

"A triumph! Poignant, darkly funny, and mind-bendingly twisty at every turn."
—Elle Cosimano, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Finlay Donovan Digs Her Own Grave*

a novel

JANE AND DAN AT THE END OF THE WORLD

USA Today Bestselling Author

COLLEEN OAKLEY

TITLES BY COLLEEN OAKLEY

Jane and Dan at the End of the World

The Mostly True Story of Tanner & Louise

The Invisible Husband of Frick Island

You Were There Too

Close Enough to Touch

Before I Go

JANE AND DAN AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Colleen Oakley

BERKLEY
NEW YORK

BERKLEY

An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC

1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

penguinrandomhouse.com



Copyright © 2025 by Colleen Oakley

Readers Guide copyright © 2025 by Colleen Oakley

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for every reader. Please note that no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

BERKLEY and the BERKLEY & B colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Book design by Ashley Tucker, adapted for ebook by Kelly Brennan

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Oakley, Colleen, author.

Title: Jane and Dan at the end of the world / Colleen Oakley.

Description: New York: Berkley, 2025.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024025580 | ISBN 9780593200827 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780593200834 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Humorous fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3615.A345 J36 2025 | DDC 813/.6—dc23/eng/20240628

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024025580>

Ebook ISBN 9780593200834

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is Penguin Random House
Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68, Ireland. [https://eu-
contact.penguin.ie](https://eu-contact.penguin.ie)

pid_prh_7.1a_150484011_co_ro

CONTENTS

Dedication

Epigraph

Four Hours After the End

Prologue

The Beginning of the End

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Three Hours and Nineteen Minutes Until the End

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Three Hours and Two Minutes Until the End

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Two Hours and Thirty-Seven Minutes Until the End

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Two Hours and Three Minutes Until the End](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[One Hour and Thirty-Six Minutes Until the End](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Fifty-Eight Minutes Until the End](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Twenty-Nine Minutes Until the End](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Three Minutes Until the End](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Four Hours After the End](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[One Hour After the End](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Five Months After the End](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Readers Guide](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[About the Author](#)

For Todd Servick. I don't think you've read one word of any of my books, and
this way I'll know for sure.

It is nearly always the most improbable things that really come to pass.

—E.T.A. Hoffmann

FOUR HOURS AFTER THE END



PROLOGUE

“DO I NEED A LAWYER?”

Jane’s voice trembles. She’s never been interviewed by the police before. She’s trying to remember the last time she even *spoke* to a police officer and thinks it must have been nineteen years ago when she was nine weeks pregnant with Sissy, driving (above the speed limit) home from her granddad’s funeral where she had eaten too many ham biscuits, causing the top button of her jeans to pop off when she sat down in the driver’s seat. When the policeman said “Do you know why I pulled you over?” she burst into tears, all the emotions of her granddad dying, and Dan not being able to be with her because he had to work, and the embarrassment of her pants being undone rushing to the surface at once. The man in uniform was so bewildered, he pretended he had a call on the radio and darted back to his car, shouting, “Slow down and be safe!” over his shoulder.

She’s only asking because everyone who’s ever seen a cop drama knows you’re always supposed to ask for a lawyer.

This police officer—Kip, as he had introduced himself, and Jane thought that was a rather jaunty name for a cop. Informal. Missing the gravitas that someone who wore a pistol holster slung round his waist should inherently have—cocks his head to the right. Dirt mars his forehead and his hair is mussed. Jane thinks she sees a twig stuck in it, and she wonders for the first time what *she* must look like. He grins kindly.

“No, I don’t think that will be necessary.” He pauses. “Unless you’re secretly one of the criminals.”

A sound escapes Jane's throat—high-pitched and hyena-like. She's unsure if she's ever made a sound like it in her life. "I think they were more like... *activists*," she says.

"Activists," Kip repeats.

"Yes."

"With guns."

"Yes," Jane says again, her voice a bit weaker.

"OK." Kip clears his throat. "Let's move on. You've been through quite the ordeal and I'm sure you want to get home to your family. All I need is a witness statement from everyone involved. Can you tell me what brought you to the restaurant La Fin du Monde last night?"

Jane clears her throat. "It was, uh...my anniversary. *Our* anniversary. My husband, Dan, and I. Our nineteenth."

Kip checks his notes. "Huh. That's not what your husband said."

"You've talked to Dan?" Jane's heart squeezes, remembering the last time she saw her husband. And she wishes for the hundredth time they'd had a chance to get their stories straight.

"He said it was your twentieth."

Jane closes her eyes longer than a blink—out of both relief and annoyance. Of course he did.

