

CLASSICS TO GO

# THE CAT'S PAW



NATALIE SUMNER LINCOLN

# **THE CAT'S PAW**

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# CHAPTER I

## KITTY!

MISS SUSAN BAIRD let her gaze rest on her companion in speculative silence. Apparently, her last jibe had failed of its mark, judging from the man's unchanged expression. With a vexed sigh she proceeded to pour out another cup of tea.

They were an oddly matched pair. Miss Baird, still erect in spite of her seventy years, her small slight figure tucked into one corner of the carved, throne-shaped chair which was her habitual seat when in her library, appeared dwarfed in comparison with the broad-shouldered, powerfully built man who faced her across the tea table.

"So you wish to marry my niece, Kitty," she remarked. "*You!*" And she broke into shrill laughter.

Her companion flushed hotly. Her ridicule cut deeper than had any of her previous comments.

"I intend to marry her," he answered, and the stubborn determination of his tone matched his set features.

"So!" Miss Baird shrugged her thin shoulders. "You forget, my friend, that until Kitty is twenty-five years of age, I am her legal guardian, and that she is absolutely dependent upon me."

"You give her a home and let her work that she may contribute to your support," he retorted.

At his words her eyes blazed in fury and her talonlike fingers fumbled in the silver bowl for the few pieces of sugar it contained.

“I am her only blood relation. It is fitting and proper that she aid me in my old age,” she exclaimed. “My poverty,” she paused, and a certain dignity crept into both voice and manner, “is my misfortune.”

“And Kitty,” he began, but got no further.

“We will not discuss Kitty,” she announced with finality. “Wait,” as he started to interrupt her. “Such discussion is totally unnecessary, for Kitty will never marry you.”

“Why not?”

“For two excellent reasons.” She spoke with deliberation. “Kitty shall not marry a poor man, nor shall she marry a man with an hereditary taint.”

The man regarded her steadfastly across the table, his strong capable hands still holding the peach which he had been peeling. The silence lengthened, but neither seemed inclined to break it. Suddenly, the man laid down the peach and taking out his handkerchief, passed it across his lips; then, still in silence, he picked up the fruit knife, cut the peach in two and, placing the fruit in front of Miss Baird, rose and left the library.

In the outer hall he paused long enough to pick up his hat and gloves from the table where he had placed them upon his arrival some time before. He had opened the front door and was about to step outside when it occurred to him to light a cigarette. To do so, he released his hold on the front door. His cigarette was just commencing to draw nicely when a current of air from an opened window across the hall blew the door, which he had left ajar, shut with a resounding bang.

As the noise vibrated through the silent house, the man glanced nervously over his shoulder. Evidently, it had not disturbed Miss Baird or the other inmates of her household, for no one appeared in the hall. He once more started to

approach the front door when he heard, through the portières in front of the entrance to the library, Miss Baird's voice raised in anger.

"Kitty!" she called. "Kitty!"

As the name echoed through the silent hall, it gave place to a scream of such intensity, such horror that the man drew back aghast. It was some minutes before he moved. With faltering footsteps he retraced his way into the library and paused by the tea table.

Miss Susan Baird still sat in her throne-shaped chair, but the light fell full on her glazing eyes and distorted features.

Slowly, reluctantly, the man bent nearer and forced himself to place his hand upon her wrist. He could feel no pulse. When he stood erect a moment later, his forehead was beaded with perspiration. Dazedly, he glanced about the library—he and the dead woman were its only occupants.

Again he compelled himself to gaze at her, and subconsciously took note of her poor and patched attire. The incongruity of her string of pearls and the diamond rings upon her fingers impressed him even in the presence of death.

Step by step he retreated backward across the room, his glance roaming upward toward the gallery which circled the library and the short staircase leading to it, but always his eyes returned to that still and lonely figure by the tea table.

A few minutes later the faint sound of the front door being closed disturbed a large ball of fur. A gray Angora cat jumped from its hiding place and, with its back arched in fright, scampered through the portières, and fled along the hall and up the staircase to the attic.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE SUMMONS**

THE broad streets of Washington City presented a lively scene as Dr. Leonard McLean drove his car with increasing slowness down Connecticut Avenue, crowded with government employees hastening to their offices. The congestion was even greater than usual owing to the downpour of rain as the drenched pedestrians swarmed around the street car stops in their endeavor to board cars, already packed to their limit, and arrive promptly at nine o'clock at their various destinations.

