

# "PAWNED"

An Unusual Romance of People Whose Very Being is Pledged to Do the Bidding of Others  
By FRANK L. PACKARD  
Author of "The Miracle Man," "From New On," etc.  
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**THIS BEGINS THE STORY**

Hawkins, an old New York cabman, was to throw off his job of driving a little mother's daughter, Claire, to his old friend, Paul Veritas, who was to be married to her. He had to be ready until he could redeem his pledge by recovering his weakness and a full attempt made by a young woman who was to marry him. Twenty years later a passenger ship sailing from Samoa brought him back to New York. He found his old friend, who followed him ashore and astonished him by his accurate knowledge of his former life as a San Francisco youngster of wealth and good family, with one weak spot—gambling. Persuaded by the tempting promise of a passage home to his old home, he accepted the offer. He was disappointed when he found that the young man had no criminal record, but a mysterious passenger drew up a strange contract, whereby the young man agreed to pawn himself—body and soul—into his service. The contract was written in a name known widely as the head of America's greatest chain of gambling houses. The younger man writes his signature in the name of the girl in the taxi-cab. She calls in Dr. Crane, a brilliant physician, but a drug addict, who is in love with her. Through his management he secures a passport for the young man, and Hawkins, her father, who has been a stranger since the day he was established. The old "cabbie" seeks consolation in liquor.



The man addressed as "Doe" rolled up the sleeve of his left arm and produced a hypodermic syringe from his pocket.

**AND HERE IT CONTINUES**

HAWKINS pushed the swinging doors open and sidled up to the bar.

"Hello, Hawkins!" grinned the bar-keeper. "Been out of town? I ain't seen you the whole afternoon!"

"You mind your own business!" said Hawkins sullenly.

"Sure," nodded the barkeeper cheerily. "Same as usual?" He slid a square-faced bottle and a glass toward the old man.

Hawkins helped himself and drank moodily. He set his empty glass back on the bar, jerked down his shabby vest and straightened up, his eyes resolutely fixed on the door. Then he felt in his pocket for his pipe and tobacco. His eyes shifted from the door to his pipe. He filled it slowly.

"Give me another," said Hawkins presently—without looking at the bar-keeper.

Again the old man drank, and jerked down his vest, and squared his thin shoulders. He lit his pipe, tamping the bowl carefully with his forefinger. His eyes sought the swinging doors once more.

"I'm going home," said Hawkins defiantly to himself. "I've got to think this out." He dug into his vest pocket for money, and produced a few small bills. He stared at these for a moment, hesitated, started to replace them in his pocket, hesitated again, and the tip of his tongue circled his lips; then he pushed the money across the bar.

"Take the drinks out of that, and give me a bottle," he said. "I don't like to be without anything in the house, and I got to go home."

"You said something," said the bar-keeper. "Have one on the house before you go?"

"No," said Hawkins with stern determination.

Hawkins crowded the bottle into the side pocket of his coat, passed out through the swinging doors, and re-annexed his seat on the car. And again the car started forward. But it went faster now. Hawkins' face was flushed; he seemed nervously and excitedly in haste. At the driveway he turned in, ranged his car in an old shed at the

rear of one of the houses, locked the shed door with a padlock, and by way of the back door, entered the house that was in front of the shed.

It was quite dark inside, but Hawkins had been an inmate of the somewhat reedy rooming-house too many years either to expect that a light should be burning at that hour, or for that matter, to require any light. He groped his way up a flight of creaking stairs, opened the door of a room, and stepped inside. He shut the door behind him, locked it, and struck a match. A gas-jet wheezed asthmatically, and finally flung a thin and sullen yellow glow about the place. It disclosed a cot bed, a small strip of carpet long since worn bare of nap, a washstand, an old trunk, a battered table, and two chairs.

Hawkins, with some difficulty, extracted the bottle from his pocket, and lifted the lid of his trunk. He groped the bottle inside, and in the act of closing the lid upon it—hesitated.

"I—I ain't myself tonight, I ain't," said Hawkins tremulously. "It's shook me, it has—had. Just one—so help me God!—just one."

Hawkins sat down at the table with the bottle in front of him.

And while Hawkins sat there it grew very late.

At intervals Hawkins talked to himself. At times he stared owlishly from a half-emptied bottle to the black square of window pane above the trunk—and once he shook his fist in that direction. "Crane—damn you!" he muttered out. "You think you got her, do you? Some dirty, cunning trick you've played her! But you don't know old Hawkins. His ain't! You think he's only a drunken lummox?"