"No matter," Kip says. "And can you tell me in your own words what happened? Starting with when the *activists*"—he looks at Jane pointedly—"came into the restaurant."

Jane suddenly finds it important to try to smooth her hunter green dress down, as if it's not ripped in two places and covered in soot. Having been awake for nearly twenty-four hours—and having just been through an *ordeal*—she thinks again of her appearance. The bags under her eyes are likely even more pronounced than usual. She reaches up to comb her fingers through her hair and finds it snarled—impossible to get through.

"Take your time," Kip says, but he looks weary, and he says it in a way that conveys he wishes she'd hurry the hell up so he could get home. She wonders if he has a family. A spouse. His ring finger is bare.

Jane opens her mouth to speak, but a knock on the door interrupts them.

“Zimmerman wants to see you.”

“Now?”

“Now.”

“Excuse me for a minute.”

Kip leaves the tiny room and Jane is alone. Typically, she would use time by herself to observe. A writer, she always tries to log details for future work—especially unexpected specifics. Like the fact that instead of an empty cement block room with a long table and a two-way mirror like in every crime television show Jane’s ever seen, she’s in what appears to be a storage closet. Overflowing filing cabinets squeezed together, a mess of office detritus—staplers, folders, boxes of pens strewn about. “This is temporary,” Kip said apologetically when he opened the door to it and gestured her in. “We’re building a new precinct. Much bigger. State-of-the-art!”

But her mind isn’t on her surroundings as much as what she’s going to say when Kip comes back. Only seconds ago, she wished for time to get her thoughts together, but now it only ratchets up her panic. Is she going to *lie*? To a police officer? Given her actions of the past twelve or so hours, it wouldn’t be the worst thing she’s done, but still. She takes a deep breath and exhales, counting to five. He just needs a statement! He said it himself. And that’s what she’ll give him. She’ll keep it short and simple, and stick to the truth as much as possible.

The door opens and Jane startles. Kip reenters, but this time is accompanied by another officer—this one older, his chin covered with white-gray stubble, his skin carved by time.

“You’re Jane Brooks,” the older cop says, peering at her.

“Yes.”

“As in Jane Brooks, the author?”

Jane would normally be thrilled by this question. Before her one and only novel had been published six years ago, she dreamt of people coming up to her on streets, in airports, fawning over her, clutching dog-eared and worn copies of her book to their chests, able to recite passages from memory.

You're Jane Brooks! Would you mind terribly signing this? And she wouldn't mind! She would be *honored*.

And yet, this was the second time in two days someone recognized her as the author Jane Brooks, and she was already quite content to never ever hear it again.

"You wrote this book." He holds up the familiar cover—the one that brought tears to her eyes when she first saw it on her computer screen so many years ago. Her name! On the cover of a book!

Now Jane's knees go weak at the sight of it. Her stomach flops like a fish on dry land. She nods. It wouldn't do to lie in this situation.

"This book that is about"—he glances at the back jacket copy, as if he's already read it but still can't quite believe what it says—"terrorists taking over a restaurant?"

Jane holds up a finger. "Technically, it was a tearoom? Not a restaurant."

The chief's nostrils flare, which Jane takes to mean he's not interested in the distinction.

"Do you know why this book—*your* book—was in the front seat of the van found at the crime scene?"

Jane knows. Oh, does she know.

"I don't know," she says. She finds that some situations warrant lying.

The second police officer's eyes look as though they may pop out of his head at any second—like buttons off the waistband of too-tight jeans when one is nine weeks pregnant and has eaten too many ham biscuits at a funeral. "That's awfully ironic, don't you think?" He's nearly shouting now, as if he and Jane are on an emotional seesaw and the more calmly she responds, the higher his agitation grows.

And even though her heart is thundering and she's dead panicked that she's likely going to find herself under arrest and behind bars for the rest of her life, she whispers: "I think you mean coincidental." She knows Dan finds it annoying, how she constantly corrects people's grammar, but she's positive there's not one person on earth who uses the term *ironic* accurately,

and she can't help herself from pointing it out any more than she can keep the sun from rising each day.

"What?" he roars.

Instead of repeating herself, she looks at Kip. "I can explain."

This time his head cocks to the left instead of the right, as if appraising her from a new angle will give him some kind of perspective or insight he didn't have before. And then he says: "I think you'd better."

She clears her throat and opens her mouth. Closes it. She repeats this exercise—opening and closing her mouth like a glitching elevator door—six more times, until she realizes the problem: She can't explain. Not really. She opens her mouth one final time and says: "I think I need a lawyer."

