Kathryn found herself crammed into a pedicab trying to tune out her companion and focus on viewing the city as the driver threaded his way through the seething masses of humanity that packed every street. While the waterfront and the market went on as usual, the rest of Canton was another story.

Large portions of the business district had been burned because of a dispute with the Kuomintang. To the dismay of the foreign community, Western houses in the suburbs had been victimized as well. It was no wonder her father was considering moving Kidwell Trading’s headquarters back to Hong Kong.

“Well?” Lucy was demanding for a second time as she hadn’t gotten an answer on the first query.

Kathryn reluctantly returned her attention to the conversation. “Well, what?”

“I asked if you had your eye on anyone in particular for the coming season.”

“Do you ever think about anything besides men and parties?” she asked acidly, appalled that her English friend seemed oblivious to the destruction around them.

“Of course,” Lucy answered. “I think about the clothes I will wear to impress the men at the parties. While we’re on that subject, I feel it my duty to point out that you’ll never catch a husband if you don’t start looking and acting more like a lady.”

“Haven’t you heard? I’m being forced to marry my father’s chosen successor, Collin McNeal.”

“He’s nice enough, but a bit rough around the edges,” Lucy offered. “Perfect for you!”

Kathryn scowled at her friend, who then exclaimed, “I have the most marvelous idea! We can have a double wedding and be sold into bondage together. I know Christmas is just around the corner, but there’s still time to piece together a decent dress for you.”

Kathryn was about to explain that she intended to put the wedding off as long as possible when the pedicab lurched to a stop. The ladies alighted, and Lucy elbowed her way across the stream of people to sweep into a shop whose front was gaudily decorated with gilded dragons and crimson Chinese lanterns.

They’d been examining silk for far longer than suited Kathryn when a faintly distant popping, like firecrackers, drifted through the open door. The elderly shopkeeper glanced nervously at the street, but seeing nothing unusual, she turned her attention back to Lucy, who was trying to decide which shade of blue would best bring out her eyes.

A moment later, the sound was repeated. This time much louder. The shopkeeper stopped attending to Lucy and padded over to poke her head out the door. In the street, Kathryn could see people starting to run.

The popping sounded a third time, even louder than before. The old woman abruptly turned from the door to announce in barely understandable English, “I close. You leave.”

“What?” Kathryn gaped.

“You leave,” the shop keeper repeated. To emphasize her point, the woman caught hold of Kathryn’s arm and started dragging her toward the door.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Lucy demanded from the counter.

“It would seem she’s closing,” Kathryn said as she was shoved unceremoniously out the door.

“Well, I never,” Lucy huffed, stomping from the shop. Once in the street she whirled around to deliver a scathing retort only to have the door slammed in her face. “I’ll tell all my friends about this outrage!” the girl hollered. “You’ll never sell another bolt of silk if I have anything to say about it! The nerve.” Lucy glanced at Kathryn as she pulled on her gloves. “Whatever is the matter with you?”

“I think we’re in trouble.”