



*Malloy heard a hellish clatter
break out behind him.*

Cold Chisel

by Robert Blackmon

Private Detective Stanley Malloy was not interested in the pearl bump-off case—until he found that hot gun-lead was moulded for a murderous, double-crossing. ... Cold Chisel

“**B**ack up and keep quiet, mug!”
The shrill voice stopped Private Detective Stanley Malloy halfway up the last carpeted flight on his way to the third-floor walk-up apartment of Damon

Curran, the traveling jewel broker who had called thirty minutes ago.

Tall figure rigid in his rain-spattered trench coat, he eased on up the stairs until his eyes cleared the floor above, and his thin, hard

mouth formed a soundless whistle.

The hall lights weren't on, despite the dullness of the rainy afternoon. Little light seeped through the curtained windows at each end of the third floor hall, yet Malloy instantly recognized the bony figure crouched before Curran's door near the end of the hall.

It was "Bats" Barren, a batty hop-head who hung around Putelli's, where one could dine, dance, and lose one's shirt in the private gambling rooms above the vicious little night club.

Bats had an automatic gripped in one bony fist. His skinny body was jerking, and Malloy knew the hop-head was doped to the gills, kill-crazy. Even as Malloy started forward, Bats shoved into the apartment, shrilled something the private dick didn't get, then the door closed.

Narrow jaw set, Malloy galloped up the remaining steps and ran down the hall, the trench coat whipping about his bony legs. As he ran, he pawed open the front of his coat, clearing the automatic bolstered under his left arm. Bats Barren and Putelli mixed in anything-meant trouble—and plenty of it.

He had taken but a half-dozen quick steps when the double blast of a gun made his teeth click together. The sound came from Curran's closed door.

Taut-muscled, Malloy sprinted the remaining twenty feet and gripped the door knob with a long-fingered left hand. His right was buried under the left lapel of his trench coat, glued to the butt of his automatic.

Something thudded to the floor on the other side of the door, and he heard an agonized groan.

Twisting the door knob, he flung the door open and plunged into the apartment. A gun blasted almost in his face, and a slug ripped splinters from the door jamb beside his head. He dived to the right of the door, gun out, the muzzle reaching for the chunky figure before him. Then his rust-flecked gray eyes took in the strange tableau in the little

apartment living room.

Damon Curran stood directly in front of the door, a heavy automatic gripped in his pudgy right fist. His thick lips were twitching, and his red-veined eyes seemed ready to start from his full, pasty face. His short legs were wide-braced, as though to keep his chunky, jerking body from falling.

Bats Barron was upon, the floor, groaning and jerking in agony. His thin fingers clawed weakly at his chest, and his bony features were horribly contorted. The automatic he'd held was not in sight.

"I shot him." Curran's voice was shrill, jerky with near-hysteria. "He's the one who came here last night and stole my pearls. You know the—"

"Yeah. I read about it in the morning papers." Malloy bolstered his gun, stepped to Bats' squirming body and knelt beside the little hophead. Bats was going fast. Half-intelligible words spilled from his writhing lips.

". . . blasted me—chisel—I came—phoney— Ah!"

Bats doubled in a sudden spasm of agony. Red bubbles formed and burst upon his twitching lips, then he went limp, abruptly. His moving body showed an automatic upon the blood-sogged rug beneath him.

Malloy got to his feet slowly, tiny beads of sweat on his narrow forehead. He'd seen death many times before and since he'd left the Force for private investigating, yet it affected him the same every time. He felt a little sick and empty. He swung bleak eyes to Curran.

The automatic slid from the jewel broker's pudgy hand and thudded to the floor beside Bats. His fat body-jerked with a shiver, and he nervously washed thick fingers before him, as though to cleanse them.

"—I'm sorry I shot at you, Malloy." Curran wetted twitching lips.

"I thought maybe you were with—him." His bulging eyes sought Bats' body. "I

know now I should have got you for protection like I always did when I come to town, but sales haven't been so hot lately, and I thought I better save my jack. I want you now. I thought that man would be back. He— Why, you must have heard all of it, his forcing into the apartment and—”

“I heard some.” Malloy looked about the room.

