

The Squeal Widow

By ANATOLE FELDMAN

It wasn't like a gang girl to talk. But sometimes there are circumstances about which the bulls don't know.

AT THE wheel of an automobile stolen within the hour for use in what he had been assured would be a fast trick, Jake Paterson grumbled nervously as he again swung into Broadway after his fifth circling of the clock.

"If we don't make it this trip," he declared, "I'm through. That cop on the corner is giving us the eye. He's wondering right now what in hell we're running a merry-go-round for. Another time around and he'll shove us to the curb and ask us what the hell."

"Dusty" Stilo, hunched on the seat beside him with eyes fixed ahead, answered harshly out of the corner of his mouth.

"Aw, shut up and drive. That's all you got to do. The cop don't even see us. If we got to go around again, we go, see?"

"Not me," said Paterson. "They'll be looking for this bus in a minute and they don't find me in it—not if I'm conscious. Make it fast like you said you would or I quit. See?"

His words were bolder than his tone. Sweating and shaky, he cursed himself for having agreed to pilot the bandit car. A daylight stickup on Broadway—what a sucker he was.

Stilo, narrowed eyes intent for the signal that would tell him the way was clear, contemptuously flicked a cigarette butt past Paterson's nose.

"Shut up, yellow," he growled, "and drive. Get over by the curb and take it easy. There's a parking place we can slide into if it's okay."

Paterson murmured rebelliously but nosed the sedan into the inner lane of traffic and proceeded slowly. Everybody seemed to be looking at him, registering his mug. He turned up the collar of his topcoat and pulled in his head.

Standing outside a jewelry shop a few doors from the next corner, "Curly" Drew pushed his hat back on his head and settled it forward again.

"Okay," said Stilo. "Hold it, Jake. Get in that hole right in front of the joint and lemme out."

Paterson's hands wavered indecisively on the wheel. There was a traffic officer ahead who must

have noted their repeated passage. Suppose he got nose-y when they stopped at the jeweler's?

Stilo's elbow dug his ribs hard.

"Get in, yellow," came the harsh command, "if you don't want to ride right on out in the country. You're going through with this, see, or you're through yourself for keeps."

Paterson chose the lesser evil. He would have some chance against the police, but none against Dusty Stilo.

His teeth chattered as he stopped the car. What if another machine should park ahead of him and wedge him in? There was space for another car. Suppose they couldn't get away?

"Take plenty room," Stilo directed. "Pull up a bit so you don't get jammed. Save room for us to swing out, you dumbbell."

Paterson moved on a few feet and hogged the space.

"Lemme wait around the corner—"

"You wait here," said Stilo. "We'll bust out when the lights are with you, understand, and we can roll right along. If anybody asks you to move and let him in tell him to go to hell. Now tighten up your guts and get set to travel."

HE GOT out of the car unhurriedly and crossed the sidewalk.

Curly Drew nodded and joined him at the jeweler's door.

They entered together with no evidence of haste.

Paterson looked furtively at the traffic policeman fifty feet away. He pulled his head further into his collar when the officer looked his way.

His foot trembled on the clutch. The car was already in gear. All he need do was let in the clutch and go away from there—leaving Stilo and Drew to shift for themselves.

If they got caught he'd be all right. They couldn't hook him up with the job. Nor with the theft of this automobile, the intended getaway car.

The moment he stepped out of it he'd be clear. Back on the driver's seat of the taxi he had parked a couple of blocks away he'd be out of the whole business and safe.

Safe for how long? What if Stilo and Drew were to make a getaway in spite of his desertion? Within twenty-four hours he would be dead.

Yes, and even if they were captured he wouldn't last long. Their friends would see to that.

Fear held him. He prayed that the holdup would take place without violence—without killing!—and shrank from a vision of himself being led to the electric chair!

KRIEBLER'S was a small shop, narrow-fronted, with a single display window, typical of upper Broadway above Seventy-second street; but it offered rich pickings for a holdup.

Disregarding the cheaper and more bulky gee-gaws, it was good for seventy-five thousand dollars worth of loot, consisting mainly of the stickup's favorite dish, diamonds. Given three minutes in which to dump into a couple of briefcases the contents of the trays beneath the glass-topped counter and in the safe, the bandits could walk out, but lightly and inconspicuously burdened.

