

"PAWNED"

An Unusual Romance of People Whose Very Being is Plagued 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, unable to throw off his love for drink, sends his little, motherless daughter, Claire, to his old friend Paul Venezia, to be reared until he can redeem his pledge by overhauling his business and redeeming himself. Twenty years later a little attempt made by a young uncle, while on his way to a steamer, a passenger ship sailing from Samoa to New York, is observed by a mysterious passenger, who draws up a contract in invisible ink, whereby the young man agrees to pawn himself into his service. Gilbert Larmon is the secret head of America's largest chain of gambling houses. The younger man, who is a San Francisco of good family with a mania for gambling, is John Bruce, "viper" as a secret inspector, he plays till he is broke, and through the mechanism of giving a chance to give some valuable. The pawnbroker is a man of means, and he is not at all avaricious. He gets into a brawl, and sends sanctuary to her home. In the morning, he is in the office of the girl. She calls in Dr. Crang, a brilliant physician but a drug addict, who is in love with her. She repulses his advances, but to save Bruce's life she gives him the money which Claire has pawned. Bruce takes a grip on her, and is astonished at Crang's grip on her. Crang reveals to Bruce the girl's voice in the gambling parlors, and redeems himself by giving up drink, and takes her father in, but having no other means, he is forced to go to the city to try to force money upon her. In the morning, he is in the office of the girl. She calls in Dr. Crang, a brilliant physician but a drug addict, who is in love with her. She repulses his advances, but to save Bruce's life she gives him the money which Claire has pawned. Bruce takes a grip on her, and is astonished at Crang's grip on her. Crang reveals to Bruce the girl's voice in the gambling parlors, and redeems himself by giving up drink, and takes her father in, but having no other means, he is forced to go to the city to try to force money upon her.



"You are killing the man! In the name of God, John Bruce, come away!"

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

HE SHOOK his head in quick, curious self-rebuke. Not yet! He needed that cold composure a little longer since it was to be a showdown now. That was what Crang had said—a showdown, and Crang was right! It meant the end—only one or the other. But with luck, if Crang was as yellow as he believed the man to be, the idea of the bluff that had led into his mind would work successfully; and if it didn't work well, then there was the end—and at least it would not be a scathless one for Crang.

The mind works swiftly. Had Crang had time only to walk down half the length of that room out there toward Larmon? Yes, he saw Crang halt now, and heard Crang call out sharply to the three men at the table.

"See if he's got a crack," saw Larmon whirl around suddenly, as though aware for the first time that he was in danger; saw two of the men grasp Larmon roughly, while the third searched through his clothes.

And then Crang laughed out raucously: "This way, Mr. Peters—please! You three can stay where you are—I'll call you if I need you!"

For still another instant John Bruce watched through the crack. Larmon, though his face was set and stern, advanced calmly to where Crang stood. Crang, with a prod of his revolver, pushed him onward. They were coming now—Larmon first, and Crang, immediately behind the other. Without a sound, John Bruce slipped around to the other side of the door; and, back just far enough so that he would not be seen the instant the threshold was reached, crouched down close against the wall.

A second passed.

"Go on in there!" he heard Crang cry.

Larmon's form crossed the threshold; and then Crang's—and John Bruce hurried himself forward, striking even while his hands flew upward to look like a vice around Crang's throat, a lightning blow at Crang's wrist that sent the revolver to the soft carpeted floor without a sound—and a low, strangled, gurgling noise was alone the result of Crang's effort at a shout of alarm.

"Shut the door—quietly! And lock it, Larmon!" John Bruce hung out.

It was an impotent thing. It struck at the air blindly, its first going like disjointed flails. Strong! He had not just risen from a sick bed this time; John Bruce and the soul within him seemed to chuckle in unison together at this wriggling thing that he held up by the neck with its feet off the ground. But he saw Larmon, though for the fraction of a second he held his attention, spring and lock the door.

"If you make a sound that reaches out there," John Bruce was whispering now with panting, labored breath, as he swung Crang over to the corner and forced him down upon the mattress—

"It will take too long to break that door in to be of any use to you! Understand!"

"Bruce!"

It was Larmon standing over them. John Bruce scarcely turned his head. His hands were still on Crang's throat, though the man lay cowed and motionless now.

