

# 妃嫔媵嫔

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七月侯  
作品

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**FPYQ**

Fei Pin Ying Qiang

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**妃嫔媵嬪**



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**Synopsis:**

The journey of a generation's male empress started because of four words.

"Send a dowry escort."

During the 19th year of the Yuanqing Era, Qi Yunruo boarded a carriage and entered through a corner door of the second prince's estate. Then, across the watery corridor, he gazed at the prince from afar.



*The promotional record of a young teen married off as part of his legitimate sister's dowry.*

*From two people who never met before to two people who could understand each other's thoughts by just a glance.*

*There's a type of happiness sparked when the most suitable people meet in the most suitable place.*

A slow-burn romance with a HE.

# Fei Pin Ying Qiang Character Page

**May contain spoilers.**

## Main Couple:

**Qi Yunruo/ 齐云若**: The fifteen-years-old third young master of the Count Ziyang estate. His birth mother was supposedly a prostitute from a brothel that was redeemed after he was conceived. She taught him how to read and write, and how to play the guqin. He lived with her outside the estate until she died. His legitimate mother (the countess) and father treat him like air, and his siblings avoid him as well. Because of this, he has a quiet personality and doesn't ask for much. The story starts with him entering Prince Chun's estate as part of his sister's dowry. The first time he saw Li Chen, he couldn't look away.

**Li Chen (Prince Chun)/ 李琛 (淳王)**: Born from the empress, he is the second son of the emperor. Out of all the other princes, he's the most likely to become the crown prince. His title is Prince Chun, which he received at age fifteen, along with his own estate. Currently, he is twenty years old. He's married to Qi Yunruo's elder legitimate sister and already has two side consorts and a few other concubines. He's handsome in a heroic and righteous way, has a high nose, and has a serious gaze. He finds Qi Yunruo endearing and likes to give him gifts.

## Qi Family/ Count Ziyang Estate

**Count Ziyang/ 紫阳伯**: Surnamed Qi, he is Qi Yunruo's father. He ignores and neglects his son and only brought him to the estate because his birth mother died. He dotes on his legitimate daughter, Qi Niquan.

**Countess Ziyang, maiden name Zhao/ 紫阳伯夫人赵氏:** A woman who only cares about the children she gave birth to. When Qi Yunruo first stepped foot into the count estate, she threw a huge fuss, causing the count to abandon Qi Yunruo in a small corner of the household. She detests his birth mother for her humble birth, and forces Yunruo to marry into the prince estate as a dowry maid, even though it's shameful and will lower his prospects in the future.

**Qi Niquan/ 齐霓裙:** The eldest legitimate daughter of the count estate. She is the apple of her parents' eyes and born from Countess Ziyang. At sixteen years old, she marries into the second prince's estate as the princess consort with her younger illegitimate brother, Qi Yunruo, accompanying her. She treats Yunruo like furniture.

**Qi Yunshan/ 齐云杉:** The eldest and also legitimate son of the count estate. He is the heir and born from Countess Ziyang.

**Qi Yunying/ 齐云英:** The second young master of the count estate. His mother died young and was originally Countess Ziyang's maidservant.

**Qi Danxia/ 齐丹霞:** The second young miss of the count estate. She is betrothed to the eldest son of the Minister of Revenue after her elder sister Qi Niquan's marriage was appointed by the emperor. Her mother is the daughter of an official in the Ministry of Revenue, Concubine Liu. Qi Danxia is a few months younger than Qi Yunruo and detests him.

**Qi Ruxue / 齐如雪:** The third young miss of the count estate, currently six years old. Her mother is Concubine Bai. When Qi Yunruo still lived in the count estate, she looked at him with cold eyes. She is a person who can wear an innocent face as she bullies others.

### Servants:

**Lulan/ 绿岚:** Intelligent and loyal to Qi Yunruo and is currently a first-rank servant girl attending to him. Li Chen gave her to Qi Yunruo after Qi Yunruo received his own courtyard in the prince estate. She and two other servants with “Lu” in their names followed Li Chen from the imperial palace.

**Liusu/ 流苏:** Intelligent and loyal to Qi Niquan's, she used to be a second-rank personal servant girl of Countess Ziyang. But the countess assigned her to monitor Qi Yunruo in the second prince's estate. Eventually, she realizes her new master is in fact Qi Yunruo.

