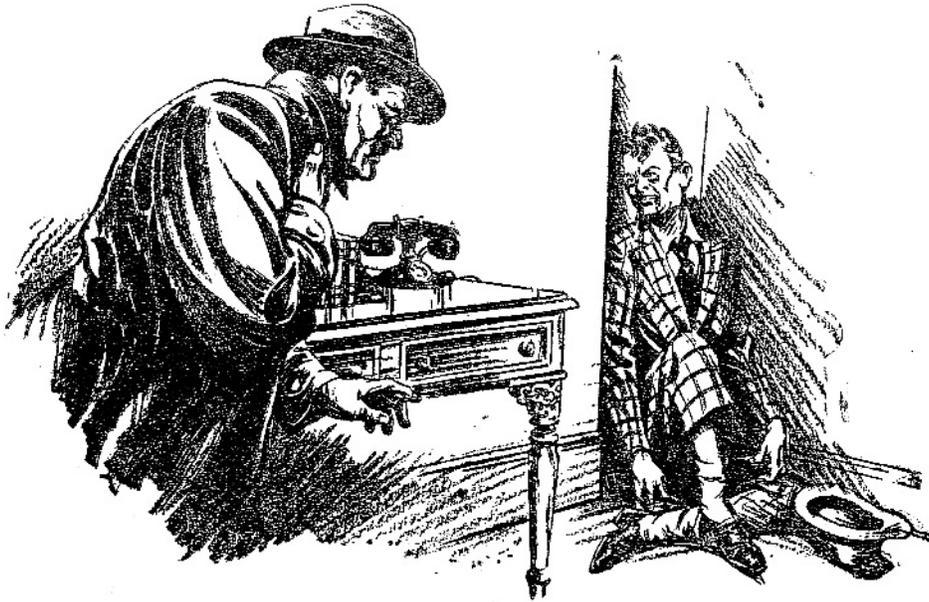


# Vim, Rigor and Mortis

By Robert Turner



*Though heavyweight slugger Maguire could beat off the leather fists of his visible opponent, it would be the lead slugs of an invisible challenger that would take the title. For the life of Maguire's kidnaped son was pitted against a hot-seat frame-up purse.*

MAGUIRE began to walk faster and faster as he hit the block where Frenchy Wons lived. He hunched his big, sloping shoulders deeper into his trench coat, lowered his head against the beating spring rain. Inside his pockets, Maguire's hands balled into lumpy fists. He could hardly wait to get hold of Frenchy Wons.

While he walked, Maguire's thoughts went back over it all. About a week ago, at the training camp over in Jersey, Frenchy had said:

"I guess you don't catch on quick, Gunner. I guess I'll have to come right out with it. I don't figure you got much chance of taking Tommy Tomaine in that bout next Saturday, so I have a big lump of green bet on Tommy. I sort of want to insure the thing.

"Now, look—you're smart, Gunner; you ain't got a thing to lose. I'm offering you ten grand to go in the tank the third round. In the bargain, you can lay your own end of the purse on Tommy and clean up all around."

For a few seconds Gunner Maguire thought about what Frenchy Wons had said. He thought about the hundreds of guys in the big shipyard where he worked. How they were all for him, were all going to bet every dollar they could on him winning.

He remembered that back eight years ago when he'd been welterweight champ, he'd never been in a fixed fight in his career. Nobody would have dared even suggest such a thing to him in those days.

Maguire never did answer Frenchy. He just took the little flashily dressed gambler

by the nape of the neck and the seat of the pants and ran him right out of the training grounds, dumped him in a ditch on that Jersey back road.

But Maguire guessed that hadn't been enough. He'd been a little too easy on Frenchy, because a half hour ago today, the day of the fight, Maguire had a phone call at his hotel suite. An obviously disguised voice had said:

"You had your chance to do the thing nice, Maguire. But you turned down our kind offer and now we're going to work things out our own way. It's going to be the third round, Gunner, just like we said. There better not be any mistakes, because we've got your kid."

The wire had gone dead before Maguire could even answer. For a few minutes he didn't get it. He stood there looking at the humming telephone, his face blank. Then he got very pale and called the school upstate where his son, Mike, was supposed to be.

