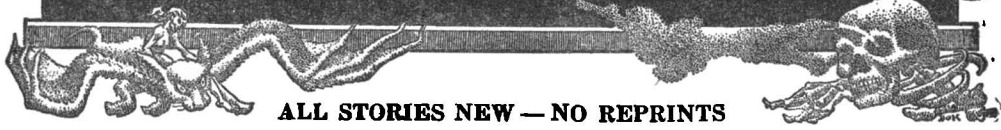


Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

November, 1943

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D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

LAMONT BUCHANAN, Associate Editor.

Hammer of Cain

By JAMES CAUSEY
and
BILL BLACKBEARD



Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

*He told how murderers walk the earth,
Beneath the curse of Cain
With crimson clouds before their eyes*

*And flames about their brain:
For blood has left upon their soul
Its everlasting stain.*

—Hood

ROGER CAIN came out of the hospital room very slowly. He stood there, staring unseeingly down the hall. "One month," he murmured.

He began walking stiffly down the corridor.

Sheila was down in the reception room waiting for him, and at sight of her standing there, golden hair like a coronal about her pale lovely face, Roger swallowed hard and, briefly, envied his brother.

"Roger!" She was standing in front of him, blue eyes wide. "Kirk! Is he—"

She waited.

Roger forced a grin. "Swell, kid. *This* operation was it. He'll be walking in a month, the doc said."

"Without—canes?"

He nodded.

The blue eyes were brimming with tears. She was smiling. She started past him. Roger said: "You've only got five minutes—"

"Five minutes'll be enough," she whispered.

He could hear the sharp staccato of her footsteps as she broke into a run. He stared after her.

"Damn," Roger said very softly.

He put on his hat, went out.

It was damned hard to be jealous of your brother when he hadn't walked in two years. But that clause in Dad's will . . . *he* appointed executor of the estate, until such time as Kirk would walk again. *Why* had Kirk liked riding horses anyway? Until he could walk again, neither he nor Roger could touch the principal, except for doctor bills, the servants' salaries and so forth. The bank's monthly check-up took care of that.

He wondered, dully, if Sheila knew he loved her.

Go home, that was it! And then get drunk. Kirk'll be walking again in four

weeks. Kirk—big, square-faced and handsome, with Sheila as his bride. While *he* ate his heart out—

"Oh, to hell with it," he said aloud. Go home, sure—and have Banners inquire "if Marster Kirk will be home soon, sir? Ah, fine. And there were those house bills you were supposed to see to. Cook said to remind you. You mustn't forget your responsibilities."

Roger had a better idea.

Go and see Ronnie. Good old Ronnie Hawker, writer of horror fiction extraordinary. He always had a sympathetic shoulder to weep on.

"Rye—" muttered Roger happily as he hailed a cab. "Straight!"

"Hi, Hawker, thou hack!"

"Hello old stench." The big sandy-haired man at the table recommenced typing in machine-gun bursts. He waved affably at the wine-cabinet in the corner of the apartment. "Help yourself."

Roger was already doing so.

Glug. Glug. The amber fluid gurgled pleasantly from the decanter. Roger felt better already.

"Ronnie."

"Uh-huh?" Ronnie Hawker kept on typing.

"What would you do if you were in love, and—there was a guy going to marry the gal?"

"Kill him, of course," Ronnie said absently.

Roger brooded blackly. "Uh-uh," he said unhappily, pouring himself another drink. "Won't do. He's my brother."

Taktaktak-ting! went the typewriter.

And so encouraged, Roger unburdened himself.

"Say!" He stood up, a good ten minutes, and half as many drinks later. "I don't think you're even listening."

Taktaktak—brzzzp—ting!

"Damned tab," muttered Hawker, pulling on his moustache and glaring at a half-filled page. Roger looked over the big man's shoulder. He chuckled.

"What's wrong?" Ronnie scowled.

"What a rotten way to make a living!"

"Huh?"

"Writing that tripe. Ronald, old man, you've degenerated into an amateur Damon Runyon. You can't write supernatural stuff that way."