Curran's two heavy sample trunks were open against the left wall, beside a door that led to a bedroom. Malloy could see the sleek leather cases that contained the jewelry samples. Curran, he knew, usually rented an apartment while he was in the territory and pulled a few lively parties for the prospective buyers. The jewel broker had hired him on the last three trips, but this time he'd thought a pocketed gun enough—and he'd lost a fifteen-grand pearl necklace.

“This fellow,” Curran's bulging eyes seemed to fight free of the still hophead, “came in last night, held me up and took the pearls—fifteen thousand dollars' worth. They were insured, so if they aren't found, the company will have to pay me the—”

“Yeah, I guess so.” Malloy's sharp features were twisted in a frown. He moved to Bats' body, swiftly searched the dead hophead's clothing. Bats' pockets were entirely empty. Malloy got to his feet slowly, gray eyes frosty. Curran was still talking.

“I hope I can get the insurance pretty quick, because I'm going to need it to pay your healthy fee. You always charge so much. Of course, a retainer is out. I'll pay the whole amount when the insurance company—” He stiffened as a police siren keened outside. Some one was running in the third floor hallway. “The police will find I have a permit for the gun. I shot a burglar trying to enter and rob. You've got to help me, Malloy. I—”

“All right, all right,” Malloy cut him off impatiently, lifting a hand in greeting to the uniformed cop who had just appeared in the apartment doorway. Other feet pounded in

the hallway, coming toward them.

THE session with the police was mostly routine. What Malloy had seen and heard fitted exactly with Curran's story. The lanky private dick hung around after the police had left, taking Bats Barren's corpse with them.

“You—you can start on the job right away, Malloy.” Curran's pudgy hand shook as he caught Malloy's arm. “I was a sap to try to get along without you, with all that in the apartment.” His bulging eyes swung to the heavy sample trunks. Malloy could see stark terror written plainly upon the jewel broker's fat face. “That—robber might have some friends. They might try to—do something because I killed him. I had to do it I—”

“Yeah—sure,” Malloy told him absently, pulling his arm away. “And I'm not taking the job, Curran. I'm covered up with work.” He headed for the door, fists jammed in the pockets of his trench coat. “You'll be all right now. You got the guy. If anything else happens, call me. Right now, I've got to check some things.” He closed the door behind him as Curran started to protest, swung long legs toward the stairway, and a thoughtful frown bit deeply into his forehead.

Something was queer about the whole set-up, and queer set-ups weren't a private dick's dish—unless there was something in it. Bats Barron wasn't the type to push into an apartment in broad daylight with a gat in his fist. Three, slugs had been fired from the jewel broker's gun. Two of them were in Bats' chest. The third was in the door jamb. Bats' gun had not been fired. That was odd.

Why had Curran blasted at him? Had he actually mistaken Malloy for Bats' helper, or—what? If Bats had stolen the pearls the night before, why had he come back for a repeat job, especially in the daytime? And why had Curran been set for him, gun in hand and waiting?

Slowly, Malloy descended the stairs, puzzling thoughts tumbling in his mind.

Last night, according to the papers, Curran had not seen enough of the man to give more than a vague description, yet this afternoon he had spotted Bats instantly, had blasted him down. Curran had called Malloy before Bats had entered the apartment building. Malloy himself had evidently followed the hophead upstairs. There was no reason to expect Bats back. Heist artists seldom pull a repeat job. It didn't stack up.

And that crack about waiting until the insurance company paid off before he got his fee. Curran hadn't talked exactly right. It was as if the chunky jewel broker hadn't expected to pay off—as if he hadn't expected Malloy to collect.

