As it happened, one day in the C-club we were talking over the War, as we often do. At times it is almost as if some of us feel we are each in some way responsible for current events and, by rights, are required to drag out whatever is going on in the world, that no event shall be denied its birth-wrought freedom of expression. “The Bomb, after all,” remarked one of our cards, “saves men the trouble of going at one-another with stone axes or cold steel.”

At this point, I had to join in the conversation. “You might think you’re only being sarcastic, but for once you are completely correct: there is nothing more difficult, more dangerous or more of a thrill than facing another man with a knife.”

Another person asked jokingly, “Ever done it?”

“Just once,” I replied; “though I wish it could have come easier, I’ve had the practice... not that I’d want to give someone another chance.”

As I had come into the discussion a bit unexpectedly, I don’t suppose anyone had been particularly ready to parry this new tangent. At any rate, they were now all caught up in it, so I had no choice but to give them the story, nothing of jungles and Viet-Cong, but a jungle of sorts...

“I was in bed one night,” I began, “in that little apartment I have, down by the Art school, a little after two in the morning, when a burglar came in, up my back stairs; he had probably been out all night, collecting petty-cash.

“He was kind of a scruffy little punk, but he had a mean-looking knife with him, and that made all the difference. I could see it clearly, even in the dim light filtering through the plastic bedroom curtains, and he was clearly determined to use it to full advantage. I was just sitting up when he walked in. He told me to hand over whatever I had, and in a sack on the low bureau next to my bed was a toy I had bought for a rather blood-thirsty cousin of mine, a ten-inch rubber dagger, quite as deadly-looking as his, though it didn’t shine. It did have one advantage in looks over my opponent’s blade, a streak of gore painted across the tip and down the double-edges; otherwise, in the dim light it was gunmetal black. I got it out in time.

“Striking out with my left foot against the matress, I jerked my body backwards over the edge of the bed, momentarily out of his
reach, knocking the sack to the floor, rolling and coming up in a crouch with the erst-while toy in my right fist. I saw his eye catch the blood on the dagger’s tip. ‘You ain’t the first bastard,’ I growled through fear-clenched teeth, all the while praying to God that he was as panic-stricken by this unexpected turn as was I and would, under the circumstances, turn about and run like hell.

“So I made a drive at him from across the bed, and he dodged backward into the doorsill, and of course I had to give him time to recover while I scrambled over the bed, else he should have guessed I held nothing more than a hard-rubber stage prop. Then he made a cut at me, and I had to dodge, too: I’m not about to tell you that bright, grizzly claw coming at me like a streak of death didn’t look as if it had my name on it.

“But dodge I did, and it gave me confidence in that I knew then the collision which interrupted his retreat had come close to disabling this antagonist. I lunged, and he staggered back out of my righting radius, then as I tried to close with him he lunged tenaciously, and I was forced to dodge again. It seemed to me then almost like those ferocious battles at time’s beginning, from the days when our ancestors came naked from the caves. That’s what hysteria does to a person, completely eliminates perspective and judgment . . . there I was a normally underdeveloped young male American pulling a bluff with a child’s toy, stark naked in every sense of the word, opposing a human predator who, doubtlessly, soon would be spreading my insides over the kitchen floor.

“I began to get tired. I was slower, a little heavier on my feet, but still able to keep away from his knife, and still not quite able to figure how I managed to keep out of the way . . . and finally I pulled something that was too smart. I feinted to the right, pulled back, then dove in, figuring him to drop his guard and jump back out of range again and then make for the stairs. My move deceived him, all right, but not as I had intended. I nailed him just under the heart . . . of course, we both thought, momentarily, that I had killed him; then as we recovered from the shock, he said hoarsely, ‘So, we was bot’ bluffin’.’ Then I realized his knife had been rubber like mine, and all along he had been letting me dodge just as I had attempted to deceive him!

“Then he reached inside his coat and I was abruptly looking down the ugly end of a .38 Police Special. And he said to me, ‘Awrite, clown, you cain’t dodge dis.’
"I fully agreed.

"He walked out of the apartment with all my spare cash, my watch and a couple of rings, and I had to pay a month’s rent that week. But what hurt the most was, as I stood there hands-against-the-wall, he, in going out the door, heaved the gun at me and clipped me right above the ear . . . and he was gone before I fully comprehended that it was rubber . . . just like the knives."