"You'd be surprised, Mister. The incongruity of style makes it one helluva lot more effective than 'On that dark and stormy night with the wind howling across the plain like the plaint of a fiend, I went forth to keep a devil's rendezvous'—hey! You're not listening."

Ronnie leaned back in his chair. "See those?"

Roger Cain looked around the little apartment. At the rows of ancient moldy books lining the walls. He stepped over to one, blinking. He snorted. "Demonology. Vampirism." He indicated a little dragon-shaped clock on the mantel. "I suppose a sorcerer gave you that."

Hawker chuckled. "Suppose," he said blandly, "if I were to tell you *all* my stuff—everything I write, is founded on truth. A fact basis—"

Roger's laughter cut him short.

"You might make your living that way, old bean. But don't try to make *me* swallow that rot."

"There are more things in heaven and earth—"

"Nuts!" Roger took another drink.

Ronnie sat looking at him a moment.

"Skeptical, aren't you?" His voice was very soft.

"Not skeptical. I just don't believe in—"

"Curses?"

"Well—yes." Roger did not see Hawker's eyes narrow. His smile. A curiously unpleasant smile.

"Collect old weapons, don't you, Roger?"

"Primitive ones." Roger nodded indifferently, then blinked. "Why? You've got . . ."

He broke off, staring, as Ronnie opened a drawer. He licked his lips, avidly.

"Guess how old it is," Ronnie drawled.

"I don't know. Gosh, early Paleolithic?"

"Much, much older than that. Suppose I were to tell you that the first murder—the very first—was committed with this."

Roger, however, was paying no attention. Almost reverently, he was examining the little flint hatchet. Its head, he noticed, was worn, age-blackened. More of a hammer than a hatchet, he observed professionally. The handle was doubtless a restoration job. This thing was *old*.

"Where'd you get it?"

Hawker's smile vanished abruptly. "Trade secret. You . . . ah . . . know of my reputation for *authenticity* in the fantasy field. Well—" He looked furtive, started to say something else, then didn't.

"Hope it looks good in your collection."

"You—you mean—"

"Sure. I want you to have it, old man. Ah . . . what's your last name—Cain? Splendid. This should be a very noble experiment indeed—"

But this last was in a whisper and Roger, absorbed in his new possession, scarcely heard it.

II

"CATCH, Banners."

Roger threw his hat at the butler and started briskly up the stairs. Banners caught the hat with the ease born of long practice, and inquired imperturbably: "How is Kirk, sir?"

Roger's shoulder sagged. He remembered.

"Swell!" he said, trying to make it sound cheerful. "He'll be home in a few days. And walking in a month. . . ."

At the top of the stairs an animated bundle of white fur, lolling red tongue, and shrill yelping, almost knocked him down. Tinker. Kirk's Pomeranian. Roger, grinning, rubbed Tinker's ears the wrong way, and went into his study.

The walls were lined with racks of weapons. The head of some long-dead Cro-Magnon's spear, knives from the early Bronze Age, flint hatchets from the late Neolithic.

"Funny," Roger murmured.

The little hatchet was *cold*. Like—well, not like ice. Imagination sure played some funny tricks on a guy.

Abruptly he felt the hairs on the back of his neck prickle, as of a cold wind. He glanced around the room. He went to the door, looked down the hall.

Nobody.

Feeling a trifle foolish, Roger took the little weapon and started to place it next to a beautiful American Indian Tomahawk. Strange, how when you held something like this that just *seemed* to fit your hand, you—

Roger Cain dropped the hatchet very quickly. He looked down at it and moistened his lips.

"Mustn't get impulses like that," he said to himself.

It was Monday. Monday afternoon, and Kirk was coming home.

The whole household bustled with activity. Mrs. Mulvaney, the cook, was buzzing about downstairs, making everything nice "for Mister Kirk's bedroom." Banners was doing his part with great efficiency and dispatch. Only Roger was restless.

Kirk was a swell guy. Fine, strong cheerful Kirk. Who had never complained—but why should he complain? When he had a girl like Sheila in love with him!

Roger strode upstairs to his study, slowly, wearily.

"What the devil—"

He swallowed hard, and took a step forward. He smiled then, decided it must be

some trick of the late afternoon sunlight.

