

The throbbing music, the glare of the lights, the flashing of myriads of diamonds, the mingling of many scents, the entire atmosphere of his surroundings, had the effect of crystallizing Allan's thoughts. His brain worked quickly and clearly, although he felt suddenly excited. His great scheme was everything to him. By it he must stand or fall. He had devoted all his money as well as his energy to its preparation—to all the experiments, all the thousand and one preliminary investigations which it had involved. If it were not taken up, he would have to start his career afresh. The scheme was his whole existence. He reckoned up its chances like a mathematical problem. In the first place, he could interest the Steel Trust. The Trust had come off second best in the struggle with Siberian iron and was now in a state of unexampled depression. It was ten to one that the Trust would back him. If it didn't, he could fight it to the death. He could "rope in" the great capitalists, the Morgans, the Vanderbilts, Goulds, Astors, Mackays, Havemeyers, Belmonts, Whitneys, and all the rest. He could tackle the great Banks. As a last resort, he could ally himself with the Press.

By hook or by crook he would attain his goal. If necessary he could do without Lloyd. On the other hand, with Lloyd as his ally the battle was won; without him it meant a long and wearisome advance, and every square foot of ground would have to be battled for.

He sat there, neither seeing nor hearing, his eyes gazing straight before him into space, working out his plan of campaign in all its smallest details.

Suddenly a thrill seemed to pass through the audience, which had been held in rapt silence by the music. Heads began to move, diamonds to flash more brilliantly, opera glasses to be turned all in one direction. The orchestra had reached a *piano* movement and the conductor looked behind him, irritated by the whispering in the stalls. Something must be happening that had a greater effect upon the house than the magic of the two hundred musicians, the great conductor, and the immortal composer.

From the next box came the words, muttered in a deep bass voice: "She has the Rose Diamond on . . . it belonged