

**"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 Now On," etc.  
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**THIS BEGINS THE STORY**  
Hawkins, an old New York cabman, had a little motherless daughter, Claire, who had no other relatives. She was a bright, cheerful girl, and her father until he became a gambler and a drunkard, was a well-to-do man. Twenty years later, when Claire was a young girl, her father was found dead in a rooming house, and she was left an orphan. She was taken care of by a woman named Mrs. Vinia, who was a friend of her mother's. Claire grew up in a comfortable home, and she was a very popular girl. She was a student at a boarding school, and she was a very successful one. She was a very kind and generous girl, and she was a very popular one. She was a very successful one, and she was a very kind and generous girl. She was a very popular one, and she was a very successful one.



**AND HERE IT CONTINUES**  
"HAWKINS," said John Bruce huskily, "I think you're a big man than you've any idea you are."  
"I've mean that?" Hawkins spoke eagerly to shake his head miserably the next instant. "You don't understand," he said. "I as good as killed her mother with drink. She died when Claire was born. I brought Claire here, and Paul Venia and his wife took her in. And Paul Venia was right about it. He made no promise she wasn't to have I was her father still—until she would have a man and not a drunkard set to look after her. That's twenty years ago. I've tried. God knows I've tried, but it's beaten me ever since. Paul's wife died when Claire was six, and Claire's run the house for Paul—and I'm Hawkins—just Hawkins—the old cab driver, that's all. I've been in the business of pawnshop since that Paul's quit the regular shop. That's what I am—just old Hawkins, who's always swearing to God, he's going to leave the booze alone."  
"I don't mean it that way," he said earnestly. "It would have been a wonder if you hadn't. Anyway, you had a right to know, and it was only fair to Claire."

**CHAPTER IX**  
**The Conspirators**  
John Bruce fumbled in the pocket of his dressing gown and produced a cigarette; but he was a long time in lighting it.  
"Hawkins," he demanded abruptly, "is Paul Venia in the house now?"  
"He's upstairs, I think," Hawkins answered. "Do you want him?"  
"Yes—in a moment," said John Bruce slowly. "I've been thinking a good deal while you were talking. I can only see things one way; and that is the time has come when you should take your leave as Claire's father."  
"The old man drew back, startled."  
"Tell Claire?" he whispered. Then he shook his head miserably. "No, no—I haven't earned the right. I—I can't break my word to Paul."  
"I do not ask you to break your word to Paul. I want you to earn the right—now."  
Hawkins was still shaking his head. "Earn it now—after all these years! How can I?"  
"By promising that you won't drink any more," said John Bruce quietly.  
Hawkins' eyes went to the floor.  
"Promise!" he said in a shamed way. "I've been promising that for twenty years. Paul wouldn't believe me. I wouldn't believe myself. I went and got drunker than I've been in all my life the night that day said Claire said it was true, and wouldn't listen to anything Paul could say to her against it."  
"I would believe you," said John Bruce gravely.  
For an instant Hawkins' face glowed, while tears came into the old blue eyes—and then he turned hurriedly and walked to the window, his back to John Bruce.  
"It's no use," he said, with a catch in his voice. "You don't know me. Nobody that knows me would take my word for that—least of all Paul."  
"I know this," said John Bruce steadily. "that you have never been really put to the test. The test is here now. You'd stop, and stop forever, wouldn't you, if it meant Claire's happiness, her future, her salvation from the horror and degradation and misery and utter hopelessness that a life with a man who is lost to every sense of decency must bring her? I would believe you if you promised under those conditions. It seems to me to be the only chance there is left to save her. It is true she believes Paul is her father and accepts him as such, and neither his influence nor his arguments will move her from her determination to marry Crang; but I think there is a chance if she is told you

wasn't anything else to do. Claire knows a bit of jewelry or a stone as well as Paul does, and I know Claire could take care of herself; and besides, although she didn't know it, it was her own old father driving the car there with her."  
"Thank you, Hawkins," said John Bruce simply; and after a moment: "It doesn't make the love I said I had for her show up very creditably to me, does it—that I should have had any questions?"  
Hawkins shook his head.  
"I didn't mean it that way," he said earnestly. "It would have been a wonder if you hadn't. Anyway, you had a right to know, and it was only fair to Claire."