**Yuzhi/ 于知:** Intelligent and loyal to Qi Yunruo. Li Chen gave this eunuch to Qi Yunruo after Qi Yunruo received his own courtyard in the prince estate.

**Xiao Shan and Xiao Jiu:** The two young maidservants assigned to Qi Yunruo after he moved into his suite in Winter Plum Courtyard. They're quick and knowledgeable for their age.

**Xiao Siqing:** Qi Yunruo's page assigned by the countess the day he left the count estate. Is about eight to nine years old at the start of the novel, and his main task is to grind ink and prepare brushes.

### Prince Chun's Estate:

**Ji Huan / 季桓:** He is the eldest illegitimate brother of Secondary Consort Ji, and has aspirations of passing the imperial examinations to become an official. Currently twenty-two years old, the last time he took the exam, his mother passed away. After that, he refrained from taking the exam again for one year. During that year, his legitimate mother and sister convinced him to study in Prince Chun (Li Chen)'s estate. Now he lives in one of the guest houses in the

estate, “Beautiful Forest,” where he spends his time practicing calligraphy, perusing many books, and studying a plethora of articles on current political issues and suggestions to the court. He is an elegant and refined sort of beauty, with a narrow yet gentle gaze. He takes a liking to Yunruo and thinks he’s sweet and childish.

**Secondary Consort Ji/ Ji Ru/ 季茹** : Surnamed Ji, she is one of the two secondary consorts (cefei) of Li Chen. She’s currently eighteen years old and has been married/controlled the prince estate for three years. She’s described as curvaceous with beautiful eyes, and gave birth to Li Chen’s first son. Currently, she’s trying to make things hard for Qi Niquin, unwilling to hand over the power of managing the estate. Her father is the Minister of War’s Right Assistant.

**Secondary Consort Wei/ Wei Qiang / 韦蔷** : Surnamed Wei, she is one of the two secondary consorts (cefei) of Li Chen. She married into the prince estate one year ago, and her father is the Imperial Academy’s Sacrificial Wine Specialist. She looks thin and frail, a delicate sort of beauty.

**Tertiary Consort Li**: Surnamed Li, she is one of the four tertiary consorts (shufei) of Li Chen. She does not seem as aggressive as the two secondary consorts, fooling even Qi Niquin’s nursemaid Song, but it’s foreshadowed that her heart is also full of tricks. She offered to let Qi Niquin raise her daughter.

**Concubine Ying**: A low-ranked concubine in the prince estate who tries to align herself with Qi Niquin.

Li Chen’s retainers/ estate guards:

**Li Yue**: Li Chen’s cousin and reading partner in his youth. His family has a lucrative business in Jiangnan, but he refuses to take on the family business. He has no filter.

**Li Xiuqi:** He used to be an official. He has no blood relation with Li Chen, despite the similar-sounding surname.

**Cao Manjin:** A Juren, someone who attained the second-highest degree in the imperial examinations. However, because he charged a fee for his calligraphy in storefront signs and the like, he garnered a bad name. He could not get the Chief Examiner to like him, and could not pass the next rank's exam even after trying many times as a result.

**Gentleman Ouyang:** An eccentric individual.

**Fang Ge/ Guard Fang:** A guard of Prince Chun's estate that followed him to the border region. He also lent money to Qi Yunruo to purchase Granny Kong and her daughter-in-law.

#### Imperial Family:

**The Current Emperor:** He treats all his sons the same, though he does seem like his second son (Li Chen) the most.

**Empress Zhou:** Favors her youngest son, the Fourth Imperial Prince, over Li Chen. And she wants her fourth son to be the crown prince.

**Prince Jing:** He is the first imperial prince and is twenty-four years old. His mother was born a servant so her status is low. She was only promoted to the rank of Imperial Concubine after he was bestowed the title of Prince Jing. His princess consort is surnamed She, and is from a renowned family in Jiangnan.

**Prince Qing:** He is the third imperial prince and marries a daughter of the Marquis of Beichang's family, Miss Zhang, as his princess consort. His mother is a noble consort and is currently favored by the emperor. He makes his ambitions known, and has recently been allowed to attend morning court.

