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THE WHISPERING DEAD

ALFRED GANACHILLY

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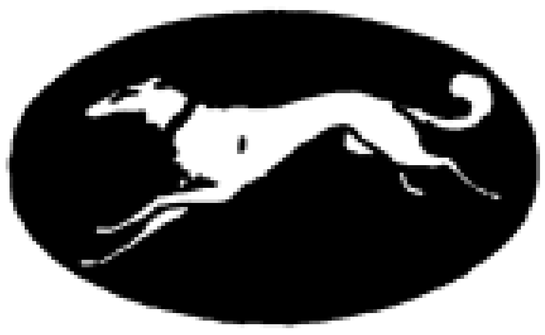
BY

ALFRED GANACHILLY



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IN *the detective story of these pages, there will be some who will recall the excitement that ran through South America a few years before the Great War as each move was swiftly taken by the master-brain which unravelled the knots of one of the most baffling and mysterious crimes of our times. A vast political interest became involved by accident; but, being once in the morass, took sides against justice with cold-blooded effrontery. Everything unwittingly seemed to concentrate on helping the escape of the guilty man; and it was only the dogged logic and the unsleeping vigilance of the famous Chilean detective that at last brought the dead man out of the handsome grave in which Germany had with pomp and goose-step buried him, and so allowed the poor dead mutilated lips to speak and —even at the cost of comic relief to the burial service—brought a felon's doom to the author of the crime. I know no story that could better illustrate the essential German moral of the modern age than this thrilling story of swift adventure.*

HALDANE MACFALL

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PRELUDE

WHERE a brilliantly lighted café in Santiago city sent forth an electric flare into the glorious night of Chile's beautiful capital, enhancing the purple and lilac glory without, in a secluded corner amidst the shadows flung by the glittering splendour of the fashionable café there sat two men in earnest talk at a small table well withdrawn, but not conspicuously isolated from the clatter and chatter of the ranked white tables where rank and fashion were foregathered hard by.

Neither of the men, however, was concerned with the beauty of the night. They spoke low, as in confidence, in short sentences, long intervals between—but their close converse was the deceptive duel of two deadly enemies, close-locked in stilly strife.

There was a skilful cynicism and wit in selecting such a public haunt of fashion for the discussion that was afoot. No man who looked upon them could have guessed what was passing between these two apparently intimate men of the world. Both were of the world of fashion, modishly dressed, mundane of that somewhat smart

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raffish mundaneness that suggests the gambler, the man about town, not innocent of debauch.

The fairer man of the two, of medium height and powerful build, was clearly at bay, seeking mercy; the other, reckless, sinewy, graceful in gesture as a leopard is graceful, was pressing with merciless sneer and relentless will for a decision. His gloved hand lay easily on the table, disciplined to hide sentiment; but his cultured voice, pitched low, showed no tinge of pity. The two men understood each other well; and there was no pretence between them.

The slender darker dandy stared cold-eyed at the other—a cynical smile upon his handsome lips.

"Oh, no, my friend—I meet you in no dark cellars nor disguised. Oh, no!"

The fair man, who looked worried, tried to catch the airy cynicism of the other; but he had flushed a little hotly even as he spoke.

"As you will," said he—"but you will confess that your letter read like that of a man who enjoys melodrama."

The dark fellow's keen eyes never left him, embarrassed him, burnt into his pride even as they smiled at him.

"Truth always sounds melodramatic—to a liar," he said.

"Are we here to quarrel?" languidly asked the fair fellow.

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The dark man's gloved fingers tapped the back of the other's fat fingers which rested upon the table.

"You *daren't* quarrel"—came the quick retort. "High position has always the defect that a scandal can kill it."

The fair fellow bit his sensual underlip.

"You dub me a shameless gambler; but I am not the only man who gambles in Chiie," he said.

"But the others gamble with gold—you with paper promises."

The fair man flushed a little.

"My honour ——"

The other laughed sharply.

