

THE ARCHIMANDRITE'S NIECE

OLD Mr. Devore stood in front of one of the windows of his office and gazed out at the heavy fog which encompassed the towers of Pine Street. He would have denied at any time, but particularly on this dreary morning, that his professional life was informed with color, and would have insisted that this was not a matter for regret. The beauty of the law, Mr. Devore had often remarked to Miss Deevey, as well as to many lesser employees, was the beauty of its codified orderliness.

Now the fog was blurring the lights across the street and turning them into sulphur-yellow splotches in the gray waste. Mr. Devore's office, while as orderly as even he could wish, was hardly more cheerful than the haze beyond. As Miss Fannie Devore must have decided when she was choosing the fabric for her bachelor brother's window draperies, anything that bordered on the frivolous would be out of keeping with the austerity that prevailed throughout the temple of Forbes, Hathaway, Bryan & Devore, within which the lawyers carefully prepared Delphic advice for the

nervous corporations which approached them for counsel. Mr. Devore was awaiting a Mme. Liapchev, the protégée of an important client.

The day before, Mrs. Herbert Kraft had talked to him eagerly and incoherently on the telephone for twenty-three minutes about the difficulties that beset a woman she knew. A charming person, she said, and one whom Mr. Devore was sure to admire and pity. Mrs. Kraft had gone on in this strain for some time, until Mr. Devore had begun to wonder just what minor infraction of the law the friend could have committed. He had heard similar preambles before.

"You say she is in a serious predicament and is having trouble with the authorities?"

"With the State Department. Didn't I mention that? And it isn't Mme. Liapchev herself who is having trouble. At least, she is, but only indirectly. It's a member of her family. I haven't been able to grasp the situation very clearly myself, but she'll explain everything to you. I'd like to send her down to your office tomorrow. She's visiting us for a while. Tomorrow *will* be all right,



Chon
Day

"I know what you're thinking, but I'm going to clean it all up."

won't it? And please try to do something for her, for my sake."

"Of course!" Mr. Devore had said warmly. The Herbert Krafts could, and did, set him whatever tasks they chose, and for an excellent reason. Forbes, Hathaway, Bryan & Devore enjoyed a substantial annual retainer for representing Mr. Kraft's various enterprises.

THE morning was well under way when Miss Deevey announced, with something of a sniff, that Mme. Liapchev was calling. Mr. Devore, astutely comprehending that the sniff meant something like "I hope you're not going to fritter away the whole morning," said in a warning tone that the visitor was a friend of Mrs. Herbert Kraft and that he would see her at once.

A distinctly handsome woman came into the room. She wore black, and her manner was impressive. She was a frowningly majestic brunette, in the forties, perhaps, and not unlike Sir Joshua Reynolds' portrait of Mrs. Siddons. Mr. Devore rose and bowed courteously.

"I am Helena Nicolaeвна Liapchev," she said, and they shook hands.

"How do you do?" said Mr. Devore. "I am always very happy to be of service to a friend of Mrs. Kraft's."

"God will comfort you," she said. "God will wash and refresh your soul!"

Mr. Devore was startled. His relationship with God, while correctly Episcopalian, had never been intimate. He felt toward God much as he felt toward his friends the H. Chauncey Folgers. He made a point of paying a formal call on God once or twice a year, just as he made a point of paying one or two formal calls on the Folgers. It was inconceivable that either Chauncey Folger or God would ever try to wash and refresh his soul.

"I can tell," he said, recovering as quickly as he could from his discomfiture, "I can tell from your very charming accent that you are Russian."

"You are mistaken. I am Bulgar. My husband was Bulgar, and I am obliged to have his nationality."

"Er—yes, I see," Mr. Devore said politely. "Then—ah—what *are* you? I mean, what are you by *birth*?"

"I am Slavonian," she said with pride. "Or perhaps you are accustomed to say Slovenian?" Mr. Devore responded with a vague smile. "I was born a Prebičević, in the town of Koprivnica in Croatia-Slavonia," Mme. Liapchev went on. Then her expression darkened for a moment. "My mother was Hercegovinian. I did not love my mother."

Mr. Devore tried to picture in his mind a detailed map of the Balkans, but became confused.

