

## **The Order 10261**

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One step... two steps... three steps...

When it reached the fourth step, the light stopped, and no matter how much Zhou Meng channeled his immortal power, it wouldn't rise even an inch further.

A roar of laughter erupted from the audience.

"Four steps? Not even halfway there!"

"You dare to embarrass yourself with this little skill? Go back and train for another hundred years!"

Zhou Meng's face flushed red. He slammed his palm hard against the pillar, turned, and jumped off the stage, squeezing into the crowd without looking back.

"Next!" the maid in green called out.

A young man in brocade robes leaped onto the stage.

He was fair-skinned, holding a folding fan, and possessed the air of a refined and elegant scholar.

"It's the young master of Zhou's Trading Company! What's a businessman doing here?"

"Don't underestimate him. Young Master Zhou is a genuine fifth-grade Upper Immortal. It's said he was found to have a profound-grade spiritual root when he was young."

Young Master Zhou calmly walked to the first pillar, closed his fan, and gently pressed his slender fingers against it.

A light shone.

One step, two steps, three steps, four steps, five steps...

Upon reaching the sixth step, the light began to flicker erratically, struggling for a moment before finally stopping between the sixth and seventh steps.

Young Master Zhou's expression stiffened slightly.

"Six and a half bars? Far from it!"

"Hahaha, Young Master Zhou, you're too delicate. Go back and settle your accounts!"

Young Master Zhou coughed, feigning composure, and cupped his hands towards the sedan chair: "I, Chen, am of limited talent and learning, and dare not presume to presume." He then quickly stepped off the stage.

Another burst of laughter erupted.

The third to step onto the stage was a gaunt old man with white hair and beard, claiming to have cultivated diligently for three hundred years, living in seclusion.

Everyone thought it was something special, but the first pillar only lit up five bars, and the second only three.

"Old man, at your age, you're still here to find a husband? Go home and hold your grandchildren!"

"Perhaps he's still vigorous despite his age? Hahaha!"

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The old man slunk off the stage.

The fourth, the fifth, the sixth...

One cultivator after another stepped onto the stage, only to slunk off again.

Some couldn't even pass five bars on the first pillar, some barely passed the first, and the second was a disaster.

The worst one tried all four pillars, only managing to light up ten bars in total, and was booed off the stage.

"Anyone else want to try?" The maid in green's voice was already tinged with impatience.

Whispers rippled through the crowd, but no one answered.

"The Chen family's threshold is too high. Passing two-thirds of all four pillars, that must be some kind of heaven-defying talent!"

"Indeed. Passing two-thirds of the first pillar, Immortal Power Strength, means at least a seventh-grade Immortal Realm Immortal Power purity;

The second pillar, Immortal Power Limit, tests the dantian capacity and meridian resilience, unattainable only by those with extraordinary talent;

The third pillar, Physical Strength, might be within the reach of cultivators specializing in physique;

The fourth pillar, Bloodline Strength, that's truly mysterious, what ordinary cultivators have any bloodline?" "So, Miss Chen doesn't want to get married at all. Setting such high standards is just for self-aggrandizement."

“You can’t say that. When Miss Lin held her marriage contest, didn’t she set similar standards? In the end, she was still won over by the third young master of the Zhou family.”

“The third young master of the Zhou family is a true genius. He reached the eighth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm before he was even a hundred years old, and it’s said he possesses some kind of ancient bloodline. How easy is it for Miss Chen to find a husband like that?”

Discussions rose and fell.

Ming Li shook his head, “The Fourteenth Heaven is indeed full of talented people, but even so, the conditions of this Miss Chen are too demanding.”

Liu Qianqian said, “Miss Chen Wanqing of the Chen family is said to be exceptionally beautiful and proficient in alchemy. How could she possibly be interested in ordinary men?”

However, she has been stuck at the eighth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm for many years, unable to break through, which is why she had no choice but to seek a Daoist partner through a marriage contest.

Although her conditions are high, they are not unattainable for everyone. At least, the young master of the Wu family in Yunxian City has the ability.”

