

Silent snowfall

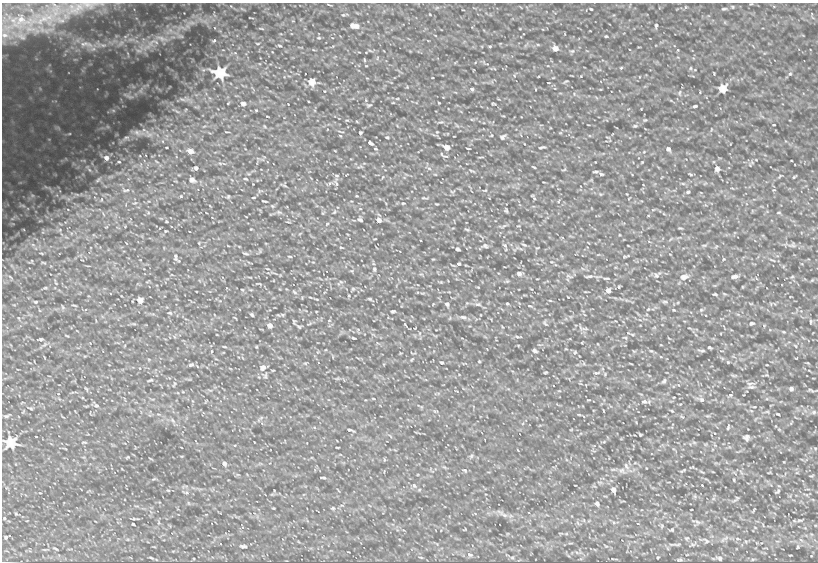


It happens over and over again throughout the winter, so why does it always surprise me? The evening, all windstorm, soon passes over into a night of rainfall. Droplets dance on the metal roof of the cabin—lightly, on their toes, and I doze; heavily, foot stomping, and I stir. Then silence. I sleep. In the morning, a lambent white light fills the bedroom of the cabin. The mirror affixed to the door of the old cupboard at the head of my bed tells me what I already know. I rise and gaze out the window at Douglas the Fir. His branches strain under the weight of white. The fields stretching up to Schauinsland Mountain blaze white-hot with cold. It's always the same feeling that accompanies the first overwhelming glimpse of snowfall at the cabin, the feeling of having been hoodwinked during the night, the sense that I should have known what the night—that inexpressibly beautiful creature—was up to, or down to. The Snow Queen of Kurosawa's *Dreams* has once again suffocated me softly in the night, and once again I awake in paradise.

The colors of snow; or, where beauty is

When Monet and Pissarro paint snow, it is all roses and bluebells with an orange aura and a crimson afterglow—every color but white. Of course, white isn't a color at all, but, as we learned in school, it is all the colors spun around on a disc. That spinning disc is rarely encountered out there in the world, to be sure, but painted snow teaches us the lesson anyway. Herman Melville calls white "the colorless all-color," and so it is, even at night, under a moon.

Years ago, I arrived at the cabin with a lover. We were jet lagged and could not sleep during the night. We sensed, then saw, in the moonlight outside the cabin window that snow had fallen. We got up, dressed, and stepped out the cabin door into two feet of snow. It was four o'clock in the morning. The waxing moon was only half full, but it lit up the blanketed valley. We walked, or trudged, in silence over Edward's Heights until dawn. In the black of night, under moonlight, the snow crystals glittered violet



and green—amethyst and sapphire—with each laborious step of ours. With each turn of the head or inclination of the back and shoulders, the snow scintillated in alternating flashes of green and purple, purple and green, each more brilliant than the last. It was as though not white but purple-green was the all-color. A flashing round dance of vert and violet seemed to capture the entire spectrum of colors, including ultraviolet and infrared. The philosopher Friedrich Joseph Schelling calls the unity of violet and green “supreme splendor,” and we believed him. We returned to the cabin, cooked a big breakfast, made love, slept away the day, and woke to another night of moonlit snow. We discovered that lag can also make a life.

Since then, I have walked over Edward’s Heights under snow and moonlight many times, searching for amethyst and sapphire but finding only diamonds. On these later occasions, I was alone. That was how I learned that vert and violet had been effluences of her eyes, and that beauty is in the eye of the beholder’s beloved.