

A terrible, awkward silence filled the room after Maggie spoke. She looked around, wondering whether she could pass off what she had just said as a joke, not sure that she even wanted to.

'What?' she asked, staring around at the other students; even their tutor, who made everyone call her Jules and who thought she was fifteen years younger than she really was, was shaking her head.

'I can't believe you just said that,' said Luke, the self-appointed moral conscience of the class. He'd run for student union president the year before on a Make-College-Green platform, marched in every march that was going, and wept openly during a discussion of the Holocaust. 'You should be ashamed.'

'I'm not saying I'm a *fan*, necessarily,' said Maggie.

'Necessarily?'

'Well, at all. I'm just saying... Rachel, take a look. Tell me what you think.'

Rachel looked a little offended to be singled out. It was true that she was generally considered to be the most sexually voracious girl on campus but that didn't mean she wanted to be involved in something like this.

'Leave me out of it,' she said, raising the palms of her hands and shaking her head.

'My God, why has everyone gone so prudish all of a sudden?' asked Maggie, rolling her eyes. 'I just meant that when he was young, Stalin was a very good looking guy. I mean it's obvious. Just look at him. He went to seed when he got older, of course. Put on a lot of weight. And I don't know anyone who can get away with a moustache—'

'Tom Selleck,' said Luke quickly, making everyone turn to look at him now. 'What?' he asked. 'He can. He looks weird without it.'

'Maggie,' said Jules. 'I think what everyone feels is that it's inappropriate to make comments such as that. Stalin was responsible for the deaths of... well, I don't know how many people.'

'You don't?' asked Maggie. 'That's worrying, considering you're the teacher here.'

'To speak of him in such an admiring way,' she continued, ignoring the remark, 'could be considered offensive. Particularly to any student who may have lost someone during one of the Purges.'

'Any student?' asked Maggie, raising her voice. 'But they're all from bloody Foxrock. And Castleknock. And Terenure. None of them lost anyone in the Purges. That's ridiculous!'

'Let's move on,' said Jules, walking away.

Maggie sighed and looked down at her textbook. She wasn't ashamed. Just because she fancied someone didn't mean that she approved of their actions, after all. And there was no getting around it. Stalin was a hottie. Those eyes. That hair. So much more handsome than Lenin, with his little rat's face, or Tsar Nicholas, with that terrible beard.

It meant *man of steel*, she remembered. Stalin. That said it all. She thought that was exactly the kind of thing her classmates should know.

'One more thing,' she said, looking across at Luke particularly with a smile on her face.