“The young master of the Wu family?” Ming Li asked curiously.

Just as Liu Qianqian was about to explain, a commotion suddenly arose in the crowd.

“Make way! Young Master Wu is here!”

The crowd parted like a tide, making way for him.

A young man walked in with his hands behind his back.

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He appeared to be around twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old, with a handsome face and clear, bright eyes. His moon-white robe was spotless, and a jade pendant hung at his waist, swaying gently with each step.

His pace was not fast, yet each step possessed a certain rhythm. His aura was restrained and profound, as if he were one with the heavens and earth.

“It really is Young Master Wu!”

“Wu Lingyun, the eldest son of the Wu family! Why is he here too?”

“With Young Master Wu personally participating in the Chen family’s marriage selection, what chance does anyone else have?”

“I heard that Young Master Wu is already a ninth-grade Immortal, and he’s not even one hundred and twenty years old yet. He truly is a chosen one of heaven!”

Wu Lingyun ignored the surrounding discussions, walking steadily towards the arena without glancing to either side.

He walked with unhurried ease, as if he weren’t there to participate in the marriage selection, but rather to inspect his own backyard.

The eight maids in green unconsciously lowered their heads, and even the curtain of the eight-treasure glazed sedan chair seemed to sway slightly.

Wu Lingyun stepped onto the arena, standing with his hands behind his back before the four pillars. His gaze swept indifferently over the crowd below, a faint smile playing on his lips.

“Finally, someone has come with something decent,” someone muttered softly.

Wu Lingyun didn't immediately test them. Instead, he first nodded slightly towards the sedan chair:  
"Miss Chen, I apologize for my intrusion today."

A moment of silence followed from inside the sedan chair, then a clear, cold female voice: "It is an honor for the Chen family that Young Master Wu has come."

Wu Lingyun smiled, then turned and walked towards the first stone pillar.

He didn't inhale deeply like the previous cultivators, nor did he deliberately gather his strength. He simply extended his right hand, his fingertips lightly touching the pillar.

Boom!

The entire stone pillar instantly erupted with a blinding white light!

A beam of light shot upwards from the bottom, one, two, three... almost without pause, reaching the ninth beam in the blink of an eye!

Everyone held their breath.

The tenth beam!

The light pierced the top of the pillar like a sharp sword, exploding into a dazzling rain of light in the air.

The entire arena fell silent.

Then, deafening gasps erupted.

"Full light! The first pillar is fully lit!"

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“My god, the entire pillar is lit!”

“Is this the power of a ninth-grade Immortal?!”

Wu Lingyun withdrew his hand, his expression calm, as if he had only done something insignificant.

He walked to the second pillar and reached out again.

This time, the light also reached the ninth beam, but paused slightly at the tenth beam, ultimately failing to completely pierce the top, stopping at nine and a half beams.

“It’s a pity it was almost fully lit.”

“Nine and a half bars is still astonishing! Didn’t you see those people before? Six bars was considered good!”

Wu Lingyun looked at the nine and a half bars of light, his brow furrowing almost imperceptibly, before returning to normal.

He said calmly, “I’ve been in seclusion for a while recently, and my immortal energy flow is a bit sluggish. Please excuse my poor performance.”

The crowd below dared not laugh, flattering him repeatedly: “Young Master Wu is too modest! Nine and a half bars is a once-in-a-century achievement!”

“Yes, yes, the second pillar tests the limit of immortal energy. Reaching nine and a half bars shows that Young Master Wu’s dantian capacity has reached a state of perfection!”

Wu Lingyun remained noncommittal and walked towards the third pillar.

This pillar tested physical strength.

Wu Lingyun was tall and slender, not as burly as cultivators who specialized in physical strength, causing the crowd to worry for him.

Wu Lingyun rolled up his sleeves, revealing a section of his strong forearm. He clenched his fist and casually struck the pillar.

Thump!

The dull impact sounded like a drumbeat.

