

YOU'VE GOT *to be* TOUGH

*A Hard-Boiled Headquarters
Detective Lies in Wait for
a Fugitive!*

By OSCAR
SCHISGALL

*Author of "Death Stalks at Night,"
"There's Money in It" etc.*

My COUSIN, Police Lieutenant Cannaday, leaned across his desk and talked bluntly.

"Matt," he said, "I have an idea your name will be up for promotion this spring. Your record's pretty good. What you need now is a chance to do something that'll sound important."

"Name it," I said, grinning.

"Three years ago Hackenberg, a jeweler in Madison, was robbed by one of his clerks—young fellow named Dan Wilmer. You were put on the case. And you never caught him. You fell flat on the job."

"I *almost* nabbed Wilmer in Philadelphia once, and again in Albany."

"Which means he's probably been living close to New York," snapped Cannaday. "He left a wife behind—a kid who still lives over on Avenue A. The boys over there tell me



*"They're not going to catch me,"
he heard him tell her*

she's very sick, maybe dying. They got the news from the grocer that sends stuff to her flat."

"So?"

Lieutenant Cannaday frowned and urged.

"Look, Matt. I'll take you off this slot-machine job. Get back on the Wilmer case. I have a hunch that if Dan Wilmer learns his wife is on her deathbed, he'll risk everything to see her. If he shows up, grab him. It will look good on the records—'Detective Matt Stevenson captures man after three-year hunt.' See what I mean? Take Quincy along and get busy."

So that evening, with promotion in sight, I walked up Avenue A with Detective Quincy. I told him, "Shove yourself into a doorway and watch the house. If Wilmer comes, nab him before he gets in. I'll be on the roof. He may try the fire-escape."

Whether the trap would work, I couldn't guess. We were simply playing the chance that any man—even a crook—would make a desperate effort to come home, despite all dangers, if he learned his wife was dying.

BUT Dan Wilmer didn't come that night. Nor the next.

Three nights later it rained furiously. I was on the roof again, huddling for shelter beside a chimney. My coat was buttoned high. Cascades dripped from my hat brim. It must have been about two o'clock in the morning when a man came running across the adjoining roof.

I crushed myself back in the shadow of the chimney; held my breath. The buildings along the block were all of the same height. Anybody who wanted to reach this place could enter the house at the corner and make his way from roof to roof without any trouble. I peered out cautiously just as the man climbed over the low brick wall that separated each of the buildings. A tense, boyish figure. The collar of his jacket was turned up about his throat, and the peak of a cap concealed his face. But his identity was unmistakable. Danny Wilmer, all right!

In that moment I felt a kind of savage triumph.

But I didn't immediately grab him. It struck me, of a sudden, that the wisest thing to do would be to let him go down the fire-escape to his wife's flat. I could follow. By listening at the window I might overhear enough to save the State a great deal of trouble and expense at the trial.

Dan Wilmer, hurrying through the rain, didn't see me. He clambered over the balustrade, vanished down the iron steps. I

allowed him a full minute to descend. Then I, too, ran across the roof and went down the fire-escape.

The Wilmer flat was on the top floor, rear. I crouched on the fire-escape beside a window that wasn't quite closed; thrust my head forward inch by inch.

Inside, in the bedroom, a dim light glowed. A dumbstruck young woman—pale, hollow-eyed, with blond hair straggling down her cheeks—gaped in a mixture of agony and unbelieving joy at the rain-soaked man beside the bed. Dan Wilmer desperately twisted the cap in his hands. His drenched hair lay pasted to his forehead.

Suddenly he dropped the cap. He fell to his knees, buried his face in his wife's pillow. The woman's hand moved tremblingly to his hair. Her fingers crawled into it, through it, and tears began to drip down her pallid cheeks.

"Danny!" she whispered. "*Danny!*"

After a while he lifted his head and kissed her. "I—I heard about you, Millie!" he said huskily. "I phoned your uncle in Jersey City. He—he told me."

"But you shouldn't have come!" Panic rushed into her voice. "Danny, there was a detective who said if they ever caught you, it would mean ten years!"

"They're not going to catch me," he told her.

For a while they were in a tight embrace. Then the woman began to moan: "Why can't they understand, Danny? I told them you'd never stolen a thing in your life before that day. I even got the doctor to testify that my sickness had been coming on, and he wanted to operate and get me out of New York—and you didn't have a cent to pay for such things. I tried to make them understand, Danny, that you stole because I was sick and—and—"

Danny stopped her. "Explaining things to the cops," he said bitterly, "doesn't help. They're too tough to listen. I—I guess they've got to be tough."

I began to feel a curious, uncomfortable thumping in my chest. It occurred to me that I ought to hop into the room, draw my revolver, and arrest Dan Wilmer. What delayed me is difficult to explain. And suddenly he was saying:

"I've thought it all out, Millie. When I leave here I'm going straight to the nearest police station and give myself up."

"Danny, *no!*"



"I've got to," he said harshly. "I'm sick of being hunted. If I give myself up and confess, the worst they can give me is a couple of years. That's not as bad as *ten* years. I'll take it."

"But Danny," she whispered in horror, "a couple of years—"

"What of it?" thickly. "Once I'm out, I'll be free! I'll go straight. I won't have to come to you like this!"

"Come to me?" she echoed. "Danny, the doctor said—"

"I know what the doctor said," he interrupted. "But you're not going to die! If you've got something to look forward to, you'll pull through!"

I was watching the woman's eyes. Something happened in them. There was a glow that seemed unearthly. It was like an inner light that shone out upon the man, bringing radiance into her whole countenance.

Staring at her, I began to feel that maybe Dan Wilmer was right. Maybe with a goal to live for she wouldn't die. If she could look forward to her husband emerging from prison in only two or three years instead of in *ten*. Certainly he'd get a mild sentence if

he surrendered voluntarily; whereas, if I arrested him—

Then I remembered my purpose in coming here. Promotion. All I had to do was grip the shoulder of this slim young fellow. If I seized him instead of allowing him to surrender, he'd get ten years, but I'd be certain to win commendation. No question about that. But as I watched those two youngsters, something crashed inside of me. Just collapsed. And what did I do?

I turned from the window and climbed softly to the roof. Later, because I wasn't quite certain he'd have the nerve to give himself up, I followed him. I could have seized him without trouble—but it wasn't necessary.

In the morning, when the telephone rang, it woke me. Blinking, I reached out of bed and picked up the instrument. Lieutenant Pete Cannaday's voice rapped through the wire scornfully:

"Matt, where in thunder were you last night?"

"Watching the Wilmer house," I answered in surprise. "Why?"

"Listen, you sap! At five A. M. Dan Wilmer surrendered to the police. He said he'd just seen his wife and had decided to give himself up. If you and Quincy were watching the place, how the devil did you come to miss him?"

After a pause I said heavily, "I don't know, Pete. Maybe he slipped a fast one over on us."

Lieutenant Cannaday snarled derisively, "A hell of a detective you are! A man like you doesn't deserve promotion!"

He slammed up the receiver. For a while I lay there, staring thoughtfully at the telephone. Then I sank back on the pillow, clasped my hands under my head, and grinned at the ceiling.

I guess you can't always be tough.