The tall private detective reached the lobby, pushed through the street door and stalked along the sidewalk, heading downtown. His fists were still jammed in his trench coat pockets, and he was entirely unaware of the dribbling rain, the wet sidewalk beneath his feet, the streaming black asphalt to his right

There was a screw loose somewhere. The other jewelry in the sample trunks could have proven strong bait for Bats Barren, but a daytime job, especially a repeat, didn't seem natural. The little hop-head wouldn't have had the nerve to come back. With a fifteen thousand dollar string of pearls in his pocket, he'd have stayed away. He'd have left town to fence the string.

Malloy slowly shook his head, and his gray eyes were frosty beneath the dripping brim of his shapeless felt crusher.

There was something more than just a missing necklace and a dead hophead. The thing went deeper and—

Abruptly, Malloy became aware of the wet suck of fat tires upon the asphalt. A vague warning seemed to whisper in his brain—a warning that had kept him from stopping hot lead more than once.

He turned his head, and the coarse brown hair stirred upon his tight scalp.

A black sedan was rolling about forty feet behind him, cutting over to the left side of the street, toward him. One of the back windows was down, and he saw the black snout of a sub-machine gun easing up over the sill. Then the face of the man behind the gun became visible. It was "Cutter" Burke, a fish-eyed rat who hung around Putelli's.

The detective's whipping eyes saw the oblong pit of an areaway ten feet ahead and to his left. Gulping air into his tight lungs, he plunged along the sidewalk and dived for the pipe railing about the square hole against the brick building.

A hellish clatter broke out behind him. Something clipped through the fullness of his trench coat sleeve and burned his left arm below the elbow. A slug whanged the pipe railing about the areaway, then Malloy skidded under the pipe and dropped to the rain-puddled concrete floor below.

He caught most of the fall upon his hands, felt skin rasp from the palms as they raked the wet concrete. His head struck and made him dizzy, jammed the wet felt crusher down over his face. He brought up short against concrete steps and felt them gouge into his back, then he rolled over and shoved to his feet, pushed his battered hat back from his face.

Screaming slugs whipped concrete chips into the areaway, slammed against the brick wall above his head. Brick particles pattered in the rain puddles about his feet. Then Malloy heard the swift whine of an accelerated motor. The gun-chatter stopped abruptly. A moment, and the gurgle of water dribbling down the areaway steps was the only sound above the rapid pound of Malloy's heart.

He waited a moment, then risked a quick look. The rain-drenched street was deserted. A police siren wailed in the distance.

Malloy scrambled out of the area-way and swung long legs in a run for the corner, turned left. A taxi started out from the curb a

half-block away. He hailed it, squinted and tumbled inside.

“Straight ahead, buddy!” he rapped, then settled back against the damp cushions, his gray eyes bleak and frosty.

The left sleeve of his trench coat was slug-ripped. A superficial wound on his left forearm trickled blood down about his knobby wrist. He wrapped a handkerchief about the slash. Another handkerchief served to clean his hands. The palms were painfully slashed, but not bleeding badly. He dragged the soggy felt crusher from his head, and hard muscle knotted at the angle of his narrow jaw as he punched the hat back into shape and replaced it.

So Bats might have friends who might not like his getting shot. Putelli should be after a fat jewel broker named Damon Curran, not a private shamus named Stanley Malloy.

Unseeing, Malloy stared at the taxi meter, thin lips puckered into a soundless whistle. Outside, rain pelted down through the gathering dusk, slashed the taxi glasses. Malloy’s rust-flecked gray eyes seemed to grow harder and darker.

The whole thing seemed to swing about Putelli. Bats had been a Putelli man. So was Cutter Burke. But where did Malloy come in?

The private dick’s lips practically disappeared into a thin, grim smile.

“Let’s roll to Putelli’s, buddy,” he said crisply, and sank back against the damp seat cushions.

THE early evening crowd was thin at Putelli’s. Barely a half-dozen tables were occupied. The place seemed dead. Malloy stalked past white, empty tables and located Cervion, the head waiter. None of the other help was in sight.

“Ah, Meester Malloy!” Cervion’s tiny eyes, bedded deep in his doughy features, were bright and shifty. An uncertain grin split his thick mouth. “Eet is pleasure you come in,

no? I—”

“Where’s Putelli?” Malloy cut him off harshly. The tall dick’s fists were buried in his trench coat pockets.

