

Little Engelbert

By KARL NEURATH

Translated, with Introductory Comment, by William L. McPherson

There has been a singular dearth of spy stories in the fiction of the war. This series of translations started with one—Poldi Schmidt's "The Idea of Balint, the Gypsy," which appeared on March 5 last. Since then there has not been another of that type. The one which follows is not primarily a spy story. Its interest does not centre in the doings and fate of the spy.

In ordinary wars the spy has been a figure of great romantic and dramatic possibilities. But he has apparently been dwarfed and lost in the vastness of the present tragedy. The theme of espionage seems a little tawdry when set against the thousand simpler and more elemental ways in which devotion and heroism have been manifested.

DARKNESS came on early out of the woods. The tavern on the edge of the village stood already in the shadow. The pale gleam of the dying day still fell on the open, snow-covered fields.

Little Engelbert pressed his face against the dirty panes and stared with curious eyes at the world outside. But he saw only the broad, empty fields and the snowed-in village, which, with its shabby houses, straggled down into the trough of the valley. There was nowhere a light burning. The whole village was dead. Nearly all its inhabitants had fled before the Russians. Only a few old farm laborers had remained, one or two aged women and Bronisch, the host, Engelbert's father.

"What should the Russians do to me?" he had said to the village pastor.

"If I stay they will drink my whiskey with me. If I go they will drink it without me. So I'll stay behind and help them to drink it. And so long as the forester, the red scoundrel, squats up there in the woods, I, too, can take my chances. The Russians will hang him before they hang me."

The pastor had tried to dissuade him. But he turped away his watery eyes and shook his head.

"I'll stay, whatever happens. The Russians can't give me a worse deal than the forester gave me."

They had stuck to the village, and Engelbert was glad that he had not been compelled to go among strangers, perhaps into some big city where there were no trees, no woods and no meadows, where people could cross the streets only when a policeman gave the word. He wanted to be at home with his father, with the dog and with his grandmother, who had locked herself in her room for fear they would carry her away.

Yet he sighed as he stood at the window. Wouldn't it be fine, now that the snow had come, if all the other boys were there—and the girls, too! Now he was all alone, alone from morning till night. At sundown a couple of wood-choppers came, drank whiskey, talked about the war and about getting rich out of it. Engelbert always felt relieved when they went away without quarrelling and his father came stumbling to bed.

They were men of bad character, and they abused the forester, the father of little Mariele, who had once given him a deer-fly and had always come to play with him so long as his mother was alive and his father had worked in the forester's house and in the woods. Then for a long time his father had not gone into the woods, except at night, and his mother had always wept.

Now since war had come he went into the woods by day and returned only after dusk. If the grandmother had not been there, Engelbert would have been left quite alone. But the grandmother was old and feeble. She paid very little attention to him. She sat beside the big Dutch tile stove, nodded her head and let the beads of her rosary trickle through her fingers. Often she pricked up her ears, listened for distant noises, sighed deeply and said: "The Russians will soon be here."

But the Russians did not come. Neither did the Germans come. And Engelbert would have been so glad to see the latter. It must

IN THE DAYS OF PUFF SLEEVES

A Story of a Spy



The Front Row Waits for the Flying Wedge



Starting from the Fifth Avenue Hotel for the Thanksgiving Game Between Yale and Princeton at Manhattan Field

Yale and Princeton Tallyhos at Madison Square in the Days When No Man Without a Chrysanthemum Was Dressed

be a great treat to see soldiers, many soldiers, and in the field-gray uniforms which the wood-choppers kept talking about. He had seen soldiers only in picture books—never real, living ones. Behind the woods, in C—, there were real troops in field gray, as the choppers said. But they didn't come. Perhaps the Russians would come first.

"Why should all the people be so afraid of the Russians?" he said to himself, as he stood at the window and peered into the dusk. A war like this must be much more interesting than Indian fights or fights with the frontier guards. He was not afraid. Nor was his father, although the latter, when he was at home, usually hid himself in the cellar. Suddenly Engelbert gave a start. He had seen a light in the distance, which quickly disappeared. It flashed out a second time and then a third time. Then it seemed as if he saw something like a circle of fire.

He looked hard, but all was dark again. He was trembling with excitement, and gazed with distended eyes through the window. Were the men in field gray coming? Or the Russians? Or was it a spy?

