplished singer and pianist, she has joined him for impromptu concert appearances over the years. 'He would call me out in the middle of a show and put me on the spot,' she laughs. Are there any plans to pursue music professionally? 'Maybe, Oh my God, my dad would love that!' Her favourite Lionel Richie song? 'I love 'Ballerina Girl', because my dad always tried to convince me that it was about me and my sister [Nicole]. I don't really know who it was about.'



Above: a mini Sofia with her father Lionel Richie in LA, 2009

*"People look at me and think I'm going through the same thing as Nicole"*

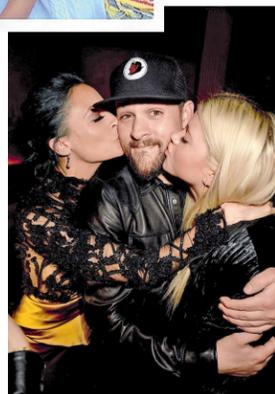
As well as the Material Girl campaign, Sofia is 'in talks' to star in her own reality TV show: 'It won't be anything like *The Simple Life*,' she says, referring to her sister's hit show with Paris Hilton, in which the friends were uprooted from Beverly Hills and dispatched around America to get a taste of how ordinary people live. 'It will be about things that I care about, like fashion and music.'

It's not hard to imagine people tuning in — her life does sound impossibly exciting. For her 18th birthday this August, she's planning to go to the Bahamas with 17 friends. She frequently visits London, where she hangs out with her close friend Rita Ora, and spends much of her time on America's East Coast for work. She attended last year's Met Gala with Cara Delevingne, as a guest of Stella McCartney. 'It was so exciting. Cara is so cool and really funny, that was a crazy night.' Highlights of the evening included 'shaking hands with Anna Wintour' and 'chilling out' with Cara and Kate Hudson at the latter's hotel 'listening to music and dancing'.

So what does the future hold? Eventually, she'd like to have her own fashion line, too, carving out her own distinct 'brand': 'I don't want to fall back on my parents and sister for anything.' And she has no concerns about critics who claim she is trading on the family name. 'You will always come across people who will put you down, but I am fortunate that my family are very uplifting and support me. I always know that at the end of the day I can go to them and they will help me out.' She gives a big smile. 'I am proud to be a Richie.'



Clockwise from above: with her sister Nicole last year; with Nicole and Joel Madden at Chateau Marmont, 2014; at Marc by Marc Jacobs A/W 2015; celebrating Madonna's Material Girl brand's fifth birthday in New York, 2015



MAJE top, £159 (uk.maje.com)  
 CLAUDE PIERLOT playsuit, £315 (claudiepierlot.com)  
 GRACE LEE ring (on fourth finger), £158, ring (on little finger), £485, and cuff, £237, at barneys.com  
 LACE BY JENNY WU ring (on index finger), £177 (jennywulace.com)

Hair by Jamal Hammadi  
 Make-up by Silver Bramham for Art Department



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