

## **The Tin Foil Woman**

By Angela Genova

A woman named Tin Foil stood in line at an athletics store. In one hand she held a twenty-pound parka. In the other was a basket containing other necessities: Gloves, snow visors, heavy-duty winter boots, a pair of ski poles. The people who ran the store claimed they would provide these things for her, but the tour guides were all scientists, and Tin Foil didn't trust scientists, just like how she didn't trust politicians or the sixteen year-olds who worked at Walmart that told her they were out of real milk and she would have to get that strange poisoned almond crap instead. No, Tin Foil didn't trust them at all.

When it was her turn at the register, the cashier chuckled. "That's some coat. Where are you headed to?"

Tin Foil looked at her total and pulled out her wallet, taking out a series of bills and coins. She didn't have a credit card. Tin Foil didn't trust banks, either.

"Antarctica," Tin Foil replied, straight faced, counting her change. "If it's real, that is."

From a young age, Tin Foil was told she was strange. An odd duck. Her eyes bulged out of her head as if trying to escape her skull, her hands constantly twitching. Now that she was an adult, her home was empty of people and filled with clutter, a sign that said "Trespassers will be shot" tacked on her front gate.

What Tin Foil lacked in human connection she made up for in strong, unshakeable belief. She had many beliefs, but most of all she knew this: the Earth was

flat as a pancake, and surrounded by a high, impenetrable wall of ice that sheep called “Antarctica”.

A few months back, Tin Foil engaged in a heated, online debate with one of said sheep.

“If you’re so convinced, go there and take a picture,” the sheep said, “Then I’ll believe you.”

Tin Foil tried to explain that the government would kill her if she tried to take photographic evidence, but the sheep blocked her. Nonetheless, Tin Foil took it to heart. She always liked a challenge.

The journey to Antarctica had three parts: First a flight to Buenos Aires. Then another to Ushuaia, the world's southernmost city. Next, a cruise down the Drake Passage. Then finally, “*Antarctica*”.

Tin Foil knew this was a suicide mission. She would become a martyr to her belief, shot down just as she took the damning picture that would prove to the world she wasn’t crazy after all.

Tin Foil’s fellow travellers did not share her belief and made it clear they did not think highly of her. Tin Foil had never been one to shut her mouth, especially if the people she was talking to disagreed with her. People had always told her that she had a “grating” and “often unsettling” demeanour. Tin Foil saw this as a gift. She hated people, and when people were “unsettled” by her, they left her alone.

But not everyone left her alone. That was the tragic reality of life. Cashier’s forcing small talk. Acquaintances saying an arbitrary hello. Or when a young woman on

the ship approached her in the dining hall, sat beside her and said, "You didn't have anyone to play with at recess when you were a kid, did you?"

Tin Foil looked around at the herds of travellers sitting together at tables, chatting excitedly about their plans when the boat docked, and realized that it did feel a lot like being alone at recess.

"I was more of a solitary child."

The woman laughed, loud and boisterous. Tin Foil hadn't realized she was telling a joke.

Tin Foil thought the woman would leave. She didn't. She stayed around, like a gnat. Soon she was sitting next to Tin Foil at breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the dining hall for the entirety of the Drake Passage cruise. Her name was Marisol.

"Do you have any children?" Marisol asked on the cruise's last day.

"No."

"Are you married?"

"No."

"Are you excited to see Antarctica?"

"No."

"Do you like to talk?"

"No."

Marisol laughed that laugh again. "You sure like to talk when it's about your conspiracy theories."

This irked Tin Foil. She felt anger reach her, scratching at the surface of her skin. “When Copernicus first theorized that the Earth revolved around the sun, people thought it was a conspiracy.”

“You believe the Earth revolves around the sun? That wouldn’t make any sense if the Earth was flat.”

Tin Foil opened her mouth to speak, closed it. She felt that anger rising some more. Scratching. She swallowed it.

“My question,” said Marisol, “Is why do you care so much about this? Do you just want to be right?”

A quiet voice in Tin Foil’s head said, *“Because I don’t have anything else.”*

She didn’t sleep well that night.

When the morning came, the boat had already docked on the icy harbour. Travellers stood on the white plain, talking excitedly, taking photos. Tin Foil felt her chest constrict, as if a giant’s hand reached into her chest and squeezed her lungs. Despite the screaming in her head, Tin Foil put on her twenty pound parka, her gloves, her sunglasses.

She summoned all of her courage and stepped out onto the big, white expanse. Despite the bright light, Tin Foil removed her glasses.

You couldn’t see the end of it. It just went on and on. But there was no wall of ice, no armed guards. Tin Foil waited one, two, three seconds for the tanks, the army men with their machine guns. They didn’t show.

It looked so large. Antarctica. So much larger than herself. Tin Foil felt impossibly small.

There was a wetness on her cheeks, and only then did she realize she was crying.

Marisol materialized beside her.

“Are you crying because everything you believed is a lie?”

Tin Foil shook her head, gurgled.

Marisol laughed. “Why, then?”

“Because it’s so beautiful.”