"My father's family was devoted to the Church," Mme. Liapchev said suddenly. "It gave many brilliant men to the Church. That is why my uncle is in such trouble. He never should have joined the Church. He should have become a political leader, but his father commanded him to turn to a spiritual life. His problem might have been even worse, of course. He might have risen in the hierarchy instead of in a brotherhood. Imagine how terrible if he had become a metropolitan or even a patriarch and then permitted his political enthusiasms to appear! He would have drawn much more attention to himself than he does as an archimandrite. But you must not misunderstand me"—Mr. Devore was trying harder than ever not to—"he should never have gone so far as to become what he is now. He certainly should not have become an archimandrite. A hegumenos, perhaps, but no more. He should have asked to be allowed to remain the Hegumenos of Enos. It is quite a small monastery, but so nice, so charmingly situated, and the gardens are very attractive. The altitude is high, and the water agrees with him. The water at St. Methodius does not agree with my uncle. It gives him—what is the word for it? I am not sure what the word for it is. It gives him—"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Devore said hastily. "I know. I quite understand. I had a similar affliction myself in—ah—Pittsburgh."

"It is unthinkable that the Archimandrite of St. Methodius should undertake political activities in Slavonia. The Hegumenos of Enos, yes. That would have excited comparatively little comment, but the Archimandrite of St. Methodius, no!"

"No?" Mr. Devore said, looking at her in wonder.

"When I was a young girl in Koprinica, it would have been preposterous even to imagine such a thing," Mme. Liapchev said. "And now he has disappeared! I have written to the brotherhood, and the brotherhood has sent me a beautiful and touching reply. It is as ignorant of my uncle's whereabouts as I am. It is supposed that he is in Croatia-Slavonia. He had been contemplating such a visit. I should explain



"Dear, I wish you'd say something nice to Victoria. I'm afraid she's catching a cold."

that he habitually carried papers which permitted him to enter Yugoslavia from St. Methodius. St. Methodius is in the Florina province, which is to say northwestern Greece, perhaps forty kilometres east of Albania."

"Ah, yes, northwestern Greece," said Mr. Devore, dazed by the variety of regions that had to be taken into account. "Forty kilometres east of Albania." He began to scribble on a memorandum pad. "This was what you wanted to see me about, wasn't it—the disappearance of this gentleman?"

"Certainly."

"Who, as I understand it, went from Greece to Yugoslavia?"

"To Croatia-Slavonia," Mme. Liapchev corrected him. "It is the only part of Yugoslavia to which one would care to go. In Serbia there are merely swine. I would go so far as to say that my uncle did not even go to Croatia. You can depend upon it—he went to Slavonia."

"You have not yet told me your uncle's name," Mr. Devore said, holding his pencil over the pad.

"His name is Cyril. The family name, as I believe I said, is Prebičević, but my uncle is now known simply as the Archimandrite of St. Methodius."

Mr. Devore could not help feeling that Cyril was a deceptively mild name for so troublesome an uncle, but he was glad to record at last a piece of information that was easy to spell. He had doubts about his rendition of a number

of the words in his visitor's deposition. When he looked up, he noted with regret that Mme. Liapchev seemed about to grow fervent again. There was a return of the inspired expression which he had seen when she had commended him to God.

"Who knows what may have happened to him by now?" she said with a musical quaver. "The Drave Banovina should be searched!"

"I presume you are speaking of a river?" Mr. Devore said, feeling strangely divided between irritation and sympathy.

"Certainly not!" She dropped the inspired expression and manifested a certain impatience. "I am speaking of the district that comprises what we know as Old Slavonia. Forgive me"—she became gentle once more, and there was an alarmingly intimate quality in her voice when she was gentle—"I make the mistake of supposing that you are acquainted with my country, do I not? There are nine *banovinas*."

"Nine?" said Mr. Devore, going into a kind of trance.

"I feel sure that he is going around the countryside of the Drave Banovina, criticizing all the politicians who are not to his taste and telling the people to do dangerous things. My uncle has a habit of speaking so recklessly! On certain occasions he has been mistaken for a madman."