THE BEGINNING OF THE END



CHAPTER

1

“**HAVE YOU SEEN MY WALLET?**” Dan yells from another room in the house. Jane can’t tell if he’s in the kitchen or his office or the den. Not that it matters.

This is the last time.

This is the last time.

This is the last time.

As she repeats her mantra, Jane slicks a tube of bright red across her lips and stares at herself in the mirror. She never wears red lipstick. She never wears lipstick, actually. But a few days ago she saw this post on Instagram: *Change your lipstick, change your life!* It was written by one of those pseudo-serious influencers who fluctuate between penning deep, thoughtful, and slightly condescending captions about loving your cellulite or your crow’s-feet because **YOU ARE ENOUGH** and making a six-figure income hawking clothing and cosmetics that will improve your life in some way because you’re very obviously not enough. Of course, these women don’t actually have all the answers but have somehow convinced their one hundred thousand desperate followers they do. Jane knows it’s all bullshit. Jane is also desperate.

“Babe?” Dan calls again.

She takes a deep breath. *This is the last time.*

“Have you looked on the table beside the door?” she says.

Where it always freaking is? she does not say.

“Beneath the mail,” she says.

A few beats of silence follow. “Found it!”

Jane scrutinizes her reflection in the mirror. She raises her eyebrows and watches the horizontal lines deepen on her forehead. She wonders, as she often does, what she’d look like with Botox, even as she knows she doesn’t care enough to get it. Or maybe it’s that she cares more what it would say about her if she did. She often fancies her anti-Botox stance as part of her long-fought battle against the patriarchy—yet she dyes her hair and applies mascara daily and she’s not sure how to reconcile her hypocrisy, except to say that shooting poison into her face is a bridge too far. She wishes women would make a pact to just not get it (much like the Wait Until 8th campaign a group of parents spearheaded when Sissy was in middle school to not buy their kids cell phones until the eighth grade), not because of the patriarchy as much as her selfish desire to not look so old and tired compared to her smooth-skinned friends. The irony isn’t lost on her that the fact that she thinks this much about her aging appearance and Botox at all means the patriarchy has already won.

She plucks a tissue out of the box and wipes the slash of cherry red off her mouth, replacing it with her reliable unflavored lip balm, and thinks: *When we’re divorced, Dan will never find his wallet again.*

Pinpricks of excitement tingle her neck, then shoot down her spine: the same feeling she’s experienced every day since she decided she was going to finally do it. It doesn’t bring her joy to think of Dan losing his wallet for good. There’s no schadenfreude to be found in his inability to look under or behind things. She’s genuinely concerned with how he’ll get on when they’re apart. And how she’ll get on without him.

She hasn’t had to take out the trash in nineteen years. Or iron a shirt. She doesn’t even know where the ironing board is. Or whether everything needs starch or just some things.

But that’s no reason to stay together, is it? Whenever someone asks the secret to making a marriage last, the answer is never, *He’s the only one who knows where the ironing board is kept.*

“Mom, I can’t find my charger and my phone’s about to die and I was supposed to leave ten minutes ago!” Sissy comes rushing into the bathroom like her hair is on fire and not like she loses her charger four times a week, which she does.

“Mom!” Jane hears Josh’s voice before he, too, appears in the bathroom. “Can you drop me at King’s house on your way out?”

Jane turns to Sissy first. “That’s the third charger I’ve bought you this year.”

“I know,” Sissy says, her voice laced with irritation, as though it’s Jane’s fault that Sissy keeps losing her chargers and Jane keeps replacing them. *It actually is my fault*, Jane thinks, knowing she’s made it too easy, hasn’t made Sissy feel the consequences of her actions.

“If you can’t find this one, you’re paying for the replacement.”

“Fine! Whatever. But I need a charger *now*.”

Jane takes a deep breath and tries to tamp down her own irritation, knowing it will do no good to match Sissy’s anger with her own. “Use mine,” she says.

“Really?”

“Yes.” Jane never lets Sissy use her charger precisely because she is so prone to losing them, but she’s about to ruin Sissy’s life by divorcing her father, so she figures this one time it won’t hurt. She turns her gaze to Josh.

“Are King’s parents home?”

“I think so.”

She cocks an eyebrow at him.

“I’ll double-check.” He darts out as quickly as he appeared, Sissy trailing in his wake.

“Wait! Sissy!”

She turns around.

“What are you ten minutes late for?” Jane can barely keep up with her own schedule, much less those of two busy teenagers.

“I’m going to Jazz’s house to watch the final episode of *Yellowjackets*, remember?”