"Honour does not gamble with slips of paper against gold, and spend the gold."

In the calm silence that the cynical lips allowed to follow his truism, the fair fellow's blood reddened his face. At last he said hoarsely in his heavy guttural Spanish:

"Where I come from, we allow no man to call us thief and live."

The dark fellow laughed, almost gaily.

"Where *I* come from, we are forbidden to duel with thieves," he retorted; and his Spanish was musical.

The other brooded awhile, the darker man's keen eyes ever upon him. At last he said with guttural solicitude:

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"I do not see why we should bandy bitter names. If our friendship is to end——"

The interruption came swift as lightning stroke before the phrase's fuller shaping.

"Our *friendship* ends the day you pay—and I thank my little twinkling stars that it will not be longer than six more full moons."

"I cannot pay——"

"You *shall* pay."

"I mean in six months."

"*I* mean in six months."

"It means utter ruin to me."

"If so; then it is ruin."

"But—but——" the fair fellow stammered in confusion. The other offered no help. "But—I know no way."

The cynical smile returned to the handsome vicious lips of the dark dandy.

"Nonsense," said he. "The man who has played with paper chits against the gold of the bloods of Chile, will find the money before six moons are worn out. Don't be modest. Opera-singers, who get a hundred pounds a night for singing, are not given scraps of paper by you—dancers do not dance for you for paper scrip—if you can pay them you can pay me. You have paid them long enough with my gold. It would not read well in the evening papers." He waved his gloved hand towards a lad who ran by, cry-

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ing the news—"Think how the people would gloat over it! You could not live a day longer in Chile."

The fair-haired man lit a cigarette; and after a long silence between them, he at last surrendered.

"I understand. If I cannot find this large sum of money in six months, I am to be made a social outcast."

The dark dandy shrugged his shoulders, rose, and laughed airily.

"I knew you would understand," said he. "Good night."

He stepped serenely into the flare of the brilliantly lighted café and was at once greeted from several tables, as the other stepped from the dark corner into the deeper darkness of the street and quietly stole away.

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CHAPTER I

THE sun was shining gaily over the beautiful capital of Chile as the German Ambassador, Baron von Bodmann, walked into the offices of his Embassy, followed by his secretary Baron Welcheck.

The Chancellor, Beckert, seated at his desk, looked up as the great man entered.

"Good morning, Herr Beckert," said the Ambassador, condescending amiably to take notice of the man, who, on hearing his chief's voice, immediately left his typing and stood up, subserviently, clicked his heels together, and, bowing low, replied formally:

"*Guten morgen*, Excellency, I hope your Excellency is quite well." His hands were twitching nervously on the desk, and he put them behind him.

"I am," answered the Ambassador, and added as though the Chilean climate were his footstool—"on a day like this one could not feel otherwise; but, Herr Beckert, you don't look very well yourself—not at all well——" He stared at the livid man.

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However, so trivial a matter as this fellow's health did not worry His Excellency overmuch; so he turned his back on Herr Beckert, Chancellor of the Embassy and the Ambassador's right hand. As suddenly he hesitated, halted, and fell a-brooding. What the devil did *he* care what happened to his Chancellor, as long as the fellow did his work properly? If the Chancellor died, there were, in the Kaiser's Empire, hundreds of mere Chancellors awaiting the post and glad to get it. He shrugged, made as though to step towards his own room, hesitated again. But the devil take the fellow! what was the matter with him? He looked as if he had been seeing ghosts! However, he had other things to think of than the bilious attacks of his Staff. He hesitated again, changed his mind—and moved towards the door of his office.

