



The White Darkness by Geraldine McCaughrean

Subjects: Deception—Fiction; Survival—Fiction; Antarctica—Fiction

Award: Best Books for Young Adults, Printz Award Winner

Book Lists: Gifted, Grade 6

Props: Furry hat, passport



Uncle Victor says, “Poor Symone, the victim of a shoddy education system.” He says this because, in general, I don’t know much about anything. But thanks to Uncle Victor, I do know about the Polar Regions. The bookshelves over my bed are full of books about the North and South Poles. He talks about the Poles all the time and every birthday and Christmas, I get books from Uncle Victor, about penguins and polar bears, whales and seals, explorers like Shackleton and Scott, and Captain Lawrence Oates—the one they called “Titus” who was on the doomed expedition to the South Pole in 1910. I say doomed because no one from the expedition survived, including Titus. He has been dead for ninety years. The reason I know about Titus, well you’ll think I’m ridiculous, but I am and have been in love with Titus Oates for quite a while now. I’ve read all about him in my books. I realize this relationship has problems. There are differences; I’m 14 and alive; he’s 125 and dead. But look at it this way. In ninety years, I’ll be dead too and then the age difference won’t matter.

Besides, he isn’t dead inside my head. We talk about all kinds of things; from whether friends are better than family to the best age for marrying: 14 or 125. And he listens to me. He was great when my father died. Not like those horrible girls at school—they just laughed at me. Said I probably just imagined my father’s death. I don’t like those girls and neither does Titus. That’s when Titus and I looked at each other (inside my head) and decided we could do without them so long as we had each other. “Just you and me, eh, Titus?” I would say. “Just you and me, ma chere,” he would reply. And Uncle Victor, of course, I would add, because he was a friend too.

Uncle Victor has been great helping Mum and me since my dad got sick and died. He’s loaned us money, helped me with my homework, and kept Dad’s business

going. He even arranged a holiday for us. He got free tickets on the cross-Channel train with two nights in a two-star hotel in Paris! I was really excited about the trip. It began well. We made it to Waterloo Station. But, that’s when things began to change, and not for the better. Mum couldn’t find her passport. She was upset, searching through every pocket, every compartment of her shoulder bag, between every page of her library book and under the cardboard stiffener in the cheap suitcase, there was no sign of either her passport or her calm.

Mum wanted to catch a later train, but apparently the tickets were valid only on the 8 o’clock. When the doors finally closed, Victor and I were on the inside with the suitcase, Mum was on the outside, her arms full of her own freshly ironed clothing. “Back on Saturday,” I mouthed with a smile. But, I would not back on Saturday. Apparently, Paris was just a stopping point where Uncle Victor could settle a few items and take me shopping. He bought me a beautiful red twirling skirt, a red camisole, and sturdy cold weather clothes. (*Put on hat*) Uncle Victor says we are off on an adventure to the Antarctic wilderness. A dream come true. At least, that’s what I thought at first, but now I’m not so sure. I found Mum’s passport (*Show passport*) in Uncle Victor’s raincoat pocket. I’m sure he didn’t realize it was there, he wouldn’t have kept Mum from coming on purpose. Would he? The Antarctic is a cold and brittle place. It has no patience for the weak or ignorant. I think something is wrong. I shouldn’t be here.

Symone is right, only terror and death waits for her in that frozen, dark place—she will have an adventure but one with disastrous results. Follow Symone and her uncle as they travel into the Antarctic, into the dark, into madness. (*Hold up book*) *The White Darkness* by Geraldine McCaughrean.