"No," the school office told him, "Michael Maguire left the school this morning with some friends of his father's. He was going home to spend the week end with his father. Who is this calling?"

Maguire hadn't told them. He'd hung up, grabbed his hat and coat and left the hotel suite. His trainers and the bunch of sports writers up there, had yelled, grabbed at him, wanted to know where he was going, but Maguire didn't stop, didn't explain. He couldn't have, if he wanted to. He couldn't even speak, with the fear and rage that was churning in him.

**T**HROUGH the rain, the whole ten blocks from his hotel to the side street where Frenchy Wons lived, Maguire had thought of nothing but what he was going to do to Frenchy. He'd put his big hands on Frenchy's throat and wring the information out of him about where

Frenchy was holding young Mike. And then what was left of Frenchy would be turned over to the police.

As he turned into the small apartment building where Frenchy Wons lived, Maguire pulled his hands from his pockets. He held them pressed stiffly against his thighs and shouldered through the down-stairs hall door.

He went up the steps to the third floor, two at a time. His blocky Irish face, heavily lined, thick with scar tissue over the ledgelike black brows that covered his eyes, was white and tight-muscled with temper.

He stopped in front of Frenchy's flat and hammered on the door with his fist. The door swung open a few inches. Maguire hit it with the flat of his hand, slammed it all the way open and strode in, down a short hall to a dimly lighted living room.

Frenchy Wons was waiting for him. The little ferret-faced gambler was wearing the same loud plaid suit. Close-set yellow eyes stared defiantly at Maguire as he stepped through the doorway, stopped still.

Frenchy was propped up on the floor in a corner, his arms and legs limp as a rag doll's. Frenchy was grinning, but it was not a nice thing to see, because his gaping mouth, where the bullet had gone in, was a horribly bloody mess of empty gums and torn flesh.

Maguire went loose at the legs, had to catch hold of the door jambs to hold himself up. He kept sucking his breath in and out, trying to get it through his head that it must not have been Frenchy who called him on the phone; that someone else was in on this with Frenchy. That person had figured that if they went ahead, Maguire would come to Frenchy about it, maybe force him to talk. So they had killed Frenchy to make sure that couldn't

happen.

Over the phone, when they had told Maguire about his son, the speaker had said, *we*, so there was more than one of them.

While Maguire stood there, trying to figure what to do, a telephone on a nearby table started ringing. At first Maguire just stared at the instrument, stupidly, his large mouth working but not making any words. The steady clanging kept up monotonously, seeming to Maguire, staring back and forth from the phone to the corpse in the corner, to be making a terrific noise that would bring everybody in the whole apartment house running to see what was the matter.

Slowly Maguire got a grip on himself. Perhaps it was one of Frenchy's pals calling him. Maybe if he answered, he might learn something. Stiff-legged, he walked across the room to the phone, picked it up. The same muffled, disguised voice which had spoken to Maguire an hour ago in his hotel room, now said:

"Hello, Gunner. So you did have nerve enough to answer. We timed it nicely, didn't we? We figured you'd go straight to Frenchy after we called. We trust Frenchy is resting well."

There was a pause, but Maguire didn't answer. His tongue was a thick lump in his mouth and he couldn't use it. The voice went on:

"You see we're not kidding, Gunner. We've got over a hundred grand bet on your losing the fight tonight, in the third round. You wouldn't want us to make a mistake on that, Gunner, because we might get mad. When we get mad, somebody gets hurt. You can see that, Gunner. Ask Frenchy. And we've got your kid, Mike."

**M**AGUIRE found his voice, now. "Wait," he said, before they could

hang up on him this time. "Listen. I can't—I'm licked, I guess. You won't hurt the boy, promise me that, if I do what you want?"

"Of course not, Gunner," the voice answered, soothingly. "We're not vicious. What would be the point?"

"You'd better make sure of that," Maguire answered. "All right, I'll do what you ask. I can't hardly do anything else. But if you double-cross me, if anything *does* happen to the boy, anything at all, I'll find you, hunt you down if it takes the rest of my life."

"You just dive in that third round and make it look real good, so there won't be any squawks," the voice assured, "and everything'll be all right. Another thing, though, I wouldn't discuss this with anyone, Gunner. No cops—nobody at all. The first sign of anything like that—and we'll be watching—we might get nervous and not take care of the kid just right. He might have an accident."