Before His Excellency could step into his private office, Beckert, who was nervous and harried and looked really ill, exclaimed anxiously:

"I have again had news, sir; I have received another anonymous letter saying that my life is at an end, that, before this week is out, I shall be a dead man. It has the Caleu postmark. It is from those men. Your Excellency, I beseech you to ask the Chilean Government, the police, or the army authorities, to place a guard here and at my house. I am certain those Caleu people we prose-

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cuted, and who were sent to prison, mean what they say; I have seen suspicious individuals around here off and on. This morning I caught sight of them; and I dared not approach the door of the Embassy offices until I saw the policeman coming along. When he came in sight the men disappeared as if by magic. I am a weak man. I have a weak heart. I could not defend myself against a child. Your Excellency knows I am not able to take care of myself. Please obtain the necessary protection!"

The man was clearly scared; and he spoke with passionate insistence.

His Excellency smiled contemptuously at the pusillanimous individual before him. The ambassadorial, upturned, catlike moustaches nearly touched His Excellency's eyelids, his fat rubicund cheeks grew inflamed, his eyes became hard, his upturned lips showed his white teeth, his appearance was that of a tiger. With his clenched hand held up menacingly towards the Chancellor, he cried hoarsely:

"Coward! Do you imagine for one moment that I am going to disgrace our country, disgrace myself, disgrace Welcheck here, by asking protection for an insect like you? If you mention this to any living soul here in Santiago, or here in Chile—if you mention your fears and your cowardice to any one—I shall dismiss you instantly,

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without consulting Berlin. To confess publicly to all Chile that there exists a German coward, never!"

He made a step forward as if to strike the cowed man and stopped perplexed. He had been talking to a coward, to an insect, yet when advancing that one step, what did he see in this man Beckert's eyes? Yet—No, he must have been mistaken; the look which he thought he had seen, the look of a hyena at bay, had disappeared. No; it had gone like a flash—there stood the coward, trembling with fear. It must have been his fancy.

"Excellency, I am no coward," said Beckert gently, but with dignity. "I can face death as well as any of the bravest in the Fatherland. My nerves are jarred; these anonymous letters have destroyed my health through continuous watchfulness. Last night I had another epileptic fit; and excitement and nervous strain render me an easier prey to them." He pulled himself together, drew himself up, and added: "You are right, Excellency; do not ask for protection; *Deutschland über alles*, and also the good name of her brave sons."

"That's the way to talk," said Von Welcheck, patting the shoulder of the Chancellor: "you cannot possibly believe those letters; it must be a joke that is being played upon you."

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Beckert smiled a sickly smile, but said nothing. There was a long pause—then he bowed, but his lips did not move. The Ambassador turned from Welcheck to the silent figure.

"I am glad to see you in a more tranquil frame of mind," said His Excellency. "Finish those dispatches as soon as possible; type them yourself; you know their contents must not go further. The work will change the channel of your thoughts." And with his grand manner he stepped into his private bureau.

The Chancellor Beckert watched him under his brows, and his eyes held an ugly look in strange keeping with the coward's part he had just been playing.

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CHAPTER II

BECKERT, left alone with Welcheck, watched him under his bushy brows through his glasses out of curious eyes that, by the intentness of their gaze, would have caught the attention of any man except this self-centred dandy. A strained anxiety, uncanny by very reason of the hideous self-discipline that the man was putting upon himself, could not have been lost even on Welcheck at most times. It was more than pathetic. That the Chancellor was in a state bordering upon absolute terror such as he had vowed that the threat of assassination had put upon him, there could be no doubt; but the modish Welcheck happened to have his eyes on other matters, more or less feminine.

At last Welcheck strolled out of the room towards the street, well-groomed and pleased that he was well-groomed. But as he reached the door, he hesitated; what caused him to pause there he himself probably could not have explained. But he said, as if in explanation, that he would be back in a few minutes; the door closed on him; and he was gone.

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A look of relief passed over the Chancellor's pallid face. He waited until the last brisk foot-fall of the departing man pronounced the silence of the room. Then glancing furtively about him, he swiftly crossed the room on tiptoe; glanced behind the large screen that stood across the huge fireplace; tugged it more closely about the hearth, and, in the doing, he nearly slipped to a fall, for the floor thereby was wet as if it had lately been washed. His face became livid. He seemed to dread an enemy in every shadow. Beads of perspiration broke out upon his pallid countenance; he swept his handkerchief over his face as he swiftly and stealthily stepped back to his desk.

