

"Pardon me; you seem to be casting aspersions on her whom you say is your wife. I don't know how those notes got into your hands, but I'd be willing to stake double the amount that the lady is quite innocent in the matter. She certainly is so far as I am concerned. If the lady is your wife, what is her name? She told me she was traveling under a different one from that written on the lost ticket."

"I am not ashamed of my name; it is Branksome Poole?"

"Ah! Then the lady is Mrs. Branksome Poole?"

"Naturally."

Stranleigh reached out, and drew towards him a passenger list. Running his eye down the column of cabin passengers, he read the names: "Mr. and Mrs. Branksome Poole."

"Well, Mr. Poole, we come to the final question—how much?"

"If you give me the roll of bank notes which you exhibited a moment ago, I shall say nothing further about the matter, and, understand me, there is no coercion about my request. You may accept or decline, as you please. I admit my wife and I do not get on well together, but I have a grievance against you, although I'm not assuming the injured husband role at all. If you decline, I shall make no scandal aboard ship, but will take action against you the moment we arrive in New York."

"Very considerate of you, Mr. Poole," rejoined Stranleigh, in even tones, "and I congratulate you on your choice of battle-ground. I believe the wronged are absolutely certain of obtaining redress in New York. Of course, you haven't the slightest intention of levying blackmail, but I prefer to spend my money on the best legal advice in America, rather than trust any of it to you. It's merely a case of obstinacy on my part. And now, if you will kindly take your departure, I will get on with my book; I am at an interesting point."

"I shall not take my departure," said Poole, doggedly, "until we have settled this matter."

"The matter is settled," Stranleigh touched an electric button. An inside door opened, and Ponderby entered, looking in amazement at his master's visitor.

"Ponderby," said Stranleigh, "in future I wish you to keep this outer door locked, so that anyone wishing to see me may come through your cabin. Take a good look at this gentleman, and remember he is not to be allowed within my suite again on any pretext whatever. Meanwhile, show him into the corridor. Take him through your cabin."

THEN occurred an extraordinary thing. Ponderby, for the first time in his life, disobeyed his master's instructions. Approaching the seated Poole, he said:

"Will you go quietly?"

"I'll not go, quietly or otherwise," answered the man, stubbornly.

Ponderby opened the door by which Poole had entered, then, seizing him by the collar, he led the blackmailer to the door, and pitched him out of the room, across the corridor. Returning, he closed, locked and bolted the door.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," said the panting Ponderby to his amazed master, "but I dared not take him through my cabin. His wife is there. She appears to have followed him. She recognized his voice, and told me hurriedly why she came. As I heard her story I felt you ought to hear what she has to say before you acted. I hope you will excuse the liberty I have taken, my lord."

"Ponderby, as I have told you before, you are a treasure! I will go into your cabin, but you must remain there while I talk to this lady. No more *tele-a-tele* conversations with the unprotected for me."

"I think she is in deep trouble, my lord, but I believe she is honest."

"I am glad to have my opinion cor-

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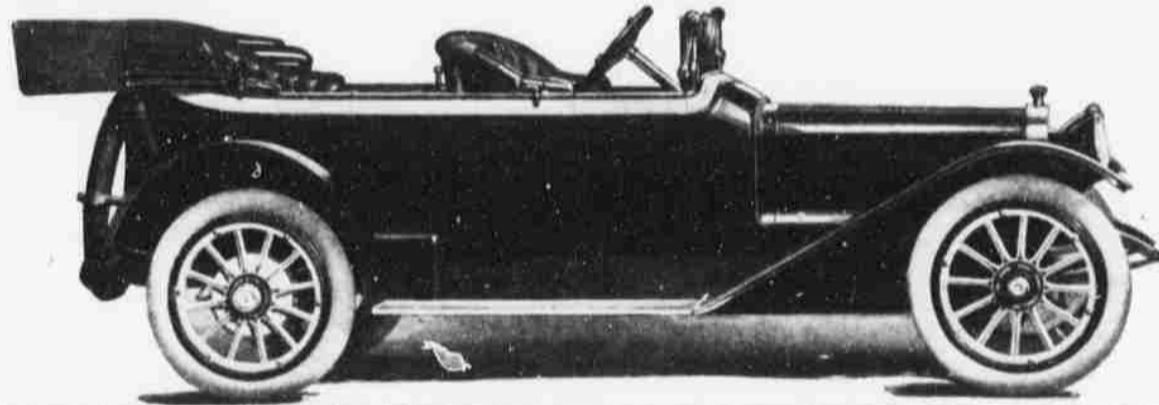
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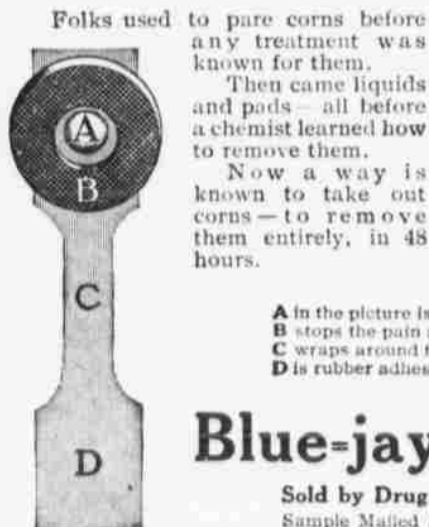
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