All his senses were in a flutter. Then he heard the dog bark and immediately afterward his father hurried into the room. The latter's hair and beard were covered with frost. His hat was awry. Beads of perspiration stood out on his face.

He put his stick in a corner, tossed his hat on the bench by the stove, drank a swallow of hot coffee and threw himself into the easy chair which stood behind the serving table. He wiped off his wet shoes and placed them by the crackling stove.

Engelbert looked shyly at him. But since he saw his father smiling he ventured to approach and tell him about the light signals.

The father seemed startled. "Why are you always idling at the windows?" he thundered. "Haven't you anything else to do?"

"Ach, Gott!" the old grandmother broke in. "What is the child to do all day long? He gets no care, no attention. Poor old creature

that I am, I can scarcely look after myself. And the poor little fellow! Come here, Engelbert! If my Anna only knew how you are treated!"

Bronisch mumbled something and scratched himself behind the ear.

"Don't scold. I didn't mean to be rough. But I have so many things in my mind. Other times are coming—and better. Then we shall ride in carriages and eat broiled meat every day. Only wait till the war is over."

The grandmother laughed contemptuously. "That's what you said the other time, and it cost you your fine position."

"Who was to blame for that but that red scoundrel? In such weather, what business had he to be on the watch in the woods? But I'll get him yet. He shall remember me."

"Do you mean the forester?" asked Engelbert excitedly.

"Yes, boy, I mean him."

"But he is a good man."

"He? A good man?" Bronisch laughed bitterly.

"He? He put me in prison, boy. He drove your mother to drown herself, boy. Your good man!"

Engelbert looked at his father in amazement. His senses were all in a whirl.

His father had served a term in prison! His mother had drowned herself!

He clung tremblingly to his grandmother. And all on account of the forester.

"If you had held your tongue you would have been more sensible," said the old woman angrily, drawing the boy close to her. "He would have learned it soon enough."

Bronisch mumbled something again. Then he laughed and lighted his pipe.

"He can know it now. He's old enough to know. And where we go after the war we shall be respected people. Money rules the world."

The grandmother gave him a searching look. "Will it be something honest this time? Where are you trying to get the money?" She stopped short and became deadly pale.

"Bronisch!" she gasped. "Bronisch, you

haven't— The lights— You are— She raised her voice to a scream.

"Old fool!" snarled Bronisch resentfully. "The lights? Do you know who made those lights? It was your forester, your good forester, the rascal, the spy."

"Bronisch, you lie!" shrieked the old woman. But Bronisch repeated his accusation, always more and more vehemently.

"You will see! You will see!" he bellowed. "I'll fix it on him. I'll run and tell the Germans at once, this very night. May I never come back safe and sound if the forester isn't a spy!"

Excitedly he paced the narrow tavern room. Two wood-choppers entered at this moment, so the grandmother withheld her answer. She turned away and murmured a fervent prayer. But Bronisch wouldn't let the subject drop.

"She will not believe that the forester is a spy, a rascal, who secretly traffics with the Russians," he cried, looking at the wood-choppers.

"Bronisch is right," said the one. "Bronisch is right," said the other. "If any one traffics with the Russians—the grandmother began. But she broke off suddenly and looked at the boy, who squatted next to her, trembling with fear.

The men drank their whiskey in silence and drank much. Now and then they glanced at the clock. They whispered together, laughed and smoked.

"If the Russians come, mother, what are you going to do?"

"Perhaps the Germans will be here first," she said quietly, and took up her knitting.

A little while afterward she slipped into the kitchen. Engelbert followed her.

The taproom resounded with the laughter of the toppers. Engelbert squeezed himself into a corner of the hearth. The grandmother mumbled softly to herself.

She had never liked her son-in-law, even when he still wore his forester's uniform. But since he had been caught smuggling and had brought misery on the family, they had lived on terms of bitter enmity. Had it not been

for her little house she would not have stayed in the village, but she would have moved away with her grandson.

And now! And now! What was to be done? "Oh, the scoundrel! The spy!" she murmured.

And Engelbert caught the words with his sharp ears.

"They ought to put him in prison again. Some one ought to run to the Germans and warn them. Yes, then one could breathe easy again and thank God."

She put the plate on the table and beckoned to her grandson to come to supper. But he sat still and thought.

"Are the Germans far away, grandmother?" he asked suddenly.

"How do I know, Engelbert? The choppers say they are in C—. But who can tell? I believe that they are further away than the Russians are."