McLean slowed down to a stop within the fifteen feet limit prescribed by law, as the street car ahead of him halted to take on passengers, and watched with interest the futile efforts of the conductor to prevent the desperate rush made by both men and women to get through the car door at the same time. Suddenly, McLean discerned a familiar face in the crowd before him and sounded his horn. The unexpected "honk" created confusion among those unable to find even clinging room, and the conductor, taking advantage of the diversion, signaled to the motorman and the car sped onward.

"Hey, Leigh!" hailed McLean. "Leigh Wallace!"

Major Wallace glanced around and with a wave of his hand McLean indicated the vacant seat in his roadster.

"Hop in!" he exclaimed, as Wallace hurried across the intervening space between the car and the curbstone. "I'll give you a lift downtown," and, hardly waiting for Wallace to seat himself and close the door, the busy surgeon released the clutch and the roadster sped down Connecticut Avenue.



It was not until they were clear of traffic and were approaching the intersection of Twenty-first Street and Massachusetts Avenue that McLean realized his companion had not returned his greeting or addressed a word to him since entering the car. Turning his head, he eyed him unobtrusively. Wallace sat moodily staring ahead; his big frame, slumped in the easiest posture, seemed to fill the broad seat of the Packard. McLean took silent note of Wallace's expression and the unhealthy pallor of his skin.

"Get any sleep last night?" he asked.

"Not much." Wallace drew out a leather wallet from an inside pocket and produced a prescription. "The druggist refused to fill this again; said I had to get another prescription. Beastly rot," he complained. "Cost me a bad night."

The surgeon ran his eye over the prescription before pocketing it.

"It's a narcotic," he explained. "The druggists are not allowed to refill. Next time you want one come to me. How long is it since you left Walter Reed Hospital, Leigh?"

"Two months ago," was the laconic rejoinder. Wallace removed his hat and passed his hand over his short-clipped hair. "I hope to report for duty soon."

"Good!" McLean slowed down to make the turn from Twenty-first Street into Massachusetts Avenue and as they drove westward Major Wallace for the first time took notice of the direction in which they were heading and that they were no longer on Connecticut Avenue.

"Aren't you going to your office, McLean?" he inquired.

"Not immediately. I have a professional call to make first. Are you in a hurry?"

The question seemed superfluous and McLean smiled as he put it. The major's apathetic manner and relaxed figure could not be associated with haste.

"No," Wallace answered. "I promised to stop in and see Charles Craige some time this morning; he's attending to some legal business for me. Otherwise I have nothing to do. This killing time gets on my nerves—look at that, now," and he held up a hand that was not quite steady. "Take me on as chauffeur, McLean. I understand an engine; shell-shock hasn't knocked that out of my head."

"Your head's all right, old man. I told you that when you were my patient at Walter Reed," responded McLean cheerily. "A few weeks more and—" He stopped speaking as they crossed the Q Street bridge into Georgetown, then, stepping on the accelerator, he raced the car up the steeply graded street and drew up in front of a high terrace.

"Hello, are you going to 'Rose Hill'?" demanded Wallace, wakened from his lethargy by the stopping of the car. He had apparently been unaware that McLean had left his last sentence unfinished. "Who is ill?"

"I don't know." McLean leaned back to pick up his instrument bag which he carried in the compartment behind his seat. "My servant called to me just as I was leaving home that I had been telephoned to come over here at once. I didn't catch all she said. I suppose Kitty Baird is ill. That girl is a bundle of nerves."

Wallace clambered out of the car so that his more nimble companion would not have to climb over his long legs in getting out. As McLean turned to close the door of his car, Wallace's hand descended heavily upon his shoulder.

"What—who—who's that standing in the Baird's doorway?" he gasped. "A policeman?"

McLean swung around and glanced up at the house. A long flight of stone steps led up to the front door and a landing marked each break in the terrace whereon grew rosebushes. It was the picturesque garden which gave its name to the fine old mansion—Rose Hill. The mansion had been built in colonial times when the surrounding land, on which stood modern houses and the present-day streets, had been part of the “plantation” owned by General Josiah Baird of Revolutionary fame. The hand of progress had left the mansion perched high above the graded street, but it had not touched its fine air of repose, nor diminished the beauty of its classic Greek architecture.

Standing under the fanlight over the doorway was the burly form of a blue-coated policeman.