As usual at this hour of the afternoon Kriebler was alone when Dusty Stilo and Curly Drew entered.

Drew had been posted to signal the departure of the jeweler's assistant for lunch and the absence of customers. He also carried the briefcases, one inside the other.

As the door opened, the jeweler looked up from some rings he was examining behind the counter towards the rear of the shop. He did not go to meet the seeming customers; gave them an anxious glance instead of his professional attentive smile.

First glance at these tight-mouthed young men who closed the door so quickly and pulled their hats down stirred his suspicions. He backed towards an open drawer containing a revolver.

Drew planted himself with his back to the glass-paneled door, shutting off the view from the street. A decorative background in the display window prevented outside observation from that angle.

Stilo whipped out an automatic and leveled it.

"Stand where you are!" he commanded, "and keep your hands on top. Where y'are, I said! Hold it!"

Kriebler hesitated. His left hand was on the edge

of the counter. His right was within reach of his gun. He was frightened but kept his nerve.

"There's a holdup alarm," he bluffed, "right under my foot. If I step on it a bell rings outside. If you want to go—I won't ring."

Stilo grinned. He knew it was a bluff; that there was no such alarm.

"Step all you want," he said, "but let's see your other hand. Put it up quick or I'll plug you."

Kriebler measured his chances. If he could duck behind the counter and open fire he would have them beaten. He needn't shoot at them but at his window. The shattering glass—

Stilo advanced.

"I'm telling you, fella—"

In his excitement Kriebler confused his action. He grabbed for his gun before he ducked.

Stilo fired twice.

Both bullets ripped into the jeweler's chest. The shock of their impact straightened him convulsively.

Dazed but still fighting, he raised his gun and tried to get Stilo. His wobbling hand sent the bullets wild, but some of them found the mark he had first intended to aim at—the street window.

The bandit's automatic also was pumping lead.

While the plate-glass clattered to the sidewalk, the jeweler slumped against his counter, an elbow holding him up for an instant—dead with three more bullets in his chest and two in his head.

In the sudden silence, Drew's voice crackled, swearing viciously. Dropping the briefcases they had expected to load with plunder, he spun to open the door.

He saw the passersby scattering in confusion, pushing one another to get away, startled by the breaking of the window and the shooting.

He saw more than that—

"Come on," he cried to Stilo, "that rat is quitting us! Run!"

Stilo already was running. He shook the empty clip from his automatic, rammed home a new charge.

Guns in hand they burst out of the shop together.

Nobody attempted to bar their way. The sidewalk was empty. Everybody was running—away.

Paterson had the car in motion.

They flung themselves into it as it left the curb.

Everybody was running away save one. The

traffic cop was coming to find the cause of the window smashing and all the commotion. The sound of the shooting had not reached him; the rumble of a subway train and the hum of traffic had drowned it.

Before the policeman was aware of what had happened, Curly Drew shot him down.

Stilo poked his gun into Paterson's side.

"Round the corner and drive like hell you—" his epithets blistered.

Shivering with fear, Paterson turned east. He drove desperately, panic-stricken, sure that murder had been done but afraid to ask questions. The vivid memory of the policeman stumbling and sprawling under Drew's fire was horror enough.

Drew opened the rear window to fight off pursuit.

Stilo kept watch forward while his gun prodded Paterson's ribs.

"You louse," he snarled, "you dirty louse. Thought you'd run out on us, didn't you? You lousy yellow rat."

Paterson's blurred brain sought to frame an alibi.

"Honest," he panted, "I wasn't runnin' out. I was just gettin' goin'—so we'd be movin'—just gettin' goin'—that's all. Hell, there's another cop!"

At the end of the long block a patrolman turned out of Amsterdam Avenue.

He ran into the middle of the street, pulling his gun and motioning for the speeding car to stop.

At Broadway, eight hundred feet away, he could see a tangle of cars and gesticulating people but could only guess at the reason for such headlong speed. There were two obvious reasons—an attempt to flee from an accident or escape after a holdup.

"Slow up," said Stilo.

Paterson glanced at him dumbly. They were making fifty miles an hour. The cop was still three hundred feet away. They could be making sixty when they passed him.