"His inside coat pocket?" John Bruce jerked out. "It will save a lot of explanation."

Larmon leaned over and thrust his hand into Crang's pocket. He produced several envelopes and the slip of paper cut from John Bruce's letter.

"Read the slip!" said John Bruce grimly. "He showed it to me a minute ago when he came in to tell me you were here. It was written in our invisible ink at the bottom of the letter he brought you." He laughed shortly. "When you've read it, I'll introduce you."

Larmon read the slip hurriedly.

"Good God!" he cried out.

"This is Crang," said John Bruce evenly.

"But"—Larmon's face was tense and strained—how—

"How did he discover there was anything there to begin with, and then hit on the salt solution?" John Bruce interrupted. "I don't know. We'll see about it. It was Crang's revolver—on Crang's throat, and taking the slip of paper from Larmon, thrust it into his own pocket. 'Go on, Crang! Tell us!'"

Crang's eyes roved from John Bruce to Larmon and back to John Bruce again. His face was ashen. He shook his head.

"You'll talk?" said John Bruce with ominous quiet. "And the less urging his grip began to tighten again—"the better for you."

"Wait!" Crang choked. "Yes—I'll tell you. I showed the letter to Claire. She—she cried on it. A tear splashed—black letter began to appear. I took the letter home, and—trace of salt in tears—and—"

Crang's voice died away in a strangled cry. Claire? John Bruce had barely caught any other word but that, Claire! The face beneath him began to grow livid. Claire! So the devil had brought Claire into this, too! "Yes, there was something else. Something else! He remembered now. There was a reckoning to come that was beyond all other reckonings, wasn't that right, that was what held this thing, that was what, not man, had upon her. He would know now—or it would end now."

"Claire! Do hear?" John Bruce whispered hoarsely. "You know what I mean! What trick of hell did you play to make her promise to marry you? Answer me!"

The thing on the mattress moaned.

"Bruce! For God's sake, Bruce, what are you doing?" Larmon cried out sharply.

John Bruce raised his head and snarled at Larmon. Neither Larmon, nor any other man, would rob him of this now.

"You stand aside, Larmon!" he rasped out. "This is between me and Crang. Keep out of the way!"

He shook at Crang's again. He laughed. The man's head bobbed limply.

"Answer me!" He loosened his grip suddenly. "Answer me, Larmon!—Crang couldn't speak, of course, if he wouldn't let him."

The man gasped, and gasped again, for his breath.

"I give you one second," John Bruce's lips did not move as he spoke. "Twice Crang tried to speak."

"Quick!" John Bruce planted his knees on the other's chest.

"Yes—yes, yes, yes!" Crang gurgled out. "It's you—the night you were stabbed. You were—were nearly gone. I—I gave her—the choice—to marry me, or—I'd let you go out."

John Bruce felt his shoulders surge forward, felt his muscles grow taut as steel, and he shook at something flabby that made no resistance, and his knees rocked upon something soft where they were bedded. For him—Claire had faced that inhuman choice, born in this monster's brain—to save his life! Madness seized upon him. The room, everything before him whirled around in great, red, pulsing circles. A fury that shook at the roots of his soul took possession of him. He knew nothing, saw nothing, was moved by nothing save an overwhelming lust for ven-

geance that seemed to give him super-human strength, that enabled him to crush between his two bare hands this nauseous thing that—

He heard a voice. It seemed to come from some infinite distance:

"You are killing the man! In the name of God, John Bruce, come away!"

It was Larmon's voice. He looked up. He was vaguely conscious that it was Larmon who was pulling at his shoulders, wrenching madly at his hands, but he could not see Larmon—only a blurred red figure that danced insanely up and down. Killing the man? Of course! What an insane thing to say! Then he felt his hands suddenly torn away from a hold they had had upon something, and he felt himself pulled to his feet. And then he awoke, then he groped his way over to the chair by the table and dropped into it.

He stared in front of him. Something on the floor near the door glittered and reflected the light from the single, dim incandescent. He lurched up from the chair, and going toward the object, snatched it up. It was Crang's revolver—but Larmon was upon him in an instant.

"Not that way, either!" said Larmon hoarsely.

John Bruce brushed his hand across his eyes.

"No, not that way, either," he repeated like a child.

He was aware that Larmon was kneeling beside the mattress, but he paid no attention to the other.