The pillar trembled, its light flaring, one step, two steps, three steps... reaching the seventh step, then slowing, finally stopping at seven and a half steps.

A chorus of sighs of regret rose from below.

“Seven and a half steps, still half a step short of two-thirds of the way to eight...”

“What a pity, what a pity. Young Master Wu isn’t a specialist in physical cultivation after all.”

“Seven and a half steps is still pretty good, a hundred thousand times stronger than those three or four steps before.”

Wu Lingyun withdrew his fist, his face revealing neither joy nor anger.

He looked at his palm and said softly, “It’s been too long since I’ve practiced body tempering, I’ve become rusty.”

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These words were spoken casually, yet they made many in the audience blush; they were far less rusty than Wu Lingyun.

Finally, the fourth pillar.

Bloodline strength.

This is the most mysterious aspect.

Ordinary cultivators don't possess any noteworthy bloodline; less than one in ten could light this pillar.

Wu Lingyun stood still and closed his eyes.

A moment later, he opened his eyes and placed his right hand on the pillar.

A pale golden light shone from the base of the stone pillar.

The golden light, like flowing honey, slowly and steadily spread upwards.

One step, two steps, three steps... Upon reaching the fifth step, the gold suddenly deepened, turning into a dazzling crimson gold.

"What kind of bloodline is this?!"

"Crimson gold! At least a high-grade Xuan rank!"

“I heard that a True Immortal existed among the Wu family’s ancestors. Could it be that ancestor’s bloodline has awakened?”

The light continued to climb, the sixth, seventh, eighth...

Between the eighth and ninth ranks, the light stopped.

Wu Lingyun frowned, seemingly struggling to push it forward.

The golden light flashed several times, attempting to break through the ninth rank, but ultimately failed, stopping at eight and a half ranks.

He stopped, remaining silent for a long time.

“Eight and a half ranks.”

The maid in green announced the result, her voice carrying a hint of respect, “Four pillars of score: First pillar ten ranks, second pillar nine and a half ranks, third pillar seven and a half ranks, fourth pillar eight and a half ranks. All exceeding two-thirds, Young Master Wu passes.”

The audience erupted in cheers.

“He passed! He really passed!”

“I knew Young Master Wu could do it!”

“Now, Miss Chen should get out of the sedan chair, right?”

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All eyes were on the eight-treasure glazed sedan chair.

The curtains remained motionless.

Wu Lingyun stood with his hands behind his back, a faint smile playing on his lips. He wasn't urging or anxious, as if everything was under control.

After a long while, a clear, cold female voice came from inside the sedan chair: "Young Master Wu is indeed exceptionally talented. However..."

She paused.

"However, the marriage selection isn't over yet."

Wu Lingyun raised an eyebrow slightly.

The maid in green quickly explained, "Young Master Wu, please don't be offended. My mistress set up this Four Pillars Test only to select a worthy candidate.

Those who pass the test may ask my mistress to alight from the sedan chair, but this is not the end of the marriage selection process.

My mistress will meet with the successful candidates in person, and if there is mutual interest, then..."

"Then the next test."

Wu Lingyun interrupted, his smile deepening. "I understand. Then, Miss Chen, would you please alight from the sedan chair for a chat?"

The sedan curtain was finally lifted slightly.

A slender hand reached out, delicate fingers like jade, gently resting on the maid's arm.

Everyone held their breath.

A graceful figure slowly stepped out of the sedan chair.

She wore a light green fairy-like dress, with tassels at the waist, the hem flowing gracefully.

Her face was covered by a light veil of the same color, obscuring her features, revealing only a pair of eyes as clear as autumn water.

Those eyes alone were enough to captivate.

Chen Wanqing nodded slightly: "Young Master Wu has come from afar. On behalf of the Chen family, I thank you."

Wu Lingyun cupped his hands: "Miss Chen, you are too kind. I have long admired your extraordinary alchemy skills. To meet you today is my greatest honor."

The two faced each other from a distance, one dressed in snow-white robes, the other in emerald green robes, truly like a pair of celestial beings from a painting.

