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CONTENTS

I LOVE LUCIFER	
By William P. McGivern.....	4
ONE WAY STREET	
By Jerome Bixby.....	22
THE WEAPON	
By T. D. Hamm.....	40
MILLION DOLLAR MAYBE	
By Evan Hunter.....	42
THE BUILDER	
By Philip K. Dick.....	58
THE PIN	
By Robert Bloch.....	74
EDDIE FOR SHORT	
By Wallace West.....	88
STAR CHILD	
By Bill Peters.....	101
THE PERFECT WOMAN	
By Robert Sheckley.....	118
THE MAN NEXT DOOR	
By Bruce Elliott.....	122
SPECIAL FEATURE	
A PORTFOLIO	
By Ernest C. Schroeder.....	70

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AN AMAZING VIGNETTE

THE WEAPON

BY T. D. HAMM

In struggles for supremacy, from a spat in the kitchen to the war of the worlds, the woman is never unarmed.

Leila Adams glared down the rutted, dusty track leading away from the dooryard and uttered a single four-letter word emphatically expressive of her feelings toward the forest, the Senator and the situation he had embroiled her in.

Only yesterday he had suddenly declared his intention of making what he pompously referred to as a "reconnaissance" and left walking rather lamely in his too-tight city shoes; absolutely tiptoeing down the very center of the narrow road as though expecting to be sprung upon by some unimaginable monster.

Leila set her lips shrewishly. With or without him she was leaving here tomorrow for civilization. The lake, the forest, the little cabin held no charms for her urban eye. Even as a child she had scorned playgrounds and parks.

Her body was to her both a weapon and a tool and she spent on it the painstaking care of an

artisan with a valued instrument. And with reason. From a first early experiment with the grocer's boy, it had carried her through a succession of out-of-town buyers and the vice-president of the clothing chain for which she modeled, to her present comparatively exalted position with fat, paunchy State Senator Layton.

And now here they were, or rather here *she* was, God knew how many miles in the backlots of Northern Michigan. No gas in the car and miles from a filling station. No shops, no beauty parlors, no decent food, and now, not even any Senator.

In the two weeks since their arrival she had reluctantly gathered a few vague ideas from the garbled, infrequent radiocasts that the Senator persisted in listening to day in and day out.

Without real comprehension she had watched the Senator growing paler and flabbier every day, till yesterday after two days of radio silence, he had suddenly declared



his intention of making this ridiculous "reconnaissance" and left.

She had every confidence in her own ability to survive any man-made disaster, whoever the authors. The inborn chameleon-like ability for protective coloration had carried her safely so far as she fought her way up from the purlieus of South Clark Street through the varied strata of society, to the rococco plushiness of the Senator's apartment.

Now she lifted the mirror of the compact and surveyed herself anxiously. Her hair was still shiny and without too much telltale darkness at the roots; her skin was well madeup.

She paused in her examination, senses suddenly alerted, oppressively aware of the close ranked cedar and hemlock pressing about the tiny cabin.

She felt suddenly very much alone and in some queer way more vulnerable . . . more exposed to

watching eyes. She shivered a little and wished that the Senator would return. At least, he would be someone human.

Her breath caught.

The two had just come into the clearing. They were staring at her with round, unblinking eyes. In the face of their silence and immobility some of her terror fell away. She eyed them with objectivity.

Rather warty . . . but then so had been the grocer's boy. And paunchy, gray-skinned and rather frog-eyed . . . but then, so had been the Senator. And male . . .

Her breasts lifted a little and a sly, secret little smile touched the corners of her mouth.

The shorter one was raising some sort of shiny, tubelike thing. Leila eyed him sidelong and passed a hand over her hair, dropping it to smooth lazily over her hip in a gesture as old as the Cosmos.

The shining tube lowered.

Leila reached for her lipstick.