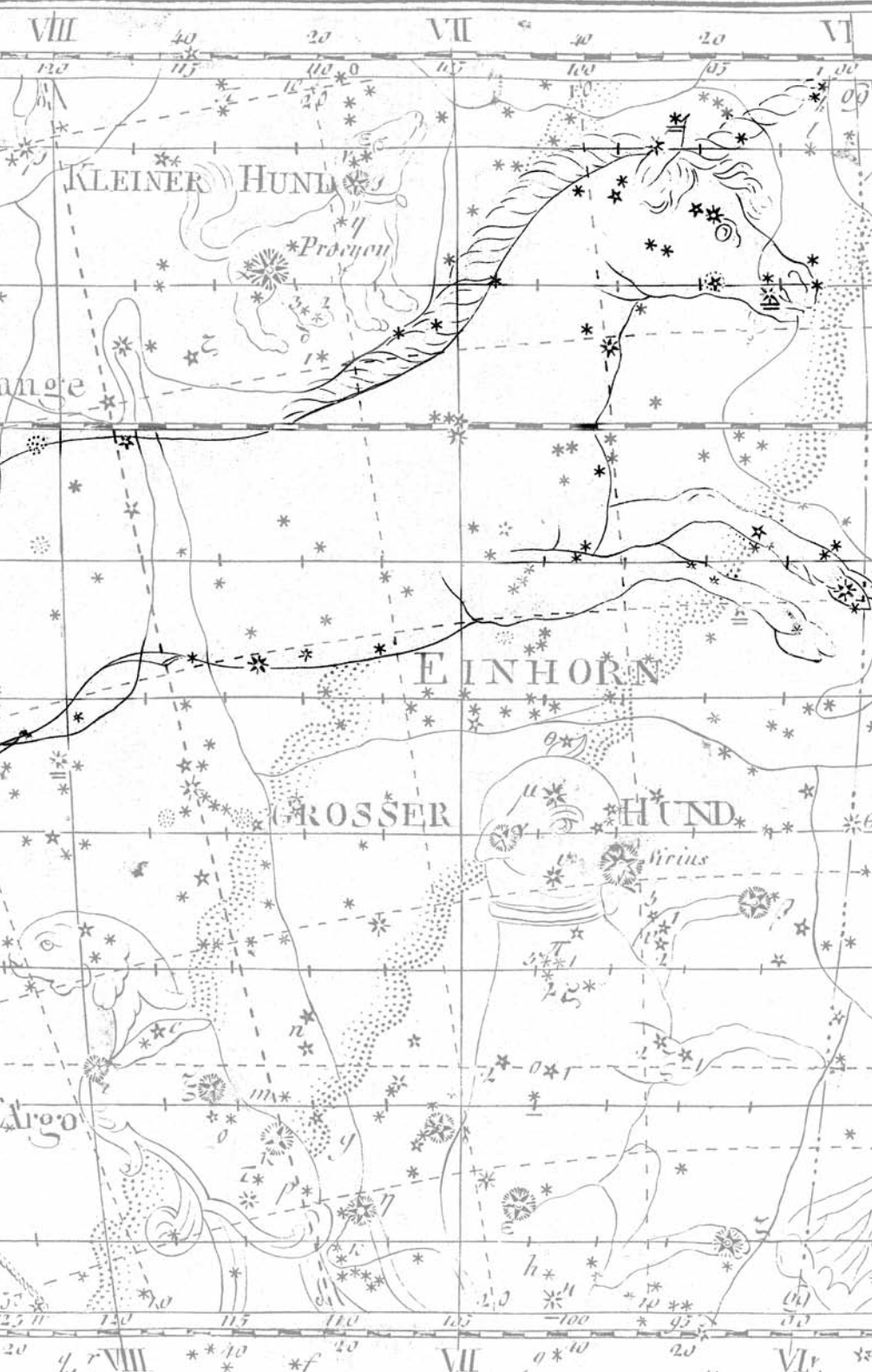




EINHORN

Monoceros

a novel by Suzette Mayr



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Toronto*

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first edition



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*For Tonya Callaghan,
and in memory of D. S. and others like him*

My skin presses your old outline.
It is hot and dry inside.