"Slow up, I tell you." Stilo's gun emphasized the order: "Cut your gas and lean on the brake. Make him think we're stopping. Understand?"

Paterson didn't understand but obeyed the prodding gun. Two hundred feet from the waiting policeman he started to reduce speed.

With squealing brakes the car skidded. He straightened it out with a shot of gas, skidded under another quick application of brakes.

"They're coming," said Drew, watching rearward. "There's a cop shoving off in a car. Give that bum the works and let's go."

Fifty feet from the policeman Paterson got the car again under control at twenty miles an hour.

"Hold it," said Stilo. "Make him think we're giving up. I'll tell you when to go."

The car rolled on easily, slower, slower.

"They're coming fast," reported Drew. "A couple more cars with cops. Give that bum the works, why don't you?"

Gun ready but counting the capture already accomplished the patrolman moved to meet them.

"Hold it," said Stilo softly, prepared to shoot through the open windshield, "hold it. Easy!"

Fifteen feet from the officer he fired.

AT the same instant, after a backward glance at the pursuing cars, Paterson lost his head. The car was still moving, still in high gear. He stepped on the gas.

With one of Stilo's bullets in his side the policeman staggered.

The powerful motor picked up with a roar. The car leaped into speed.

The policeman fired but without effect as self-preservation made him jump in an effort to escape the charging car. He could not move fast enough.

A fender struck and tossed him aside.

"Cripes," said Stilo with a crooked grin, "but that was good. Maybe for that, Jake, we'll save your spot for another day."

Paterson heard neither the compliment nor the reprieve. He had room for only one thought—escape!

Spurred by panic he drove like a madman.

Turning into Amsterdam Avenue he went north at a dizzy rate. A couple of blocks and he made a corner on two wheels, scraping the far curb and remaining upright only by a miracle.

East to Central Park West, then north again. Then west and north on Amsterdam Avenue. West to Columbus Avenue and north again—zigzagging across town but always making to the northward away from the scene of the killing.

The pursuit was long since lost but he went on at reckless pace, paying no heed to the demands of Stilo and Drew that he halt.

Here and there policemen, accounting him either a lunatic or drunk, ran into the street and flagged him. He rushed to them, driving them from

his path.

Stilo finally cut the ignition and pulled the emergency brake as they were about to dash across Broadway on One Hundred and Seventh Street in defiance of traffic lights.

Jabbering inarticulately, Paterson struggled to restart the car.

Stilo rapped him on the knuckles hard with his gun.

“Get some sense, you nut,” snarled Stilo. “What the hell are you trying to do? We’re away okay, miles ahead of everybody. You want half the cops in town tagging after us just because you’re crazy? Lay off, I tell you!”

His gun smacked Paterson’s hand again wickedly.

The pain brought Paterson partly back to his senses.

Stilo and Drew got him out of the car, abandoned it and boarded a taxi.

HALF an hour later they were in a Tenth Avenue hangout pouring stiff jolts of liquor into him.

The idea was to get him into a drunken stupor. The result was otherwise.

The drink inflamed him, gave him courage of a kind. His gibberings of fright changed to abuse which grew louder when, striving to humor him, they took it in silence.

Still hoping he would pass out, they fed him more liquor. It made him more violent in his talk, more unbearable.

Presently he announced that he was going out; that he was going his way and they could go to hell.

They sought to dissuade him peacefully. He damned them as this and that; struck at Drew.

“Agh!” said Stilo with angry disgust, “what’s the use?”

He answered his question by jabbing his gun into Paterson’s ear and pulling the trigger.

“And that,” said Drew after a long minute of quiet, “is that. Swell!”

Stilo shrugged, dismissed the killing with a word:

“He’d’ve squealed anyhow.”

Drew lit a cigarette, straddled a chair and stared without interest at the boys.

“Yeah. All right, he’d’ve squealed. Sure he would. But this don’t fix things so awful good. What do we do now?”

“Dump him.”

“And start that moll of his yelling. She’s a squeal-widow. Not so good.”

“No,” agreed Stilo, “not so good. She’ll raise hell.”

