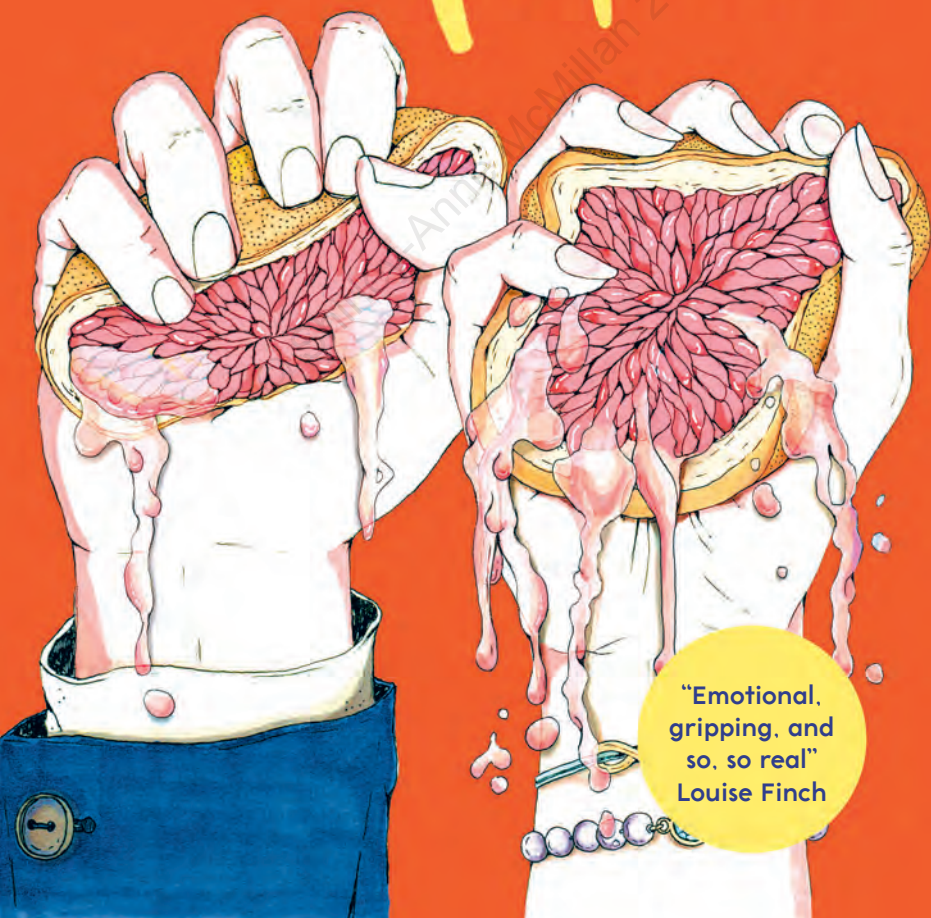


SHIRLEY-ANNE MCMILLAN

# Grapefruit Moon

How far would  
you go to fit in?



"Emotional,  
gripping, and  
so, so real"  
Louise Finch

# GRAPEFRUIT MOON

*Shirley-Anne McMillan*

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GRAPEFRUIT MOON

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*Poesía, pequeño pueblo en armas contra la soledad*  
Poetry, a small town in arms against loneliness

- Javier Egea

*Translated by Ian McMillan*

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# PART ONE

*September–December*

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# 1. Charlotte

Sixth form. A new start.

Walking into the student centre, I glanced around for Lucy and Artie. There they were, at the back. I tried to ignore Adam as I walked past him, but my eyes locked with his for a second by accident. He smirked and raised a hand in mock greeting.

His little gang of Stewards were gathered around him, their badges gleaming in the sunlight, bright as their futures – the elite, the rugby boys, the chosen ones. But the chosen ones were always boys, never girls. Welcome to the twenty-first century at one of Northern Ireland's best schools.

Not that I wanted to be a part of their group. Idiots. *Ignore them*, I thought. *Look, your friends are here. Ignore him.*

Adam hadn't been in touch all summer, and maybe he'd gotten over everything now. I shook off the thought of him.

Artie was in good form. He gave me a massive hug and scooped over so I could sit on the table next to him.

'Hey, new boy!' he called, looking over my shoulder.

I looked behind me, and sure enough, there was someone new standing at the window, looking a bit dazed. I couldn't blame him. Cooke's can be a lot if you're not used to it. It's like a little planet all of its own. You can forget you're in Belfast sometimes.

‘Come and sit with us!’ Artie went on as the boy acknowledged him. ‘What’s your name?’

‘Andrew.’ The new boy ambled over to us and leant against a desk. ‘Drew, just.’

Lucy grabbed my arm, beaming. ‘Sooooo,’ she said, ‘please say you decided on English in the end?’

‘Yes. Also Sp-’

‘Oh, yay!’ said Lucy. ‘What about you?’ she said to the new boy.