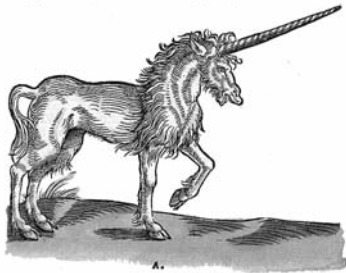
— Maxine Kumin, 'How It Is'

Make a hawk a dove,
Stop a war with love,
Make a liar tell the truth.

— Theme from *Wonder Woman*

DE MONOCEROTE.

Figura talis est, qualis à patribus fere hodie pingitur de qua certissimi habent.



Monday

The End

Because *urafagis* scrawled in black Jiffy marker across his locker. Because after school last Thursday, the girlfriend of the guy he loves hurled frozen dog shit at him, and her friends frisbeed his skateboard into the river. Even though he stomped and cracked through the ice shelving the banks, waded in to rescue it — after the shouting and shoving, they're stronger than they look, all those girls with their cello- and violin-playing fingers, yanking him back by handfuls of coat, handfuls of hair, hooking with their elbows and digging with their fingernails as he scrambled after his skateboard — the banks too slippery and shattered with ice, the current too swift, the water too cold and deep and brown. Freezing river water up to his chest, the water and ice shards wicking into his armpits, scratching his heart. His black coat wet and sucking him down into the current. His skateboard buried in the river.

Because the Tuesday before that horrible Thursday, the guy he loves gave him a kiss so electric electrons shot into his penis, his toes, it was like he discovered Planet X, and he ejaculated into his pants, luckily they were black, luckily it was dark outside, luckily when he got home his mother was squealing into the phone about how she wanted to replace the new stone kitchen counter with a newer, stonier kitchen counter, and his father's face flickered blue before the tv, mouth open and tongue like a leftover slice of roast beef drying out with snoring, his arm triangled behind his head.

Because in a text the girlfriend of the guy he loves said, *we're going 2 kill you*. Because she knew he lived at 2279 Moth Hill Crescent sw; knew that when he wasn't in school he was playing *World of Warcraft* or the faggy JRPG *Divinity XII* with his imaginary, online, why-not-just-buy-a-blow-up-doll loser friends; knew Monday nights he watched his favourite tv show, *Sector Six*; knew that every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, like a wobbly-assed soccer mom trapped in a dead marriage, he ordered a large iced cappuccino from the drive-thru at the Tim Hortons on

12th Avenue; knew that anytime he could, weekends and weekdays, nighttime, daytime, he'd yank it in his cubby-hole bedroom, splattering himself like the *devient* he was because he was a loser with no friends *n thats Y u deserve 2 di u Flngfag cocksucka fuckface royal sht eater*. In the text, she has almost all of his days right, except for two things she'll never know: 1. he's not watching *Sector Six* — they're all reruns in February, and 2. one or two pockets of time he's on secret dates hooking up with her boyfriend when she and her foot soldiers have their junior serial-killer cadet training classes. Lucky him. And the spelling is *deviAnt*, not *deviEnt*. Though it still means he's a dead boy.

Because that last glorious Tuesday, Ginger, the guy he loves, met him at their special place in the cemetery, halfway between their houses. Their breaths misted in the cold air, little white ghosts dissipating in the light of the tall lamps that lined the graveyard, the ache evaporating when they finally touched, their lips colliding, eating, so much time had drained away since they last met. The dead boy pulled away, burrowed into the front of his shirt and brought out a heart-shaped locket in a pool of gold chain, the dead boy smiling so hard his face nearly cracked heart-like in two, the metal heart a hot star in his icy hand.

