

Snowflakes

by Jim Schicatano

Whiteness. For as far as Alan could see, nothing but pure white covered the flat landscape before him. The heavy snowstorm continued to blanket the farmland as he plodded through the hostile environment across the frozen fields. Gusts of freezing wind blew directly into him, the bitter snow biting at his reddened, uncovered face. He drew his heavy winter coat closer to his body, kicked the snow and ice off his boots, and continued on his journey.

"Just up ahead," Alan mumbled to himself, struggling to breathe. The icy air burned his nostrils and lungs. Sharp pains shot across his chest and stomach, and his leg muscles ached from the difficult journey as he stumbled through the foot-high snow. Ice particles clung to his eye-lashes, further hindering his visibility. His fingers and toes burned with frostbite.

He was cold and tired; his body weary. But he trudged through the snowstorm, over the harvested corn fields, to his farmhouse ahead. It was less than a mile away by his estimates, though his judgment was probably affected by the storm.

"Damn car!" he muttered to himself. Alan could think of a thousand better times and places for his car to break down. He had only been a mile from home when the engine suddenly failed, forcing him to complete the journey by foot. Cutting through the edge of his farm would cut his journey in half, but made travel more difficult.

He took momentary shelter from the howling, blustery wind behind a snow-whitened evergreen growing in the middle of his field. The ten-foot tree swayed back toward him, rocked by the unrelenting forces of wind and the weight of the heavy, wet snow. Alan bent over to catch his breath and rest his fatigued body. Everywhere, there was milky whiteness. The bleached expanse of ground, the creamy, stretching sky, the frosted, icy tree – the entire world around him was painted and enveloped in pure white. It seemed to be descending upon him, engulfing him, devouring him.

Snowflakes. Perfectly geometrical crystals of ice. Unique, wondrous patterns of beauty; brilliant, complex designs of whiteness. Each, remarkable; all a product of the diversity of nature.

Alan pulled himself upright, and peered through the pearly sheet of snow and ice, plummeting from the sky, toward the direction of his

farmhouse. At this distance, however, nothing could be seen – except more snow-whitened evergreens.

The break in his journey and semi-shelter from the driving storm had cleared his mind. He hadn't noticed the silence that had encompassed him – a silence broken only momentarily by the sharp whistling of the fierce wind. The snowfall had muffled all sound around him and he could not even recall hearing his own footsteps tramping through the snow. It was now that he realized his mind had been wandering aimlessly as his trek through the storm had mesmerized him, pushing him into a silent, lonely, daydream. He had lost all sense of time and had been moving through instinct.

"Wait a minute," he suddenly whispered to himself. He gazed in disbelief at the multitude of evergreens on his farm. What were they doing here? Why were trees growing in the middle of his corn field?

He turned to gaze back at the direction where he came. Was he at the wrong farm? Had he been driven off course by the storm?

Alan closed his eyes and shook his head as a magical dream-like sensation swept through his conscious. The snow and howling wind abruptly ceased. The white sky suddenly evolved into a mysterious gray. An ominous silence enveloped the land.

Evergreens. Perfect white cones rising perpendicular from the ground. They dotted the entire landscape in all directions for as far as he could see. The large ones and the smaller ones all separated by equal distance. But they were no longer trees.

Beautiful, symmetrical patterns extended majestically upward from the ground all around him – spectacular in complexity and wondrous in design. Perfectly geometrical patterns of crystal that comprised the icy world that he now inhabited.

A gentle breeze flowed across his horrified, wind-scorched face as his snowflake gently floated downward.