“I—” Cervion’s tiny eyes focused upon the bullet-ripped coat sleeve, and he gulped. “I’m not knowing where Meester Putelli is went, Meester Malloy. Eet ees pleasure for to help you, but—”

“How would you like your front teeth knocked out, Cervion?” Malloy’s voice was almost pleasant. “I asked you where was Putelli?”

“He—he—” Cervion’s fat hands fluttered helplessly, then abruptly, an expression of profound relief swept over his round features.

Malloy spun, narrow jaw thrusting forward. Two of the club waiters were hurrying toward him. His fists dug deeper into his trench coat pockets. He knew the short one as Gus. He’d never seen the heavier one.

“Hi, pal.” His gray eyes probed Gus. “Just hunting Putelli. Any idea where—”

“Yes *sir!*” With a mocking gallantry, Gus stepped aside, waved toward a side door. “This way, sir.”

Malloy stalked across the floor. Gus minced at his side, grinning. The heavier waiter brought up the rear, glaring at the private dick. Cervion waddled through the swinging doors into the kitchen.

Malloy reached the side door. Still mockingly gallant, Gus opened the door and stepped aside. Malloy saw a narrow stairway leading up. It did not, he knew, lead to the gambling rooms.

“Mr. Putelli’s office is at the top of the stairs.” Gus’ short, powerful body made a quick bow. He grinned broadly. “I’m sure Mr. Putelli will be delighted to see you, *sir!*”

Malloy grunted, stalked up the stairs. The door closed behind him. Neither Gus nor the heavier man had followed. He went on up to the second floor, stopped in front of the first door, and the hoarse tones of a man talking

reached his ears. He eased nearer the door, listened.

"I tell you he dived in a areaway!" Malloy's tall figure went rigid. It was Cutter Burke. "I'd got him if—"

"If." The flat, cold voice of Putelli cut him off. Malloy's thin lips bared white teeth in a mirthless smile. "I've told you, Cutter, not to get gay with that chopper. I can't fix—"

Malloy palmed the door knob, twisted, and shoved the door open, stepped into the little office.

The three men inside froze, eyes wide as they stared at him. Putelli, lean, black-haired and a bit handsome in a cold, ruthless way, was sitting behind a small desk to Malloy's right. Cutter Burke was standing in front of the desk, his back half-turned to the door. He was staring over his shoulder, his fishy eyes wide, filled with sudden terror. A small, wiry man whom Malloy knew only as Sid, was sitting in a chair beside the desk. Sid's close-set eyes were colorless in his high-cheeked face, and his thin fingers were frozen in the act of toying with a small, gold pen-knife.

Cutter Burke moved suddenly, his husky body twisting. One clawing fist dug at his coat pocket.

"Freeze, you fool!" Putelli's clipped command stopped the gunner. He licked twitching lips and his fishy eyes stared fixedly at Malloy. "Hello, Malloy." Putelli's dark-skinned face creased in a grin. His sleek hair glistened in the light from the overhead fixture. Sid didn't move. "I thought you'd be around."

Malloy walked toward the desk, both long-fingered hands in sight. Cutter Burke gulped audibly and backed away as the tall dick came closer. Malloy stopped, his thighs touching the desk edge.

"I don't get the idea of the chopper," he told Putelli flatly. "So I dropped around to find how come. Mind telling me?"

Putelli built a pyramid of manicured

fingers, leaned back in his chair. His black eyes seemed to have a film over them. His lips barely moved as he talked.

"You know, Malloy," he said tonelessly. "Cutter jumped the gun when he emptied a trayful at you, but it all adds up the same. Nobody ever pulled anything over on me and got away with it. Understand?"

"No chance of your making a mistake?" Malloy kept both hands in sight, and his muscles tightened as he sensed a guarded footstep behind him. It was either Gus or the heavier waiter, he knew.

"You made the mistake, Malloy," Putelli said coolly, then his head bobbed in a quick nod.