“Yes, that’s one of the ‘City’s finest,’” he laughed. “What of it?” he added, observing his companion’s agitation in astonishment. “The policeman is probably taking the census; one called on me last Saturday.”

Wallace swallowed hard. “That’s it,” he mumbled, rather than spoke. “You’ve hit it.”

McLean, conscious of the bleak wind which accompanied the driving rain, stopped to open the door of his roadster.

“Wait in the car, Leigh; I won’t be long.” Not pausing to see if his suggestion was followed, McLean hurried up the steps.

Wallace plucked at the collar of his overcoat and opened it with nervous fingers, mechanically closed the car door, and then with slow reluctant feet followed McLean toward the mansion. He was breathing heavily when he gained the surgeon’s side, and the latter’s surprised exclamation at sight of him was checked by the policeman who had advanced a few steps to meet the two men.

“Dr. McLean?” he asked, and as the surgeon nodded, added, “Step inside, Sir.” He touched his hat respectfully. “Is this gentleman with you, Doctor?”

“Why, certainly.” McLean glanced inquiringly at the policeman; the latter’s manner indicated suppressed excitement. “What’s to pay, Officer?”

“They’ll tell you inside,” waving his hand toward the open door. “The coroner’s there.”

“Coroner!” McLean’s bag nearly slipped from his hand; but before he could question the policeman further, his name was called from the back of the hall and he hurried inside the house. Coroner Penfield stood by the portières in front of the library door.

“I am glad you could get here so promptly, McLean,” he said. “Come in,” and he drew the portières to one side. McLean entered the library hastily and continued to advance with his usual brisk tread until he caught sight of a huddled figure in the throne-shaped chair.

“Good God!” he ejaculated and retreated a few steps. Recovering his usual calm poise he walked around the tea table and examined the body. When he straightened up and turned around, he found Coroner Penfield’s attention was centered on Major Leigh Wallace.

Wallace had followed McLean across the threshold of the library only, and stood with his back braced against the doorjamb while his eyes mutely scrutinized every movement made by the surgeon.

“Well?” he questioned, and McLean’s stare grew intensified. If he had not seen Wallace’s lips move he would never have recognized his voice. With difficulty Wallace enunciated his words. “Well—what—what is it?”

“It’s a case of—”

“Sudden death.” Coroner Penfield completed McLean’s sentence.

In the silence that followed, a man who had been leaning over the railing of the gallery which circled the library, watching them, walked over to the stairs and came slowly down. At sound of his footsteps McLean glanced up and recognized Inspector Mitchell of the Central Office. He bowed courteously to the surgeon before addressing the coroner.

“If it is all right, Dr. Penfield, we’ll have the body removed,” he said. “My men are here.”

“Certainly. Call them.” Penfield turned to McLean. “I wanted you to be present as I understand you attended Miss Susan Baird.”

“Yes, I have been her family physician for years.” McLean spoke with an effort, his thoughts centered on one idea. “Where is Miss Baird’s niece, Miss Kitty Baird?”

His question went unanswered. Apparently Coroner Penfield and Inspector Mitchell failed to hear him as they busied themselves in superintending the removal of the body. McLean, after watching them for some seconds, walked over to Wallace. The latter took no notice of him whatever, his eyes remaining always on the tea table. McLean scanned his drawn face and listened to his labored breathing with growing concern. Whirling around, he opened his bag, took out a flask, detached its silver cup and poured out a liberal allowance of whisky, then, darting out of the library, he returned an instant later with some water in a glass. Slightly diluting the whisky, he thrust the cup against Wallace’s white lips.

“Drink that,” he ordered, and Wallace followed his peremptory command. “Now, sit down,” and he half-pushed, half-supported him to a large leather covered lounge.

"I—I," protested Wallace. "I'm a bit undone, McLean," and he raised miserable, apologetic eyes to his friend.

"Sure, it's enough to bowl any one over," McLean acknowledged, with a sympathetic pat. "Even the strongest —"

"Which I am not," supplemented Wallace. The powerful stimulant was taking effect, and he spoke with more composure. "Have you—can you—" he hesitated, and cast a sidelong glance at McLean. "Can you learn any details about Miss Baird and how she came to be lying in that chair?" It was impossible for him to suppress a shudder as he indicated the empty throne-shaped chair. "She was dead, wasn't she?"

"As dead as a door nail." His question was answered by Inspector Mitchell, who had returned in time to catch their last few remarks. "Can you give me any facts about Miss Baird, Doctor McLean?"