Pulling his will together, he sat down at his Adler typewriting machine and tapped out official dispatches with feverish address. The business steadied his nerves, and he was soon thoroughly master of himself.

This man was clearly a man of action; action cleared his brain; lack of action fretted his will. As the click of the typewriter ceased, Beckert was wholly himself again. A man now sat in his seat who, with brows knitted and stubborn will, was setting himself a stern path to follow, a marked and definite design. The tensity of his determination blanched his cheek, but it was the whiteness of a man about to act on a vital decision.

He glanced at the clock. But a quarter of an

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hour had gone by since Welcheck had left him alone.

The Chancellor arose deliberately; and, bracing his nerves, knocked at his chief's door, and entering presented the dispatches to the Ambassador for signature. When they were signed, the Ambassador, without looking up, asked Beckert to address them to the Foreign Office, Berlin, and to give him the envelope. Beckert had moved behind the Ambassador, and the evil look in his eyes betrayed no love of the great man.

"I am going to the Post Office with Welcheck and he can post them himself," said His Excellency. "I am leaving nothing to chance." The Chancellor's face blanched as he stepped back with a baffled look, but the other did not notice it as he went on: "These documents should be sent by courier, but maybe it is better to send them by post as the damned English may even waylay the courier and steal them from him. By the way," he looked up, "where is that fellow, the porter, Tapia? I did not see him at the door when I came in."

Beckert steadied his voice and answered indifferently:

"I sent him to the Post Office to get some stamps just before you came, sir; he should be back by now."

Beckert started as Welcheck came into the

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room, hat in hand, gloves and stick, quite the dandy. "In your state of nerves," said Welcheck, "you should have that fellow Tapia by you; he is a sturdy chap and faithful; being an old soldier he can handle a sabre or stick and give you ample protection if necessary." He turned to the Ambassador: "Excellency, it is eleven twenty-five, and if you want to go to the Post Office before lunch, I might suggest we go now."

"I am ready," said His Excellency, rising, and following Welcheck, who stepped briskly towards the hat-rack, handed His Excellency his hat, gloves, and stick; opened the door to allow him to pass, bowing slightly as his chief stepped forth after telling Beckert that he would be back about three o'clock when work would be resumed. Welcheck closed the door and followed the great man into the street. Could he have looked into the room he would have seen a black scowl on the subservient Chancellor's face that would have caused him wonder.

The Embassy offices of the Chilean capital were situated in the Calle Nataniel leading from the world-famed Alameda, the beautiful wide avenue which runs from east to west of Santiago, with its broad sidewalks, its roadways on either side crowded with traffic, and in the centre the ample

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walk for pedestrians lined by secular trees, which border the picturesque rivulets that run on each side of the promenade.

Under the shade of these gigantic trees that met overhead, His Excellency paused before the wonderful vista of the snow-capped Andes.

"What a climate!" he exclaimed, "nearly chilly in the shade on a midsummer day! Who would believe that in South America one could be cool in summer? But, my dear Baron, these Andes are the refrigerating plant for the heat in the atmosphere and for the blood of the Chileans." After which very original epigram he smiled conceitedly.

"The blood of the Chileans is cold, but—suffering from what they may believe an injustice it boils," said Welcheck; and added, "I don't know, Excellency, what to think about the threats poor Beckert has received. They have undoubtedly made an impression on him. I have often wondered if the 'Compadres' of those men in prison would dare to assault a member of our Embassy. Beckert said this morning that he had seen suspicious persons about, and he was undoubtedly in a frightened and nervous condition. I told him I thought it was a joke, but if he really saw those persons it may turn into a very tragic joke."

