

Bai Xiaochun's scalp was tingling so hard it felt like it would explode. Eyes crimson, he let out a powerful shout as he slapped more and more paper talismans down onto his body, causing more and more shields to spring up. Soon, he was surrounded by a barrier almost two meters thick.

Almost in the same moment that all the shields sprang up, the red-robed woman suddenly lunged out of the darkness toward Bai Xiaochun. A bang could be heard as she pierced roughly thirty percent into the shield barrier before being stopped in place. Then she screamed, a scream that was apparently capable of piercing through the shields. When the ear-splitting sound stabbed into Bai Xiaochun's ears, he began to lose consciousness. Shocked, he bit his tongue hard, which made things clear just in time to see the woman transforming into a swarm of countless red beetles, which then began to batter against his shield. However, the shield was too thick, and the red beetles were incapable of piercing through the seventy percent that remained. After bouncing back, they flew back and re-formed into the shape of the red-robed woman. She stared at Bai Xiaochun for a moment, then began to laugh as she charged toward him once again. Simultaneously, popping sounds could be heard as the ornamental rocks began to ripple and rise up, transforming into stone golems. The fruit trees also sprouted arms and legs, wrenched themselves out from the ground and began to walk forward toward Bai Xiaochun and the others. Especially bizarre was the fact that the fruit on the trees began to laugh and sing nursery rhymes again. One of the trees joined the red-robed woman to specifically target Bai Xiaochun. "Puppets!" Du Lingfei gasped. Bai Xiaochun was trembling violently. In all the years in which he had lived, he had never experienced such a sensation of imminent danger. As the woman closed in on him, he quickly performed an incantation gesture, drawing upon all his spiritual energy as he waved his finger at her. Instantly, his wooden sword flew out at top speed, a black streak that kicked up a huge blast of wind. Then, a boom echoed out as the sword stabbed into the woman's head. The woman let out a shrill scream, and her body suddenly dissolved into a mass of red beetles, which twitched and spasmed as they fell down onto the ground and then shattered into pieces. The wooden sword didn't vanish; after stabbing through the woman's head, it continued to speed onward toward the fruit tree behind her. It stabbed through the tree, which lurched to a stop and then suddenly exploded. Instantly, the fruit on the tree shriveled up, and yet continued to sing happily even as they died. Everything that was happening caused the hair on Bai Xiaochun's body to stand on end. Thankfully, his wooden sword was extremely powerful, and after stabbing through the tree, it continued to sail through the air and then blasted a hole into the nearby wall. As soon as the hole appeared, though, tentacle-like tendrils began to swirl out from the broken sides, as if the wall were preparing to re-form itself. "Get out through that hole!" Du Lingfei cried, instantly flickering into motion. However, Feng Yan was the closest of all of them to the hole in the wall. Wincing at the pain of wasting such a valuable item, he produced another of the black medicinal pills and then threw it down in front of the young man with the lantern. A huge boom echoed out. Feng Yan then borrowed the force of the resulting explosion to fly toward the hole. Just when he was on the verge of shooting out through the hole, though, his face fell, as two huge stone lions leapt in from outside. Roaring, they charged, one of them toward Feng Yan, the other toward Bai Xiaochun. Astonishingly, these were the same two stone lions which had been standing guard outside the main gate! "You can't escape," said the young man with the lantern. "Everyone from the Spirit Stream Sect... shall die!" He began to laugh as he once again began to fight with Feng Yan. When Feng Yan saw that the hole in the wall was already beginning to mend itself, he roared, hands flashing in a double-handed incantation gesture as he summoned a head-sized fireball. That fireball