"Only that she was a lifelong resident of Georgetown and a well-known character—known for her eccentricities, that is," responded McLean. "Her death has come as a great shock to Major Wallace and to me, Inspector."

"When did you see her last?" inquired Mitchell. His question was addressed to both men, but it was McLean who answered it after a moment's thought.

"She was in my office on Friday."

"Was she ill?"

"No. For a woman of her age she was remarkably free from organic trouble," replied McLean. "In fact, she did not come to consult me about herself at all, but to ask for a tonic for her niece. By the way, where is Miss Kitty Baird?"

At the question Wallace raised his head and eyed the surgeon intently for a second, then dropped his eyes as the

other felt his gaze and turned toward him.

“Where is Miss Kitty Baird?” Mitchell repeated the surgeon’s question. “Blessed if I know.”

“What!” McLean started from the chair where he had seated himself a moment before. “Do you mean to say that Miss Kitty Baird is not in her bedroom?”

“I do.” Mitchell shook a puzzled head. “And she isn’t in any part of the house. My men and I have searched it thoroughly. We found only the dead woman in the house and a live Angora cat.”

McLean stared at the inspector in dumbfounded amazement. A gurgling sound from the sofa caused him to look at Wallace. The major, with purpling face, was struggling to undo his collar.

“Air! Air!” he gasped, and before the surgeon could spring to his aid, he sank back unconscious against the sofa pillows.

## CHAPTER III

### DETAILS

INSPECTOR Mitchell and Dr. McLean watched the taxicab, in which rode Major Leigh Wallace and Coroner Penfield, until it passed out of sight on its way to Washington, before reëntering the Baird mansion.

“Major Wallace seems in bad shape,” commented Mitchell, as they crossed the hall toward the library. “I thought you would never bring him back to consciousness, Doctor.”

“This library wasn’t a pleasant sight for well man to encounter, Mitchell, let alone a man in the major’s condition,” replied McLean. “The results of shell-shock do not exactly prepare a man for this—” and with a wave of his hand the surgeon indicated the tea table and the throne-shaped chair where Miss Baird’s body had lain on their entrance three quarters of an hour before.

“Eh, yes; but I should have thought the major’s experiences overseas would have accustomed him to gruesome scenes.” Mitchell paused in front of the portières and adjusted them carefully so that they completely covered the doorway.

“Walking into a room and finding a friend lying dead is a shock, regardless of any past experience,” responded McLean dryly.

“Did Major Wallace know Miss Baird well?” inquired Mitchell.

“Know her well?” repeated McLean. “Yes, and her niece, Kitty Baird, even better, if rumor speaks truly.”



A certain inflection in the surgeon's voice caused Mitchell to eye him sharply, but McLean's attention was entirely centered on the tea table before which he was standing, and he appeared unaware of the inspector's scrutiny.

"Exactly what do you mean, Doctor?" asked the latter. "Your words would imply—"

"Nothing—except that rumor has it that Leigh Wallace and Kitty Baird are engaged to be married." McLean balanced one hand on a chair and tipped it back and forth.

"And what is your *personal* opinion, Doctor?" asked Mitchell shrewdly.

McLean hesitated. "I am not quite so certain," he admitted. "Three months ago I believed Wallace and Kitty were engaged; then—"

"Yes?—" as McLean paused once more in his speech.

"Then Kitty met Edward Rodgers of San Francisco," McLean smiled. "It's a toss-up which man wins."

"So." The inspector considered a moment. "So Miss Baird is still willing to take a chance on marrying Major Wallace, is she?"

"What d'y'e mean?" McLean's abstracted manner disappeared instantly.

"Well, I wouldn't exactly like my daughter to marry him," retorted Mitchell. "Not after seeing his condition here to-day. I haven't much medical knowledge—"

"Quite so." The surgeon's dry tone caused Mitchell to redden. "I can assure you, Mitchell, that Major Wallace's ill-health is but temporary."

"Is it?" Mitchell eyed him reflectively, then as an idea occurred to him his expression altered. "By Jove! Perhaps it wasn't the sight of Miss Baird lying there dead which

knocked him out, but the absence of her niece, Miss Kitty Baird.”

McLean let the chair, which he had been balancing on two legs, go slowly back to its proper position.

“It is just possible that you are right,” he agreed. “Kitty Baird’s absence has alarmed me also.”