The crowd below was mesmerized, and the murmurs subsided.

Ming Li leaned closer to Chen Ping and whispered: "Mr. Chen, this Young Master Wu seems quite formidable. He has passed two-thirds of the Four Pillars of Destiny. Shall we still go up on stage?"

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Chen Ping did not answer, but simply watched the white-robed man standing with his hands behind his back on the stage.

Liu Qianqian said softly, “Wu Lingyun, the eldest son of the Wu family of Yunxian City, is 120 years old and at the mid-stage of the ninth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm. The Wu family and the Chen family are known as the two major families of Yunxian City. The Wu family is a rising star, only emerging in the last five hundred years. This young master Wu has been hailed as a genius since childhood. It is said that he entered the Qi realm at the age of three, established his foundation at ten, and entered the Upper Immortal Realm at fifty. Among his peers, he has never met a worthy opponent.”

She paused, then whispered, “My benefactor, this person... is not to be trifled with.”

Ming Li looked at Chen Ping nervously.

Chen Ping withdrew his gaze, his expression remaining calm.

“Let’s observe further.”

On the stage, Wu Lingyun seemed to sense something. His gaze casually swept across the crowd, lingering for a moment in Chen Ping’s direction.

He smiled, withdrew his gaze, and continued talking to Chen Wanqing.

On the stage, Wu Lingyun and Chen Wanqing stood facing each other, one dressed in white as snow, the other in emerald green as smoke, truly like a couple from a painting.

The crowd below was mesmerized, and the murmurs gradually subsided.

A full incense stick’s time passed, and not a single person dared to step forward to challenge.

Wu Lingyun’s smile deepened.

He stood with his hands behind his back, his gaze slowly sweeping over the crowd. His eyes seemed calm, yet carried a condescending scrutiny, as if to say: Who else?

The cultivators below avoided his gaze; some lowered their heads, some turned their faces away, and some simply turned away, pretending to talk to others.

The results of the Four Pillars Test were undeniable; Wu Lingyun's score had crushed everyone before him. Who would dare to go up and humiliate themselves?

"It seems no one dares to step forward today."

Wu Lingyun withdrew his gaze, his tone indifferent, neither revealing regret nor pride.

He turned to Chen Wanqing, bowing slightly: "Miss Chen, since no one else is going to try, may we begin the next test now?"

Chen Wanqing's eyes flickered slightly. Her expression was obscured by her veil, but her clear, autumn-water-like eyes seemed to hold approval.

She nodded slightly: "Young Master Wu is right. Since no one else is going up, then..."

"Wait."

A clear voice suddenly rang out from the crowd.

The voice wasn't loud, but it clearly reached everyone's ears.

Everyone was startled and looked in the direction of the voice.

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A man in a blue robe slowly stepped out from the crowd.

He was simply dressed, with an ordinary face and a restrained aura, appearing unremarkable. But his eyes were exceptionally calm, like a deep, still pool.

It was Chen Ping.

Wu Lingyun raised an eyebrow, his gaze falling on Chen Ping, scrutinizing him from head to toe.

Immediately, a faint smile appeared at the corner of his lips, a smile tinged with amusement and disdain.

The audience erupted in chaos.

“Who is this guy? He dares to go on stage at a time like this?”

“Is he crazy? Didn’t he see Young Master Wu’s score? Going up there to embarrass himself?”

“Judging by his appearance, he’s only at the first rank of the Upper Immortal Realm, right? He dares to come with that kind of cultivation?”

“First rank? Am I seeing things? Peak first rank of the Upper Immortal Realm? This... isn’t this a joke?”

“Hahahaha! A first-rank Upper Immortal Realm cultivator dares to come to a martial arts contest to find a husband? Miss Chen is an eighth-rank! Is he trying to eat a swan?”

“Get down! Don’t embarrass yourself!”

The mocking laughter surged like a tidal wave.

Chen Ping's expression remained unchanged as he walked step by step towards the arena.

Wu Lingyun watched him approach, his smile deepening.