**Fourth imperial prince:** Name hasn't been revealed yet. He is Li Chen's full-blooded brother and the second son born from the empress. He will be fifteen

this year and soon have his own palace.

Subjects:

**Situ Xu:** A great and experienced general. The emperor sent him to the northwest border to assist General Si De in driving away the Qiang people, but he is killed in battle.

**Si De:** A general that has been stationed at the northwest border for many years. He and Situ Xu clashed ever since the latter arrived, and they could never get along.

**Zhao Weidou:** The new leading general that the emperor has sent to the border. Li Chen will be traveling in his army. He used to be one of the candidates for the Minister of War, but lost the seat to Ji Hansong, Ji Huan and Consort Ji's father. He's also known as General Huwei.

**Ji Hansong:** The current Minister of War and father of Ji Huan and Consort Ji.

# Chapter 1- Dowry Escort

Qi Yunruo sat in bed dressed in green, the firecrackers outside suddenly increasing in volume. His head rested on the edge of the bed, long lashes casting shadows upon his cheeks.

There were no servants left in the house. Today was the wedding of Count Ziyang estate's sole legitimate daughter. Earlier, an older female servant had called for two of the low-ranking servant girls to help outside. Not long after, Cuiyu, the mistress' personal maidservant, knocked on Qi Yunruo's door. On her face was a trace of happiness courtesy of the joyous occasion, but when speaking to him her tone was neither warm nor cold. "The mistress calls for Third Young Master to go to eldest miss' courtyard."

Raising his head to glance at her, Qi Yunruo nodded. "Understood."

Although the eldest miss' East Courtyard was not especially large, Count Ziyang and his main wife had doted on their daughter since childhood. Currently, her courtyard was the picture of festivity, red silk draping from every surface, charming and exquisite throughout. Count Ziyang waited outside of his beloved daughter's room. It was inevitable he would come visit her as the time for the wedding drew near. As such, he happened to meet Qi Yunruo.

"Master," said Cuiyu as soon as she laid eyes on him. "Mistress has called for Third Young Master to come over."

As Qi Yunruo attempted to kowtow to the door, Cuiyu quickly held him up and frowned. "Careful of wrinkling your clothes, Third Young Master."

Distracted, he reacted just in time to change his course, and quickly made his way before the mistress. He saluted.

The eldest miss, Qi Niquan, appeared in tears, leaning on the countess without a sound. Distracted, she did not look at anyone. The countess, maiden name Zhao, caressed her hand, a soft sigh escaping her lips. Then without turning to Qi Yunruo, she said, "You've been called because I have some orders for you."

"What are the mistress' orders?" His voice was soft. Light.

"I've told you this before, but Prince Chun's estate already has two secondary consorts. There's also a few lower-ranked concubines. The harem isn't small. Although your elder sister Niquan has a noble birth, the prince already has an eldest son... You must always remember that your elder sister is also your master. Always be alert and protect her. Do not imitate those vixens and their vulgar behavior."

From Qi Yunruo's mouth came one word. "Understood."

"As a person coming from my household, your status will not be low. Not only that, you're the younger brother of the princess consort. No one will bully you," said the countess. "In fact, your situation right now is better than if you marry a girl from a small family in the future, once our household splits. Your birth mother had passed on early. The count and I will not treat you poorly. Once you're older, you'll be able to leave the prince estate, and both the prince estate and ours will compensate you with shares. If you're lucky, wouldn't serving the prince be better than a few years of hard study?"

Although Qi Yunruo listened, he did not respond.

The countess had said these words several times before. As Qi Yunruo listened distractedly, she sent him out and continued to comfort her daughter.

A red veil had already covered Qi Niquan's face, her makeup perfectly applied and her attire masterfully adjusted. After observing it from multiple angles, Countess Ziyang decided there was nothing wrong with her daughter's appearance. "Once you step foot into the prince estate, there will be no one around to help you. The people there won't be ordinary. I've carefully picked the servant girls who will follow you and made sure none of them are too eye-catching. But if you have a sister to accompany you, or more specifically your brother, you'll be more secure. Even if the prince favors him in the future, he will never be able to give birth to a child. No matter what, his status will not threaten yours."