“Is that so? You kept mighty calm about it,” grumbled Mitchell. McLean was not evincing much interest. “Possibly you don’t realize that Miss Baird did not die a natural death.”

McLean smiled ironically. “You pay me a poor compliment,” he said. “I only made a superficial examination of her body, but it assured me that a—” he hesitated for a brief second, “that a tragedy had occurred.”

“Tragedy!” In fine scorn. “Why mince words? Say murder.”

“No.” McLean spoke with provoking deliberation. “Suicide.”

“Suicide!” echoed the inspector. “Bah! Look at this room.”

Obediently McLean glanced about the library. It was a large room, almost square in shape, two stories in height with an arched roof containing a stained glass skylight. It was paneled in Flemish oak; and oak bookcases, with sliding glass doors, filled most of the wall space, while a gallery, on a level with the second story, circled the library. Access to the gallery was gained from the library by a flight of circular steps near the huge brick chimney which stood at the farther end of the room. Bookcases, similar in type to those on the main floor of the library, were in the gallery, and McLean scarcely glanced upward; instead, his eyes roved over the worn furniture with its shabby upholstery, the

faded rugs on the hardwood floor, until finally his gaze rested on the tea table. Given to observation of little things, he noticed the spotless condition of the tea cloth and the neat darns in one corner. Inspector Mitchell observed his silent contemplation of the tea table.

“Evidently Miss Baird was enjoying a cup of tea,” he remarked. “See, her cup is half full.”

“Have you analyzed its contents?” asked McLean.

“Not yet.” Mitchell moved impatiently. “Give us time, Doctor. It won’t take long to locate the criminal. He is sure to have left a clue behind him among the tea things.”

“You will insist on murder!” McLean shrugged his shoulders. “I see only one cup of tea,” pointing to the table. “A teapot—is it empty?” He stretched out his hand to pick it up, but Mitchell checked him with an imperative gesture.

“Don’t handle anything, Sir,” he cautioned. “We are making tests for finger prints.”

“Quite right.” McLean’s hand dropped to his side. “Well, murder presupposes the presence of some one beside the victim. I see only one teacup, one plate with two sandwiches and a piece of cake, another plate with a half-eaten peach. Not a very bountiful repast. Now, while Miss Baird was poor, she was hospitable, inspector; had any one been here, her visitor would have been provided with a cup of tea at least.”

“Perhaps—but suppose she wasn’t aware of the, er, visitor’s presence?” asked Mitchell.

McLean eyed him in silence for a second. “Have you found any indication of another’s presence?” he questioned. “Any clues?”

“Nothing worth mentioning now,” responded Mitchell, evasively. “Can you give me the name of an intimate friend to whom Miss Baird may have gone?”

“Why, certainly; there’s—let me see—” McLean pulled himself up short. Who were Kitty Baird’s intimate friends—her girl friends? He could enumerate dozens of men whose admiration for her was sincere and unconcealed, but when it came to the girls in their set—pshaw! women were cats! Kitty’s popularity had not endeared her to her own sex.

“You might try Mrs. Amos Parsons,” he suggested, and pointed to the telephone table in a corner of the library. “Kitty is her private secretary. No, wait,” as Mitchell snatched up the telephone book and hastily turned its well-thumbed pages. “She may be with her cousins, Mr. and Mrs. Ben Potter. Here, I’ll look up their number for you.”

Mitchell hung up the receiver in disgust a minute later. “Central declares no one answers,” he explained. “Who shall we try next? Mrs. Parsons, did you say?” This time he was more successful in getting the number desired, but the reply to his question was unsatisfactory. “The butler declares Miss Baird hasn’t been there since yesterday,” he told his companion. “Mrs. Parsons is not at home.”

McLean’s expression had grown serious. “We had better communicate with Charles Craige,” he said. “Craige has handled Miss Baird’s affairs for years, lawyer, agent, and all that. He may aid us in locating Kitty.” Then with a touch of impatience, “Don’t stop to look up the number of his law office—it is Main 3300.”

As Inspector Mitchell turned again to the telephone, McLean rose and slowly paced back and forth the length of the library. His familiarity with the furnishings and the contents of the bookcases—his taste in literature having coincided with that of Colonel Baird, who spent the last years of his life squandering a depleted fortune to gratify his craving as a collector—caused him to pay little attention to his surroundings, and he walked with head bent, his thoughts with the dead woman upstairs.