Maguire nodded his head dumbly, his blue-gray eyes dull and full of hurt, his big face under its beard stubble a sickly yellow.

Once again the connection broke and Maguire hung up. He turned woodenly away from the phone, his long powerful arms hanging limp at his sides, trickles of rain running from the brim of his battered felt hat.

He stared at the ugly-looking corpse of Frenchy Wons and shuddered. He thought of his son, Mike, a long-legged gawky kid of ten with an all-out grin, a face full of freckles and big brown eyes like his dead mother's. Somehow Maguire stumbled down the hall and out of the murder flat.

Just as he started down the stairs, another apartment door opened. An old hag with a lantern-jawed face looked out at him. She had a towel wrapped around her head and held a mop in one hand.

“Excuse me,” she said, showing discolored teeth. “Is anything wrong in Mr. Wons’ apartment? I was wondering. I thought I heard a shot in there some time ago. When I went to see, nobody answered. And just a few minutes ago, the telephone was ringing such a long time. I ain’t nosy, but I just—”

“No,” Maguire stopped her. “Nothing. I mean everything is—”

He didn’t finish. Instead he went on down the stairs very fast, saying a little prayer that the old woman hadn’t got too good a look at his face. He was feeling a little sick by the time he got outside. The cold damp air and the rain felt good on his face. He walked slowly back to the hotel.

When Maguire stepped into his hotel suite, the place was full of cigar smoke, the smell of Scotch, and the loudness of sports writers. The laughter and the conversation stopped as Maguire leaned against the closed door. All eyes went toward him.

Looking around, Maguire thought, *It could be any of these guys, any of the newspapermen, or even my own crew. It could be Harry Elkins, my manager, or Bootsie Grant, my trainer, or Spam, my sparmate. It could be any of a thousand gamblers here in the city. I’ll probably never find out.*

“What’s the matter, Gunner?” a sports columnist finally demanded. “You look like you been hauled through a threshing machine.”

“You’re crazy,” Elkins cried in protest. “He’s fine. A little nervous maybe, but that’s all. But he’s in fine fettle. We wound up yesterday, sloughing the heavy bag and shadow-boxing for twenty minutes. Then a five mile jog and—”

Maguire walked through the room and into the bedroom, didn’t hear the rest of it. The door slammed shut behind him, shut out the sounds from the other room. He

crossed to the window, stood staring down at the traffic crawling through the rain on the wet black street far below.

*This is what I get, he decided. I had to listen to Harry and make this comeback. I should have known better. What do I care that they’re running out of fighters because of the war? After this fight, they tell me you can set up a row of punks, bowl ’em down, and make a cool million. Sure, and leave myself open for something like this. We were doing all right, young Mike and I, with my job as a shipwright and with the dough I had saved from the last time. . . .*

HE HAD to stop thinking about that, then, because Spam, his sparmate, came into the bedroom. Spam was a big guy with no neck and a red and battered face, with ears like lumpy tea biscuits.

“You all right, boss?” Spam wanted to know. He kept peering at Maguire who had turned from the window now. “Aw, why don’t you stop worrying. You’ll beat this chump tonight. He’s only a punk. He’d still be fighting semi-windups in tank towns if it wasn’t for this here war. You’ll take—”

“Of course I will.” Maguire turned fiercely on his sparring partner for a moment, fists clenched. “It isn’t that, you blubber-faced fool. I’m not even thinking about that. I—”

He broke off. The anger flowed out of him. The fear and the utterly futile feeling of helplessness came back. His fists laxed.

“That’s more like it.” Spam’s gold teeth flashed. “You had me worried, too, but it ain’t nothin’. You’re just wound a little tight. That’ll wear off. Listen, boss, we got to go down for the weighin-in. Better get ready.”

“Sure,” Maguire said. “All right.”

Cabbing downtown through the rain to the commission’s office, Maguire sat

morosely in his corner and listened to Harry Elkins, his manager, talk about the fight. Elkins was short and stocky, with a bland, round face, and merry-looking blue eyes. As he talked, Elkins kept tugging at tufts of grey hair that grew just forward of his ears on his otherwise bald head.

