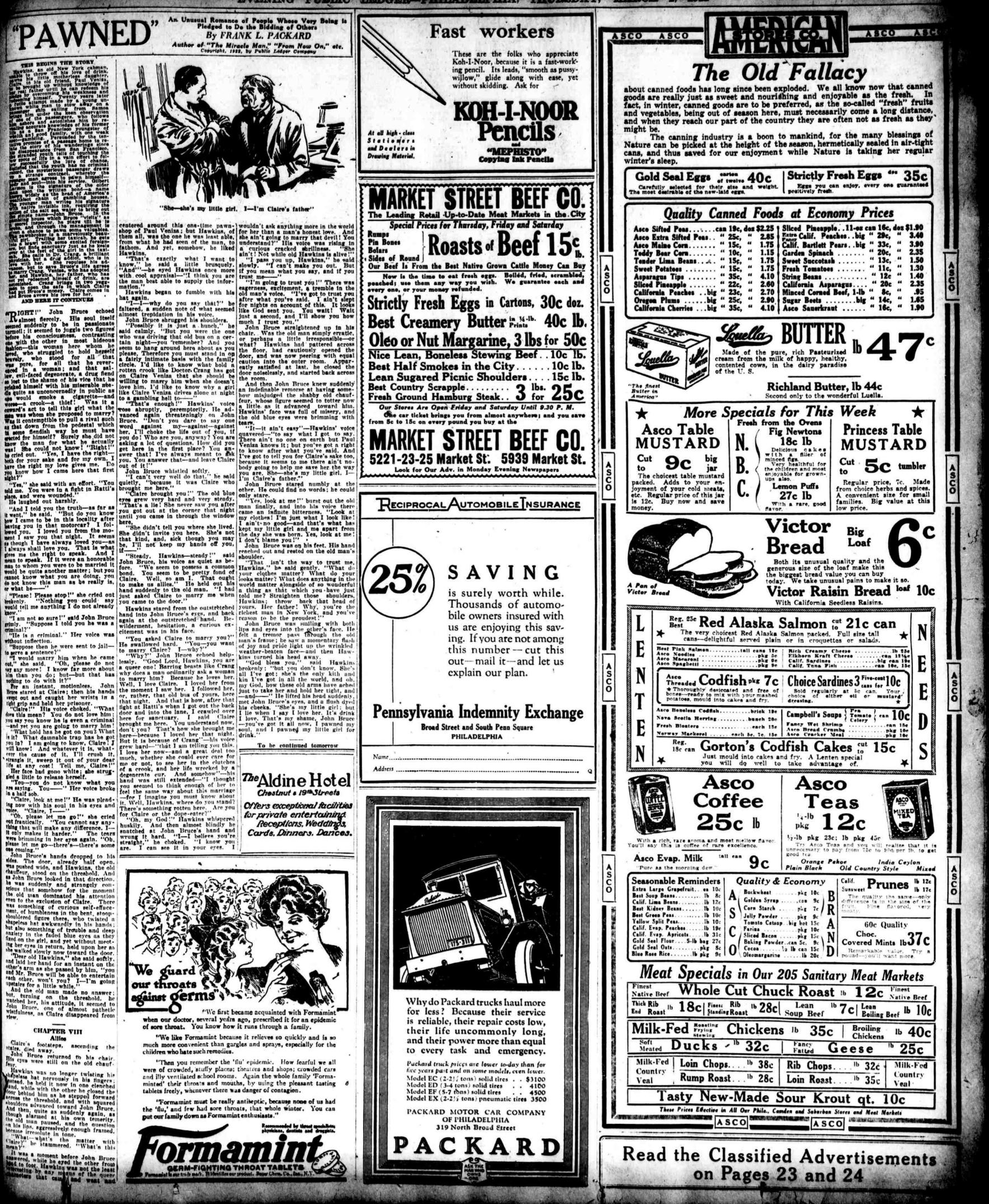
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"And I told you the truth—as far as it went." he said. "But do you know how I came to be in this locality after laving you in that motorcar? I fol-lowed you. I loved you from the mo-ment I saw you that night. It seems as though I have always loved you—as I always shall love you. That is what gives me the right to speak. And I mean to speak. If it were an honorable men to whom you were to be married it man to whom you were to be married it would be quite another matter; but you know what you are doing, you annot to not know this man as be really is, or what he-

"Please ! Please stop !" she cried out mokenly. "Nothing you could say would tell me anything I do not already

"I am not so sure !" said John Bruce gimly. "Suppose I told you he was a rimly. "

strangle it, sweep it out of your dear life at any cost! Tell me, Claire!"

Her face had gone white; she strug-sled a little to release herself. "You-you do not know what you are saying. You-"" Her voice broke in a half sob. "Claire, look at me !" He was plead-

ing now with his soul in his eyes and roice. "Claire, I----"

"Oh, please let me go!" she cried out frantically. "You cannot say any-thing that will make any difference. I-it only makes it harder." The tears were brimming in her eyes again. "Ob, means let me go-there's-there's some please let me go-there's-there's some

please let me go-there's-there's some one coming." John Bruce's hands dropped to his sides. The door, already half open, was pushed wide, and Hawkins, the old chauffeur, stood on the threabeld. And as John Bruce looked in that direction. he was suddenly and strangely con-telous that somehow for the moment the old man dominated his attention even to the exclusion of Clairs. There tren to the exclusion of Claire. even to the exclusion of Claire. There was something of curious self-efface-ment, of humbleness in the bent, stoop-shouldered figure there, who twisted a shapeless hat awkwardly in his hands; but also something of trouble and deep anxiety in the faded blue eyes as they fixed on the girl, and yet without meet-ing her eyes in return, held upon her as she walked slowly now toward the door. "Dear old Hawkins," she said softly, and laid her hand for an instant on the There

"Dear old Hawkins," she said softly, and laid her hand for an instant on the other's arm as she passed by him, "you and Mr. Bruce will be able to entertain "ach other, won't you? I.—I'm going upstairs for a little while." And the old man made no answer; but, turning on the threshold he

but, turning on the threshold, he watched her, his attitude, it seemed to John Bruce, one of almost pathetic wistfulness, as Claire disappeared from

## CHAPTER VIII

Allies Claire's footsteps, ascending the

stairs, died away. John Bruce returned to his chair. His cycs were still on the old chauf-

feur. Hawkins was no longer twisting his chappeless hat nervously in his fingers: astead, he held it now in one clenched and, while with the other he closed the floor behind him as he stepped forward across the threshold, and with squared shoulders advanced toward John Bruce. And then, onite as suddenly again as And the threshold, and with squared shoulders advanced toward John Bruce. And then, quite as suddenly again, as though alarmed at his own temerity, the old man paused, and the question on his line, aggressively enough framed, became irresolute in tone. "What-what's the matter with Claire?" he stammered. "What's this mean?" It was a moment before John Bruce answered, while he eyed the other from and to foot. Hawkins was not the least interesting by any means of the queer answeres that came and weat and