“Anyhow,” said Drew, “he’s the only guy the cops know to look for. See how I mean? They’ve got his number and figure if they locate him they can make him turn us up. If we turn him up stiff we blow our hand. Why not let ‘em keep on looking for him? It’ll keep ‘em busy, see?”

Stilo nodded: “That’s an idea. Yeah.”

“Yeah,” said Drew, “but how do we work it? We can’t shove him in the icebox.”

“Wait a minute.” Stilo scowled at the man he had so callously slaughtered: “Lemme think.”

SEARCH for Paterson began two hours later with the discovery of his cab near the scene of the abortive holdup which had cost four lives.

It was a fair conclusion that the bandits, anticipating a smooth getaway, had planned to transfer from the stolen sedan to the taxi. Abandonment of the stolen car much farther uptown showed how their plans had miscarried. The quick chase had forced them to leave the taxi with its identification of the driver.

Paterson’s photograph and license number, in the cab according to law, gave the police what seemed to be a quick and easily productive lead. The license bureau furnished his general description. Before nightfall an intensive hunt was underway—but that was as far as it got. He apparently had vanished.

Five days later Inspector Kiely, commanding the Detective Division, went on the warpath. The newspapers were riding the commissioner. The commissioner was riding the inspector. The inspector rode Captain Harvey, in charge of the homicide squad.

Inspector Kiely wanted scalps. He threatened to collect them in his own bureau if the bureau could not give him those of the bandits.

“Almighty!” he stormed, “ain’t there any real cops in this bureau anymore? You’ve got a picture of your man. What more d’you want? Motion pictures with him making a personal appearance?”

“We’re doing our best,” said Captain Harvey placatingly. “We’ll dig him up.”

“You will,” vowed the inspector, “or somebody else will. Find him, I’m telling you, and find him

quick. I want these cop-killers brought in and I want them now. I'm giving you twenty-four hours more to get Paterson. Get him and we'll get the others fast enough."

"We'll get him," nodded the captain. "We've got his cab and—"

"And what the hell good is that? Can his cab talk? It can't but he can. To hell with his cab. Get him."

A telephone call interrupted.

"Inspector Kiely," he responded irritably. "Oh, hello, Stanton—uh— How do you happen to horn in on this?"

Malcolm Stanton was a lawyer with a flair for criminal investigations.

"Kriebler's widow," he explained. "She thinks you're laying down. It's five days since her husband was killed and—"

"And it's five days since two cops were killed besides. We don't lay down, Stanton, and we certainly don't lay down on any cop-killer. Tell her that."

"I've told her. But between ourselves, Inspector, how does it look? You ought to be able to get the taxi driver, Paterson, without too much trouble. You've got his picture—"

"Don't tell me, Stanton," shouted Kiely, "for the love of Heaven, don't tell me that! Don't I know! But all the dumbbells around here can find out is that there are fifty thousand taxi drivers in town and that Paterson is only one of them! What the hell!"

"Then," said Stanton, "you haven't anything to suggest? Anything I might ride along on, I mean?"

"If I had I'd ride it myself. Now you," said Inspector Kiely more companionably, "you sometimes have ideas. Maybe you've got one on this job, huh? If you have—"

"I'll let you know," said Stanton—and left the inspector free to continue making the captain's life miserable.

ON the books of Dusty Stilo and Curly Drew the case was regarded as closed. They were out of their hideaway and once more openly going about their lawless concerns. Not even the shadow of a dick had appeared in their vicinity.

There had been some slight difficulty with Paterson's girl but she finally had accepted their explanation that he had run for separate cover. He had talked of going out of town, they told her—

Cleveland or Chicago. With the police looking for him, of course, he couldn't communicate with her. They'd hear from him one of these days and let her know.

"Nothing to it," said Stilo on the fifth day. "It's all washed up. How about tearing off that Brooklyn job tonight?"

"Nothing to it is right," said Drew, "not a damn cent. That jeweler guy had guts but no sense. Yeh, let's go to Brooklyn tonight. I need some jack."

"We'll start about ten," said Stilo. "Let's play some pinochle."

STANTON, long and lean, sauntered into Inspector Kiely's office five hours after their telephone conversation. An overdressed drugstore blonde, sullen and angry, with a vicious sparkle in her eye, accompanied him.

The Inspector scowled at her.

