



The Christmas Snowflake[®]

by Jim Worth

All day the dreary gray clouds covered the sky. The temperature was dropping and icy flakes were forming for the first snowfall of the season.

Each winter there was a first snowfall. It was considered an honor to be one of the first pure white snowflakes to cover the land. Thousands of new snowflakes were preparing for the task. All except one. He had other plans, and it didn't include falling on the Smith's driveway.

No, that is not what Chill, who thought he had the coolest name of all the new flakes, had in mind. His siblings, Crystal, Whiteout, Snoflake, Icy, and Powder were all very excited to be a part of this grand plan. Blizzy couldn't sit still.

Chill looked down from the cloud to the flat area below. "This does not look like the mountains," he exclaimed. "It's ugly and flat."

Mr. Freeze, ice tablet in hand, was going over his list. He was in charge and wanted to be ready when the temperature was just right. Chill did not notice. He was busy working out his escape.

A cold voice interrupted Chill's thoughts. Mr. Freeze began reading off names with lightning speed, and flakes all around Chill began to move. He was stuck between Blizzy and Powder as the group pushed quickly to the edge of the cloud. Before he could protest he was floating with the others toward the ground.

Chill had to get away and desperately lunged at a cold stream of air going west. But he missed and tumbled into Crystal. "Chill, what are you doing?" she cried out. "We've been assigned to give the Smiths a white Christmas." She smiled. "It will make them happy."

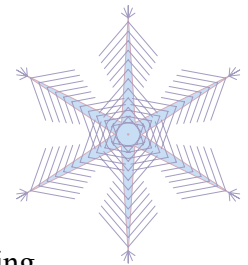
But Chill didn't want to make the Smiths happy. He was a selfish snowflake and decided he would just float forever. Yes, snowflakes had short lives and gave lots of people joy, but it wasn't his job to make anyone happy. There were thousands of other flakes to do that.

Try though he did, he continued to drift toward the Smith's, a nice home in some small town in the Midwest. He strained to his left, but missed the wisp of air going by. He tried hard to accelerate but was too slow for the gust of air below him. No matter how hard he tried he couldn't stop falling.

He was a determined snowflake though, and would not give up. He reached for the tail of a stream heading west and like magic, was swept away from the others. As he watched Snoflake and Icy disappear in the distance he could faintly hear Powder. "Chiiiiiiiiii," she called. In the next moment they all disappeared.

Chill had been floating for two days and had mastered the winds and breezes, especially those going west. When he grew weary he would rest briefly on slow clouds, then continue on his magnificent adventure. He was sure no snowflake had ever floated this far before. He would be famous.

As he was congratulating himself for being the greatest snowflake of all time, the wind died and suddenly he found himself drifting again, falling, floating toward a barren place he'd never seen. There were no homes and no yards. Not even a driveway. It was flat and ugly. This was no place for a snowflake as famous as Chill to end his



journey.

Whiteout and Crystal were gone. He was alone with flakes he didn't know. He was cold and tired, and this was not the mountains. This made Chill very sad.

A westerly breeze brushed him, but he was not paying attention and didn't grab it. He was struggling, unable to stop the fall to the desolate terrain below. He had almost given up when a blast of cold air lifted thousands of flakes high into the sky. Luckily, Chill was one of them. His journey would continue.

He caught a few gusts of wind that took him further north and west. But Chill was lonely. He wondered about Snoflake and Crystal and if they had made the Smiths happy. Had they survived during the days since Chill left? Could they see the children's smiles? Hear their laughter?

It was Christmas Eve and Chill was tired of drifting. It wasn't as fun as he thought it would be. He had no friends and no one knew he was the greatest snowflake of all time. He tried to tell the other snowflakes how special he was, but all snowflakes are unique and none of them cared about Chill or his record. He had been battered along the way by a very strong wind, and an unfriendly flake knocked off one of his delicate arms. He had lost his symmetry and his self esteem, and now questioned his existence.

It was becoming more difficult to find colder air and keep from melting. He was growing weary and thought about going down with the next snowfall. Chill missed his siblings. He was sure they had made the Smith's happy. He now realized that being selfish was lonely. It made him sad knowing that he wouldn't make anyone happy.

Chill managed to drift through the night, and awakened to a beautiful, crisp, sunny day. Below him were mountains and tall trees, lush valleys and wandering streams. This would be a perfect place for a snowflake, he thought. He would make the mountain white, melt quickly, and his loneliness would end.

Chill closed his eyes and started his descent well ahead of the others. There were cabins among the trees and he would be someone's first snowfall after all. Yes, he thought, Christmas morning is the best time to fulfill his destiny.

Being first, Chill would be able to select the best spot. As he drifted down he looked at the sloping hills and towering pines. It was beautiful and he could pick any place he wanted to light: the top of the most magnificent trees, the roof of one of the nicest cabins, or beside a crystal clear stream. He had many choices.

What he saw next surprised and disturbed him. Below, in front of a wonderful cabin was an odd creature. It was a little girl with bent legs and odd sticks on her arms; one hand extended skyward. Chill was floating right toward her. This is not what he had envisioned.

He struggled to move right or left, choosing instead to fall on one of the tallest pines; a lofty resting place, much more suited to a flake of his stature. It was much better than being crushed and melting in the hand of a handicapped little girl.

As he slowed his descent, he could hear a conversation coming from inside the cabin.

"Do you think it's okay for her to be outside? It's so cold out there," a caring woman's voice inquired.

"We promised her we would give her snow for Christmas," a man's voice explained. "She's



bundled up and it looks like it's going to snow. After all she's been through, I don't think a little chill is going to hurt her."

"You're probably right, but her little cheeks looked so cold."

A few flakes floated past Chill, but he hadn't noticed. He was too involved in the words echoing through the cold mountain air to the top of the mighty pines.

"Did you see her face? She wanted to be outside when it started to snow."

A few more flakes passed Chill, but he continued to listen intently.

"It has to be today," the man said. "The doctor said this was probably her last Christmas."

Chill did not know exactly what the words meant, but he felt them, and was sure he had found his purpose. He saw flakes below and took off like a shot, faster than any snowflake had ever fallen. He had to be first to this child whose need was far greater than his own.

He raced by the first dozen snowflakes with ease. The next few were just below him, about halfway down the tree. Control, at this speed, was a little problem and he bounced off the first of the flakes and into a limb knocking off another of his arms. The heck with symmetry, he thought. He had to be the first, and determined, he regained his bearings.

Only seven flakes left between him and the little girl. Chill blasted by the first and second, and sent the third crashing into the pine tree. The next two were easy, but he would need some luck and a little help to reach the outstretched hand, with the crutch attached, before either of the last two. He pulled back his four remaining arms and turned into a rocket—an icy missile. The last flake and tree limb were his last obstacles; the hand only a few feet below. He had to make it.

The last flake settled on the lowest branch of the tree. Chill let out a huge sigh, spread his arms and slowed to a perfect snowflake glide.

Chill had succeeded. His aim was flawless. He settled softly in her raised palm and immediately felt the warmth of her smile as she lowered her hand to see the flake she had caught; her first ever.

The beautiful little girl, face aglow, stared in wide-eyed amazement. "Mom, Dad," she shouted, "come see. I've caught the most beautiful snowflake in the world. My Christmas snowflake."

Her radiant smile and warm heart overwhelmed Chill. He smiled up at the little girl and all thoughts of selfishness and loneliness faded. Chill's brothers and sisters would be proud. His life had meaning. He had given one wonderful person more joy and happiness than he could ever imagine possible.