Malloy felt a gun muzzle jam against his spine. His hands raised slowly. Making a break would be worse than useless.

"All right, Cutter. You and Sid know the rest." Putelli's dark-skinned face was moveless, his eyes still filmed. "Leave him the same place, then go for Curran. If he don't talk, tear the dump to pieces, and him, too. Remember Bats, and don't be careless. Get going."

Cutter Burke, fish eyes burning with a queerly avid light, stepped to Malloy and tore the automatic from the detective's holster. He dropped it in his coat pocket, caught Malloy's left wrist in hairy fingers. The gun pressure behind did not slacken on Malloy's spine. Sid pushed slowly to his feet, slid the pen-knife into his vest pocket and stepped toward the detective, every move deliberate, almost studied.

"Hold it a minute." Sweat beads clammed Malloy's forehead. His throat was dry and hot. His bands felt cold. "I'm clean so far as you're concerned, Putelli. I don't get this at all. You've got the wrong idea about—"

"You got the wrong idea, Malloy. Take him away, boys." Putelli waved a manicured hand.

PRIVATE DETECTIVE Stanley Malloy sat in the front seat of a '33 sedan. Sid was driving. Cutter Burke was on the back seat, alone. The two gunmen had taken Malloy down the back steps of Putelli's and across the alley into a garage. The garage, apparently, was also Putelli's, for the men took the first handy car. The sedan wasn't the same one they'd used to gun Malloy near the Curran apartment.

The rain had stopped, yet the streets were still wet when they left the garage. Windshield and glasses were dry. Tires made a wet, sucking sound as they rolled over the streaming asphalt. Fluttering neon signs and other lights killed the depressed beam of the car's headlights.

Sid tooted the car through the early evening traffic, colorless eyes cutting to the right at Malloy's every move. Cutter Burke was hunched forward, almost hanging over the front seat. Malloy could feel the husky gunner's breath on his neck. An effective mouthwash would have improved it, greatly.

"So you burned Bats, eh?" Cutter's snarl was vicious, gloating. "Thought you could get by with that, eh?"

"Can it, Burke," lipped Sid, not turning his head. "You spilled a trayful out of turn. Don't talk that way. He'll be talking to Bats in a few minutes." The slim gunman swung about a corner, made a traffic light, then cursed flatly as the sedan was pocketed behind a delivery truck and a trolley car.

Malloy sat motionless, jaw set, his mind churning.

So that was the line-up. He'd gone into the apartment after Bats Barron. Sid and Cutter had been outside, waiting. They'd heard the shots, figured he was the trigger man!

He half turned to explain to Sid and Cutter, then stopped and stared through the windshield with, frosty eyes.

The two rats would take explanations as whining.

Hard muscle knotted about Malloy's narrow jaws, then a gleam came into his eyes as he stared at the ignition switch directly in front of him.

Hanging down from the key in the ignition lock was a small metal tag. It swayed with the movement of the car, seemed to mock him. A quarter turn of that key and the motor would go dead, cut off. If a red light caught Sid

The sedan looped around a loafing car, then Sid cursed and jammed on the brakes as the intersection light showed red. A blue-coated traffic officer was almost directly in front of the car, facing them, not over twenty feet away. Sid jazzed the motor with quick, nervous bursts. Cutter Burke eased back on the rear seat, and his fishy eyes stared at the cop.

Deliberately, Malloy leaned forward and switched off the sedan motor. Carrying on in the same swift movement, he opened the right-hand door and stepped from the car. He heard Sid's gasp of astonishment, Cutter Burke's quick snarl. The husky machine gunner lurched forward, then Malloy heard Sid's rasping warning.

"Not in front of the cop, you fool! Sink that rod!"

The tall detective dropped the car key to the wet pavement and ducked to the curb. Looking back as he merged in the crowd upon the sidewalk, he saw Sid hunting for the key. He grunted, swung long legs in the opposite direction, and a smile tagged at his thin mouth.

