

A SMALL EXCERPT FROM MY UNFINISHED NOVEL

The ANTAGONIST Quest

CHAPTER 1: The Winter Blast

“Roar.” Then came a flash.

I stood frozen, mouth ajar, trying to process what had just happened on stage. It soared so fast that my eyes barely registered anything but stripes. Never before had I felt goosebumps this intense — not even when I saw my incognito crush! My cheeks tightened, my brows lifted, and I got pulled into those hypnotic lines.

It was a regular afternoon in my quiet little town when I decided to attend a local theatre show — me, invisible as a pin in grass.

The name of the play was **The Winter Beast** — striking and unforgettable.

By the time it ended, I was still stuck in my seat, goosebumps crawling all over me, like I had just absorbed something bigger than myself. That’s when my half-conscious self wandered toward the place no one ever celebrated — the animal park.

There it was.

In a wide enclosure lay the very beast from the play — raw muscle, rage, and nobility in one colossal form. I was gullible enough to fall for those stripes, even before I knew what the creature was called. It rose from the pool, soaked and staggering, and approached. The fence between us suddenly felt... invisible.

The beast ignored me — it didn’t acknowledge my existence at all. It walked with the kind of grace that made it look like it ruled the very idea of freedom.

Well... to begin with, this is the story of the time a rumor — a **canard**, they called it — about a man-eating predator transformed into a horrifying truth in the village I lived in.

My town was a tiny fraction of fertile pastureland, barely even named, with just a handful of people. It was surrounded by larger villages, yes, but nothing stood taller — literally or metaphorically — than the **White Forest** at its center: a wilderness ruled solely by the season of snow.

Here, winter wasn't a phase. It was **divine law**. The snow chose who lived and who vanished.

Our village lay on the far western edge of the forest — a place no one dared to live year-round. And there was good reason for that.

Every winter, we migrated to the town of **Bracota**, about a hundred miles away — a place filled with livestock, warm homes, and the mundane comforts of survival.

That annual migration wasn't optional; it was **ritual**. No one questioned it. Winters in our side of the White Forest were brutal in ways legends could barely describe. Survival here was like trying to breathe on the moon — beautiful, silent, and deadly.

But don't mistake our town for barren or lifeless.

It had soul.

A timeworn library, dusty but filled with stories.

A small school dormitory.

And yes, a zoo — though we preferred calling it the **animal park**.