Softy, Qi Niquan said, "Mother and father are so thoughtful toward me."

"If that child doesn't follow customs, just let me know. I'll give him a strict warning."

"If he accompanies me to the prince estate, he won't dare cause any trouble," said Qi Niquan.

Countess Ziyang beamed. "Qun'er is blessed. The Second Imperial Prince is the most likely to become the next emperor. So in the future..." She leaned closer to her daughter. "Qun'er will become the Mother of the World."

For a moment, Qi Niquan kept silent. Then she said, "Mother, didn't you just say there are many people in the prince estate?"

Holding her hand, Countess Ziyang said, "Qun'er, as long as your father is here, you don't have to worry." Countess Ziyang had wracked her head to help her only daughter survive in the next household. Although Qi Niquan's appearance was comely, life was not without setbacks. There were people around her that could steal the Second Imperial Prince's affection. By chance, Countess Ziyang overheard that the Second Imperial Prince had once stayed overnight at a male brothel. Recalling Qi Yunruo's appearance, which resembled his low-born mother's, she couldn't help but frown.

As a member of the imperial family, the Second Imperial Prince Li Chen, titled Prince Chun, did not come to personally receive Qi Niquan for their wedding. There was no need to show off to others. As Qi Niquan saluted and bid farewell to her parents, Qi Yunruo boarded the carriage meant for dowry escorts. His father, Count Ziyang, did not come see him again. Meanwhile, a few of his brothers and sisters went to see off Qi Niquan.

Trailing after Qi Niquan were four personal servant girls who had been attending to her since childhood. Since Qi Yunruo's current status was just a dowry escort, there would naturally not be too many people waiting on him. One of those was Countess Ziyang's personal servant girl, Liusu. As a personal maid of the countess, Liusu received a lot of face from the other servants. The countess had also prepared in advance a small child, about eight to nine years old, to prepare Qi Yunruo's brushes and grind ink. Xiao Siqing was the name.

Qi Yunruo examined the carriage. Including him, there were three people sitting within. He secretly lifted the curtain to peek outside. Immediately caught sight of the corner of the bride's wedding dress, just as the heir of Count Ziyang's estate, Qi Yunshan, lifted the newlyweds into their designated carriage.

As Qi Yunruo tried to stick his head out of the window, to see more clearly, Liusu snorted. "Young Master!"

Her words prompted Qi Yunruo to return to his seat, his expression now betraying disinterest. Not a word left his lips.

Of Count Ziyang's three sons and three daughters, only the heir Qi Yunshan and the eldest miss Qi Niquan were born from Countess Ziyang. The mother of the second young master, Qi Yunying, died early. She had also been Countess Ziyang's maidservant originally. The mother of the second young miss, Qi Danxia, was the daughter of an official from the Ministry of Revenue. Maiden name, Liu. Count Ziyang doted on her. After the emperor appointed the marriage between Qi Niquan and the Second Imperial Prince, Count Ziyang finalized the marriage proposal between Qi Danxia and the Minister of Revenue's eldest son. It was said to be a good match.

Then there was the odd one out, Qi Yunruo. Whose birth mother had been a prostitute from the pleasure district. Once she had become with child, Count Ziyang redeemed her from the brothel. Before the age of six, Qi Yunruo lived with his mother in a house on Qingzhi Street. After she had passed away, Count Ziyang brought him back to the estate.

But there had been no one willing to raise him. Count Ziyang later summoned an old female servant for that purpose. Just to fulfill his obligations as a father. And she was stern, not the type to get close to others. Later, when Qi Yunruo reached marriageable age, the old female servant returned to her hometown, to be waited on by her grandchildren.

The screeching of wheels filled the carriage. After a while, Qi Yunruo felt bored. To relieve said boredom, he attempted to strike a conversation with the little servant boy, Xiao Siqing. "Are you literate?"

"Yes," Xiao Siqing cautiously said.

Qi Yunruo smiled, shuffling closer. "What books have you read?"

"Just a bit of the 'Three Character Classics'. Roughly skimmed it. This one did not really read any books."

