



EXCERPT FROM
"ON THIS NIGHT"

She had just begun to pump water for the coffee when something struck her, some cold little tap at her consciousness telling her she was not alone in the room.

She froze, the coffeepot in her hand. Had anyone thought to lock the doors? They must have been locked; Logan always saw to it. No one had bothered locking doors before the war but things had changed since then.

Instinct told her not to betray her knowledge. Quietly she set down the coffeepot and opened a drawer as though looking for a spoon. Her hand closed over a paring knife and again she froze, listening hard, trying to decide whether she was having a wild flight of imagination or if there was someone there, standing on the other side of the pantry where the stairs began.

That was the only place where anyone could be, watching and waiting...

In a moment she would be gibbering with terror. Should she simply walk out of the room? Should she, even for an instant, place herself with her back to that shadowed alcove? There had been no sound and then she heard the faintest rustle, like clothes against a body that had made a slight move.

The kitchen was quite far removed from the rest of the house. If she screamed no one would hear her.

Clutching the small knife against the side of her right leg, she made herself turn. She could see the stairs; she could see the closed door of the pantry. But she could not see on the other side of it.

In the dim, wavering light she noticed the towel she had used earlier draped over the back of a chair and she moved toward it slowly, as though she were made of wood. If someone gave chase she would turn and throw the towel in his face and then she would run and scream until her lungs burst.

Mallory began to walk toward the opening to the long corridor. She had to turn slightly to reach with her left hand for the towel, and as she did so someone stepped from the alcove in front of her. She dropped the towel and almost dropped the knife...