No reason why the head of the hatchet should look as though it were carved out of blood.

There was the sudden clamor of Sheila's horn outside, and Tinker's frantic joyous barking downstairs. Roger put on a good face and went down to help bring his brother in.

Kirk was home.

THAT night they had supper together. The three of them. Kirk, handsome, smiling, in his wheelchair. Sheila beside him, her face radiant. Rogers' dark thin face was impassive, as he miserably thought that he had never seen her so beautiful.

". . . tell you yet?" Kirk was saying.

Roger started. "What?"

"Sheila's finally set our wedding date! Third Sunday in November!"

"Oh—fine," Roger said with false heartiness, fiddling with his dessert, and watching Kirk scratch Tinker behind the ears. "Swell, old man!"

Kirk looked up at them, grinning bashfully, and set Tinker down on the floor. "Great little guy," he said. "Somebody said once that Pomeranians are ignorant, but—"

"But Tinker isn't!" said Roger and Sheila in chorus.

"Nuts," said Kirk defensively. "Dog's man's best friend—"

He broke off, and he and Sheila were both looking at each other over the white tablecloth, and not saying anything.

Roger got up, unobtrusively. "I got some work to do, you guys. House expenses . . . see that he gets to bed, Sheila. Not supposed to be hobbling around on those crutches any more'n he has to. 'Night, love birds—"

And he started out, a smile on his lips, but an icy painful sensation gnawing deep inside him.

He looked back once. He could see

Tinker, gnawing industriously on a bone underneath the table.

So Kirk *liked* Tinker! Well.

Before going to bed, Roger Cain managed, without being seen, to filch a choice hunk of steak from the refrigerator and carry it upstairs, where he placed it in a strategic spot by the doorway.

And that was the night Roger slept with the hatchet under his pillow.

It was shortly after midnight when he awoke.

There was a quick, eager sniffing, and he saw Tinker come nosing past the doorway to stop, peer about inquisitively.

So Kirk *liked* Tinker.

Roger threw the covers back swiftly. The handle of the hatchet was warm and smooth against his palm.

Smiling, he shuffled across the floor on bare feet, closed the door.

"Here, Tinker. Come on, boy."

Tinker looked up—and froze. He stood like that perhaps three seconds, head up, one paw half-raised. A low querulous whine came from his throat.

"Come on fella," whispered Roger. "Atta doggie—"

He lunged. Tinker went backward. Fast. Whimpering, tongue half out, paws scrabbling on the floor.

Ah, this was living! To have something scrambling away from you, whining, afraid. To feel the blood coursing hot through your veins—

Roger swung the hatchet.

Tinker tried to dodge aside, paws skidding on the waxed wood, a howl beginning deep inside him that choked off . . .

Roger stood up.

He looked down at the little Pomeranian, eyes bulging, still in death, a small furry bundle lying half in, half out, the patch of moonlight on the floor.

Roger Cain's mouth twisted in revulsion. *Why had he—*

He strode to the window, tried to hurl

the hatchet out. He couldn't. It wouldn't *leave* his hand.

Instead, quite unconsciously and without his volition, he took the small stone hatchet and placed it gently in its rack with the rest of his collection.

Then, sweating—he took the dead dog and threw him out of the window, into the flower garden. After carefully wiping all noticeable stains from the floor he smiled and went to bed.

III

NEXT morning Roger went down to breakfast late, with not a care in the world. He was whistling. Once he swallowed, almost choked as he remembered, then laughed and went back to gouging the grapefruit with his spoon.

"Just a dream," he said.

But after breakfast he went outside, and walked nonchalantly around the house by the garden.

He stopped, nodded affably to the gardener. "Morning, Simpson."

The gardener, a broad hulking fellow with an ordinarily beet-red complexion, stared at him. His face was white.

"What's the matter?"

Simpson said nothing. He raised a small white Pomeranian by the hind leg for Rogers' inspection. The dog's skull was split open.

"I found him, Mister Cain," Simpson said awkwardly. "In the flower bed."

Roger moistened his lips. He tried to speak, but couldn't. Simpson was staring at him.