Somewhat disappointed, Qi Yunruo did not respond. Instead, he leaned against the wall of the carriage, lethargic. He lacked any great ambition in his life. In the eight years he had lived in the count estate, because of the count and countess' neglect, he didn't even have the chance to meet guests. In fact, his name had only been added to the genealogy list two years ago.

It had been his birth mother who taught him how to read and write. And how to play the guqin. The mother and son pair had been inseparable. Later on, when

he became alone, Qi Yunruo dreamed of taking the imperial examinations. Of becoming a small official, compile books for his whole life, or perhaps copy cases. Now the last embers of his own dreams had been snuffed out.

Countess Ziyang was the one who had proposed Qi Niquan's dowry. The count had not objected. By having their daughter marry into the Second Imperial Prince's estate, their family was now pressed towards his side. Having multiple bargaining chips was always a smart move. Additionally, the matters regarding Qi Yunruo's marriage had brought the count worry. Although the status of illegitimate children from his household was not humble, just hearing about Qi Yunruo's life would spoil others' mood.

In the countess' eyes, Qi Yunruo looked weak. However, she was afraid that his heart harbored evil intentions. For this reason, Countess Ziyang sent one of her second-rank servant girls, Liusu, to monitor him. It helped that Liusu was intelligent and loyal toward Qi Niquan. However, Liusu found this powerless young master incomprehensible.

After riding for about one hour, Qi Yunruo heard someone knock twice on the carriage. Liusu quickly lifted the curtain for Qi Yunruo, and a few rough-labor servants came to view. In front stood a young woman who said, "May the young master please disembark from the carriage."

Only the principal wife had the privilege of stepping through the main door. Concubines were relegated to the doors on the side of the estate. Yet the door in front of Qi Yunruo was not even that. Small, with a rusted knocker. The sight of it caused Liusu some discontent, but she merely frowned. Qi Yunruo remained silent, holding a small hand brazier as he walked.

There was no one to even lift a palanquin through the door. Further up ahead, a group of older female servants surrounded him as they passed through a moon gate. Then a woman with a yellow flower tucked into her hair appeared. She touched Qi Yunruo's hand, a smile tugging on the corners of her mouth. "How old is this little young master?"

A slight smile graced Qi Yunruo's lips. "Fifteen."

Hearing his response, some people helplessly sighed as they indulged in chit chat. Qi Yunruo stood close enough to pick up on some of their gossip. Apparently, the Ji family's daughter had also been fifteen years old when she first entered this estate. After that, they mentioned how the princess consort was sixteen. That the then-fifteen-years-old Ji family daughter and the currently

sixteen-year-old princess consort were both naive and ignorant starting out. However, the secondary consorts had already controlled the inner courtyard for three years. In the future, who would come up on top was anyone's guess.

To enter the inner courtyard, one must start by walking through the right corridor lining a lake. Five to six yards from the left corridor stood a few servant girls pointing and laughing. The target of their mockery: Qi Yunruo.

Yet he was not mad. He found their actions interesting. Although their eyes reflected contempt, these servants did not carry any malice toward him.

Suddenly, the servants went quiet. Standing by the side, Qi Yunruo stared blankly at a crowd of people passing by the left corridor. Led by a man dressed in red wedding attire, a high crown perched on top his head. He seemed to be aware of someone watching him from afar.

Across the water, Qi Yunruo watched carefully, emblazoning the image in his mind.

## Chapter 2- Prince Chun

The inner courtyard looked completely different from the outside. The group of women that had trailed Qi Yunruo previously did not follow him within. In fact, other than Liusu and Xiao Siqing, the only people traveling with him were a low-ranking eunuch and two first-rank servant girls. These servants stopped once the group was in front of the Winter Plum Courtyard. The residence in which Qi Niquan would live from now on. Its specifications were a little less grand than that of the Prince's residence, the Ink Lotus Courtyard.

Standing by the entrance was a steward eunuch, Eunuch Gao. As he started to walk, Eunuch Gao said, "By the rules of the estate, the princess consort will have her own residence. The two secondary consorts live in the western Frost Autumn Courtyard together, and the four tertiary consorts live in the back residence, the Sunset Courtyard. There are also three regular concubines who live together in Tinglan House. Besides the prince, the princess consort has the most power and the largest residence. You will be living there as well."

