That Qi Niqun continued to suppress Consort Ji caused Li Chen displeasure, though he didn’t show it. He wanted to raise his sons together by his own hand. Letting a single woman in charge of raising his children had not been part of his plan. Nor would it ever be.

While the legitimate sons were the most noble in birth, Li Chen’s goal wasn’t solely to be a first-ranked prince. His eyes were on the throne. As such, Li Chen hoped that his sons would be close while also possessing their own talents. He didn’t want them emulate those sons of past emperors, fighting each other to the death. On the other hand, pampering the legitimate son would bring rise to an ineffectual ruler.

Since Secondary Consort Ji had finally yielded the right to manage the estate to Qi Niqun, the latter had been celebrating. However, Li Chen had then taken the habit of seeing her rival for the past few nights. Now Qi Niqun
could not suppress her anger anymore. Her expression sunk. She understood the implications. Li Chen had given her the estate’s managing power as a trade. He didn’t want his son to be raised in her courtyard. That he had lately frequented that woman’s residence was part of the warning.

Although they’d only been married for a little over a month, Qi Niqun already noticed one of the worries and annoyances of being a princess consort. The more she noticed, the more she felt she could not deal with them all. Apart from this Consort Ji, she needed to force the inner courtyard into the palm of her hand. She needed to showcase her authority, so that no one would dare challenge her. Once Qi Niqun accomplished this, she would be considered on the same level as the prince. And Li Chen would then value her more than the others.

Only from having tricks, brains, and authority would one survive in the inner courtyard.

After Qi Yunruo finished copying one book of the ‘Lotus Sutra’, he ran out of paper. Lately, the mood in Winter Plum Courtyard was a little anxious. He did not search for the eunuchs or older female servants for paper and brush. He also did not look for Ji Huan. Instead, Qi Yunruo slipped into the worlds of Li Chen’s novels. Several times, in fact. Other than that, he didn’t do much of anything.

Due to the rising temperature, Qi Niqun had instructed servants to send Qi Yunruo new summer clothes. Most of them were shades of green, though some were a bright color.

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Liusu was starting to lose track of the eldest miss’ intentions. Was she mad at her master? Or was she treating him as if he were important? Whatever the reason, Liusu’s heart thumped with joy as she helped Qi Yunruo try out each outfit one by one. Then she carefully folded them and put them away.

Qi Yunruo had received a few new sets of inner and outer garments. All of which were made of silk and breezy when worn. Liusu and the other maidservants also received new clothes. Liusu was now considered one of her master’s first-rank servant girls. Her monthly allowance was 100 grams of silver. At the end of every season she would receive two silver winterfrost flower hairpins and two sets of new clothes. As lower-ranked servants, Xiao Shan and Xiao Jiu received 40 grams of silver² and two new sets of clothes. Because they didn’t wear their hair in complicated hairstyles, they didn’t receive much jewelry.

Whether the main room had been too busy or not was anyone’s guess. But in the end, Qi Yunruo did not receive a single cent.

Technically, he didn’t need money to survive, but his heart still felt a tinge of disappointment.

On the outer part of the estate, another person also felt a bit unhappy.

It had been a long time since Ji Huan last laid eyes on Qi Yunruo. He missed the teen. Yet Qi Yunruo had locked himself up in his suite, and Ji Huan himself could not visit him either. A few times he had thought of sending some gifts over, but in the end he held in the urge.

The right to manage the estate had finally fell into the princess consort’s hands. Ji Huan felt a bit relieved. All these years his sister had tried to hold
on to the power. Even when she was pregnant, she didn’t rest. And because of this, it would be a lie to say her son was healthy.

Consort Ji had managed the estate for three years. Those working under her had no idea when the princess consort take strike them down. The best case scenario would be if no trouble occurred, thought Ji Huan as he read.

Suddenly, a servant entered his room. “Young master, word has it that there will be guests arriving at the estate tonight.”

“Who?”

“Count Ziyang.”

Ji Huan slightly arched a brow. “Count Ziyang? Why would he suddenly come over?”

“This slave has also heard that his two sons and the countess will be attending. This slave only knows so much.”

“...That quickly...”

As Ji Huan had predicted, Qi Niqun was pregnant.

Li Chen and his princess consort had only been married for less than three months. But today, when the doctor checked her pulse for her health, he discovered the fetus was less than two months old. It was already stable.

To impart the good news, the servants of the estate had waited patiently at the gates of the imperial palace for Li Chen. Once he learned of what happened, he returned to the imperial palace, breaking the news to the empress and empress dowager. Come noon, the two bestowed gifts to his estate. Similarly, when Countess Ziyang had been filled in, she gifted a

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golden ingot to the messenger. These events were what led to Count Ziyang and his family’s trip to Li Chen’s estate. Only Qi Ruxue, who was too young, would be kept at home.

Throughout the night, a slight smile had found its place on Qi Niqun’s lips. She felt that this child had come at the right time. In the past, she had wracked her brain to form a better relationship with Li Chen. Now she was carrying the eldest legitimate son, and it was in such a short amount of time too. It was a gift from the heavens. Even the previously most favored Consort Ji had waited more than a year to conceive a son.