"This was Mister Kirk's pooch, wasn't it?"

"Uh—yes," Roger said. "Kirk's pooch."

He turned, walked stiffly away, leaving Simpson staring after him.

"No dream," he whispered.

That stone hatchet!

It was rather hard—telling Kirk about

the dog. His brother lay there, staring up at him tightly, his eyes big and dark, his mouth pinched.

"Who did it, Rog?"

Roger said he didn't know, tried to look appropriately doleful. "He was probably outside in the street—maybe a car hit him," he said.

"He didn't go outside," said Kirk, looking at him oddly.

Roger licked his lips. "Then maybe he fell out the window."

He went out.

Later that morning he went out to see Ronnie. He talked about inconsequential things for awhile, and finally got up the courage to say: "Ronnie . . ."

"Yes?" The big man was sitting over by the fireplace, smiling lazily at him. Was there a faint hint of—mockery in his eyes?

"Well—" He hesitated, went on "It's about that hatchet."

"What about it?"

"That's what *I* want to know, dammit. What's wrong with the thing—"

"Eh?" Hawker's face was bland, innocent. "What could be wrong with it, old man. Just an ordinary flint hatchet—old, but—"

"It's hexed!" Roger blurted out, and instantly felt like a fool.

"Oh, come now." Roger could sense the laughter behind his friend's voice. "You, the boy who doesn't believe in witchcraft. Curses. Your nerves must be shot, old man. Too much worrying. You're jealous—"

"I'm *not* jealous!" Roger bit his lip. Hawker was making a fool out of him. "You made some funny cracks that other day—"

"Did I?"

"Hell, yes, you did! Do you talk, or—"

"Sure," Ronnie said, suddenly amiable.

"I'll talk. But you won't believe me."

"Go on."

Hawker went over to a bookshelf. He

brought an old dusty tome over to the table, flipped open its pages. "Here. Read aloud, Roger."

"What's this? A bible—"

"One of many." Hawker fingered his moustache urbanely. "You'd be surprised if I told you how many bibles exist. Read."

Frowning, Roger read.

". . . and while Abel was kneeling with folded hands before the altar of his Sacrifice, the smoke of his sacrifice ascended toward heaven and the savor thereof pleased God, while that of Cain—who made his offering with an unwilling heart, was scattered over the Earth.

"His heart burning with rage and envy, Cain took up a stone, and slew his brother Abel."

"What's this about a stone—"

"That's a very old bible," said Hawker quietly. "You'd be quite surprised to learn how I obtained it."

"But I fail to see—"

"Quiet." There were little mocking lights in Hawker's eyes. "Suppose I were to tell you that the hatchet you possess was carved *from the stone which Cain used.*"

Roger started to say "Rubbish"—and didn't. Ronnie Hawker's smiling face seemed a wooden mask. This wasn't the friend he knew; it was some stranger.

Ancestral memory—curses. . . . Ancient, withered crones with toothless gums muttering strange rituals beneath a gibbous moon. Things of the darkness, of the night—*there are more things in heaven and earth—*

Somewhere, an auto horn honked. There were the distant sounds of noonday traffic, the shrilling of some cop's whistle. With an effort, Roger grinned shakily, said: "Rot, Ronnie! This is nineteen-forty-three—"

"Still skeptical, aren't you? And suppose I pointed out the analogy—you, having a brother. Jealousy. And your last name. Cain. Supposing I told you that all

the descendants of Cain bearing his name are susceptible to the influence of that hatchet."

Roger glared at him, not quite sure whether or not he was joking.

"Got quite a sense of humor, haven't you?"

"Quite." Ronnie put the bible away carefully, blew thick dust from the bookshelf, then showed Roger to the door. "Now, if you'll excuse me. I'm writing a yarn about a skeptical guy—just like you. You've just gotta read it when it comes out, and see what happens to the poor fellow. Very interesting."

Out on the sidewalk Roger turned and looked back at the closed doorway. Ronnie was pulling his leg. Sure. Just his nerves. You did a lot of funny things, walking in your sleep—

That night, Roger did.

