1657 Heart of Winter

The snowstorm manifested by the Winter Beast was like a rolling cataclysm, with devastating winds carrying a seething mass of swirling snow and tiny ice particles. Close to its heart, the ice particles were like a myriad of razor-sharp blades, shredding anything that had not been frozen by the unholy cold already.

Each of the countless shards of ice had been a part of someone slain by the blizzard once, perhaps.

And yet, absolute peace reigned in the heart of the storm. A vast area beyond the invisible fortress wall of suffocating cold was entirely devoid of wind, snow, and ice... everything was flawlessly still, as if nothing could move in this frigid kingdom, not even the winds of the blizzard itself.

With the sky above shrouded by ash, it was dark here, with frozen rivers of lava glowing dimly as they turned to glass. The heat of the underground rivers of molten rock was powerless against the profane power of the Corrupted Titan... and yet, it was enough to buy Sunny a second or two more.

The Winter Beast itself was floating above the ground in the middle of its frozen kingdom.

When Sunny first saw it, he was taken aback.

The creature... was eerie and grotesque, unlike anything he had ever seen. Just witnessing it made him feel appalled, as if his senses were trying to reject the existence of such a being.

The Winter Beast could not be called a beast, at all. Instead, it was an expansive, ethereal structure made of ice, as if countless torrents of water had frozen when they exploded outward from a hidden source. It would have been beautiful if it wasn't so... organic.

Although the titan's body was made of ice, it also looked like a living creature. The twisting pillars of ice vaguely resembled parts of a mangled body... limbs, organs, torn intestines, broken bones, and desiccated flesh. It was as though a giant being had been meticulously disassembled into countless parts, and then violently fused together in macabre disorder.

There were dark shapes of other Nightmare Creatures fused into the ice here and there, as well, still and lifeless.

The ice was pale and bleak, but the Winter Beast itself was nevertheless full of color.

That was because numerous flowers bloomed on the ice, their petals an intense azure color. The contrast between their vibrant beauty and the appalling body of the creature beneath was hideously striking.

Vast plumes of snow drifted from the flowers like pollen, shrouding the Winter Beast in a frosty haze,

It was both beautiful and harrowing... but mostly harrowing.

...At the very heart of the eerle abomination, barely visible through the ice, a small shadow was encased in it. Sunny thought that it resembled the remains of a human being, but he wasn't sure.

In any case, he was momentarily lost as to what to do. How was one even supposed to fight such a creature?

But his hesitation only lasted for a split second.

Still carried forward by inertia and having lost his balance, the Shadow Colossus fell and rolled over his shoulder. The ground quaked from the terrible force of the impact, and the thin layer of volcanic glass cracked under his weight, a fountain of molten lava shooting into the air - only to freeze a moment later into an abstract sculpture.

At the same time, the frozen pauldron of the Onyx Mantle shattered into countless pieces of black ice, and the giant's shoulder beneath it became covered by a net of deep cracks.

The outer layers of the Shell had already been turned to ice, and were now fracturing under the strain of his movements. It seemed as though the giant's skin was peeling, revealing the black mess of firm muscles underneath.

It did not matter.

Sunny was already exiting the roll, propelling himself forward into a powerful leap. The Winter Beast moved slightly, the azure mountain of its body hovering above the snow. Some of the twisting, vaguely organic pillars of ice moved, as well..., unfurling slowly, as if preparing to explode forward and receive the shadow giant into their embrace.

Sunny shuddered as he flew through the frozen hell toward the harrowing creature. But it was too late for regret. Now that he had jumped, there was no turning back, and no choosing a different strategy.

'Die!'

A stifled roar escaped through the dark giant's bared teeth.

Sunny fell on the Winter Beast from above, but just then, countless spikes of ice extended from the creature's body and tore through his armor, impaling the damaged Shell. Not paying it any attention, he immediately grabbed the thickest of the ice spears and pulled himself lower across its length, leaving a trail of dissipating shadows behind.

In the place where his hand touched the ice, the gauntlet of the Onyx Mantle disintegrated into a haze of ice, and two of his fingers broke off.

Sunny sensed the twisted pillars of ice flowing forward to encompass him. The unbearable cold permeated the entire mass of the Shadow Colossus Shell, sending waves of pain through his soul.

His dark eyes surged with murderous fury.

In the next moment, the impaled giant slid low enough to reach the actual body of the abominable titan. His feet touched the ground.

Crushing countless azure flowers, he stretched his hands and grabbed onto the grotesque shape of the titan, his claws digging into the killing ice.

And then...

Sunny pulled the Winter Beast into the shadows.

'Let me help you off your throne, you abominable wretch...'

In war, the best advantage one could gain was fighting on a battlefield of their choosing. Sunny was currently in the very heart of the Winter Beast's storm, where his enemy wielded the most power. So...

He was going to carry both of them away from this frozen hell.

Shadow Step had undergone an evolution during his Transcendence, so Sunny could carry living beings with him now. Sadly, he could not leave them in the dark realm of shadows... but he could very well transport them to someplace else in the material world. The range of his teleportation had also increased drastically due to how far his shadow sense could reach.

Of course, teleporting a Corrupted Titan against its will, and over a vast distance, was going to burn an immeasurable amount of his essence.

But it was more than worth it.

'Come! Come with me, beast!"

He would have grinned if his lips hadn't been frozen and shattered already,

Sunny exerted all of his power to pull the Winter Beast into the shadows. The titan tried to resist,but it was of no use. Perhaps if it had reacted sooner, or knew the enemy better, such an outcome could have been prevented... but not anymore.

Even when the hands dragging the creature into the darkness turned to ice and shattered, it was already too late.

In the next moment, unbelievably...

The crumbling giant made of shadows and the appalling creature of azure flowers and pale ice suddenly disappeared from the frigid stillness of the snowstorm's heart.

...A split second later, both of them emerged from the darkness in the infernal depths of Mount Erebus, plummeting into a vast lake of Incandescent magma.