"You got to watch this guy, Tomaine, all the time tonight," Elkins said. "You'll take him all right, if you'll lead all the time like we've planned. Just don't give him a chance to shoot that left. It'll kill you if it lands."

Maguire grunted and stared out at the rainy streets. He was thinking that tonight he was going to do the first dishonest thing of his life. He was going to double-cross his own crew here. None of them had said so, but he knew that they'd all bet heavily on him. And then there was the bunch down at the shipyards. A lot of them, he knew, were sinking two or three weeks' wages on him.

"They were going to lose, all those gays. He was going to let them down. Some bunch of killers and gamblers were going to profit by it. And there was nothing much, he, Maguire, could do about the matter.

Suddenly Maguire sat up stiffly. Harry Elkins was still talking. Something he had said caught Maguire's full attention.

"What was that, Harry?" Maguire demanded. "What did you just say?"

"I said, you gotta watch the third round, especially," Elkins repeated. His blue eyes were narrowed shrewdly. His tiny red mouth twisted up at one corner. "They got something special planned for that round. I got a hunch. So be on the watch for—"

"What gave you that idea?" Maguire interrupted. He leaned forward now, all attention, the muscles of his jaw under their three-day growth of beard, white-ridged.

"I just got a sneaking suspicion," Elkins nodded his head sagely. "I know that bunch of Tomaine's, they're slick as eels. I found out they're laying all kinds of dough—and giving big odds, too—that Tommy's gonna win. I even heard they're naming the round—the third—so—"

"I see," Maguire said, his big hands clutched tightly at his knees. Elkins went on talking, but once again Maguire was lost in his own thoughts. He thought it had narrowed down, now. One or more of Tommy Tomaine's crew were behind this, forcing him to throw the fight by kidnaping his son.

IN ANOTHER few minutes they arrived at the commission's offices and went up for the weighing-in. It was pretty bad up there. Tommy Tomaine, a lean and beautifully built youngster with a dark savage face, pranced and posed and wiseaered all over the place for the newspaper cameramen who were there. Tomaine's crew of trainers and rubbers were almost as bad. They all oozed self-confidence. Abe Callahan, Tomaine's manager, a skinny little old man with a piping voice, kept making cracks about Maguire's age, about the barely perceptible folds of flesh around Maguire's middle.

Once, when a newspaperman asked how Maguire felt, Callahan piped in, "Oh, he's fine, can't you see? Gunner's full of vim, rigor and mortis."

The crowd guffawed at that. Maguire didn't say anything. He kept staring at Callahan, hard-eyed, remembering that Tomaine's manager, years ago, had a bad rep for fixing fights.

"Yep," Callahan went on, giggling. "I'll give old Gunner until the third round. About three rounds and those rubber legs'll fold up."

Maguire got very white around the

corners of his mouth. But he held himself back. He could hardly keep from leaping at Callahan's throat. But he kept remembering that somewhere his son was penned up with some hoodlum guard. If Callahan, or any of Tomaine's crew, were the ones who had kidnaped Mike, it wouldn't pay to get them riled.

Finally it was all over. They rode uptown again, to the Garden. In the dressing room, Elkins, Spam, and mousy Bootsie Grant, his trainer, watched Maguire closely as he stripped. Then he danced around a little and limbered his arms. Sweat sheened over his lithe, rippling muscles in a few moments, began to roll. Bootsie rubbed his hands and sighed at this.

"That's the boy," he said. "That's more like it."

The door opened, and a couple of newspapermen who hadn't been at the hotel came in. A roar of sound from the crowd watching the preliminary bout swelled in for a second, then cut off suddenly as the door closed again. Maguire got into his shorts, draped a robe over his shoulders.

Minutes fled past. Soon Maguire was walking down the aisle toward the ring. The Garden was jam-packed, a solid whooping roar of sound.

He climbed into the ring with the officials. Tommy Tomaine entered a few moments after. While the two fighters got their instructions from the officials, Maguire looked out over the crowd. He heard his name called from different places. In some of the front seats he saw the faces of men who worked with him at the shipyards.

He felt sick and moved like an automaton back to his corner. The voices of his seconds and his manager were just a blur in his ears. He didn't hear a thing they said.