emanated blistering heat as it expanded, sending a wave of flames out in all directions. The stone lions were shoved back, and the young Luo Chen Clan cultivator's face flickered. There were also two treants who were caught up in the flames, one of which exploded. The other treant tried to fall back, but was then directly hit by Du Lingfei's deadly flying sword. Rumbling booms echoed out as green sap exploded out from the destroyed treants. At the same time, it was revealed that inside of the two treants were emaciated, gasping figures, whose life force seemed to have been almost completely absorbed. One of those figures collapsed, unconscious, whereas the other struggled to open his eyes, and then looked excitedly at Du Lingfei. "Elder Brother Hou!" she cried, having instantly recognized Hou Yunfei. She immediately scooped him up into her arms. At the same time, the weakened Hou Yunfei grabbed Du Lingfei's arm and poured his last remaining bit of spiritual power into her. "The Luo Chen Clan has turned traitor. We have to get out of here and warn the sect!!" Du Lingfei's spiritual energy instantly swelled. Gritting her teeth, she held Hou Yunfei in her arms as she shot toward the hole in the wall with even greater speed. When Bai Xiaochun looked over, he instantly recognized Hou Yunfei. Then, he flickered into motion as he dodged the stone lion and sped toward the hole in the wall. As of this point, Du Lingfei was now closest to the breach in the wall, with Feng Yan and Bai Xiaochun close on her heels. The fastest of them all was Bai Xiaochun, who was quickly closing the distance between himself and Du Lingfei. Feng Yan's face was pale white. The fireball he had just unleashed had taken quite a toll on him. However, after noticing the speed with which Bai Xiaochun was moving, his eyes suddenly flickered with a cold glow, and he held up his hand, within which could be seen a black medicinal pill. "Junior Sister Du, you have to get word back to the sect! I'll give you a bit of extra power!" With that, he flung the black medicinal pill down into the space between Du Lingfei and Bai Xiaochun. As the medicinal pill exploded, a powerful force blasted out, pushing Du Lingfei toward the hole even faster than before. Then, a plopping sound like splashing water could be heard as she burst out. In contrast, Bai Xiaochun was blocked by the explosion, and was suddenly set upon by the stone lion. Instantly, his eyes turned bright red. "Feng Yan!!" he bellowed. A wind blasted out as the stone lion pounced. Just as Bai Xiaochun was about to dodge, three treants closed in. There were now four puppets all attacking him simultaneously, making it impossible to evade. A popping sound could be heard as his shields glittered brightly and then began to shatter. Even the green shield from the jade pendant faded and shattered. Although the majority of the force of the blow was dissipated, the stone lion was extraordinary, and its attack landed fully on Bai Xiaochun's chest. The massive force sent Bai Xiaochun flying, his entire body shaking. "Junior Brother Bai!" Feng Yan cried said. Although a cold smile twisted his lips, his words sounded bitter and lamenting. And yet, he didn't slow down at all; in the blink of an eye, he passed into the rippling hole in the wall. Just when he was about to burst through to the other side, the young Luo Chen Clan cultivator let out a piercing shriek, then suddenly exploded into a mass of countless chunks of flesh, all devoid of blood, which then shot toward Feng Yan. Before Feng Yan could pass through the gap in the wall, the chunks of flesh wrapped around him and began to drag him backward. Feng Yan let out a roar of rage as he was pulled out. By this point, the hole in the wall was on the verge of closing up completely. After gritting his teeth for a moment, he then bit down on his tongue and spat out a mouthful of blood, which landed onto his flying sword. The flying sword instantly turned crimson. Instead of shooting out in attack, it then exploded, transforming into a cloud of shrapnel that shot back toward him. Although it was injurious to himself, the hail of shrapnel also managed to slash away the chunks of flesh which had grabbed ahold of him! He was now freed, but was also covered in a mass of cuts and wounds. The pain from his mangled flesh threatened to render him unconscious, but he was still able to clench his jaw and shoot back toward the hole in the wall. Meanwhile, Bai Xiaochun had been slammed by the lion's paw, sending him tumbling backward, screaming. And yet, even as his scream was still echoing out into the air, Bai Xiaochun looked down in surprise at his chest to discover that, although his clothing was shredded, his skin hadn't been harmed at all. In fact... he didn't even feel any pain. After performing a quick inspection, he confirmed that... although the situation had seemed extremely dangerous... he hadn't been hurt in the least. The stone lion's blow had sent him flying, but other than that, it had done virtually nothing. Even as his elation grew, the treants closed in, and one of them punched him in the back. Although he was thrown forward, he felt no pain at all, whereupon he threw his head back and laughed uproariously. "I can't believe I'm actually so strong! Fudge! What do I have to be afraid of?!" Enlivened, and now fully confident, he shot

into the air toward the gap in the wall, moving with even greater speed than before. In the blink of an eye, he was at the gap. Feng Yan was now about halfway through the gap, and didn't even notice Bai Xiaochun and his sudden burst of speed. In his mind, Bai Xiaochun had probably already been killed by the numerous puppets. Just as Feng Yan was about to free himself, a furious gleam appeared in Bai Xiaochun eyes, and he reached out toward Feng Yan's shoulder, which was already outside of the hole. "Free at last!" Feng Yan laughed. But then, he suddenly felt a huge force dragging him back through the hole. "No!!" he howled. Before he could even see what was dragging him, he felt his bag of holding slip away, and then he was flung deep into the courtyard, away from the gap. It was only at this point that he saw Bai Xiaochun. "Bai Xiaochun!!" he howled, eyes bloodshot. However, he was now cut off by the two stone lions. Booms rang out, followed by a miserable scream. "Elder Brother Feng!!" Bai Xiaochun screamed, simultaneously leaping through the hole in the wall. Just as he emerged on the other side, the hole finished closing up. He was now outside, no longer in the courtyard of the Luo Chen Clan. As for Du Lingfei, she had continued to run as soon as she had emerged, and was now waiting some distance off at the edge of the forest. When she saw Bai Xiaochun appear, she was just about to call out to him when he suddenly began to wail miserably. "Elder Brother Feng!! Not only did you give me your bag of holding to help me escape, you also held off the puppets. Oh, Elder Brother Feng!" After hearing Bai Xiaochun's words, Du Lingfei felt horrible. However, the gap was closed, and Bai Xiaochun was just standing there in grief and indignation, so she quickly said, "Bai Xiaochun, come on, let's go!" Not needing any further coercion, Bai Xiaochun began to run, tears streaming down his face. Helping Du Lingfei support Hou Yunfei, they vanished into the forest. Looking over his shoulder, Bai Xiaochun frowned sadly and said, "Elder Brother Feng, such a good guy...." Du Lingfei was very upset. She had never imagined that the mission would be this dangerous. Then she remembered Bai Xiaochun's suggestion to not come to the Luo Chen Clan, and realized that if they had listened to him, Feng Yan might not have died. And when she saw that Bai Xiaochun was in so much grief that he was on the verge of beating his own chest, she felt even worse. Finally, she sighed. "Junior Brother Bai," she said, looking at him bitterly, "let's hurry up. If the Luo Chen Clan has turned traitor, they won't want the sect getting wind of it. I just tried to send word back, but there's interference in the area.... Transmission jade slips won't work." Bai Xiaochun shivered, feeling more in danger than ever before.