

Desolate 33

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 2: The Lake in the East Mountain Chapter 16: The Fur Collectors

The exquisitely cut and stitched beast furs were very form fitting, causing Autumn Leaf to seem rather heroic and valiant. She stood there in the area outside the Metalstone Tribe, staring off into the distance.

Her figure had attracted the attention and the gazes of this rustic tribe's youths. Ever since Autumn Leaf had arrived at the Metalstone Tribe, there had been no question that she had become the most beautiful girl here...one youngster after another did their best to find opportunities to show off their strength and valor in front of her, but not a single one had been able to attract her interest.

"Miss Autumn Leaf is waiting for her young master, right?"

"Right. I hear that Uncle Dala, upon returning, said that her young master is extremely powerful. Over a hundred Blue Guards of the Ironwood clan were all killed by that young master in the blink of an eye!"

"Only a powerful young master like that would be worthy of someone as beautiful as Miss Autumn Leaf."

"It's a pity that he encountered a Diremonster! Most likely, that powerful young master won't be able to survive his encounter with the Diremonster. When angered, Diremonsters can cause the entire area to change. That one had immediately killed a large group of people by freezing them to death. Uncle Dala and the others were only lucky enough to survive because they fled quickly. If that young master were to die, Miss Autumn Leaf would have to find another person to marry!"

The youths of the tribe all watched from their position by the gate while speaking quietly amongst themselves.

As far as they considered, a girl like Autumn Leaf was like one of the legendary goddesses...compare to Autumn Leaf, the other girls of their tribe were as far beneath her as the earth was beneath the heavens.

Autumn Leaf stood there, staring into the distant mountain forest.

She was waiting. Waiting for the most important man in her life.

"Autumn Leaf." A powerfully built figure strode out from the tribe. It was the other servant, Mowu. Mowu urged her, "Go back and get some rest. Once the young master arrives, the guards at the gate of the tribe will definitely see him."

"No." Autumn Leaf shook her head gently.

Mowu looked at Autumn Leaf, and then he sat down as well on a nearby, chopped-through tree trunk. His forehead was furrowed in worry as well. After Uncle Dala had returned, he had found out that Ji Ning had begun battling with the 'Aquatic Rhino King', a Diremonster. As to what the results of that

battle were, no one knew. Although in his heart, of course he still hoped that his young master would return, his rational mind was telling him...the young master probably had met with misfortune!

This was because Uncle Dala and the others had spent roughly two days on the journey back from Eastmount Marsh.

Given young master Ning's speed, if he was still alive, he probably would have made his way to the Metalstone Tribe under half a day. Logically speaking, he should have reached the Metalstone Tribe before Uncle Dala and the others had arrived! But Uncle Dala and the others had been back for more than two days, but Ning had yet to return.

"If the young master is dead...Autumn Leaf and I will most likely have to die as well." Mowu said quietly.

If their master died, how could the servants continue to live?

Local hegemony such as the Ji clan had very strict internal regulations.

"Huh?" Mowu suddenly blinked. From afar, he faintly saw an indistinct, yet familiar figure...the young master's figure!

"Young master!" Autumn Leaf had already begun to rush over there.

"Young master?"

"Miss Autumn Leaf is running over."

"Look, there seems to be someone coming from that side. Could that be the young master which Miss Autumn Leaf has been waiting for?" The youths standing guard at the gate whispered to each other, while some of them also immediately began to run inside the tribe to inform the other tribesmen.

Autumn Leaf watched as the fur-clad, smiling young man walked over. The past two days, she had been constantly repressing her own fear, her nervousness, her wild thoughts...and now, all these various emotions caused her to suddenly begin to shed tears.

"Young master." Autumn Leaf looked at Ning. "I, I..."

"Hey, I'm back." With his astonishing eyesight Ning noticed that from afar, in the middle of the tribe, Uncle Dala and the one-armed man were currently walking in their direction. He couldn't help but laugh, "So Dala made it back already. Was he the one who told you that I was battling with the Aquatic Rhino King? Just because I didn't come back for a few days, you were frightened this badly?"

Autumn Leaf did her best to hold back further tears.

"It was just an Aquatic Rhino King. To your young master, it's barely worth mentioning." Ning winked at her, seemingly in extremely high spirits.

Autumn Leaf breathed out in astonishment, "Young master, you killed the Diremonster?"