THEN the gong sounded and he was moving across the canvas to meet Tommy Tomaine. Three words kept pounding through his head, *The Third Round!* Other bits of the telephone calls he had received filtered through, . . . *make it look real good . . . you wouldn't want anything to happen to the kid. . .*

That first round was a nightmarish thing, through which Maguire moved like a sleepwalker. Automatically, he kept dancing away from Tomaine's slashing fists. Every once in a while he lashed out with a punch himself. But it was all instinct. Before two minutes were past the crowd was booing and jeering.

After the gong, Maguire listened to the crowd. A feeling of panic stole over him. He *had* to snap out of it, make it look good. His son's life depended on the way he put this over. The crowd who had Mike wouldn't take any fooling. They'd kill the boy, if they were double-crossed, as quickly as they'd rubbed out Frenchy Wons.

He came out for the second with a rush. He broke through Tomaine's guard, caught the surprised youngster with several hooks and shook him a little. Then he closed in, gave Tomaine a chance to recover. The mob stopped their hooting after a few seconds of this round, inched to the edges of their seats as the two fighters swapped punches and mauled each other around the ring.

The act fooled the ring crowd all right, but not Tomaine. In a clinch, he snarled at Maguire, "What are you tryin' to pull, wise guy? Stop the stalling and fight."

It went on like that for the second all the way through. When the gong sounded for the third, Maguire came out wide open. He figured that the best way was not to take any chances, to really let Tomaine knock him out. That way, it couldn't help but look good.

At first the other fighter was a little wary, a little slow to take advantage of the chin that Maguire practically held out for a target. But finally he pushed one through Maguire's faked guard. The punch sizzled along Maguire's jaw, ripped away skin and hair. Maguire fell back against the ropes. The sound of the crowd became a roar in his ears.

Anxious for the kill, Tommy Tomaine bored in. Again and again his gloves thudded against Maguire as he hung on the ropes. Blood and sweat splattered out over the ring. Finally when Tomaine stepped away, Maguire fell stiffly forward, went down on his face.

Maguire seemed to come looping suddenly up out of a funnel of blackness. He heard a meaningless jumble of words. He rolled over. Slowly it came back to him. The fight. He had been knocked down. Somehow he got to his knees.

Now he heard the referee's count quite clearly. He heard, "—seven—eight—"

That was all he heard. With his last ounce of returning strength, Maguire lurched to his feet, brought up his guard. Groggily he dodged Tomaine's rush from his corner. He bounced off the ropes and shook his head, dabbed at the sweat and blood in his face.

He tried to think. In that agonized moment of gathering his senses, Maguire forgot about the telephone calls he had received. He forgot that his son, Mike, had been kidnaped, that this was the round he was supposed to throw the fight. He forgot everything, except that he was in a ring and that he was a fighter.

A sense of fury that he had been knocked down, that he had almost lost the fight, swept over him. All the old instincts, all the old tricks and experience of a hundred past battles came back to him.

WHEN Tomaine charged him again, Maguire fell against the younger man and clung, sucking in deep breaths of air, getting his strength back. And all the time he hammered kidney punches at Tomaine.

There wasn't much to it after that. Maguire backed off from a clinch, crouched and feinted with his left, shot across a killing right hook that landed on Tomaine's jaw. He followed it right up with a flurry of lefts and rights to the body and head. In a moment he had his opponent backed into a corner. But Maguire didn't let up.

In the last minute of that round, Tomaine's guard dropped completely and Maguire uncorked an uppercut. Tomaine's head rocked back, his eyes glassed over, his legs twisted out from under him. He went down and he didn't get up, even after the ref finished counting. They had to come into the ring and lift him to his corner.

Still confused, but grinning through his battered face, Maguire half-staggered to his own corner. Then the ref took him out and raised his hand and the ring was jammed with people, all yelling and shouting at once. Maguire heard the ref shout:

"— in two minutes and thirteen seconds of the third round—"

The last two words jammed in Maguire's ears, echoed there. The whole thing came back to him like a knife stab in his brain, leaving him cold and shaken. The perspiration on his body was suddenly clammy. He had gone against them. He had *won* the fight. And they had Mike. They had the boy!