— I'm wearing it this time, said the dead boy. — See? I haven't lost it.

— You lose it and my granny's ghost will haunt you forever, said Ginger, and he laid a hand overtop the locket, over the dead boy's hand, pushing against the dead boy's chest. Kissed him again, bit the dead boy's bottom lip. Ginger wearing layers, a blue sweater on top of a striped T-shirt on top of a long-sleeved white shirt; all the layers still showing off his flat, gorgeous abs, the smooth mounds of his pecs. The soon-to-be-dead boy, smiling, clicked open the heart, snap.

— When will you give me your picture for it? asked the dead boy.

— You crazy? asked Ginger, his eyes darting over the graves, his mouth blowing on his cold hands, on the dead boy's. — What if

you lose it? Anyways, you don't need a picture, we see each other in the halls. But see the rose engraved on the front? It's red. Red means love.

— No it's not, said the dead boy. — The heart's the same gold metal as the chain. It's red because you say it's red? Are you on crack? The dead boy laughed, his voice erupting in the marble and granite forest.

— Yeah, it's red. I am telling you it's red.

— So love is red, said the dead boy. — Then why can't you red me at school?

— That's stupid, said Ginger.

Layers peeled and discarded, Ginger's and the dead boy's lips and tongues and bodies fitting puzzle piece into puzzle piece, skins moulted in the dead grass, the gold locket pressing skin into skin.

The dead boy and Ginger fumbled their clothes back on in the dark, chilled their bodies dizzy as newborn kittens, Ginger hurrying into his jacket, the dead boy pulling on Ginger's sweater, then his own long coat, the smell of Ginger knitted to his skin.

Now Monday. Because today, nearly a week since that starlit Tuesday, the dead boy doesn't want to leave his house because Ginger will still be cold to him like he always is in the days right after hooking up in the cemetery, because he doesn't want to leave his house in case today is the day the girlfriend and her hive finally kill him. His mother gnaws at him with her mandibles to hurry up, — The sun doesn't beam out of your bum even though *you* seem to think so, she says, and she gulps a spoonful of bran flakes.

He hates the way his mother says *bum* like he's a kid, like he doesn't know what you can use it for. He crunches his cereal, one sugary shamrock, one star, one diamond, one Lucky Charm at a time, and listens to his parents drink their orange juice, their swallows loud and revolting, watches his mother x-ray the Monday morning paper, sometimes her lips moving, the heart-shaped locket swinging on the outside of his three T-shirts and a blue argyle sweater, where she can see it, where his father

slushing his coffee into a travel mug can see it. He watches his parents not watch him, drive away in their separate, oversize pollution machines. His father slinging a briefcase stitched together from an endangered species, his mother meandering out to buy hunks of dead animal for supper before barricading herself with paint, paintbrushes and canvasses big as sails, small as stamps, in her studio in her fashionable yoga pants, made by tiny brown children for less than a nickel a day.

Because the Friday right after the horrific Thursday, he fought to see the principal to tell him about his skateboard thrown in the river. The dead boy had to scramble up the fortress wall of secretaries and vice-principals. The principal straightened his tie, rolled forward his chair, jingled the keys in his pocket, said, — If they purloined your skateboard when you were all off school property, there's nothing I can do. That would be more of a matter for the police. The principal clearing his throat emphatically to indicate the matter was Closed.

Because the dead boy ran into his English teacher at the Pita Pit after talking to the principal, in her black clothes punctuated with her own white, chalky handprints, her face splotchy white and pink. The only teacher who ever says anything like, — That attitude smells worse than poo, when someone says *The Glass Menagerie's* a gay play. He told her about the principal, and she said, — He really said that to you? You've got to get out of this deadbeat school.

Her eyelids and pinked lips twitched.

