

To The End

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The white flowers were just beginning to wilt, the edges curling slightly, the tips tinged with brown speckles.

Antarctica. It'll be our beginning. Her words are muffled by the pillow.

He sifts her hair through his fingers—the strands gliding effortlessly like penguins on ice. The white continent? He pauses. Haven't many people met their *end* there?

She faces the window, eyes squinting against the bright sun. That was *them*. This is now.

He throws the sheets off, gets up, and shakes his head. You speak your own language.

The boat is rocking like a millennium party—complete with vomiting passengers, spilt drinks, and lots of stumbling. The ocean is experiencing turbulence, sending him flying against a railing as the shadow of a Wandering Albatross ominously shades his face. Why are we going here again?

She watches the giant bird soar away with the wind. I've never seen it snow.

He reaches for her hand, finds a washcloth carefully wrapped around it. There *are* other places.

She places her other, gloved, hand on top of his. But it wouldn't be an *escape*. It would just be a trip. Now I really need to buy another glove.

When her feet first touch ground, they sink. On her tenth step, she is swallowed up to her hips. I didn't think the ice would be so *hungry*. She wriggles around, stuck.

He laughs. You're like one of those Gentoo penguins in the video, stuck in a boot hole. He grabs her hand, a random passenger the other, and they haul her up.

She lies on her tummy, soaking her coat, water beading against her waterproof pants, and peers into the crater she has left behind. If one of those penguins falls in this, what will happen to her?

He kneels down, pats her back. Don't worry. They'll be more penguins.

She spreads her arms out and drags them forward, dumping ice into the cavity in a reverse snow angel. That's what *someone* said about the passenger pigeon.

The next day, they remain on the boat, judging icebergs.

Hundreds of sculptures littered over the ocean, each a little tomb marking the death of the continent. Some pure, blinding white, some with a deep, teal heart encased within them. They look like a shattered vase against a blue tiled floor.

That one looks like two hands reaching up towards the sky. It emotes human longing for a higher power; the narrow tips speak of modern desperation. I give it a two.

He catches a few snowflakes by cupping his hands and throws them in the air. The burst of confetti makes it seem like a celebration. That one looks like Snoopy—*definitely* a ten. He leans over to kiss her lips, but conjures up an image of the stone lions outside of Chinatown. Or a traffic light pole.

Yeah, but he's *melting*, so minus points.

He snorts. We all are.

The Humpbacks are feeding, diving deep and creating tight spirals of effervescent froth as they rise—circle within circle like a Russian Doll. The fish are trapped within these bubble nets and the Humpbacks swallow them at the top in their gaping jaws, tails flipping the bird to the sun as they dive down again.

Nothing should be able to live here. She points at the bare face of a nearby rock, covered in emerald moss, then whips her hand over the railing and her camera drops down into the heart of one whale's bubble net. Yet there's plenty of *life*.

He watches the camera hit the water, the splash immediately overwhelmed by the throes of bubbles being released from the whale's blowhole, making the impact insignificant.

She's leaning over, arms outstretched, as if trying to pick up the ocean and cradle it. Her beanie falls in too.

He embraces her, arms encircling her waist, his chin resting on her head. Is this the beginning? This moment right now?

Her eyes remain on the ocean. *I was wrong*. Beginnings lead to ends.

He eyes a colony of penguins far off in the distance—little chess pieces plotting. So what do *we* do?

We'll live in the middle.