

The Snowstorm

by Loren Eiseley

'It is the first and last snows - especially the last -
that blind us most,' Thoreau once said, and I wonder
what he possibly could have been thinking since snow
is always with us and keeps falling
in its proper season,
the generations accepting it without first or last
save perhaps this:

There is a single snow which a child
stores in his memory, the first
snow when he falls in a drift, the first
snow that reveals secrets
like the flake on his sleeve
always to be remembered because it brought
knowledge of crystalline perfection, infinite diversity to be tested
with his own salt tears,
the immeasurable prodigality
of the universal worlds in which we are lost,
the first and blinding snow of childhood.

Second,

The view from the farm window, the last,
with the black guest
waiting at the door
and outside
falling and falling
across corn shocks
wheat stubble
plowland
the whiteness of the void. Lucretius must so have seen his atoms,
created
out of them a world. A wind whipped the flakes aside, perhaps,
a snow flurry that conceived
a farmhouse kitchen
and a stove,
made fields,
made animals,
made men.

Look, can you say I am not composed of snowflakes?

My eyes are filled with them.
They are falling faster now.
Suppose I go
outside and join them.
Could you say that I
was ever here? No, no. The first blindness is to see the ultimate minute perfection.
That is the illusion of the water drop.
The second is to believe
the black guest at the door.
My friend,
there is only the blindness of a million years of snowfall,
and you and I
wraiths, wraiths, discoursing as we fall.
Do not bother to throw up the window,
snow is already blowing
the room is disassembled,
our substance,
the room's substance, is snowflakes;
we are falling apart now,
we have re-entered
the eternal storm.

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