Because the dead boy and Ginger wrestled into scorching sex in the dead grass, hot enough to start a grass fire, their bodies flaring in the dark, in the middle of a February chinook, the smell of chinook wind and Ginger in his nose, Bed Head shampoo, blue wool sweater the dead boy pulled up over Ginger's head, Ginger's sweaty silky ribcage, flowery fabric softener from all six of their shirts, Ginger's tongue pushing bright as a meteor into the dead boy's, Ginger's nipples, the warm salt of him, behind a tombstone

that said, *Lél Somogyi Gone But Never Forgotten 1987–2004*. Ginger's torso naked and slick, dead grass and twigs sticking to his skin. Afterward, the dead boy accidentally on purpose pulling over his head Ginger's blue sweater in the dark, and Ginger was so sweaty and hot he forgot the sweater, tugging on his other shirts and his jacket in a rush because he was late for home. The next morning in the hallway, Ginger's fingers sticking in his girlfriend's tangled hair, stroking, while they prodded their way through the waves of students pushing, bumping and clanging lockers around them, the dead boy wading toward them as though by pure cosmic coincidence, Ginger hovering over a tangle in his girlfriend's hair, and not catching the dead boy's eye, not for a second even though they had agreed last week that occasional eye contact was not completely verboten, they could kiss and fuck with their eyes, no one could tell if they just fucked with their eyes. Ginger's irises radiating aurora borealis from Hershey Kiss brown into caterpillar green, a hazel colour meant for kissing. Their bodies' protons and electrons zinging across the shortening space between them; Ginger staring at the top of his girlfriend's head. The dead boy and Ginger, each of them a sun, each of them a planet in orbital thrall to a sun, the dead boy hugging himself, suddenly cold, in Ginger's blue knit sweater. The body slam of Ginger twisting away from the dead boy, not a single eyekiss, like the dead boy was already dead. Though not a surprise: Ginger frozen sub-zero like he always was in the days following a cemetery date.

Because on Friday, Valentine's Day, an envelope with the dead boy's name on it was slipped into his locker, just a corner of it peeping out from the metal crack between the locker's metal frame and the locker door, and when he pulled it out and ripped it open starting at the crumpled corner, he found a card — a painting of a bowl of fruit, circled by a ballpoint-pen heart. Inside, scrawled in more ballpoint, *Happy Valentine's Day Faggot. Love, G*. Calling him *faggot* was Ginger's idea of a joke. An exhausted, pathetic joke.

Because Ginger's girlfriend hissed at him, she is such a dyke-in-training and she doesn't even know it, so he hissed back and he was doomed. Once, a long time ago, he overheard her playing a waltz on the piano in the band room. He had to fight not to cry, the song tugged at him so.

Because he scraped himself down the crowded walls of the cafeteria, past a jughead accompanied by a jughead parasite who said, — Out of my way, homo, as they chewed their way into the middle of the cafeteria lineup.

Because on his walk to school this morning — he's a dead man — a cat pads across the dead boy's path with a grey and yellow bird in its mouth, stepping into human boot steps pressed into the ice and snow, neat, like a dog carrying a newspaper.

Because today, tromping his way to school through mushy cigarette butts, a lost comb in the muck, waiting at this intersection as the cars slop by exhaling exhaust that burns his eyes, his phone chirps, Ginger: *i cant hang out wit u any more this time its 4 real ... I want my locket back*

Ginger will never change.

Because the crosswalk light shines its red eye, refuses to blink into green, cars spitting gravelly snow, one slap to his face after another on this Monday that refuses to start and refuses to end, he has to stand and stand, waiting for the light beside the brick wall spray-painted *Ava is a muff muncher*. Ginger wants the locket back, the only thing Ginger's ever given him, the only thing that keeps the dead boy going through all the days of Ginger pretending he doesn't exist. Monday. He can't bear it. He turns and tromps back home, ignoring cars, his frozen rubber soles scuffing iced concrete. The wind slathering cold, his exposed throat, the locket a hunk of metal pounding against his sternum, the chain winding winding round his neck.