"Yep." Ning nodded delightedly.

“Wow, a Diremonster. Young master, you killed a Diremonster.” Autumn Leaf was extremely excited. “Young master, you are only eleven years old, but you killed a Diremonster. This...this...” As a personal maidservant, Autumn Leaf’s life centered around Ning. As she always revolved around him, to her, Ning was like her most important family member. Naturally, Autumn Leaf was truly excited to learn that Ji Ning was now capable of killing Diremonsters.”

Ji Ning hurriedly lowered his voice. “Don’t spread the news.”

“Right, right.” Autumn Leaf nodded hurriedly.

“Come, let’s go take a look at the Metalstone Tribe.” Ning said. The past few days, Ning had been in the mountain forests, pondering the results of the past two day’s battles. He had also come to realize some mistakes he had made in the previous battles. After careful pondering and consideration of the two sword techniques he had used, he had actually improved quite a bit further.

Ning led Autumn Leaf towards the gate of the Metalstone Tribe.

Uncle Dala and a group of tribesmen were there, and they went up to welcome him. Leading the tribesmen was a balding old man with white hair. The balding old man walked over and bowed repeatedly with respect. “I, Tyson of the Metalstone Tribe, would like to thank you, mighty young master, for having repeatedly saved the lives of the tribesmen of my Metalstone Tribe. All the clansmen of the Metalstone Tribe feel boundless gratitude for you...and we’ve been waiting for your return.”

Ning smiled and nodded. “I’ll stay with your Metalstone Tribe for a period of time. As for ‘rescued’, all I did was help out in passing. Also...for now, I don’t want to be disturbed.”

“Understood, understood.” The balding old man nodded repeatedly.

“Dala.” Ning looked over.

The tall, powerful, bear-like Uncle Dala hurriedly stepped forward, seemingly very excited. “Young master, when I saw that you returned, I...”

“It’s alright.” Ning laughed. “You helped me for a month in Eastmount Marsh. I told you that when I returned to the Metalstone Tribe, I would definitely reward you heavily. Take this.” As he spoke, within his hands, three ‘beastheads’ of gold appeared. He tossed it over, each beasthead weighing ten pounds. This bear-like Uncle Dala instantly was stupefied.

And then, he hurriedly caught them all, while the surrounding tribesmen all stared at him with envy.

“Let’s go.” Ning looked at Mowu and Autumn Leaf, then headed straight into the Metalstone Tribe.

Ning could easily have given an even more valuable gift, but to a small tribe like the Metalstone Tribe, which had barely a thousand people, truly valuable treasures might cause a disaster instead!

Within the Metalstone Tribe.

“Young master.” Autumn Leaf poured some fruit wine for Ning, then offered him some fruit and some delicacies. “Mowu and I have been in this tribe for a month now. Not soon after arriving, we got in touch with our Ji clan.”

“Right.” Ning nodded.

While adventuring, every month he had to reach out to and contact the scattered troops of the Ji clan of the Western Prefecture who were stationed in various places throughout the area.

“There is a letter from the West Prefecture City.” Autumn Leaf withdrew a scroll from her sleeves.

Ning accepted it. He rolled the yellow parchment open, and as he did, he couldn’t help but reveal a smile. This was a letter his mother had personally written to him! The letter didn’t contain too much; it mainly just consisted of some words of concern. But having just experienced a life-and-death battle, the nagging of his mother actually filled Ning’s heart with a sense of warmth.

“Enough, Autumn Leaf. It looks as though it’s been many days since you had a good rest. Go get some rest.” Ning said.

“I’m not tired.” Autumn Leaf hurriedly said.

“Go.” Ning ordered.

Autumn Leaf hurriedly lowered her head, obediently going back to her own room to get some rest.

Time moved on. Every ten days or so, he would make a trip to Eastmount Marsh. Most of the time, though, Ning remained within the Metalstone Tribe, practicing his sword techniques. In the blink of an eye, over a month had passed.

Ning was currently seated on the eaves of his house, holding a bamboo reed that was filled with fine fruit wine. “Although West Prefecture City is large, it isn’t as comfortable as these small tribes.”

Resting at sundown, heading out at sunrise.

The Metalstone Tribe showed great solidarity. Everyone helped each other, and they all treated each other like brothers.

“Quick, quick, quick.”

“Everyone, go back.”

“Quick, bundle everything up.”