"The man's unconscious," Larmon said.

John Bruce did not turn his head. The minutes passed.

John Bruce's brain began to clear; but the unbalanced fury that had possessed him was giving place now only to one more implacable in its considered phase. He looked around him. Crang, evidently recovered, was sitting up on the mattress. The letters Larmon had taken from Crang's pocket lay on the table. John Bruce picked them up lightly. From one of them a steamer ticket fell out. He stared at this for a moment. A passage for John Bruce to South America! Then low, an ugly sound, his laugh echoed around the place.

"South America! It recalled him to his actual surroundings—that on the other side of the door were Crang's apaches. There was still time to catch the steamer, wasn't there—for South America? "If the bluff worked"—he remembered his thoughts, the plan that had actuated him when he had crouched there at the door waiting for Crang to enter. Strange! It wouldn't be a bluff any more! All that was gone. What he would do now, and carry it through to its end, was what he had intended to bluff Crang into believing he would do. And Crang, too, would understand now how little of bluff there was—or, misunderstanding, pay for it with his life.

He thrust the ticket suddenly into his pocket, stepped from his chair, the revolver in his hand, and confronted Crang. "Stand up!" John Bruce commanded. Crang, groveling against the wall, got upon his feet.

"Full minute before John Bruce spoke again, and then the words came choking hot from his lips:

"You damned cur!" he cried. "That's what you did, wasn't it? The price Claire paid was for my life. Well, it's hers, then; it's no longer mine. Can you understand that, and understand that I am going to pay it back, if necessary, to rid her of you? We are going to walk out of here. You will lead the way. We are going down to that steamer, and you are going on John Bruce's ticket where you proposed to send me—to South America. Either that—or you are going on a longer journey. I will carry this revolver in the pocket of my coat, and walk beside you. It is your affair how we pass those men out there. If you make any attempt at trickery in getting out of here, or later in the street attempt to escape, I will fire instantly. It does not matter in the slightest degree what happens to me at the hands of your men or at the hands of a thousand people in the most crowded street. You will have gone out first. The only consideration that exists is that Claire shall be free of you."

"That's it," was the dull quilltip flexing against one of Larmon's teeth. John Bruce turned.

"I did not understand," said Larmon in a low, grim way. "If I had, I am not sure I should have stopped you from throttling him when I did."

John Bruce nodded curtly. He spoke again to Crang.

"I am not asking you whether you agree to this or not," he said with level emphasis. "You have your choice at any moment to do as you like—you know the consequences." He slipped his hand with his revolver into the right-hand side pocket of his coat, and took his place at Crang's left side.

"Now, go ahead and open that door, and lead the way out." Mr. Larmon, you follow close behind me."

"Yes," Crang stammered, "yes—for God's sake—I'll do it—I'll do it—"

"Open that door!" said John Bruce monotonously. "I didn't ask you to talk about it!"

Crang opened the door. The little procession stepped out into the long, low cellar, and started down toward the lower end. The three men, from playing dice at the table near the door, rose uncertainly to their feet. John Bruce's revolver in his pocket pressed suggestively against Crang's side.

To be continued tomorrow

Chess Champ Sails for Europe
New York, March 16.—Jose R. Capablanca, world's chess champion, sailed yesterday for Europe where he will compete in the chess masters' international tournament in London next July. He will give a preliminary series of exhibitions in France and Spain.

Divorcee Seeks \$45,000
Mrs. Edith Kelly Gould Says She Needs That Amount Yearly
New York, March 16.—Counsel for Mrs. Edith Kelly Gould, divorced wife of Frank Jay Gould, yesterday told Justice Newburger, of the Supreme Court, that his client needed \$45,000 annually for living expenses.

These were enumerated as follows: Clothes, underwear, shoes, etc., \$15,000; operating automobile, \$4000; rent of apartment, \$6000; food, \$5000; entertainment, \$5000; doctor bills, \$2000; dentist, \$1000, and dancing and music, \$4000.

This statement was presented to the Court by Gustavus Rogers, attorney, who asked that Mrs. Gould be granted \$100,000 for "her board, clothing, maintenance and other necessities, since her husband discontinued her allowance after a divorce obtained from her in France nearly four years ago. Decision was reserved.

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It begins TODAY on Page 29

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