Because he can't bear it.

He can't bear any of it. It will never get better.

Because he wants to be in charge of his own ending.



Tuesday

Faraday

Until Faraday settles into her desk and the news about Patrick Furey whacks her between the eyes, all she can think about is the tuft of evil frizz above her ear that day, what a toolshed her brother George M. is, hiding her straightening iron and not giving it back no matter how much she shrieks, and how she's finally going to buy that brocade bag with the medieval unicorn tapestried on the side and the humongous silver clasp (also unicorn-shaped) after school, and if someone else has already bought that perfect bag, and the metal shelf where it normally sits is empty dust in the shape of the bag instead of crammed with the delicious bulk of the bag itself, she will kill herself. She will.

She swings through the school bathroom door into the swirl of flushing toilets, gushing faucets and girls tit to shoulder at the mirrors lacquering on mascara and lip gloss, the smells of perfume and deodorant and freshly washed hair poofing into the air, and she tries to clamp down that frizz with another barrette, brushes on another lick or two of mascara. She tries to prepare for this day: how to not spill on herself, or have a menstrual calamity, or call her *Teacher Advisor* her *homeroom teacher* like she did last week like some junior high school loser. When she drops into her desk, the barrette clipped crooked and poking at her scalp so hard she's seeing a galaxy of stars, a boy at the back of the class neighs at her and his posse all laugh. She hooks her unicorn pen out of her unicorn pencil case and clicks it once just as her *Teacher Advisor* Mrs. Mochinski rattles out the announcements in her tin-can voice, — Yearbook club meeting in roooooom 210, graduation committee meeting at 3:15 in the band roooooom, math club meeting tomorrow at lunch in compuuuuuter lab 14, and Madison, the girl who sits behind Faraday, not a friend of Faraday and her unicorns, taps Faraday on the shoulder and whispers, — Patrick Furey's dead. That's why he's not here for a second day in a row. Look!

Faraday whips around in the direction of Patrick Furey's desk, her hair fanning out in the sudden wind, Patrick Furey's desk empty, Madison sucking on the corner of her cellphone, already murmuring to Jennifer next to her. Madison tucking the cellphone into the dark valley of her cleavage. Faraday clutches both hands around her pen. Jennifer's leaned over to Juana, who leans over to Maurizio, who leans over to that boy Ginger who sits at the front and who's juggling erasers and grapes from hand to hand as though they are stars and planets. His erasers and grapes abruptly bounce and zing to the floor.

Faraday raises her hand neatly, her elbow tucked in, spine straight.

— Mrs. Mochinski? she asks. — Where's Patrick today?

— Patrick? answers Mrs. Mochinski, busily fitting a new stick of chalk into its metal holder. — I don't know. He's away obviously.

Mrs. Mochinski's chalk snaps, so she fishes another one out of the box. — Okay, time to call attendance, people, so listen up! she says.

Ginger raises his hand to ask to go to the bathroom and bolts out the door, his backpack hooked over his shoulder.

Then Mrs. Mochinski calls attendance and the bell drones, and Faraday and all these alive people get up and traipse to their different classes, crowding and bottlenecking each other out into the aisles between the desks, out the classroom door as if Patrick Furey isn't dead. Faraday neatly prints the biology teacher's chalkboard notes about human kidneys on a sheet in her binder, her letters round as cherry pies, the vertical and horizontal lines straight and strong, her diagrams of Bowman's capsule and the loop of Henle each the exact width of a quarter, her fingers touching her barrette, the lined paper, the bag, a bisected kidney including cortex, medulla and nephron the width of a quarter, her hair, the boy, click the pen, her hair, that boy, her barrette, her bag, unclick the pen, her bag, her hair, the loop of Henle, click, a boy, the

boy, that boy, unclick, oh boy, why that boy, the jarring rumour drilling her between the eyes, suddenly that boy, her hands crashing down from the barrette and her hair, the pen unclicked, an illustration of a kidney belonging to a dead boy, the size of a silver quarter.