Hawkins, as it grew later still, became unsteady in his seat. Gradually his head sank down upon the table.

"I—I gotta think this out," said Hawkins earnestly—and fell asleep.

### CHAPTER VI

#### The Alibi

John Bruce opened his eyes drowsily, unseeing; and then his eyelids fluttered and closed again. There was an exquisite sense of languor upon him, of cool, comfortable repose; a curious absence of all material things. It seemed as though he were in some suspended state of animation.

It was very strange. It wasn't life—nor life as he had ever known it. Perhaps it was death. He did not understand.

He tried to think. He was conscious that his mind for some long indeterminate period had been occupied with the repetition of queer, vague, broken snatches of things, fantastic things born

down through which he might have climbed in.

He frowned in a troubled way. It was true, as he had climbed in that night, he had not been in a condition to take much note of the room, but yet it did seem to be the same place. The frozen vanishes. What did it matter? He knew now beyond any question whose face it was that had come to him so often in that shaft of sunlight. Yes, it did matter. He must have been unconscious, perhaps for only a few hours perhaps for days, but in this was the same place, then she was here; not as a figure of the brain, not as here in her actual person, a living, breathing reality. It was the girl of the traveling pavement, and—she was here!

John Bruce found himself listening with sudden intentness. Was he drifting back into unconsciousness again, into that realm of unreal things, where of his sick imagination queer, meaningless fancies? It was strange that un-real things should seem so real! Wasn't that an animal of some sort scratching at the wall of the house outside?

He lifted his head slightly from the pillow—and held it there.

From within the room reached him in a muffled, rasping whisper:

"Damn you, Birdie, why don't you pull the house down and have done with it? You clumby, old! Do you want the police on us? Can't you climb three feet without waking up the whole of New York?"

John Bruce's lips drew together until they formed a tight, straight line. This was strange! Very strange! It wasn't a vagary of his brain this time. His brain was as clear as crystal. He had seen no one in the room, but that was natural enough since from the position in which he was lying his line of vision was decidedly restricted; what seemed incomprehensible, though, taken in conjunction with the words he had just heard, was that his own presence there appeared to be completely ignored.

He twisted his head around cautiously, and found that the head of the bed was surrounded by a screen. He nudged to himself a little grimly. That accounted for it! There was a scraping sound now, and heavy, labored breathing.

John Bruce already and stealthily stretched out his arm. He could just reach the screen. It was made of some soft, silken material, and his fingers found no difficulty in drawing this back a little from the edge of that portion of the upright framework which was directly in front of him.

He scarcely breathed now. Perhaps he was in so weak a state that he could not see that he could not see so much to see that he could not see. He grasped the screen. The details came slowly—one by one. It was the room where he had crawled in through the window and had fallen senseless to the floor—whenever that had been. That was the window there. And, curiously enough, another man was crawling in through it now! And there was whispering standing in the room, but he could not see their faces because their backs were turned to him.

Then one of the two swung around in the direction of the window, bringing his face into view. John Bruce closed his eyes for a moment. Yes, it must be that! His mind was off wandering once more, painting and picturing for itself its fanciful unrealities, bringing back again the character it had created, the man with the sinister face whose pallor was unhealthy and repulsive.

And then he opened his eyes and looked again, and the face was still there—and it was real. And now the man spoke:

"Come on, get busy, Birdie! If you take as long to crack the box as you have taken to climb in through a low window, make we'll be invited to breakfast with the family! You act just like a swell cracksmen—not! But here's the combination—so try and play up to the part!"

The man addressed was heavy of build, with a peck-marked and forbidding countenance. He was panting from his exertions, as, inside the room now, he leaned against the sill.

"That's all right, Doc," he grunted. "That's all right! But how about his ribs over there behind the screen? Ain't he ever comin' out of his nap?"

The man addressed as "Doc" rolled up the sleeve of his left arm, and produced a hypodermic syringe from his pocket.

"There's the safe over there, Birdie," he drawled, as he pricked his arm with the needle and pushed home the plunger. "Get busy!"

"I know you know your business, Doc," he said unsteadily; "but I guess me an' Pete here'd feel more comfortable if you'd have put that shot of coke into the guy I speak about instead of into yourself. Ain't I right, Pete?"

The third man was seething against the wall, his back still turned to John Bruce.

"Sure," he said; "but I guess you can leave it to Doc. A guy that's been pawin' the air for two days ain't likely to bust in much all of a sudden."

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