They walked on in silence awhile, oppressed

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by a feeling of uneasiness; they both knew the complications that would arise if anything happened to Beckert. German dignity would demand the heaviest penalty for the guilty ones. Revenge being the motive of such a crime, doubts would be cast on the imprisonments, which gave cause to it. Were the German Embassy officials quite correct, quite just in the case? Had they not acted a little too harshly, demanding heavier penalties than were deserved? Would the Chilean people sympathize with their countrymen, who, although of the lower classes, carried out the vendetta?

What impression would a crime in the Embassy cause at the Foreign Office in Berlin? No crime is committed without a motive. Had the officials at the Embassy given a motive? If a motive had been given His Excellency thought he would be blamed, if a motive had been given Baron von Welcheck thought he would be blamed. It was their duty to maintain the most cordial relations with all and everyone. To be liked, to be thought "simpaticos," to please every one, to gain each and everybody's confidence; had they failed?

"I am not taking this matter seriously," thought His Excellency aloud.

"Nor I," echoed Welcheck.

They had walked towards the east, towards the Cordillera's snow-capped peaks. They

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turned to the left and walked up the Calle Ahumada, where, regardless of their diplomatic position and their titled personalities, they were jostled by the crowds coming out of the shops and the employers and employed hurrying home for lunch.

As they neared the Post Office, each steeped in his own thoughts, they were startled by the twelve o'clock gun, fired at midday, which has startled the natives since the time of the Spanish occupation.

A few minutes later the dispatches had been stamped, registered and posted.

As they walked out of the imposing Post Office building, His Excellency turned towards Welcheck:

"Come to lunch with me," said he—"and then we can go back to the Embassy together. The baroness will be pleased to see you. You young fellows are always after the pretty girls when not at the Club. You have no time to spare on an old couple like us, except diplomatic functions, when you are obliged to come." He laughed sadly.

Baron Welcheck's conscience pricked him. He was fond of his chief, he was the "*enfant gâté*" of the Ambassador. All the work was done by Beckert; Von Welcheck was the society butterfly; he never had time for private calls on the old pair. He felt guilty, and forthwith accepted the invitation with seeming alacrity.

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His Excellency hailed a cab, and stepped in, followed by the young baron.

They had not driven three hundred yards when the traffic was stopped at a corner by a policeman, as there flashed by them two fire-engines, full speed, the horses' hoofs rattling furiously on the pavement from which flew showers of sparks, the firemen holding on to their seats as the huge engines bumped along the uneven pavement.

"Another fire," quoted His Excellency, "another bad balance sheet! just think of it on the 5th of February! The auditors were late," alluding to the enormous increase in fires during the fortnight preceding the New Year, and the one following it. "The insurance companies here should set fire to themselves; there would then be no more fires."

A policeman lowered his hand and the blocked traffic resumed its course.

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CHAPTER III

TEN minutes later the Ambassador and Welcheck arrived at the Ambassador's house. They had hardly time to get out and reach the front door, when it was opened by the butler—a splendid figure in livery and knee breeches of red velvet, coarse white cotton stockings and buckled shoes.

He looked at first glance a magnificent German flunkey, six feet high, fair, blue-eyed and square-headed. You could not fail to admire the splendid physique of the man; it attracted one; but at a second glance one saw that his breeches were soiled with grease, showing dark spots, his stockings were darned in several places, his shoes had, from ancient comradeship, moulded themselves to his feet and now showed up all the defects and natural deformities thereof.

Baron Welcheck blushed at the sight that his chief's butler presented. He would have given fifty pounds willingly to have this man dressed as he should be dressed; etiquette forbade him. How could a subaltern criticise his chief's love for cheap ostentation which was the laughing stock

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of Santiago Society? At the Club Welcheck had been chaffed about it by other diplomats. At parties and public functions the young girls teased him about the splendid butler.