The buzzer sounds, a thumb jabbed into the back of her skull, and knapsacks sprouting from backs, book bags like blood-engorged ticks swinging from armpits, the occasional jutting wheelchair handle in the hallway groping her, oomping her in the ribs, jabbing her in the loop of Henle; she weaves toward social studies class and she cannot believe she now personally knows a person who is dead. Except: no minute of silence. No silent prayer. No special assembly. Rumours fluttering and roosting in the hallways. The walls of the school echoing and hammering with unicorn hooves only Faraday can hear.

— I heard he fell off the balcony in his building.

— Garrett said he was hit by a car.

— Accidentally poisoned when he bit into a poinsettia plant left over from Christmas.

— Crushed in a trash compactor!

Faraday blows her cheeks out into balloons of frustration.

— Maybe he's on a train to Antigua! she explodes to Madison right after lunch in the bustling lineup outside their classroom.

— Maybe he's not dead at all!

Madison, chewing on the corner of her phone, shrugs her shoulders.

Mrs. Mochinski, in her chalk-splotched black pants and lady's feathery moustache, rattles out after them in the hallway to keep the noise down please, while fiddling with her brooch. But throughout the day — as they scarf down their lunch, after biology, social studies, math and religion, when Faraday has to bound from one end of the school to the other across the cracking tiles, the fresh gobs of chewing gum, around a janitor's yellow mop bucket — she doesn't see Patrick Furey anywhere. After lunch, in

chemistry, French, then English. In English, again with Mrs. Mochinski, the chair where Patrick Furey normally sits, angled away slightly from its small table so it looks like he's just stood up to go to the bathroom and will be right back.

And, except for Madison's tiny gigantic rumour, Tuesday is as predictable and unkempt as any other. Almost. She learns that the ancient Greeks placed coins under the tongues of their dead loved ones, about afferent and efferent arterioles, though she knows she will forget the difference before the next test. What should be remarkable is that, for the first time ever, Madison is talking to her, a lot of people are talking to her, and she actually has a conversation with the goth girl who sits across from her. But instead, what's remarkable is that goth girl whispers that she's sure as fuck the boy killed himself because why aren't any of the teachers announcing that he's died?

— Like, if he'd been in a truck accident they would have said, says goth girl. — If he'd been randomly shot on his way to the snowboard shop, fuck, man, they'd be like, *he's been in a drive-by shooting*, but they're not. No one's saying a fucking *thing*. As if him not coming to school because he killed himself is something *ordinary*.

Goth girl drums her nails on her desk as she whispers, each of her fingers drumming on the fake wood surface, her fingertips galloping across neurotic fields. And goth girl's parents switched her to this school, a fucking Catholic school, on purpose because Catholics are supposed to be more disciplined, right? They aren't allowed to commit suicide. Right?

Tap tap tap tap tip tap, goth girl's fingers say.

— Right? Goth girl's eyes wide in the rings of charcoal eyeliner. — Right? Fuck! Right? She reaches over and grasps Faraday's arm.

— Yes, exhales Faraday, her eyes prickling at the clammy touch.

— Suicides go to hell. It's a sin for Catholics. It's a technicality with no loophole, says goth girl, her fingers drumming a hole in

the cover of her paperback copy of *Romeo and Juliet*. — Well, a girl drank something in the bathroom of my last fucking school and a janitor found her still fucking *twitching* on the floor, a fucking non-Catholic school this was, and maybe I'm cursed, fuck, I'm hoisting this curse with me everywhere I go, like I thought hiding among Catholics and their fucking crucifixes would protect me, how wrong was I? I blame society! You can't run away from society, no matter how fucking hard you try.

Tiny spit bubbles fleck goth girl's lips, Faraday stares at the goth's black, chipped fingernails, the flecks of dry skin in her moonless black hair.