Her mother had also been smiling the whole night. She too felt that her daughter was fortunate. Other young misses from noble families had dreamed of marrying Prince Chun, but the emperor had bestowed this sought-out bachelor a marriage with her daughter. And now her daughter had quickly gotten pregnant. Not to mention, she finally held the right to manage the estate. From now on, her position was unshakeable.

Out of all his daughters, Count Ziyang doted on Qi Niqun the most. She was also the daughter he had the most hopes for. As such, he had carried a slight smile since he heard the news.

Count Ziyang’s eldest legitimate son, Qi Yunshan, had been close to this sister since young. Now that his sister was with child, he naturally was happy and personally came to congratulate her. The second young master of the count estate, Qi Yunying, kept mostly silent. After he congratulated his sister, he didn’t speak again.

Li Chen accompanied Count Ziyang outside for a chat. He also spoke with his brother-in-laws. From their conversations, he learned that Qi Yunshan was eighteen years old and highly educated, manner of speaking refined. He had learned martial arts at a young age, but later on switched to the pen.
Still, he was quite knowledgeable about blades and swords. Qi Yunying too could say a few things regarding weapons.

“It’s true that if the father is a tiger, the sons won’t be dogs,” praised Li Chen. “The two brother-in-laws are young yet so educated and knowledgeable. In the future, they will definitely have bright futures.”

Count Ziyang said, “Your Highness is joking. These two sons aren’t as amazing as you describe them. If they can keep the count title, this official⁴ will already be satisfied as a father.”

Li Chen shook his head with a smile. “The title of Count Ziyang has been impressive for three generations. This title will resist the ravages of time.”

As soon as Count Ziyang heard those words, a wave of relief crashed into his form. He smiled as he looked at his sons. “This official thanks His Highness for the praise. In the future, they will keep the title and also have the support of His Highness.”

Count Ziyang’s words brought Li Chen joy. For Qi Niqun to marry him, it represented Count Ziyang and his family supporting Li Chen. And he needed the continued support of those who are talented in Count Ziyang’s family. As such, he didn’t mind helping Count Ziyang’s children. Li Chen once again studied his brother-in-laws. Qi Yunshan looked similar to his sister, with small eyes, long lashes, and a high nose. Qi Yunying wasn’t as handsome, though his brows were nice and thick. He resembled his father.

All of a sudden, there was a strange sensation in his heart. He couldn’t help but close his eyes for a moment. Then he shifted his gaze elsewhere.

“...Since this is a family banquet, the family should be reunited. Father-in-law hasn’t seen that boy⁵ in a while...”
After a long period of thought, of trying to figure out who 'that boy” referred to, Count Ziyang said, “Ah right, that boy Yunruo...”

Li Chen slightly smiled. “Little Qi hasn’t seen his father in a while. He must miss you.”

Count Ziyang’s expression was a bit unnatural. He nodded. “He is an understanding child.”

“Su Ge,” said Li Chen, turning around. “Bring young master, Little Qi, here. So that he can meet his father and brothers.”

As soon as those words left Li Chen’s lips, Qi Yunshan stood there expressionless. Qi Yunying shot him a glance.

During every new year celebration and Count Ziyang’s birthday, Qi Yunruo would kneel behind his brothers to kowtow to his father. Other than that, Qi Yunruo seldom appeared in front of Count Ziyang. Even if Count Ziyang saw him, he would only say a few words before dismissing the teen.

Therefore, once Qi Yunruo had arrived, Count Ziyang was unsure of what expression to wear in front of this son.

Qi Yunruo appeared very indifferent. He greeted his father in the way he was most familiar with, and once he saw his brothers, he went to stand at the side without a word.

Li Chen raised a hand as he said, “Give Little Qi a seat next to his brothers.”

“Understood,” said Su Ge.
Today, Qi Yunruo wore clothes the shade of wormwood. When he had arrived, the hair that usually draped on his shoulders was tied up according to protocol, and on his waist hung a few scented pouches.

Qi Yunruo’s appearance caused his family to feel embarrassed. Yet Count Ziyang still managed to carry a smile. “Yunruo looks well.”

Qi Yunruo lowered his head and grunted his acknowledgment.

Aware of their guests’ desires, Su Ge bowed as he said, “Your Highness, where should the banquet be held?”

“Hold it in the lakeside pavilion⁶. What does father-in-law say?”

“At this time of year, eating near the water should be pleasant.”

Li Chen arched a brow. The smile never left his lips. “The princess consort cannot be near the chill air. Let’s have her and the countess stay inside to eat. I think the two of them must have things they wish to say to each other.”

Count Ziyang rose to his feet and gestured for Li Chen to lead the way. Li Chen did not refuse and did so, Count Ziyang and his sons following his figure. Qi Yunruo glanced at them, before slowly trailing them.

As Li Chen looked over his shoulder to show Count Ziyang around, he glanced silently at Qi Yunruo.

He seemed too short compared to his mighty father and brothers. When Li Chen himself had been fifteen years old, had he been more than a foot taller than him?