Was Inspector Mitchell right—could it have been murder? Who would have reason to harm so feeble an old lady? What motive could have inspired such a senseless crime? Robbery—bah, thieves would not kill to secure books and knickknacks of doubtful value.

But then what motive could have prompted suicide? Why should a woman so near the grave take her own life? Miss Baird had abhorred illness in any form; she had always had a healthy distaste for invalidism, and little patience with neurotic friends.

Miss Susan Baird, of all persons, to be found dead—possibly murdered! McLean took out his handkerchief and passed it over his forehead. For the first time he grew conscious of the closeness of the atmosphere, of the musty smell which dampness sometimes engenders. Instinctively, he stopped in front of a side door which opened on a “stoop” leading to the garden which extended to the back of the house. The door resisted his attempts to open it, and he felt for the key. It was not in the lock.

McLean stared at the door in some surprise. It was the only one in the house fitted with a modern lock, and it had always been Miss Baird’s custom to leave the key in the lock. The locks of the other doors were hand-wrought before the Revolution and massive in size. It had been Miss Baird’s fad never to have them modernized. One of her few extravagances, if it could be called such, had been to employ a grandson of old “Oscar,” their colored factotum, to keep the copper highly burnished and shining with its old-time, slave-day luster. The great fireplaces were lined with copper and Miss Baird was never happier than when able to contemplate her grotesque reflection in the walls of the fireplace in her library.

McLean had been a frequent visitor at the Baird mansion, but never before had he seen the key removed from the

side door of the library. With a puzzled frown he reached up and pulled back the copper latch which released the upper half of the door—built in the style of the “Dutch” door—and pulled it back. The fresh air, laden as it was with dampness, was refreshing. The rain had slackened, and seeing there was no danger of it splashing inside the library, he pulled the half door still further open. Turning about, he found Inspector Mitchell at his elbow.

“I caught Mr. Craige,” he announced. “He is coming right over.” Then with a complete change of tone. “How did you open the upper half of this door?”

“By pushing the catch, so—” and McLean demonstrated.

“Hump!” Inspector Mitchell moved the catch back and forth. “I see, there’s a knack about it; it baffled me when I tried to open it. I have the key of the lower door,” and he drew it out of his pocket.

“Why did you take it out of the lock?”

“Because—” Inspector Mitchell’s answer was interrupted by the sudden rush of feet across the outer hall. The portières were thrust aside and a girl dashed into the library followed by a man.

Utterly oblivious of the inspector’s presence, she sped across the room to McLean.

“Oh, Doctor, is it true?” she gasped, incoherently. “Is Aunt Susan—has she—” She faltered and McLean caught her outstretched hands and drew her into a chair.

“Yes,” he said, and his quiet, controlled tone brought some measure of relief to the overwrought girl. “Your aunt is dead.”

Kitty Baird’s head dropped forward and rested on her cupped hands, and tears forced their way through her fingers. At the sound of her weeping, a seven-toed Angora

cat stole out from behind a piece of furniture and pattered across the floor. With a flying leap she seated herself in Kitty's lap and brushed her head against the girl's hands. Kitty looked down, caught the soft body in her arms and held the cat tightly to her.

"Mouchette, Mouchette," she moaned. "Aunty's gone—gone," and she buried her face in the long fur. Gradually, her sobs grew less, and McLean, observing that she was regaining some hold on her composure, withdrew to the other end of the library where Inspector Mitchell was holding a low-toned conversation with Charles Craige.

"I am glad you are here, Craige," McLean said, keeping his voice lowered. "This is the devil of a mess."

The lawyer's handsome face expressed grave concern. "So I judge from what Inspector Mitchell told me on the telephone and what he has just said." He moved so as to catch a better view of the library. "Where have you taken Miss Baird?"

"To her bedroom," replied Mitchell. "The autopsy will be held this afternoon probably."

He had not troubled to lower his rather strident voice and his words reached Kitty's ears. Dropping the cat, she sprang to her feet with a slight cry.

"Autopsy?" she exclaimed. "No, not that!" And she put up her hand as if to ward off a blow.

"Why not?" demanded Mitchell, and as Kitty hesitated, McLean spoke quickly.

"It is customary in cases of sudden death, Kitty, to hold autopsies," he explained. "Your aunt was found dead in this room—"

"Here!" Kitty looked about with a shudder. "I did not realize—Mr. Craige only told me—we met at the door," she