The goth's eyes, globby with eyeliner, abruptly turn shiny, her tapping fingers trembling and uncertain, so Faraday turns away, scribbles the first words of the notes on the board with her unicorn pen on an empty lined page near the middle of her notebook.

Goth girl's fingers resuming their synchronized, millipede-foot tapping.

Faraday would like to go to the funeral, but will the dead boy's family be upset if a stranger crashes in and plunks herself down in one of the grieving pews? She wishes goth girl's fingers would stop running, that goth girl would stop trembling and streaking her makeup and saying the f word. Mrs. Mochinski should have announced the date and time of the funeral in the daily announcements, should have announced the dead boy. Maybe Faraday will light a candle for the dead boy next time her parents make her go to Mass.

— Fucking Petra Mai and her skanked friends told him they were going to kill him, goth girl whispers, her black lips turning pinker as she chews off her black lipstick, voice so low Faraday can hardly tell it from the whistling in the heating vents. Petra.

Ginger's girlfriend, Petra, copying notes about Mercutio and Tybalt also like it's all ordinary, her long dusty hair a shaggy curtain spilling over her anorexic shoulders, snapping her gum. Ginger's chair empty too. Goth girl draws a pentacle in the

margin of her coiled notebook. — That's why he hung or poisoned or shot himself, goth girl says.

— Or maybe she managed to kill him, says Faraday. — She got to him.

— Oh, fuck! exclaims the goth, her hand flinging to her raw mouth.

— *Hanged himself* is the correct grammar, the dead boy's English teacher says. — This will be on the next quiz. Fumiko, quit swearing! ... This will be on the next quiz!

The class bursts into whispers. Petra flicks her hair over one shoulder and scans the class. Jésus at the back of the class stands up and whinnies into his hand.

— You at the back of the class, you can raise your hand like everyone else, bellows the dead boy's teacher, and then she coughs, croaks.

Jésus raises his hand.

— Yes? asks Mrs. Mochinski.

— Because he was a homo-sek-shhhhyoo-al, says Jésus.

Jésus's posse howls.

Faraday looks at Jésus.

— What's *your* problem, Unicorn Girl? Jésus smirks.

— Jésus ... That attitude smells like poo, says Mrs. Mochinski. — Where have all the manners gone? ... Romeo was a homosexual? ... Please.

She holds her hand up in the air as though to say *Stop*. Coughs again.

— What's wrong with the word *unicorn*? asks Jésus. — Is it pronounced *unicorn-ee*? Shit!

The teacher flings her arms around her copy of *Romeo and Juliet*, around her drooped monobreast.

— Homosexual? says Jésus. — What's wrong with the word *homo-sek-shhhhyoo-a*? Well, he was.

— You can talk about that with the veep if you keep pushing it, Jésus.

— All right! I'm *sorry*.

— Now, says Mrs. Mochinski, — Can someone please ...

— So what if he was gay? Faraday says. Her paper one giant mess of unicorn ink.

— It's a sin, says Madison.

— Where on *earth* does it say in this play that Romeo was gay? splutters Mrs. Mochinski.

The class sizzles with whispers, a popping of *sssss* and *ssssh* as students lean forward to speak, lean backward to hear, hunch forward to click text keys to buzz to each other about the dead and dying Romeo who up until today went to their school.

— Listen, hisses goth girl, leaning across the aisle, — This is what happened: those girls from the chamber ensemble murdered him. Fuck. The ones who hang out with Ginger's girlfriend when she's not fucking sitting on Ginger's face, they're the ones. I think I've accidentally warped into the wrong Catholic dimension. I am torrentially fucked. This is so torrentially sad.

She lays her cheek down on the top of her desk. Closes her eyes. Her eyelids scarab-wing blue. Murmuring all around them.

The teacher swivels back from the board and coughs at her buzzing, whispering, humming class. She slams her copy of *Romeo and Juliet* down on the desk, another chalk breaks as it hits the floor, and she jams her hands on her hips.