Although Eunuch Gao had said this, in reality Qi Yunruo would only be living in the Winter Plum Courtyard by the slightest technicality. A small garden separated his two-room suite on the south side from Qi Niquan's main chamber.

Qi Yunruo didn't pay much attention as he had listened to Eunuch Gao speak. How much he had actually heard was anyone's guess.

Because of this, Liusu shot him a look. She walked up to Eunuch Gao. "Our young master is young and careless. May Eunuch Gao please advise him in the future." Finished speaking, Liusu retrieved a piece of silver from her sleeves and handed it to the steward eunuch.

After receiving the silver, Eunuch Gao carelessly put it away. "Young master will have two people attending to you in your suite. Including miss Liusu, there will be three servants. Everything has already been prepared. This old slave will no longer accompany you."

Qi Yunruo would not be living here for long. His name had been added to the dowry list only recently. As such, it wasn't unusual for the prince estate to not have a proper place for him. Once his sister, Qi Niquan, became familiarized with living here, Qi Yunruo would be pushed out of her residence.

"Have a safe trip, Eunuch Gao," Liusu said as she sent him off.

Meanwhile, Xiao Siqing examined the first small house. Two servants girls saluted them from the inside. "Greetings to young master."

Exhausted, Qi Yunruo sat on the bed provided for him. He swept his gaze through the servants without saying a word. Then he asked, "What will be my duties later?"

Xiao Siqing unfurled the schedule parchment. Took a look. "Today there isn't much to do. However, young master must wake up very early tomorrow to attend to the prince and eldest miss in the morning. And your honored self must also wear a new outfit."

Qi Yunruo asked, "When will eldest miss enter the prince estate?"

"Soon."

Qi Yunruo said nothing. In his heart hid a clawing sort of fear, and a sadness that he didn't know how to put into words. Starting from a month ago, upon waking each day, he would be bombarded by those two emotions. His life inexplicably disrupted, he was now unsure on how to move forward.

The newlyweds would soon arrive at Winter Plum Courtyard, to the main chamber at the front. Qi Yunruo cracked open the window and glanced outside. And he saw the Second Imperial Prince.

After Li Chen had delivered his bride to the room, he shut the door behind him. As he spun on his heel, on his way to the celebratory banquet, Li Chen felt as though someone was looking at his direction. He turned around again in time to catch sight of Qi Yunruo.

The moment their eyes met, Qi Yunruo slammed the window shut.

The banquet stretched on, sounds of cheer and laughter permeating even the walls of Qi Yunruo's small suite. Still, he was able to sleep through the loudest moments. Before dawn arrived, Liusu shook him awake. It was about time to enter the main chamber.

Since he had slept in his clothes, Qi Yunruo's hair was in slight disarray, a few strands loose here and there. Liusu helped him brush his hair. Helped him into a new green outfit before he took his leave.

Qi Niquan had brought four personal maid servants who had served her since childhood to the estate. Their names were Liubai, Liufang, Liuyue, and Liuling. The four of them looked stunning as they stood still outside the main chamber. Once Liusu brought Qi Yunruo right before the entrance, she instructed him to take the basin of water from Liubai's hands.

A soft cough could be heard from inside the room. Two tall maidservants, who seemed like overnight attendants, pushed the doors open from the inside. In walked Liubai and the three other maids, with Qi Yunruo following behind them. Liusu trailed at the back.

One of the tall maidservants drew the curtains of the windows. Then she maneuvered around a divider screen to the master bedroom. The red curtains hanging from the bed, which doubled for mosquito nets, were still closed. The silhouette of a single person sitting upright could be seen.

Liubai and the three other maids had already seen this person before. They saluted and said, "Paying respects to Your Highness."

Li Chen nodded. Seeing that Qi Yunruo did not move, Liusu nudged him. He lost his balance. Splashed some of the basin's water on the two servants before him. Qi Yunruo hesitantly lifted his eyes, then remembered his duties. Quickly, he took a few steps forward and knelt by the bed. He lifted the basin of water.

Li Chen said nothing.

If the master did not speak, no one else would dare to. Qi Yunruo's shoulders started to grow stiff and tired. However, Li Chen had yet to use the basin. As such, Qi Yunruo could only grit his teeth and endure.

