

# The Lamp That Went Out

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The Case of the Lamp That Went Out by Grace Isabel Colbron and Augusta Groner

INTRODUCTION TO JOE MULLER

Joseph Muller, Secret Service detective of the Imperial Austrian police, is one of the great experts in his profession. In personality he differs greatly from other famous detectives. He has neither the impressive authority of Sherlock Holmes, nor the keen brilliancy of Monsieur Lecoq. Muller is a small, slight, plain-looking man, of indefinite age, and of much humbleness of mien. A naturally retiring, modest disposition, and two external causes are the reasons for Muller's humbleness of manner, which is his chief characteristic. One cause is the fact that in early youth a miscarriage of justice gave him several years in prison, an experience which cast a stigma on his name and which made it impossible for him, for many years after, to obtain honest employment. But the world is richer, and safer, by Muller's early misfortune. For it was this experience which threw him back on his own peculiar talents for a livelihood, and drove him into the police force. Had he been able to enter any other profession, his genius might have been stunted to a mere pastime, instead of being, as now, utilised for the public good.

Then, the red tape and bureaucratic etiquette which attaches to every governmental department, puts the secret service men of the Imperial police on a par with the lower ranks of the subordinates.

Muller's official rank is scarcely much higher than that of a policeman, although kings and councillors consult him and the Police Department realises to the full what a treasure it has in him. But official red tape, and his early misfortune ... prevent the giving of any higher official standing to even such a genius.

Born and bred to such conditions, Muller understands them, and his natural modesty of disposition asks for no outward honours, asks for nothing but an income sufficient for his simple needs, and for aid and opportunity to occupy himself in the way he most enjoys.

Joseph Muller's character is a strange mixture. The kindest-hearted man in the world, he is a human bloodhound when once the lure of the trail has caught him. He scarcely eats or sleeps

when the chase is on, he does not seem to know human weakness nor fatigue, in spite of his frail body. Once put on a case his mind delves and delves until it finds a clue, then something awakes within him, a spirit akin to that which holds the bloodhound nose to trail, and he will accomplish the apparently impossible, he will track down his victim when the entire machinery of a great police department seems helpless to discover anything.

□□The high chiefs and commissioners grant a condescending permission when Muller asks, "May I do this? ... or may I handle this case this way?" both parties knowing all the while that it is a farce, and that the department waits helpless until this humble little man saves its honour by solving some problem before which its intricate machinery has stood dazed and puzzled.

□□This call of the trail is something that is stronger than anything else in Muller's mentality, and now and then it brings him into conflict with the department, ... or with his own better nature.

□□Sometimes his unerring instinct discovers secrets in high places, secrets which the Police Department is bidden to hush up and leave untouched. Muller is then taken off the case, and left idle for a while if he persists in his opinion as to the true facts. And at other times, Muller's own warm heart gets him into trouble. He will track down his victim, driven by the power in his soul which is stronger than all volition; but when he has this victim in the net, he will sometimes discover him to be a much finer, better man than the other individual, whose wrong at this particular criminal's hand set in motion the machinery of justice. Several times that has happened to Muller, and each time his heart got the better of his professional instincts, of his practical common-sense, too, perhaps, ... at least as far as his own advancement was concerned, and he warned the victim, defeating his own work. This peculiarity of Muller's character caused his undoing at last, his official undoing that is, and compelled his retirement from the force. But his advice is often sought unofficially by the Department, and to those who know, Muller's hand can be seen in the unravelling of many a famous case.

□□The following stories are but a few of the many interesting cases that have come within the experience of this great detective.

□□But they give a fair portrayal of Muller's peculiar method of working, his looking on himself as merely an humble member of the Department, and the comedy of his acting under "official orders"

□□when the Department is in reality following out his directions.

□□THE CASE OF THE LAMP THAT WENT OUT

□□by Grace Isabel Colbron and Augusta Groner  
CHAPTER I

□□THE DISCOVERY

□□The radiance of a clear September morning lay over Vienna. The air was so pure that the sky shone in brightest azure even where the city's buildings clustered thickest. On the outskirts of the town the rays of the awakening sun danced in crystalline ether and struck answering gleams from the dew on grass and shrub in the myriad gardens of the suburban streets.

□□It was still very early. The old-fashioned steeple clock on the church of the Holy Virgin in Hietzing had boomed out six slow strokes but a short time back. Anna, the pretty blonde girl who carried out the milk for the dwellers in several streets of this aristocratic residential suburb, was just coming around the corner of the main street into a quiet lane. This lane could hardly be dignified

by the name of street as yet, it was so very quiet. It had been opened and named scarcely a year back and it was bordered mostly by open gardens or fenced-in building lots. There were four houses in this street, two by two opposite each other, and another, an old-fashioned manor house, lying almost hidden in its great garden. But the quiet street could not presume to ownership of this last house, for the front of it opened on a parallel street, which gave it its number. Only the garden had a gate as outlet onto our quiet lane.