Within ten minutes, he was legging it up the carpeted steps to Damon Curran's apartment on the third floor of the apartment building.

"So you came back." Curran held the door open with his left hand. His right was hidden behind him. Frank relief showed in his bulging eyes. He stepped aside, closed the door behind Malloy. "I'm sure glad you'll take the job. With your reputation for body

guarding—”

“Get this straight.” Malloy turned on his heel, stared down at the little jewel broker. “I’m not guarding anybody but Stanley Malloy right now. You shot Bats Barren, Lord only knows why, yet Putelli’s rats are after me. If I’m to be shot, I’d at least like to know why.”

“After *you!* Why—” Curran’s right hand came into sight, and Malloy saw that he held the gun with which he had shot Bats Barren. “But—Malloy!” Curran pawed at the tall dick, caught his right wrist. “You’ve got to save me! You’ve got to!” He sagged against Malloy in a funk of terror. The tall dick felt his hands clawing the side of the trench coat. “I can’t stand it! I—”

“Get this!” Malloy pushed him away. “Cutter Burke and Sid are—”

“Are here!” clipped a colorless voice to his left.

MALLOY froze, brown hair prickling upon his tight scalp. He turned, and saw Sid standing in the bedroom door, not ten feet away. The thin gunman had an automatic in his hand, its muzzle trained on the detective. Cutter Burke’s leering face and fish eyes showed over Sid’s narrow shoulder.

“All right, boys.” Damon Curran stepped away from Malloy, his right hand hidden behind his fat body. “Malloy made me pull it that way. He came up here and found Bats. Malloy got hard and Bats wouldn’t take it. Malloy shot him and—”

“Save it, sweetheart,” clipped Sid, his colorless eyes probing Malloy as he stepped into the room. “Cutter, you got the dick’s rod. Give.” He took the gun from Cutter without shifting his eyes, held it in his left hand. “We’ll burn both with the dick’s heater. The cops can figure any way. You slap Curran around and—”

The sudden blast of a gun cut him off. Blood spurted from his left hand, and Malloy’s automatic thudded to the floor.

Cotter bellowed an oath and pumped a slug at the jewel broker, who was to Malloy’s right. Curran had the heavy automatic in his right hand and was lifting it for another shot. The gun blasted and splinters flew from the bedroom door behind Cutter and Sid. Sid’s colorless eyes left Malloy, and he swung his automatic toward Curran. The jewel broker was screaming now, a horrible, terror-wracked sound.

Taut-muscled, Malloy left the floor in a headlong dive, his long arms flailing for Sid’s thin legs. Cursing, Sid tried to leap back and bumped into Cutter Burke. The husky machine gunner snarled an oath, knocked him away and off balance. Malloy crashed into Sid’s legs, the trench coat ballooning over his back.

Powder flame scorched the back of his neck as Sid fired, and he felt the whack of the slug hitting the floor beside him. He wound long arms about Sid’s legs and jerked. Sid yelped, pawed wildly to keep erect, then crashed to the floor beyond Malloy.

Cutter Burke leaped their struggling bodies and pounded toward Curran. The little jewel broker was on his knees now, screaming, holding the automatic with both fat hands. He blasted at Cutter twice and missed both times.

A bony fist crashed into Malloy’s mouth, splitting his lips and loosening a couple of teeth. He tasted blood in his mouth. Sid fought to squirm about, bring the automatic to bear on Malloy’s body. The tall detective released his leg-hold, swarmed up over the gunman and flung short jabs at his face. Cursing, Sid banged him in the face with his bloody left hand, tried to hit the tall detective’s head with the flailing gun. Malloy gritted his teeth, stabbed long fingers for Sid’s gun-wrist. He caught it and twisted savagely. Sid yelled shrilly, his thin body arching with agony. Malloy heard another gunshot behind him, heard Cutter Burke’s exultant bellow, Curran’s terrified scream.

Sid exploded into a wild effort to break free. Malloy put all of his strength into a right smash to the thin gunman's jaw. Sid's head, driven back by the blow, thumped the floor and the narrow-shouldered gunman went limp. His gun dropped to the floor. Malloy scrambled around, staggered to his feet.