IV

IT WAS a strange dream. About Sheila, Kirk, and a sharp little hatchet. An ancient wailing of desolation and hatred. . . . There was something he had to do! Something about the hatchet—and Kirk.

Roger Cain awoke.

The moonlight was silver on Kirk's pillows, on his upturned, sleeping face, and what was he doing *here*, in Kirk's bedroom. With the hatchet in his hand! Raising it over his brother's head, and laughing, soundlessly—

God! And in that instant Roger swiftly threw the hatchet out of the window.

It was as if an intolerable weight had been lifted from his mind. He was free again, to think, clearly. An immensely relieved Roger Cain crept silently back to bed. He was free!

Things went along splendidly the next few weeks. Sheila was in the house constantly, and lavished infinite attention on Kirk. Roger found himself jealous no longer.

"Great pair of kids," he told himself. "Deserve all the happiness they get." He was trying to forget about Tinker. And the hatchet. Besides—you couldn't be influenced by something you didn't have.

Came the day when Roger came back from a visit with Kirk's doctor. He was whistling, as he swung up the big stone steps to the house, tossed his hat to Meadows, and hurried to Kirk's room.

"Kirk! Hey, wake up, boy!" He shook him awake and chuckled merrily as Kirk blinked, sat up and dug the sleep out of his eyes.

"Whatsa idea of waking a guy out of a sound sleep—Say, Rog! You been drinking?"

Roger Cain laughed, richly, warmly. "No, but it's a good idea. Celebrate—" He broke off. "Guess what?"

"What?"

"You'll be walking soon! Matter of days now. I talked with Van Horn at the hospital just an hour ago. Here—won't need these any more—" And chuckling, he seized his brother's canes in the corner of the bedroom, and broke them.

"Hey, dammit, I need those!"

"Nuts. Here." And Roger threw the covers back, urged Kirk to a standing position. "Lean on me, old son . . ."

And supporting Kirk halfway, Roger marched him around the bed.

Gasping, Kirk sank back on the covers and stared up at him. "I walked." His voice was awed, husky. "I—walked! Today's my lucky day, all right."

Kirk looked ruminatively at his big toe. "Sheila advanced our wedding date. A week sooner than we figured."

"Oh," Roger said faintly.

Kirk looked up at him and the pattern of freckles across his nose stretched wide as he grinned, embarrassedly. "Well—*how* about congratulating me?"

"Huh? Oh, sure. Sure! Best of everything. Look—" He started out awkwardly.

"I got to see about some bills 'n stuff. . . ."

"Sure," Roger said softly to himself for the dozenth time. "I'm glad for him. Deserves a gal like Sheila—"

He went into his study, sat down at the desk. He looked over at the vacant space in his collection of hammers and smiled.

"I am *not* jealous."

He winced as he realized he'd spoken aloud.

Rapraprap.

"Come in."

It was Banners. He was carrying a proud, half-apologetic smile, and—

Roger Cain stared, aghast.

And a little, flint-headed hatchet.

"Here, sir—" Banners was saying. His words seemed loose, very disconnected. ". . . found it in the back yard. Undoubtedly yours—lost from your collection—"

Roger Cain nodded. He licked his lips. The hatchet. Here on his desk. Small, sharp, *old*—

He did not even know when Banners went out. He only sat there, staring.

"Get a grip on yourself," he whispered.

He took a deep breath and forced himself to move forward—

THE moment he touched the hatchet everything was changed. No more fear. Strange. He felt *reassured*. Confident.

He hefted the hatchet, swung it experimentally through the air, and, his heart pounding, stood up. He was thinking suddenly of Kirk. Kirk, whom he hated, who would take Sheila away from him!

Roger went downstairs quietly, opened the door to his brother's room.

Kirk was standing there at the foot of the bed, grinning, trying his unsupported weight on his right foot.

"I can stand!" he was whispering. "I can sta—"

He turned. He blinked, puzzledly.

Roger Cain stepped forward, gripping the hatchet tightly.

His arm rose and fell. Rose and fell—

Afterward, Roger Cain stood staring down at Kirk. At the hatchet in his hand. The heavy, helpful hatchet—

Walk.