He shook his arm free from the ref's grip. He wheeled and rammed his way through the people jamming the ring. He climbed through the ropes, ignoring the cries that came after him. Spectators were

so crowded in the aisles, though, it was like a solid wall of humanity.

Someone grabbed Maguire's arm and as he tried to wrench loose, shouted, "I have Maguire right here by the mike, folks. Just a moment and I'll try to get him to say a few words for you."

Thoughts beat through Maguire's brain. He grabbed the mike that was thrust in his hands. He took a deep breath and said hoarsely, through puffed lips:

"Listen, will the party who called me before, call me at the hotel in fifteen minutes? I think I can make up for what happened."

That was all he got a chance to say. The announcer yanked the mike away from him. "Are you crazy?" the radio man yelled. "We can't allow things like that. All you were supposed to say—"

But Maguire was gone. He saw an opening in the mob ganged up in the aisle and leaped toward it. He rammed his way through, knocking away the hands that grabbed at him, tried to stop him. He broke into the clear at the head of the aisle and sprinted toward the dressing room.

**T**WO strange men were waiting for Maguire. They were middle-aged, nondescriptly dressed. The tall one with the long nose and the bloodshot eyes, said in a sad voice:

"Hello, Maguire. Sorry to spoil your triumph, but as soon as you're dressed, we want you to come downtown for a little talk."

The tall man pulled a wallet from his pocket, flipped it open to show a shiny police badge.

Maguire's mouth dropped open. He shook his head, put his hands over his tired eyes for a moment. Things were getting a little too much for him. For a moment, he misunderstood. He thought that they were here about the other business. He said:

"How—how did the police find out—"

"One of the neighbors saw you leaving the flat," the tall detective cut in. "She gave a perfect description of you."

Then it hit him. They were arresting him in conjunction with Frenchy Won's murder. He remembered the old hag who had seen him leave.

"Listen," he said desperately. "I—I didn't do that. I was up there, sure, but I—"

His voice trailed off. He couldn't explain why he had been there, without telling about the other.

"We'll hear all about it downtown," the dick said. "Get yourself showered and dressed."

Spam and Bootsie burst in then. "Hey," they shouted at Maguire. "What's the idea running out on us?" Then they saw the two detectives.

Maguire explained briefly, but maintained a steadfast silence, when they questioned him about it, while they took off his gloves, rubbed him down, and tended to his cuts and bruises.

All that time Maguire was thinking that he couldn't go down to headquarters with the detectives. The kidnapers would probably call him at his hotel soon. He had to be there to take that call, to tell them how he was going to make up for double-crossing them, so that they wouldn't kill his son.

Out in the dressing room, by this time, crowds of newspapermen were milling around. A couple of them recognized the detectives and, smelling a big story, tried to get them to talk, but they wouldn't.

While he was taking his shower, Maguire got the idea. He spotted the little window in the back of the shower stall. He reached out, while the detectives were busy with the reporters, and snagged some of his clothes. Shrinking back into a corner of the booth, he dressed. Then he opened the small, frosted glass window, leaving

the shower water still running full tilt. Under cover of the clouds of steam, he climbed out into a dark side alley.

Dressed only in shirt, trousers, and shoes, Maguire dashed to the street, hailed a cab, went back to his hotel. He ignored the curious glances of lobby loungers, hit right for the elevators.

**U**PSTAIRS, he entered his suite, flicked the light on. Maguire leaned back against the door, stared into the darkness of the room. Suddenly a splash of bright light from a flash hit him right in the face. A voice, disguised and muffled through a handkerchief, told him:

"I'm less than ten feet away and there's a gun trained right on your guts. Start talking, Maguire."

Maguire held his breath for a second, let it out explosively. He held up one hand before his eyes, trying to shield them from the light.

"It—it was an accident," he said. "But I guess that doesn't matter now. I—I'm ready to make up for it, though, if Mike—if the boy is still all right and you turn him over to me safely:"

"Make up for it? We lost a hundred thousand dollars tonight through your little blunder, Maguire. How can you make up for that?"

"I won that much," he answered. "And a little more. My share of the purse was seventy-five grand. I won another fifty on bets I made on myself, before—before you called the first time."

"Go on. You're beginning to make a little sense."