Was the teen too quiet? Not a word had left his lips since his arrival. Was he unhappy toward Count Ziyang, or was he naturally like this? Li Chen feared

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it was the former. In Ji Huan’s own words, Little Qi loved to talk and was very animated. Did the task of copying scriptures change his personality to a more quiet, muted one?

Li Chen remembered the first time he had laid eyes on him. He wore a green outer garment. Although the color suited him, refined and hushed, it was not bright. Li Chen couldn’t think of him wearing bright clothes, however. As if he should wrap himself in only those colors that painted him in a refined light.

Around the table, Li Chen sat in the main position, with Count Ziyang sitting across from him. Qi Yunruo sat next to Qi Yunying. He felt very awkward, and didn’t even have the strength to lift his chopsticks.

He didn’t pay much attention to his surroundings. Qi Yunruo felt like he couldn’t speak or smile. Like he was shadow. Although he was obviously sitting at the same table, it was as if the others couldn’t see him. As time passed, he felt trapped, embarrassed, despite having done nothing wrong.

“...Little Qi?” said Li Chen.

Qi Yunruo’s leg was suddenly tapped. He quickly looked at Qi Yunying, the person who had tapped him with his foot. His brother gestured toward Li Chen.

Snapping out of his daze, Qi Yunruo looked at Li Chen.

Li Chen patiently repeated, “Are these dishes not to your taste? Let the kitchens know what you like to eat.”

“I’m not hungry.”
But Li Chen ordered the servant standing behind him, “Go make some appetizing personal dishes for him. Something crunchy and not too filling.”

“This slave understands.”

Qi Yunshan dropped his gaze, still expressionless. Qi Yunying glanced at his father and then glanced at his brother. Not a word left his lips.

The atmosphere was a bit strange.

Li Chen and Count Ziyang pushed their cups aside, exchanging them for a fresh new set. They were still smiling. Once again they talked about the matters concerning Li Chen’s legitimate son. Li Chen’s joy was apparent from his voice. “The child born from the princess consort, whether male or female, will be my greatest treasure.”

“That will be that girl’s blessing,” said Count Ziyang. “This official has spoiled darling Qun since young, so she may also spoil her own children. In the future, this official hopes His Highness will spend more time to teach this child.”

With a smile, Li Chen drank from his cup.

Shortly after, a maidservant served three dishes of sweet and sour vegetables. Qi Yunruo ate one piece of radish at a time.

Count Ziyang couldn’t help but look at him, and Qi Yunshan said, “What does younger brother do usually? Have you caused trouble for His Highness and Her Highness?”

Qi Yunruo slowly said, “Eldest sister has taken care of me, so I didn’t cause any trouble.”
“The princess consort is pregnant, so you should be the one taking care of her,” said Qi Yunshan.

“...Yes.”

It seemed this was the first time Qi Yunshan took the initiative to talk to this brother of his. After these meager words, Qi Yunruo once again filled his cheeks with radish.

Count Ziyang and his family were to leave the estate once the banquet ended. Qi Yunruo stayed behind Li Chen and watched silently as the figures of his father and brothers shrank into the distance.

As they walked back to Winter Plum Courtyard, Qi Yunruo kept his head down. Two eunuchs lit the way with a lantern each. The path before them bright.

Li Chen was only half a step ahead of him, so his shadow covered Qi Yunruo.

“Have you eaten your fill tonight?”

“Yes.”

“You eat too little.”

“I’m full though.”

For once in his life, Li Wei wracked his brain to keep a conversation going.

“Are you happy that your sister is pregnant?”

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Qi Yunruo lifted his head, staring at the Li Chen who had stopped in his tracks. Their gazes met. Qi Yunruo’s was calm, calm yet carrying a question.

Li Chen laughed at himself for thinking too much. “You’ll have a nephew.”

“It’s not a nephew.”

Li Chen stood there, shocked.

Qi Yunruo’s words were so faint, that if Li Chen were any farther away, he would have just missed them.

“It’s not a nephew, but my master.”

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1. **Lotus Sutra**: (法华经) Fǎ huá jīng. From Wikipedia-- The Lotus Sūtra is one of the most popular and influential Mahayana sutras, and the basis on which the Tiantai, Tendai, Cheontae, and Nichiren schools of Buddhism were established.
2. **40 grams of silver**: (钱) Raws said 800 qián. A qian is an ancient Chinese currency. 10 qian = 1 liang. 1 liang = 50 grams. So 800 qian = 40 grams.
3. **checked her pulse for her health**: In Chinese medicine, especially back in ancient China, people believed you can check someone’s health just by reading their pulse. So what the doctor performed here was kind of like a doctor’s regular checkup in modern times.
4. **this official**: (臣) Chén. Illeism for officials in imperial Chinese court, used in front of the emperor.

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5. **that boy:** (小郎) Xiǎo láng is literally a young teen male, but that’s just way too much of a mouthful. I shortened to something close enough and not as awkward sounding.

6. **lakeside pavilion:** A picture has been provided in the chapter supplement.

7. **Radish:** This isn’t the red western kind, but the white Chinese kind. A picture is provided in the chapter supplement. Known as daikon in Japan.

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