Walk to Ronnie's house. Good old Ronnie. The boy with the sense of humor. With the oh so splendid sense of humor! Teaching him about curses the hard way.

Roger hammered on the door.

Ronnie opened it a moment later, and quickly tried to slam it shut, but Roger stuck his foot in the crack. He forced his way in.

"Hello, Ronnie."

Ronnie Hawker's face was a sickly gray. He backed away slowly, eyes fixed on the red stains on Roger's fingers. "What do you want?"

"You know what I want," said Roger. He pulled the hatchet from beneath his coat.

"Don't!" Hawker's lips writhed. He was speaking very rapidly. "Don't, Cain, I—"

"*Cain*. That's right. Rub it in." Roger's grin was tight, set. He moved forward. "Well, Ronnie, you proved your point all right. Didn't count on it backfiring, did you?"

"I only did it for a joke! I had to find out—"

"A *joke*," said Roger. "Oh, fine!"

He heard the sudden laughter—the distorted, insane laughter, everywhere about him. His own laughter.

"I like jokes, old man!" he heard himself gasp. "You've no idea how I appreciate a good prank. Too bad this one'll be on you—"

"No!" The big man's eyes were two shiny black marbles of fear. His face was contorted. "*No*—"

"Oh, *yes*."

Hawker tried suddenly to run, to dart past him to the door. So very funny.

After he fell down the first time Roger

bent over and systematically hacked Ronnie's features into something quite unrecognizable.

"What a shame," he murmured, looking sadly at the blood on Hawker's clean gray tweeds.

He laid the hatchet delicately down on the table, and stepped into the bathroom. He found what he was looking for. Ronnie's straight-edge razor. He opened the veins in his wrists. A matter of minutes, now.

He frowned at the hatchet. Get rid of it! Destroy, burn—

Roger heard sounds outside, and unsteadily made his way to the window. A refuse truck, stopping in front of the house! Two trash men, unloading the cans of junk on the curb.

Weakening, feeling his life drain away, drop by ruby drop, Roger still had enough will about him to throw the hatchet.

He made it. He saw the hatchet fly fair and true, to bury itself deep in the refuse heaped high in the back of the truck.

Presently the truck rumbled on down the street. Roger Cain fell back with something like a smile on his lips.

The hatchet. Gone.

No one else would it influence, no other brother named Cain . . . to destroy—

Roger's eyes closed. In the little apartment there was silence.

V

CHARLEY KANE shifted his cud of tobacco to his left cheek, spat vigorously. He glanced sideways at Will, who jammed on the brakes and jumped to the ground. Charley sang out: "Ready, Will?" "Let 'er go!"

Charley pulled the lever, his faded old eyes surveying the vast dump heap in front of him. The truck shuddered as the mass

of assorted rubbish slid off. Will immediately attacked the pile with his shovel. Charley stepped down, took his own shovel and pitched in. For a time the two brothers worked in silence. Eleven years now, that Will and Charley had been on the same dump truck together. Working side by side.

But just now the smooth efficiency of the team was broken. Charley stopped shoveling a moment. Slowly, deliberately, he bent over and picked up a small object from the ashes.

"A hammer," he muttered.

Oddly shaped head. Sharp, sort of. And strangely wet and sticky . . .

"Hey, loafer!" Will rubbed sweat from his brow. "You gonna help me or not?"

Without looking up, caressing the handle of the little hatchet, Charley said very softly: "Jest a minute, Will."

His brother grunted, swore disgustedly and went back to his shoveling.

Presently the job was done. Will gave Charley a puzzled glance, went back to the side of the truck, where he hung up his shovel.

"You coming or not?"

Charley was smiling now.

"Yeah," he said. "I'm coming."

Will's constant nagging—constant, biting insults. Funny, he hadn't noticed them before . . . indeed, he hadn't known what to do. But he knew now.

His breath hoarse in his throat, aware of the "hammer's" weight, cool and comfortable in his right hand, Charley stepped around the side of the truck.

Will turned, hearing his brother's quick, shuffling footsteps. He had time only to open his mouth wide and yell once, before Charley stepped forward, his right arm high.

He brought the hatchet down—