

LOVE IN A FALLEN CITY

SHANGHAI'S clocks were set an hour ahead so the city could "save daylight," but the Bai family said: "We go by the old clock." Ten o'clock to them was eleven to everyone else. Their singing was behind the beat; they couldn't keep up with the *huqin* of life.

When the *huqin* wails on a night often thousand lamps, the bow slides back and forth, drawing forth a tale too desolate for words—oh! why go into it? The tale of the *huqin* should be performed by a radiant entertainer, two long streaks of rouge pointing to her exquisite nose as she sings, as she smiles, covering her mouth with her sleeve... but here it was just Fourth Master Bai sunk in darkness, sitting alone on a ramshackle balcony and playing the *huqin*.

As he was playing, the doorbell rang downstairs. For the Bai household, this was most unusual; people didn't pay social calls after dark, not in the old etiquette. If a visitor came at night or a telegram arrived without warning, either it meant that some event of huge import had transpired or, most probably, someone had died.

Fourth Master sat still and listened, but since Third Master, Third Mistress, and Fourth Mistress were shouting all at once as they came up the stairs, he couldn't understand what they were saying. Sitting in the room behind the balcony were Sixth Young Lady, Seventh Young Lady, and Eighth Young Lady, along with the Third and Fourth Masters' children, all growing increasingly anxious. From where Fourth Master sat on the darkened balcony, he could see everything in the well-lit room. So when the door opened, there was Third Master in his undershirt and shorts, standing on the raised doorsill with his legs stuck out wide, reaching behind his thighs to slap at the mosquitoes, and calling out to Fourth Master: "Hey, Old Four, guess what? That fellow that Sixth Sister left, well, it seems he's caught pneumonia and died!"

Fourth Master put down the *huqin* and walked into the room. "Who brought the news?" he asked.