"I'll turn that over to you right now."

There was a moment of silence, then the muffled voice wanted to know, "How? You haven't that much cash. Don't try and pull anything slippery."

"I'm not." Maguire poured it out breathlessly fast. Everything depended on

this. He had to make it sound right. "I'll give you a check right now. Tomorrow morning when I collect, I'll put the money in the bank. Meanwhile you'll have my son. If the check isn't honored, or if there seems to be anything wrong in any way—you—you can see that your previous threat is made good."

Another moment of silence, then the man behind the flashlight said, "All right. We'll try that. Get over to the desk."

As Maguire moved across the room, the flashlight stayed right on him. He walked in its bright path toward a desk at the other side of the room, pulled a checkbook and fountain pen from a cubby hole. The man with the light stood right behind him, now. He said:

"Don't get any wild ideas about using that paperweight on the desk, Maguire, nor trying to signal through the phone in any way. Any move like that will put a bullet through the back of your head."

Maguire didn't answer. The pen started scratching on the check. He made it out to Cash, started to fill out the amount. While he worked, Maguire's brain whirled. He thought he understood the whole thing. He suddenly knew who the man was, standing behind him.

Abruptly Maguire stopped writing. The pen was poised in his hand. His little finger was on the filler lever. He said, without turning his head:

"Maybe I shouldn't have made it out to Cash. Maybe you'd have liked it in your own name, Elkins."

**B**EFORE the words were out of his mouth, Maguire flipped up the pen's filler lever, and hurled the ink-spouting pen, point first, back over his shoulder. The same instant he went over backward in the chair.

There was a scream of pain. The flashlight went out, leaving the room in

well-like blackness. The gun went off in a harsh crack of sound that echoed in the room. Plaster rained from the ceiling where the bullet had struck. Maguire rolled free from the chair and the writhing figure of Harry Elkins, his manager, pinned under it.

His hands found Elkins' arm, twisted, and the gun fell to the rug. Then both men clambered to their feet. Maguire flung himself headlong at the footsteps pounding through the dark toward the door. He brought Elkins down in a flying tackle. This time the roly poly little fight manager stayed down, as Maguire swarmed all over him.

Maguire held Elkins' throat with one hand, slashed his knuckles back and forth across Elkins' dumpling cheeks with the other. He said over and over:

"Where is my son? Where have you got young Mike? Talk, Elkins, or I'll beat your face to a pulp."

When Elkins didn't answer, he did that, but still it didn't work. Finally in a wild, almost insane fury, Maguire picked the other man up bodily, strode toward the window. Holding Elkins' screaming, kicking figure with one arm, Maguire threw the window wide with the other.

"Tell me!" Maguire said. "It's ten stories to the street."

That did it. Elkins broke, then, and blurted an address down in Greenwich Village. Maguire slung the fight manager to the floor just as the two cops from the dressing room at the garden, burst in.

Swiftly, Maguire poured out his story to them. Elkins denied it, of course. The

detectives were a little incredulous, but Maguire finally got them to drive to the given address.

They found young Mike there, bound and gagged, with a surprised and quaking small-time thug guarding him. Elkins broke down, then. He told bow he had needed a large lump of cash—much more than his share of the fight proceeds—to meet a debt on a bad market gamble.

"So that 'we' stuff on the phone, was a lot of malarkey, just to throw me off," Maguire said. "It was you, alone, all the way through, Elkins. I knew it was you, when you told me to get to the desk to write the check. Only one of my crew would know there was a desk in the room and that I kept my checkbook there.

"You, Elkins, were the only one of my gang who didn't come back to the dressing room after the fight, didn't know the cops were after me. You were standing nearby when I made that announcement over the mike."

Later, at police headquarters, they found that Elkins' gun was the same one that had shot Frenchy Wons. That left Maguire completely in the clear. Over a couple of sodas in an all night drug store, young Mike Maguire told his pop:

"That was some fight. That monkey guarding me had it tuned in on the radio. I almost went crazy when you came back and knocked Tomaine out. I guess that lug isn't as poisonous as his name, eh, pop?"

"Nah," Maguire said around his two straws. "They never are." He sucked happily at the soda. It had been a tough fight all the way around, but he had won.