

I saw Aunt Phoebe drawing herself up rigidly as Anna Selamowsky came toward our bench, and, amid deafening applause, laid her finger upon the Anstruther diamonds. The clapping and noise produced no effect upon the girl. She stood motionless as though she had been a statue, her hand still upon the necklace.

Whether Aunt Phoebe was aggravated by the complete success of the experiment or annoyed at having been obliged to take so prominent a part in it, I do not know—but she was certainly was a good deal out of temper, for when Selamowsky made his way to where his daughter was standing, she said, in tones of icy disapproval, which must have been audible for a long way down the room:

"A very clever piece of imposture, sir."

The mesmerist's face flushed and his eyes flashed angrily. He, however, bowed low.

"There's nothing so hard," he said, "to overcome, madam, as prejudice. I fear you have been inconvenienced by my daughter's hand. I will now release her—and you."

So saying, he placed his own hand for a moment over his daughter's and breathed lightly on the girl's face. Instantly the muscles relaxed, her hand fell to her side, and I could hear her give a little shuddering sigh, apparently of relief.

I noticed, too, that, whether by design or accident, Selamowsky kept his hand for a moment longer on my aunt's necklace, and as he took his finger away, I fancied that he looked at her fixedly for a second, and muttered something either to himself or her, the meaning of which I could not catch.

"What did he say to you?" I asked, as Selamowsky, after removing the bandage from his daughter's eyes, assisted her to remount the stage.

Aunt Phoebe looked a little confused and dazed, and her hand went up to her necklace as though to reassure herself of its safety.

"Say to me?" she repeated, rousing herself as though by an effort; "he said nothing to me. But I think, Elizabeth, it is the same to you we will go home; the heat of the room has made me feel a little dizzy."

We heard next day that we had missed the best part of the entertainment by leaving when we did, and that many and far more wonderful experiments were successfully attempted, but I had no time to waste in vain regrets for not having been present, for I was much taken up with Aunt Phoebe.

I was really anxious about her, she was so strangely unlike her calm, equable self. All Saturday she was restless and irritable, wandering half-way up-stairs, and then, as though she had forgotten what she wanted, returned to the drawing-room, where she set to work opening old cabinet drawers, looking under chairs and sofas, tumbling everything out of their work-box as if in search of something, and snubbing me for my pains when I offered to help her.

This went on all day, and I had almost made up my mind to send for Dr. Perkins, when, after late dinner, she suddenly sank into an arm-chair with a look of relief.

"I know what it is," she said; "it is my diamonds?"

"Your diamonds, Aunt Phoebe?" I exclaimed. "Why I locked them up for you myself in your dressing-box when we came home last night!"

"Are you sure, Elizabeth?" she asked, with an anxious, worried expression.

"Quite sure," I answered; "but if it will satisfy you, I will bring down your dressing-box now and let you see."

"Do, there's a dear child? I declare I feel too tired to move another step."

I was not surprised at this, considering how she had been fussing about all day, and I ran up to her bed-room, brought down her rose-wood dressing-box, and placed it on the table in front of her.

I was greatly struck by the nervous trembling of her fingers as she chose out the right key from among the others in her bunch, and the shaky way in which she fitted it into the lock. Even when she had turned the key she seemed half afraid to raise the lid, so I did

it for her, and taking out the first tray, lifted out the morocco case which contained the heirlooms and laid it in her lap.

Aunt Phoebe tremblingly touched the spring; the case flew open and disclosed the diamonds lying snugly on their bed of blue velvet. She took them out and looked at them lovingly, held them up so they might catch the light from the lamp, and then with a sigh replaced them in their case and shut it with a snap.

I waited for a few minutes, then, as she did not speak, I put out my hand for the case, intending to replace it in the dressing-box and take it up-stairs. But Aunt Phoebe clinched it tightly, staggered to her feet, and said in a husky, unnatural voice: "No, I must take it myself."

"Why, you said you were too tired," I began, but before I could finish my sentence she had left the room, and I heard her going up stairs and opening the door of her bedroom.

Some few minutes afterward I heard her steps once more on the stairs, and I waited, expecting her every moment to open the drawing-room door and walk in; but to my astonishment I heard her pass by, and a moment afterward the clang of the front door as it was hastily shut told me that Aunt Phoebe had left the house.

"She must be mad!" I exclaimed to myself as I rushed to the hall, seized up the first hat I could see, flung a shawl over my shoulders, and tore off in pursuit of my runaway relative.

It was quite dark, but I caught sight of her as she passed by a lamp post. She was walking quickly, more quickly than I had ever seen her walk before, and with evidently some set purpose in her mind. I ran after her as fast as I could, and came up with her as she was turning down a small dark lane, leading, as I knew, to a little court, the home of a very poor but respectable section of the inhabitants of Bishopsthorpe.

"Aunt Phoebe," I gasped, as I touched her arm, "where are you going?" You must be making a mistake?"

"No! no!" she cried with a feverish impatience in her voice. "I am right! Quite right! You must not stop me!" and she quickened her pace into a halting run.

I saw clearly that there was nothing to be done but to follow her and try to keep her out of actual harm's way, for there now seemed to be no manner of doubt that my poor aunt was, for the time at any rate, insane. So I fell back a pace, and, never appearing even to notice that I had left her side, she pursued her course.

Suddenly she stopped short, crossed the street, and stumbled up the uneven stone steps of a shabby-looking house, whose front door was wide open. Without a moment's hesitation she entered the dark hall, and I followed closely at her heels. Up the squalid, dirty stairs she hurried, and, without knocking, opened a door on the left-hand side of the first landing and went in.

I was a few steps behind, but as I gained the threshold I saw her take a parcel from beneath her cloak and hold it out to a man who came to meet her from the far end of the badly-lighted room.

"I have brought them," I heard my aunt say in the same curious, husky voice I had noticed before.

As the man came nearer and stood where the light of the evil-smelling little paraffin lamp fell upon his features, I recognized in the heavy jaw, the bull-neck, and the close cropped head the Prof. Dmitri Selamowsky of the previous evening. Our eyes met, and I thought I detected a sort of not altogether pleasant surprise; but if this were so he recovered himself quickly and, bowing low, said:

"I had not expected the pleasure of your company, madam, but as you have done me the honor of coming, I am glad that you should be here to witness the conclusion of last night's experiment. This lady," he continued, pointing to my aunt, who still stood with fixed, apparently unseeing eyes, holding out the parcel toward him—"this lady, you will remember, considered the hypnotic phenomena exhibited at last night's entertainment as a clever imposture—those were the words, I think. To one who, like myself, is an enthusiast on the subject, such words were hard, nay, impossible, to bear. It was necessary to prove to her that the power