When his chief gave a reception which was only once a year on the Kaiser's birthday and he had perforce to be present to receive the guests, Welcheck could see the smile on their faces when they glanced at the butler with his white piqué four-in-hand tie and celluloid collar. These were moments of great trial. At times he wished the man would die of apoplexy; at others he would laugh outright and joke with the guests about it, winking his eye towards the butler.

On this occasion Welcheck took his eyes away from him impatiently, and followed his chief into the morning room, where the baroness was sitting by a window darning His Excellency's socks, aided by a gold-rimmed pair of spectacles.

"*Guten Morgen*, Frau Excellenze," said von Welcheck, as he came up to her, clicked his heels together, and bowed low, kissing the hand extended to him in greeting.

"Ach, Welcheck, what a pleasant surprise! *Aber lieber*," turning to her husband, "why did you not tell me the dear boy was coming to lunch?" Then looking at His Excellency's socks in her hands—"Ach Gott! look! he finds me

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mending your socks! *Nein du lieber*, it is not right, besides being old-fashioned; what will Welcheck think of me in this prosaic occupation? but you are late—Otto announced lunch some time ago, and you must be hungry. I will ring for him to serve at once."

She had hardly reached the bell when Otto's voice was heard: "Excellenze, lunch is ready."

"I am glad you came today, Welcheck, we have a real German lunch—Bismarck herrings, lovely ones—Frankfurter sausages with sauerkraut, and Arme Ritter with golden syrup."

She led the way towards the dining-room, followed by Welcheck and Baron von Bodmann, who insisted that whilst in his own house his young guest should precede him.

They crossed the spacious hall, entered the dining-room, and sat down to the "real German lunch."

They had scarcely tasted the Bismarck herrings, when they were disturbed by the ringing of the telephone bell in the next room, which was the Ambassador's private study.

The butler imperturbably continued his duties, pouring out the wine. It was the footman's day out; it was not the butler's duty to attend to the telephone. The baroness, with the born natural curiosity of women, began to fidget and wished

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she knew what the message on the telephone could be—was it for her? or was it some dry, stupid, uninteresting doubt of Beckert's about some important dispatches?

The bell went on ringing merrily. It had begun intermittently, now it was continuous. Baron von Bodmann did not look pleased he also began to fidget. It was beginning to jar on their nerves. They both looked at each other and then at the young baron.

Frau Excellenze thought it was very unfortunate that the footman was out. The baron wondered why the footman did not answer the infernal instrument; and Welcheck, having no responsibility, was amused at the embarrassment of his host and hostess. The more they fidgeted the more his eyes sparkled at the joke; he did not dare to laugh. The bell rang on furiously. As everybody was silent it seemed to grow louder and louder in their ears. The butler's silent footsteps were ghostly; no sound could be heard except that awful bell.

The situation became ridiculous in the extreme. There sat three people hypnotised by a telephone bell without saying a word.

Baron von Bodmann's nerves could stand it no longer.

"Where is the footman, and why does he not answer that telephone?" he exclaimed angrily,

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turning to the baroness; and, without waiting for an answer, he added irritably:

"Otto, go at once and stop that noise."

Otto gently put down some plates he was about to place on the table, and with a look of "it isn't my duty" slowly directed his steps towards the adjoining room. When he opened the door the sound of the bell furiously ringing became even louder. At last the deliberate man took up the receiver, and at the same time three sighs of contentment, as nerves were relaxed, escaped upon the sudden silence.

"Telephones are very useful indeed," exclaimed the baroness, "but at times (specially when the footman is out, she thought) they are awful nuisances."

"Still," said the baron, "we are in the wonderful age of wonderful inventions, what should we do without them?"

Otto, through the open door, could be heard exclaiming, "No, *ja*, *so unmöglich*—impossible."

Suddenly he ran into the dining-room, his face and manner betraying the most intense excitement, and burst forth:

"Excellenze! Excellenze! Frau Excellenze! Herr Baron!" In his agitation he could not find words to convey the news.

"Well, what is it?" shouted His Excellency angrily, "can't you speak?"