— That's it! I have *had* it. You people! Stand for prayer please, staaaand for praaaayer.

The students scrape, shuffle and skulk themselves to standing.

— InthenameoftheFathertheSonandtheHolySpiritAmen, she says, crossing herself. — Our Father who art in Heaven ...

— Our Father who art in Heaven, the students say with her.

After the prayer she enforces Silent Reading until the bell.

— And by Silent Reading, says Mrs. Mochinski, — I mean Silent and Reading. Stop doodling, Faraday. Now that's a nice waste of paper and ink. Fumiko, she says to goth girl, — *Try* to stay awake for longer than a minute!

Faraday would like to hold Fumiko's hand.

Jésus jumps onto his desk and gives a loud, juicy belch.

The time is 3:19, and then that droning, time-for-home-and-dysfunctional-family bell. Faraday and her asymmetrically frizzy hair dawdle on the front steps of the school, other students in puffy coats and parkas shoving her into the sandstone door frame in a continuous herd as they crash through the doors, cascading, coursing, dribbling down to two students at a time, the occasional one cantering down the snowy carved stone steps and leaping to the bottom. Faraday leaning into the stone, scarf drawn up over her nose, not because she's cold, but because she is afraid to breathe. Clicking and unclicking a unicorn pen — the cold starting to pluck at the fingers on her clicking hand — she is afraid to walk, worried how to place her toes on each step so she won't fall and crack her head open like a snow globe on the school steps. Madison sucking her phone and telling her that rotten, indisputable thing that Patrick Furey is not in school and probably dead.

The Canadian flag whips against the grey winter sky; her head is bubble-clear on her neck. The flag isn't at half-mast like it was at her brother's school last year when that Grade 7 kid died on a downhill skiing field trip.

She breaks the spring in her pen because she has overclicked it, and nearly tumbles down the school's front steps.

She takes the bus to Bettie's Bag Boutique, the bus windows foggy with condensation. Faraday listening to staticky piano music as she stands in line at customer service with her brand-new unicorn bag. Paying for the bag, jamming her papers, books, emergency menstrual equipment — and her old bag — into the new bag, clicking closed the silver clasp in the shape of an anatomically correct unicorn — billy-goat beard, lion's tail, cloven hooves, the shadowy angle of a penis, not the kiddy, neutered, Disney horse-with-a-horn version. Leaning into and

through the front door of the boutique to stand on the sidewalk and wait for her bus. The people around her walking, blabbering, spitting, begging, complaining, farting, buying, selling, and a boy from her English class. Most probably dead. Did she serve him his last large iced cappuccino? Did he die Monday morning or Monday night? Or Sunday night? Maybe she was the last person to see him alive. Should she go to the police?

She wants to plop down on the gritty, icy concrete and cry.

She remembers how he had not a single zit on his entire face. Once she knocked her eraser off her desk and it bounced across the floor. He had to reach from an awkward angle to pick it up, his face reddening as he hung upside down. Did he know he only had a month and three days to live? He exhaled a breath when he tossed the eraser to her, his face scarlet — a crack in the veneer of him.

She never was his friend. She said *Thanks* when he threw her the eraser but that was all, she was so afraid she would miss catching it. If she'd known he was going to die she would have said something or written him a note saying *Hi*. She would have donated her virginity to him even though it would have meant giving up her chance at having a unicorn lay its head in her lap as her life companion, its pearled alicorn spiralling smooth and nourishing in her hand, its shaggy lips nuzzling her other palm. Even though he would never have slept with her because he was gay, but whatever, she would have liked to give. Let him know that soon a blessing of unicorns would be here to save them all.

She wonders how many days she has left to live. If sitting on this revolting sidewalk is one of her final acts. Formaldehyde stews behind her eyes. She clasps her bag in her arms, its stiff new-car smell.