"Paterson's girl," said Stanton.

"I've met her," said Kiely shortly. "Well?"

"Well," said Stanton, "she wants to tell you who pulled the Kriebler job."

Kiely's scowl deepened. They already had used all their efforts short of violence to make her do just that.

"If she thinks she can get a deal for Paterson—"

"She knows she can't," said Stanton. "Tell him, Sadie."

Her lip and nose curled in a snarl.

"Dusty Stilo and Curly Drew," she stated harshly. "The lice! I hope they burn! I'm turnin' squeal mama!"

Inspector Kiely stared, skeptical. He could see a catch in it somewhere. A gang moll didn't come in and spill like this. There must be a trick.

"Where's Paterson?"

"In the morgue," said Stanton.

"The morgue?"

"For the last five days. I've found it helpful at times, Inspector, to look for them dead when you can't find them alive. You couldn't find Paterson alive so I looked for him dead and found him."

"In the morgue?" repeated the inspector incredulously.

"Five days," repeated Stanton. "Perhaps you remember a man getting cut up by a train on Tenth Avenue the night after the Kriebler holdup. No? Well, there was. A siring of freight cars went over him—mashed his head. Identification was made by letters in his pocket. Letters addressed to George

Jones at a cheap hotel in Chicago. The hat he wore had a Chicago label in it. So your people labeled him George Jones, bum, and let it go at that."

"And why not?" demanded the inspector, defensively. "There wasn't anything on him to show he was Paterson, was there?"

"No, there wasn't. But if you'll pardon the seeming criticism, Inspector, your people rested too readily on the apparent identification. There were several things to indicate he was a chauffeur. And you were looking for a chauffeur, weren't you?"

"We were," said the inspector sourly. "Well?"

"His shoes for one thing," said Stanton. "The soles show he was a driver, especially the right sole. They're scarred by the brake and clutch pedals; and you know how the right sole gets worn by the accelerator."

The inspector nodded; bit on a cigar and warmed up another section of Hades for his sleuths.

"And," said Stanton, "his coat shows he was a chauffeur. You know how big the pin is on a chauffeur's badge—like a horse-blanket pin. He only wears the badge while driving and the constant sticking and removal of the pin cuts up the cloth. Paterson's coat was like that."

The inspector nodded again and thought of many things to say to his men.

"And," said Stanton, "his left sleeve was considerably worn on the underside, another indication of his trade. You know how taxi drivers almost invariably rest the left arm on the door.

"So you see there were some pretty fair reasons for believing that George Jones of Chicago might actually be Jake Paterson. To make sure I took Sadie to the morgue. There's a mole on Paterson's back and a scar on his side which she remembers.

"And since she figures that Stilo and Drew put him under the train—"

"All right," said the inspector, "all right. Say

you"—to the girl—"where do we pick them up?"

"Tommy's," she snarled. "Tommy's speakeasy at Tenth and Thirty-six. The lice! They got him into the job and then—"

"Shut up," snapped Kiely. "When we want a speech from you we'll ask for it."

His broad thumb squashed a buzzer which summoned Captain Harvey.

"Dusty Stilo," he barked. "You know him. Get him. And a guy by the name of Curly Drew. In Tommy's joint at Tenth Avenue and Thirty-sixth Street. Get them now!"

"And don't forget," said Inspector Kiely while Stanton smiled, "don't forget to tell your flatties it's me that's handing them this Kriebler job on a platter. And say—you'll find Paterson in the morgue cut up by a train. That cleans it all up for you, don't it?"

"If we can get witnesses to identify them."

"To hell with witnesses. You get Stilo and Drew and I'll get the witnesses."

"Burn them," snarled Paterson's girl. "The lice!"

IN a private room back of Tommy's speakeasy Dusty Stilo and Curly Drew sat apathetically playing pinochle, killing time while waiting to start out on a restaurant holdup in Brooklyn.

Stilo melded eight kings—

The door crashed in, battered down with a fire-ax.

Detectives crowded them, guns pointing, demanding surrender.

Stilo and Drew went for their guns.

Police pistols blazed, thunderous in the confined space.

When the smoke cleared, Inspector Kiely had no use for witnesses.

The case was closed at the morgue.