□□Anna stopped in front of this gate and pulled the bell. She had to wait for some little time until the gardener's wife, who acted as janitress, could open the door. But Anna was not impatient, for she knew that it was quite a distance from the gardener's house in the centre of the great stretch of park to the little gate where she waited. In a few moments, however, the door was opened and a pleasant-faced woman exchanged a friendly greeting with the girl and took the cans from her.

□□Anna hastened onward with her usual energetic step. The four houses in that street were already served and she was now bound for the homes of customers several squares away. Then her step slowed just a bit. She was a quiet, thoughtful girl and the lovely peace of this bright morning sank into her heart and made her rejoice in its beauty. All around her the foliage was turning gently to its autumn glory of colouring and the dewdrops on the rich-hued leaves sparkled with an unusual radiance. A thrush looked down at her from a bough and began its morning song. Anna smiled up at the little bird and began herself to sing a merry tune.

□□But suddenly her voice died away, the colour faded from her flushed cheeks, her eyes opened wide and she stood as if riveted to the ground. With a deep breath as of unconscious terror she let the burden of the milk cans drop gently from her shoulder to the ground.

□□In following the bird's flight her eyes had wandered to the side of the street, to the edge of one of the vacant lots, there where a shallow ditch separated it from the roadway. An elder-tree, the great size of which attested its age, hung its berry-laden branches over the ditch. And in front of this tree the bird had stopped suddenly, then fluttered off with the quick movement of the wild creature surprised by fright. What the bird had seen was the same vision that halted the song on Anna's lips and arrested her foot.

□□It was the body of a man - a young and well-dressed man, who lay there with his face turned toward the street. And his face was the white frozen face of a corpse.

□□Anna stood still, looking down at him for a few moments, in wide-eyed terror: then she walked on slowly as if trying to pull herself together again. A few steps and then she turned and broke into a run. When she reached the end of the street, breathless from haste and excitement, she found herself in one of the main arteries of traffic of the suburb, but owing to the early hour this street was almost as quiet as the lane she had just left.

□□Finally the frightened girl's eyes caught sight of the figure of a policeman coming around the next corner. She flew to meet him and recognised him as the officer of that beat.

□□"Why, what is the matter?" he asked. "Why are you so excited?"

□□"Down there-in the lane, there's a dead man," answered the girl, gasping for breath.

□□"A dead man?" repeated the policeman gravely, looking at the girl.

□□"Are you sure he's dead?"

□□Anna nodded. "His eyes are all glassy and I saw blood on his back."

□□"Well, you're evidently very much frightened, and I suppose you don't want to go down there again. I'll look into the matter, if you will go to the police station and make the announcement. Will you do it?"

□□"Yes, sir."

□□"All right, then, that will gain time for us. Good-bye, Miss Anna."

□□The man walked quickly down the street, while the girl hurried off in the opposite direction, to the nearest police station, where she told what she had seen.

□□The policeman reached his goal even earlier. The first glance told him that the man lying there by the wayside was indeed lifeless.

□□And the icy stiffness of the hand which he touched showed him that life must have fled many hours back. Anna had been right about the blood also. The dead man lay on the farther side of the ditch, half down into it. His right arm was bent under his body, his left arm was stretched out, and the stiffened fingers ... they were slender white fingers ... had sought for something to break his fall. All they had found was a tall stem of wild aster with its purple blossoms, which they were holding fast in the death grip. On the dead man's back was a small bullet-wound and around the edges of it his light grey coat was stained with blood. His face was distorted in pain and terror. It was a nice face, or would have been, did it not show all too plainly the marks of dissipation in spite of the fact that the man could not have been much past thirty years old. He was a stranger to the policeman, although the latter had been on this beat for over three years.

□□When the guardian of the law had convinced himself that there was nothing more to do for the man who lay there, he rose from his stooping position and stepped back. His gaze wandered up and down the quiet lane, which was still absolutely empty of human life.

□□He stood there quietly waiting, watching over the ghastly discovery.

□□In about ten minutes the police commissioner and the coroner, followed by two roundsmen with a litter, joined the solitary watcher, and the latter could return to his post.

□□The policemen set down their litter and waited for orders, while the coroner and the commissioner bent over the corpse. There was nothing for the physician to do but to declare that the unfortunate man had been dead for many hours. The bullet which struck him in the back had killed him at once. The commissioner examined the ground immediately around the corpse, but could find nothing that pointed to a struggle. There remained only to prove whether there had been a robbery as well as a murder.

□□"Judging from the man's position the bullet must have come from that direction," said the commissioner, pointing towards the cottages down the lane.

□□"People who are killed by bullets may turn several times before they fall," said a gentle voice behind the police officer. The voice seemed to suit the thin little man who stood there meekly, his hat in his hand.

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