There was no answer from the window, only the shaking of the old man's shoulders.  
"Hawkins," said John Bruce softly, "wouldn't it be very wonderful if you saved her, and saved yourself; and wonderful, too, to know the joy of your own daughter's love?"  
The old man turned suddenly from the window, his arms stretched out before him as though in intense yearning; and there was something almost of nobility in the gray head held high on bent shoulders, something of greatness in the old wrinkled face that seemed to exalt the worn and shabby clothes hanging so formlessly about him.  
"My little girl," he said brokenly.  
"Your promise, Hawkins," said John Bruce in a low voice. "Will you promise?"  
"Yes," breathed the old man fiercely. "Yes—so help me, God! But—faltering suddenly—"but Paul—"  
"Ask Paul to come down here," said John Bruce. "I have something to say to both of you—more than I have already said to you. I will answer for Paul."  
The old cab driver obeyed mechanically. He crossed the room and went out. John Bruce heard him mounting the stairs. Presently he returned, followed by the tall, straight, white-haired figure of Paul Venia.  
Hawkins closed the door behind them.  
Paul Venia turned sharply at the sound, and glanced gravely from one to the other. His eyebrows went up as he looked at John Bruce. John Bruce's face was set.  
"What is the matter?" inquired Paul Venia anxiously.  
"I want you to listen first to a little story," said John Bruce seriously—and in a few words he told Paul Venia, as he had told Hawkins, of his love for Claire and the events of the night that had brought him there a wounded man.  
"This afternoon," John Bruce ended, "I asked Claire to marry me, and she told me she was going to marry Doctor Crang."  
Paul Venia had listened with growing anxiety, casting troubled and uncertain glances the while at Hawkins.  
"Yes," he said in a low voice.  
John Bruce spoke abruptly:  
"Hawkins has promised he will never drink again."  
Paul Venia, with a sudden start, stared at Hawkins, and then a sort of kindly tolerance dawned in his face.  
"My poor friend!" said Paul Venia as though he were comforting a wayward child, and went over and laid his hand affectionately on Hawkins' arm.  
"I have told Hawkins," went on John Bruce, "that I love Claire, and I asked her to marry me; and Hawkins in turn has told me he is Claire's father, and how he brought her to you and Mrs. Venia when she was a baby, and of the pledge he made you then. It is because I love Claire too that I feel I can speak now. You once told Hawkins how he could redeem his daughter. He wants to redeem her now. He has promised never to drink again."

"Yes," said John Bruce. "Go on, Hawkins," he prompted.  
"Well," said Hawkins, "I used to drive an old hansom cab in those days, and I used to drive Paul out on those private calls to the sweet houses. And then when Mrs. Venia died, Paul was closed up the shop here, he kind of drove himself into his shell all around, and mostly he wouldn't go out any more, though the swells kept telephoning and telephoning to him. He'd only go to just a few people that he'd done business with since almost the beginning. He said he didn't want to go around ringing people's doorbells, and being wheeled out on a stretcher or anywhere else, and he was bottling down his mood to everybody and everything. It wasn't good for Paul. And then a sort of crazy notion struck me, and I chewed it over and over in my mind, and finally I put it up to Paul's lawyer. He was in it. It just caught his fancy; and so I bought a second-hand closed car, and I fitted it up like you saw, and learned to drive it, and that's how there came to be the traveling pawn shop."  
"After that there wasn't anything to it. It caught everybody else's fancy as well as Paul's, and he began to get him out of himself. He called it the time. Lots of the swells who really didn't want to pay anything took a ride and did a bit of business, and the sake of the experience, and the regular customers just went nutty over it, they were that pleased."  
"And then some one who stood in with that swells, I remember, he picked you up, must have tipped the manager off about it, and he saw where he could do a good stroke of business—make it a kind of advertisement, you know, besides doing away with the tending by the house itself, and he put up a proposition to Paul where Paul was to get all a bit of business at regular rates, and a bit of business at regular rates, and a bit of business at regular rates to keep sometimes. Paul said he'd do it, and they dooped out that pass word about a trip to Persia to make it sound mysterious and help out the advertising. John Bruce was twisting the tassel of his dressing gown again abstractedly; but now he stopped as Hawkins rose abruptly and came toward him.  
"No—it ain't all," said Hawkins. "A serious note almost a challenge in his voice. "You said something about Claire going to that gambling joint. It was the first time she had ever been there."

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