In this tense moment, Qi Yunruo helplessly pondered over his master's actions. Or rather, the lack of. In Qi Yunruo's opinion, he had already fulfilled his duties properly. He sneaked a peak at Li Chen. Saw Li Chen lowering his own head to look at him. Panicking, Qi Yunro quickly dropped his gaze.

"Who are you?"

Those words shocked Qi Yunruo to the core. Once again, he lifted his gaze, staring dazedly at the man before him. This man was twenty years old, handsome in a heroic and righteous way, and possessed a high nose. His gaze was serious as he stared at Qi Yunruo. Qi Yunruo was rendered speechless.

Lu Xuan, a servant who had attended to the prince since childhood, presented Li Chen tea. She said, "This is the young master from the princess consort's family."

Li Chen nodded. "Everyone leave. Don't bother the princess consort."

Sure enough, the rest of the people in the room followed Li Chen outside. Furrowing her brow, Liusu pulled Qi Yunruo to his feet. Finally did he realize that everyone had left. He followed suit. On the other hand, both Liubai and Liusu stayed behind, waiting for Qi Niquan to rouse from slumber.

Maneuvering his way around the screen divider, Li Chen sat on the small couch just beyond. This time, Qi Yunruo was quick to perform his duties, immediately kneeling before the prince, the basin of water raised high. As Li Chen washed his face, the other servants handed basins of salt and mouthwash to Qi Yunruo to present to Li Chen. His arms started to grow sore again. After Li Chen finished brushing his teeth, he glanced at Qi Yunruo once more.

Naturally, Li Chen would recognize him. It had taken just a glance from yesterday. Separated by ten or so yards, he had caught sight of a young teen surrounded by several female servants. Such a sight was too conspicuous.

If a dowry escort was female, as the sister or niece of the household's mistress, she had a chance of becoming a side consort in the future. On the other hand, because males could not give birth, aristocratic families often sent some to their newly-wed daughters' households as part of their dowry. Generally, these men were left untitled. Not to mention that their futures were practically ruined, only a minuscule amount of them were liked by powerful masters. Although it's possible for them to pick up officialdom in the future, the chances were slim. It was hard to garner respect even in the odd chance they succeeded in becoming an official.

While Li Chen felt his own thoughts strange, when he first laid eyes on Qi Yunruo, his immediate impression was as followed: Qi Yunruo did not seem like that kind of person.

In Li Chen's estate, there was already a Ji Huan, a "guest" of Secondary Consort Ji. And who was gentle and courteous to others. Originally, Li Chen had thought to send him out of the estate after some time had passed. The time spent here wouldn't have been wasted if Ji Huan could buy some deeds and set up some industries.

"Your Highness, the princess consort has awoken."

Qi Yunruo rose to his feet, patting his knees to relieve the strain. He went to stand by the side. Then, in one fluid moment, Qi Niquan slowly came out from behind the screen divider.

She had transformed into a different person overnight. Yesterday, as she wore a large phoenix crown, although she appeared beautiful and exquisite, the bridal attire of a princess consort had seemed too heavy and complicated for her. She still had the demeanor of a maiden. Now her hair was styled into a cloud bun, a long hairpin inserted to keep the hairstyle together. At the end of the hairpin dangled three strands of small pearls. The gentleness of a married woman had replaced the demeanor of a maiden.

Li Chen personally helped Qi Niquan into her seat. Then, the rest of the servants saluted. "Paying respects to Her Highness."

Qi Yunruo's soft voice could not be distinguished from the others'.

He waited for the couple to finish eating breakfast. After the meal ended, as a dowry escort, he would follow them into the imperial palace to pay respects to their elders. Before that could happen, however, Liusu pushed him back into his little suite. As soon as they entered through the doorway, she said, "What happened this morning?"

His voice betrayed a hint of awkwardness. "I don't know."

Liusu sat down. She felt that the way the prince looked at Qi Yunruo had been strange. She spent a moment pondering. "Let's not worry about this for now. First, we need to help eldest miss secure a foothold in the estate. As such, Third Young Master must watch the prince's expression carefully when fulfilling your duty."

Liusu, Liubai, and the others were servants that Countess Ziyang had nurtured for a long time. The count estate still had three: Liushang, Liuyue, and Liugui.