



*Martin Kebler*

# Bullets Don't Lie

*by Owen Fox Jerome*

*Martin Kebler, Master Bullet-Reader, Traces a Death Weapon to an Unexpected Source!*

**M**ARTIN KEBLER, ballistics expert, adjusted the light above his binocular microscope. His face was grim as he surveyed the little row of fired bullets with their anonymously identifying

tags. He smiled bleakly as he picked up the fourth pellet, the one at the end, marked "death bullet."

He hefted it in his palm before placing under the microscope. "Jowls" Rittner, killed

by that bullet, had been a king of rats. He had richly deserved to die. But the law couldn't look at things that way. So—if Homicide had grabbed the right suspects—the owner of one of those guns whose test bullets were marked so simply from one to three, was doomed to pay whatever penalty the court meted out.

Kebler knew all about the case. Who didn't? The slaying of the wealthy night-club owner, Rittner, had been plastered all over the tabloids for three days. The ballistics expert had become acquainted with the roué in the old days when Kay Lamarr sang torch songs in his Zero Club. Kay was a swell girl. She had been fond of Martin, too—before she met his kid brother, George Kebler, the lad Martin had been putting through college.

Kebler sighed as he placed number-one bullet in position to compare the markings with the death bullet. It seemed a century ago, but it had only been five short years. Nothing had happened at first; things like that came about gradually. It had just been a few months ago that Kay told him she was in love with George, and there wasn't anything she could do about it. There wasn't anything Martin could do, either. George was a good kid—one of the best—and he was already making a name for himself at textile designing.

After a lapse of time Kay had gone back to work for Jowls Rittner in his new Crystal Slipper. And that was when trouble started. Martin recalled his last conversation with Kay.

"Mart, I can't stand it any longer," she had said. "If that overstuffed sausage doesn't quit pestering me, I'll—I'll—blow up."

"Why don't you quit, Kay?" he had suggested. "You don't have to work, you know. George will soon be on his feet, and—I'll help."

"You're such a dear, Mart," she had responded. "I feel like a dog already. And Rittner has me under contract. I'm not a quitter."

"I know that," Kebler had assured her. "I'll speak to Rittner for you."

"No, don't! George has done so. They—they had a bad quarrel last night in Rittner's office. Maybe things will be all right now."

But they hadn't been all right Jowls Rittner had been found on the floor beside his desk, his black blood ruining his Turkistan rug from a hole in his shirt front directly over his heart. Gripped in his right hand was his own .38 automatic, from which one bullet had been fired. The paraffin test proved that he had fired that shot himself. But the slug was never found. Either his killer had carried it away, or it had ricocheted out the open window.

Martin Kebler stiffened slightly and began re-counting the minute rifling marks on the second specimen. It matched perfectly with the slug extracted from Rittner's heart. Number two, therefore was from the death gun! Nevertheless, Kebler methodically removed it and inserted bullet number three for a check.

One gun, Kebler knew, had been Rittner's. One had been that of "Slats" Delaney, Rittner's plug-ugly bodyguard. The third had been a .38 automatic the detectives had found in—Kay Lamarr's handbag.

The third bullet didn't check, and the ballistics expert slowly removed it. He was alone in the laboratory, and now his face was suddenly old and drawn and gray.

He got up and went to another table where three .38 automatics laid, all tagged and numbered. Number one was Rittner's gun. Number three belonged to Delaney, who languished in a detention cell, awaiting vindication or condemnation. Number two—was the gun taken from Kay Lamarr.

It was the gun he had given George a couple of years ago when he had purchased a pair of Colts. Kay had got that gun from George. Before or after the killing?

Kebler's actions then became peculiar.

He went back to his workbench and opened a drawer. From this he drew an automatic, the twin to the death gun.

Carefully he changed the barrels of the two weapons. It took all of his skill with weapons to make both of them function properly, but he was something of a gunsmith as well as a ballistics expert.

This having been done, he put the incriminating barrel in its new housing back into the drawer. The death gun, with his own barrel, he loaded with one cartridge and calmly fired it into a huge bar of compound.

Digging out the bullet, he cleansed it and substituted it for number two. This done, he took the telephone and called for the captain in charge of the Homicide Squad. Captain Richards came in almost at once, his face beaming with expectancy.

"Well, Kebler," he asked briskly, "what's the verdict?"

The ballistics expert indicated the three guns and the four bullets.

"Nothing, Richards," he said in an even tone. "You've drawn blanks." Then, as

the captain's face registered incredulous disappointment, he went on. "There's no use holding out any longer. You'd finally get around to me, anyway. Here's the death gun. Check it yourself."

HE pulled open his drawer and took out his own weapon.

"Yours?" demanded Richards in disbelief.

"Mine," answered Kebler in a weary voice.

"Hell!" said Richards. "I would have sworn it was going to be the dame's gun. But—but, you! Why did you do it—if you did do it?"

"Ballistics don't lie, Richards."

"But—but why? The woman would have got off on a manslaughter charge. I knew you knew her, that she was going to marry your brother—but what made you tangle with Rittner?"

"She is my wife," Martin Kebler said simply.