DAMON CURRAN was on the floor, squirming, weakly fighting. Cutter Burke, a wild snarling in his throat, was leaning over the fat jewel broker, slapping at his bloody face with an automatic.

"Where are they?" he roared. "If you don't tell me where they are, I'll tear the face off you and—"

Trench coat a torn ruin about his tall figure, Malloy stumbled toward them, labored breath whistling through his set teeth. His foot struck something upon the floor. He looked down and saw it was his own automatic, splashed with Sid's blood. Scooping the gun up, he gripped the familiar butt with long, hard fingers.

"Cutter!" he rapped. "Drop that—"

A vicious snarl ripped from the husky gunner's lips. He whipped about, swinging the blood-smeared automatic. Crashing flame blasted from the muzzle, and Malloy felt a white-hot weight smash into his left arm, high up.

Grinding his teeth against the stunning pain, the tall dick aimed deliberately and squeezed the trigger. A sudden stream of blood gushed from Cutter Burke's throat. The machine gunner dropped his automatic and his hands went red to the wrists as he pawed at his neck. His fish eyes seemed to thrust out beyond his veined cheeks. He took a wavering step, another, then sank to the floor, a bubbling groan pushing from his blood-flecked lips.

Bleak-eyed, Malloy looked at Sid. The thin gunman was out, cold and unmoving. The tall dick stumbled to Damon Curran.

His drilled left arm throbbed at every

dragging step. He lifted it, thrust the hand into his trench coat pocket, hoping to ease the pain by supporting the weight of the arm. His numbed fingers touched beadlike objects in the coat pocket.

Puzzled, he pocketed his automatic, dug the things out with his right hand. The beadlike objects were pearls—two strings of them, apparently identical in every way.

Malloy nodded slowly, and his thin, hard mouth formed a soundless whistle as he stumbled on Damon Curran, knelt beside him.

The fat little jewel broker was moaning. His broad face was a wreck. Cutter's automatic had slashed his cheeks, knocked out most of his teeth. Blood made a spreading stain upon his shirt front, and his red-smeared fat fingers plucked weakly at his chest. His bulging eyes seemed glazed as he stared up at Malloy.

"It—was a chisel—Malloy," he whispered brokenly. "I was hard up for cash. I—"

"You got Putelli to snatch the pearls." Malloy's voice was hard and flat. "You were to collect the insurance and he was to fence the string for his share. You had a phoney duplicate made. Putelli got the phoney string instead of the real one. You kept the real ones, hoping to get both the insurance and the pearls. I was to bodyguard you against all comers, then you would blow, taking everything—a cold, double chisel. Putelli got wise, sent Bats back with the phonies. You shot Bats and frisked him for the phonies before I came in. With me in the apartment, Cutter Burke and Sid figured I was in on the chisel. They knew I'd guarded you the last two or three times and believed I was in on this. They thought I shot Bats Barren. You slipped both strings of pearls in my coat pocket before Cutter and Sid came into the apartment, via the fire escape. You knew Putelli was after them, so you wanted to shift the blame to me. You—"

"I—got scared." Curran's eyes were

closed. His voice dropped to a whisper, barely audible. "I knew they tried to get you. I heard the Tommy-gun. When you came back, I knew they'd tail you, knew they'd be here—soon. I wanted to get out from under before—they got me. How did you—" The jewel broker coughed softly.

"A number of things tipped me off." Malloy's voice had softened a bit. "Your saying Bats was the pearl snatcher, then his coming back. A number of things."

"I—thought I could—swing it." Blood

seeped from the corners of Curran's full mouth. The siren screaming outside almost drowned his weakening voice. "That's one chisel—that didn't—" Abruptly, his voice stopped.

Some one banged on the apartment door. An authoritative voice bellowed something.

"Not *one* chisel," Malloy said grimly as he pushed to his feet and stumbled toward the door, "a double chisel!"