It had become quiet in the taproom. A door opened and shut. Footsteps crackled over the snow. Engelbert went to the window. By the light of the half moon he saw his father and the wood-choppers put on their snowshoes, quickly glide down the slope and vanish into the night.

Had they gone hunting, or where? Had they gone to the Germans, to warn them and accuse the forester? That would be better. Then the rascal would get his punishment. And he was Mariele's father. The poor thing! She was only a year younger than he, just twelve. And to have such a father! A man who would betray his own people!

Then a thought came suddenly into his head. He looked carefully around. The grandmother was not there. He heard her cleaning up things in the taproom. Softly he stole outside in front of the house. Softly he drew on his snowshoes. Softly he glided away into the night.

He struggled onward with all his strength. His short skis often sank deep in the new snow. Many times he was obliged to tighten the straps. And there seemed to be no end to the wood. Trees everywhere, trunk on trunk. And everything was absolutely still and sol-

emn, as in a church. But in the branches there was a slight rustling, as if the priest was turning a leaf in the prayer book and, with his outstretched arms, was stroking the silver fringes of the altar cloth. Many times he stopped and listened for footsteps, but it was silent all about. He could, in fact, hardly notice the sound of his moving snowshoes.

Suddenly he heard a rustling, a whispering and a stamping. Something black and unformed seemed pushing through the wood. He gazed fixedly at it, holding his breath. The wind blew sharp in his face and penetrated his thin clothing. But he felt neither the wind nor the cold. He crouched and covered in the darkness.

There was a sound now of steps behind him, but he did not hear it. He was staring into the night.

They must be soldiers!

He was seized roughly by the shoulder and turned around. A dazzling light was thrown in his face. Frightened and blinded, he closed his eyes.

"They are Russians," it flashed through his mind. He struggled rebelliously under his captor's grip. He summoned all his courage, all his strength, and straightened himself up.

"Which is the way to C—?" a weak voice asked him.

He opened his eyes and saw a tall, slender man before him. Under the black fur cap a pair of good-natured eyes twinkled.

The boy saw by the shining shoulder straps that it was an officer who was questioning him. He tried to keep his self-control. Not in vain had he read his Indian stories; not in vain had he played old Shatterhand. With a bold gesture he pointed in the wrong direction.

The officer drew out a map. Then Engelbert utilized the opportunity, swung around and started running through the sheltering woods. Some bullets flew over his head. They lodged in the ice-covered trees and broke off twigs and branches.

Running downhill, Engelbert flew past the Russian column. Uninjured, he reached the opposite valley. With a few more strides he was on the road leading to C—. Near the first houses a German outpost challenged him. Stumblingly he explained what he had come for, and a man from the double outpost took him to the inner guard. A young sergeant, with broad scars on his cheeks, listened to him attentively and wrote down his message. Then he offered Engelbert hot coffee and a piece of bread.

The boy fell asleep sitting there. But they gave him no chance to sleep. He was taken to the district commander and was asked to tell over again what he knew. The officer listened eagerly, asked here and there a pointed question and then talked with his adjutant.

"Poor little fellow!" whispered the major. "He evidently misunderstood. We can depend absolutely on the forester."

"It might have been his father," suggested the adjutant.

The major gave a look of surprise. "It may be possible, Wendhorst."

Again he questioned the boy, who squatted shyly on the edge of a chair. The latter answered freely and fully.

"You are probably right, Wendhorst," said the major sadly. "How horrible!"

He walked a couple of times across the room. Then he gave his orders, brief and curt. "Can you show us the way back, my boy?" he asked in a friendly tone.

"I think I can, Mr. Officer."

"Very well, young man. Rest here a little while. We shall start in half an hour."

A still alarm went through the village. The outposts were reinforced. The bulk of the troops made a detour about the mountain, so as to take the enemy in the rear. Couriers and adjutants rushed hither and thither. But the snow deadened all the noise. Nothing was to be heard when they started but the creaking of the harness and the snorting of the horses.

Engelbert trailed along, clinging to the major's stirrup.

But the advance was slow, very slow. Soon it was midnight.

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THE DANCING LOCAL; A HINT TO THE INTERBOROUGH—Drawn by L. M. Glackens



ONE SUBWAY GUARD TO ANOTHER—Great idea of the Company's, Bill! We've been blocked here an hour and none of 'em is wise to it yet!