He didn't speak, but his eyes clearly said: I'd like to see what tricks you have up your sleeve.

Chen Wanqing's gaze narrowed slightly as she scrutinized the suddenly appearing man in blue robes through her veil.

After a moment, she frowned slightly, and her cool voice came from behind the veil:

"Young master, there are rules for this marriage contest. You must pass two-thirds of the four pillar tests before you can ask me to step down from my sedan chair for an audience. Young Master Wu has already passed; the next test is about to begin. If you wish to participate, perhaps you should wait for the next opportunity."

Her tone was polite, but the meaning was clear: You are not qualified; don't waste your time.

Chen Ping stepped onto the platform and stood before the four stone pillars.

He looked up at Chen Wanqing, his expression calm: "Miss Chen, you misunderstand. I don't want to wait for next time; I want to try now."

This statement drew another burst of laughter from the audience.

"Trying now? He really dares to say that!"

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“Young Master Wu is standing right there, isn’t he just asking for trouble?”

“A first-grade Upper Immortal, lighting up even one square would be impressive!”

Wu Lingyun chuckled, stepping aside half a step and gesturing for him to proceed.

His movements were elegant and composed, but the contempt in his eyes was undisguised.

“Since this fellow Daoist wants to try, then let him try.”

He said calmly, “I, Wu, also want to see how many squares this first-grade Upper Immortal Daoist can light up.”

He emphasized the words “first-grade Upper Immortal,” eliciting another burst of laughter from the crowd.

Chen Ping ignored the mockery and walked straight to the first stone pillar.

He extended his right hand and gently placed it on the pillar.

The movement was casual, as if he were merely stroking an ordinary object.

The crowd held their breath, waiting to see him make a fool of himself.

Then...

Boom!

A blinding white light exploded instantly! A beam of light shot upwards from the base of the pillar, one, two, three, four, five... without pause, without hesitation, like a sword drawn from its sheath, like a rainbow piercing the sun, breaking through the ninth beam in the blink of an eye!

The tenth beam!

The light burst forth, exploding in the air into a dazzling rain of light, even more brilliant and dazzling than Wu Lingyun's attack!

The entire arena fell silent.

Everyone stared wide-eyed, mouths agape, as if someone had grabbed their throats.

"This...how is this possible?!"

"A first-grade Upper Immortal, how could they possess such power?!"

"I must be seeing things! The pillar must be broken!"

The composed smile on Wu Lingyun's face froze.

He abruptly turned to look at the pillar; the light hadn't completely dissipated, the afterglow of the tenth beam still lingering in the air.

His pupils contracted slightly, a flicker of disbelief flashing in his eyes.

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Chen Wanqing's eyes widened slightly. Her expression was obscured by the veil, but her suddenly clenched hand betrayed her inner turmoil.

Chen Ping withdrew his hand, his expression remaining calm, as if he had merely performed a trivial task.

He walked towards the second stone pillar.

Finally, someone in the audience snapped out of their daze and screamed:

"There's a second one! Look at the second one!"

"Impossible! His first one was just luck!"

"Right, right, just luck. The second one definitely won't work!"

Chen Ping ignored these voices and pressed his right hand against the stone pillar again.

Boom!

The white light exploded again!

One, two, three, four, five... unstoppable, devastating!

The ninth pillar!

The tenth pillar!

The light surged forth once more, even more intense and dazzling than before!

The second stone pillar was fully charged!

This time, no one uttered a sound. Everyone seemed frozen in place, staring blankly at the still-glowing stone pillar.

The vast plaza was so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

The composure on Wu Lingyun's face vanished completely.

His brows furrowed, his gaze fixed on Chen Ping's retreating figure, a flicker of doubt and uncertainty in his eyes.

Chen Wanqing's breath hitched slightly.

She instinctively took a half-step forward, then stopped abruptly, her eyes, like autumn water, filled with shock and a hint of inquiry.

Chen Ping withdrew his hand, remaining calm.

He walked towards the third stone pillar, to test his physical strength.

"The third one... he definitely can't do it!"