Suddenly, the formerly peaceful tribe instantly became a chaotic bedlam of activity. This caused Ning, who was drinking wine leisurely on the top of his building, to grow confused. He immediately leapt down from the building, then grabbed one of the running youths. “You.”

“Young master.” The youth, seeing that it was Ning who grabbed him, immediately greeted him respectfully.

“What’s going on?” Ning asked. “Why did the tribe suddenly turn so chaotic? Weren’t you training in spear-fighting just now? Why did you stop?”

“The people of the Blackmount Tribe are coming!” The youth hurriedly said. “The people of Blackmount Tribe have come to collect furs from us. We need to hide some of the finer furs which the tribe has, as otherwise, if the Blackmount Tribe discovers them, they’ll take them for their own. That would be terrible. Young master, I need to get back immediately...”

Ning, understanding, nodded. “Go ahead.”

Autumn Leaf was watching this from in front of the building as well. She spoke out, “The Blackmount Tribe is an extremely large tribe with tens of thousands of tribesmen. Each year, these smaller tribes will have to offer them some tribute.”

“Hmph.” Ning frowned. “This land belongs to the Ji clan! Only my Ji clan has the right to levy taxes. If the Blackmount Tribe is forcing the nearby, smaller tribes to pay them tribute, isn’t that the same as levying a tax?”

The Ji clan levied and collected taxes from every singlet tribe within its borders.

At the same time, the Ji clan itself was a subject of the Grand Xia Dynasty, and so most of the tax they collected had to be delivered to the Grand Xia Dynasty!

“In principle, yes.” Autumn Leaf shook her head. “But how would these smaller tribes dare to refuse? If they were to refuse, the Blackmount Tribe is completely capable of utterly destroying them, then selling off the captives as slaves.”

Ning let out a long sigh.

Right.

Because there were too many tribes, there was no way for the Ji clan to manage all of the internecine squabbles between the tribes, so they usually left them to their own devices. Not just the Ji clan...even the Grand Xia Dynasty, who ruled over an enormous, boundless expanse of territory, had to govern in a loose fashion. Wasn’t the Ji clan and the Ironwood clan also in a state of war, viewing each other as deadly enemies? If one’s territory was too large, it became hard to govern!

“They are coming.” Autumn Leaf said. “The Blackmount Tribe’s tribesmen are coming.”

Ning looked over as well. He saw that from afar, a group of half-armored, pelt-clad tribesmen were currently strutting around in the area, looking around as if they were in territory which belonged to them. The leader of the Metalstone Tribe, Uncle Dala, and the others were all by their sides, obediently following them, not daring to disobey them at all.

The leader of this Blackmount squad, Braveshell, was currently viewing this little tribe with satisfaction.

“Hmph.” Braveshell glanced at the nearby Metalstone tribesmen. Seeing the frightened, supplicatory looks on their faces, he couldn’t help but feel even more delighted.

Even within the Blackmount Tribe, he was a high level, central figure. In a small tribe like this Metalstone Tribe...he could act as he wished! If he was angered, this entire tribe would probably be finished. The

hundred guards he had brought with him could probably destroy this sort of small tribe all by themselves. In this sort of small tribe, he had absolute authority.

“Huh?” Braveshell suddenly saw that not too far away, there was a young man and a girl standing together. Braveshell’s eyes instantly lit up. The guards by his side, looking along with him, couldn’t help but hold their breaths as well.

“Beautiful. Mesmerizing.” Braveshell was instantly stunned, and then his heart was instantly overwhelmed with powerful lust and desire. He definitely had to seize this beautiful girl and make her his personal maidservant. Every day, he would definitely ‘bestow his affections’ on her! Just thinking about it made Braveshell feel the blood pumping through his entire body.

“Hahaha...” Laughing loudly, Braveshell walked directly towards the young man and the girl.

Ning frowned slightly as he looked at this tall man walking towards him, who was wearing some exquisitely crafted ornaments. The tall man swept Ning and Autumn Leaf with a gaze, as though he were a high ranking tribesman inspecting some goods. In particular, he didn’t disguise the greedy look in his eyes when he was staring at Autumn Leaf. “Your fur clothes were cut and stitched so exquisitely. Did you make it yourself, miss? Your handiwork is quite fine. The fur clothes of the youngster next to you is stitched and cut very nicely as well. Is he your little brother?”