‘Um. No, not English. Spanish, though, and -’

‘Cool!’ I said. ‘You’ll love Don Antonio – he’s brilliant.’

‘Wooooo,’ said Artie. ‘Does someone have a little crush on señor teacher?’

‘An intellectual one, maybe!’ I said. ‘Besides, I think you’re more his type.’

‘I’m everyone’s type, darling,’ said Artie, with a grin directed at the new boy, whose eyes widened.

‘He’s just teasing,’ I said. ‘Artie’s a pussycat. Aren’t you, Artie?’

‘Miaow!’ he purred, flexing a mock paw.

The bell rang and we headed off to form class. Turned out Drew was with me and Lucy, which was nice. We’d look out for him while he found his feet.

As I left the room, I noticed Adam staring at me. Urgh. At least I wouldn’t have any classes with him. He was destined for a career in medicine, so it would be all science and maths for him. We’d hardly even see one another, and we only had two more years of school together. I was sure that everything was on the verge of settling down and disappearing into the new year ahead.

I was so completely wrong.

## 2. Drew

‘Well?’ Mum said. I’d barely put the second foot through the doorway. ‘How was it, love?’

She had this rictus grin, like she’d been panicking all day, practising looking breezy when I came in. *Don’t worry, Mum, I thought. I passed as human. I didn’t let us all down.* Awk, that wasn’t fair. She meant well.

‘It was good,’ I said, throwing my backpack on the kitchen chair.

And it had been OK. The students didn’t seem too bad. Like, they were totally over-confident, though. And their humour ... It had no *edge* to it. All that sparkly enthusiasm was a bit hard to take. It was their total lack of sarcasm that really made me feel like the kid from the council estate – more than the thick carpets and the clean smell and the students driving up to school in their own shiny cars.

‘I’m starving,’ I said.

Her smile softened, like she’d finally breathed out after a full day of holding it in. ‘I’ll make you a sandwich. Go and get changed. And hang that uniform up! It cost more than –’

‘More than a month’s pay. I know.’

I knew she’d got a grant for the uniform. I saw the forms on the table one night before I went to bed. But I understood. They wanted me to value the opportunity I’d been given. Hardly anyone got into Cooke’s sixth form from the outside, and nobody at all from our estate ever



got in. Until I did. Walking out of our house in the morning it felt like that uniform was luminous against the dull grey houses. Like I was walking through Greenwood estate in a butterfly outfit. Everyone was looking. The neighbours even said, ‘Congratulations, Drew!’ as I passed. *Congratulations! Not Good luck! Or Have a good day! But Congratulations* – like I’d won the lottery or something.

I was halfway up the stairs when Dad came in.

‘Drew!’ he yelled, as if he was surprised to see me in our own house. ‘Well? How was it?’

I stopped. ‘It was good.’

‘Great!’ He beamed. ‘That’s my lad! You’ll be at university next thing you know.’

*No feckin’ pressure, eh, Dad?* I nodded at him and went up to my room.

I flipped open my laptop and switched it on while I went to the toilet. It always took about ten minutes to come on and I had to keep it plugged in cos the battery was wrecked.

At the start of Spanish class today, everyone opened their bags and pulled their iPads out. What the hell. I didn’t know you were meant to have an iPad. It wasn’t on the list of stuff to get before school. I must have looked like a total idiot staring at everyone tapping on their screens, not knowing what I was meant to do. Don Antonio smiled kindly and set one on my desk. I looked over at what Charlotte was doing. I pressed the button and all these little apps appeared in front of me. Charlotte noticed me swiping through them.

‘Here, it’s this one.’ She tapped on the app that had the school crest. ‘This is a school iPad, so it’ll have all the subjects. When you download the app to your own iPad you

can put in your student number and you'll just get the info for your subjects. Cool, eh?'

'Uh, yeah. Thanks.'

I was shitting myself, though. *Your own iPad?* Where was I gonna get an iPad from? I literally started imagining where I could get an iPad. I wondered if Jamie's ma still sold knock-off stuff. But even then. Maybe if I got a part-time job ...

The teacher's voice woke me up. 'New student? Andrew?'

He had a Spanish accent and something about it made me relax a bit.

'OK. Well, welcome, Andrew.' He smiled and turned to the whole class and started talking about the A level curriculum. I had loved Spanish at my old school, Laney. Going over the words, saying them out loud when nobody else was in the house, it felt like knowing a secret code. I could write poems in Spanish and nobody even knew they were poems. It was like being invisible.

I hung up my uniform, put on my trackie bottoms and a T-shirt and flipped open a physics book. You would never have got homework on the first day at Laney. My phone beeped. Message from Dale.

How's the posh school, genius? Comin down the rec later?

I flipped the book closed.

Yeah. See you around 7.

The phone beeped again.

Big news. Tell ye later.