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"Excellenze, they say the Embassy Offices are on fire; the house is destroyed; nothing remains of the building."

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Baron Welcheck, who lives in a flat adjoining the Embassy Offices.

"Excellenze, allow me to rise and verify this."

"Go, go quickly; this idiot must have been mistaken." The Ambassador turned and glared at the butler angrily.

Welcheck instantly rose and, stepping briskly towards the Ambassador's room, made for the telephone; His Excellency and the baroness rose and followed him slowly, the butler bringing up the rear. This worthy with a revulsion of bitterness on being called an idiot was hoping to heavens that even the last atom of the buildings would be found to have been burnt to a cinder. That at least would prove that he was not an idiot.

Welcheck took up the receiver and waited. No answer. He banged the receiver with his left hand several times and waited.

"This is enough to drive one mad," he said. "First it rings worse than an alarm clock, now nothing, no answer. Heavens! Excellency, shall we send Otto for a cab and go at once? All documents may not be burnt, maybe there is no fire." He banged and banged on the receiver. No answer. "Donnerwetter! will they never answer?"

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"Otto, go for a cab at once, as you are; hurry, hurry!" commanded His Excellency.

Otto forgot his overdressed ease and actually ran off.

The idea of half-burnt but more or less legible secret documents being at the mercy of a curious crowd was not relished by His Excellency. Even if the fire were not at the Embassy but in adjoining houses the firemen would of a certainty break into the Embassy in order to attack the fire from there.

"I shall go mad," said Welcheck, his eyes darting furious looks at the telephone. He looked as if he were going to break the instrument with his fists. He felt like it.

"Hallo! hallo! you rang up to say the German Embassy Offices were on fire, is it so?"

"What number did you say?" came the cackling answer, passionless and official and unhurried.

Welcheck was getting angry, really angry.

"You rang up to say the German Embassy Offices were on fire. I am the Secretary of the Embassy, Baron Welcheck. Tell me quickly if it is true?"

The instrument answered deliberately.

"You are connected with the Central Telephone Office. What number do you want? I can't wait here, there are others waiting for calls."

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"Put me on to the Fire Department, quickly, please."

"There you are, Fire Department 409 Alameda; put it down, please, for next time."

Welcheck did not put it down.

"Hallo!" he called impatiently. "Is that the Fire Department?"

The telephone coughed back in another key: "Yes."

"This is the German Embassy. They tell us that there is a fire at the Embassy Offices. Is that so?"

"Don't know," came the wheezing answer, and added dispassionately—"there is a big fire in District 14."

"Is Calle Nataniel in District 14?" asked Welcheck.

"Yes; the fire is in Calle Nataniel."

Without another word Welcheck put down the receiver and turned excitedly to His Excellency:

"The fire is in Calle Nataniel district," he said. "It may be in the Embassy, or in the houses adjoining. Quick! let's get into a cab, and go there . . ."

That instant Otto burst into the room, the perspiration pouring down his face. He had run full speed, eighty yards, and secured a cab. He was out of breath and said, panting, "Excellency, the cab is at the door, you can see immense clouds of

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smoke in the direction of the Offices" (*Ach*, thought he, who is the idiot now? and who exaggerating?), "the flames can be seen leaping towards the sky."

His Excellency and Welcheck, followed by the agitated baroness, hurried into the hall, where Otto already held their hats and sticks. They seized them from his hands.

The baroness clung to His Excellency's arm:

"Do not go too near, *mein lieber;* do nothing rash. Do not expose yourself to any danger; be careful, please, won't you, darling? Welcheck, you will take care of him, won't you? He is so rash."

His Excellency responded to the affectionate words by running down the steps with "Yes, yes," as Welcheck followed exclaiming, "Yes, Baroness, yes."

They leaped into the carriage, Welcheck shouting out to the driver:

"Calle Nataniel, quick! drive as hard as you can; there's a good tip; hurry up!"

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