Mr. Devore pulled himself together

THE POSTMAN'S BELL IS ANSWERED EVERYWHERE

God and the devil in these letters,
stored in tin trunks, tossed in wastebaskets,
or ticketed away in office files:
love, hate, and business, mimeograph sheets, circulars,
bills of lading, official communiqués,
accounts rendered. Even the anonymous letter says,
Do not forget.

And in that long list, Dean Swift to Stella,
Walpole to Hannah More, Carlyle to Jane—
and what were Caesar's "Gallic Wars" other than letters
of credit for future empire?

Do not forget me.

I shall wear laurels to face the world;
you shall remember the head in bronze,
profile on coin.

As the bell rings, here is the morning paper and more letters,
the post date 10 P.M. "It is an effort
for me to write; I have grown older.
I have two daughters and a son, and business prospers,
but my hair is white; why can't we meet for lunch?
It has been a long time since we met;
I doubt if you would know me if you glanced quickly
at my overcoat and hat, and saw them vanish
in a crowded street. . . ."

Do not forget. . . . "Oh, you must not forget
you held me in your arms while the small room
trembled in darkness; do you recall the slender, violet

light between the trees next morning through the park?
Since I'm a woman, how can I unlearn
the arts of love within a single hour,
how can I close my eyes before a mirror,
believe I am not wanted, that hands, lips, breast
are merely deeper shadows behind the door
where all is dark? . . ."

Or, "Forgive me if I intrude; the dream I had
last night was of your face; it was a child's face,
wreathed with the sun's hair, or pale in moonlight,
more of a child than woman; it followed me
wherever I looked, pierced everything I saw,
proved that you could not leave me, that I am always
at your side. . . ."

Or, "I alone am responsible for my own death." Or,
"I am White, Christian, Unmarried, 21." Or, "I am happy
to accept your invitation." Or, "Remember that evening at the
Savoy-Plaza?" Or, "It was I who saw the fall of France."

As letters are put aside, another bell
rings in another day; it is, perhaps, not too late to remember
the words that leave us naked in their sight,
the warning,

"You have not forgotten me;
these lines were written by an unseen hand
twelve hours ago. Do not reply at this address; these are the last
words I shall write."

—HORACE GREGORY

er. "I infer that your uncle is a highly
imprudent person," he said. "We have
men like that in this country, thanks
to the extraordinary liberties which pre-
vail here. Your uncle evidently uses the
Church as a cloak for radicalism."

Mme. Liapchev was shocked. "*Radicalism?* He is a *conservative!* He was
the first to demand vengeance after the
Skupština tragedy!"

Mr. Devore felt that it was time for
him to assert himself. "I'm afraid I
don't know anything about the—ah—
the Skupština tragedy," he said firmly.

"You don't remember it?
You don't remember Puniša
Račić? He fired on the Croat
deputies in the Skupština. Račić
was a Montenegrin radical. Oh,
it was too shocking! I shall never
forget it. No one in Slavonia will ever
forget it, in spite of the fact that the
Croats are unbelievably inferior to the
people of the Drave Banovina. At least,
the deputies were not Serbs! It would
have been so much better if they *had*
been!"

"Quite so. And now to return to the
matter we were discussing." He had no
intention of enduring any more of these
complications, not even for Mrs. Her-
bert Kraft's sake. "Perhaps he has some

close friends to whom you could write."

"Friends?" Mme. Liapchev seemed
to consider this a novel idea. She pon-
dered the suggestion for a few moments
and then said, "I believe there is a
Dr. Hrdla in Moravia. Unless my uncle
quarrels with everyone. But Moravia—
can one send letters to Moravia these
days? I do not think so. No, there is no
close friend to whom I could write."

"Perhaps our own State Department
could help you," Mr. Devore said. Then
he remembered it was with the State

Department that she was sup-
posed to be having trouble. He
gave her a puzzled look.

"The State Department!"
she said with scorn. "They
are stupid there. They told
me I was not to bother them any more.
They told me I must not come back!"

Mr. Devore understood perfectly.
"When your uncle goes into"—he hesi-
tated, but decided to be independent of
geographical niceties—"into Yugoslavia,
does he visit anyone in particular?"

"I have never heard him speak of
anyone," she said with a shrug. "He has
never mentioned anyone in his letters.
His chief reason for going is to annoy the
Muslim faction."

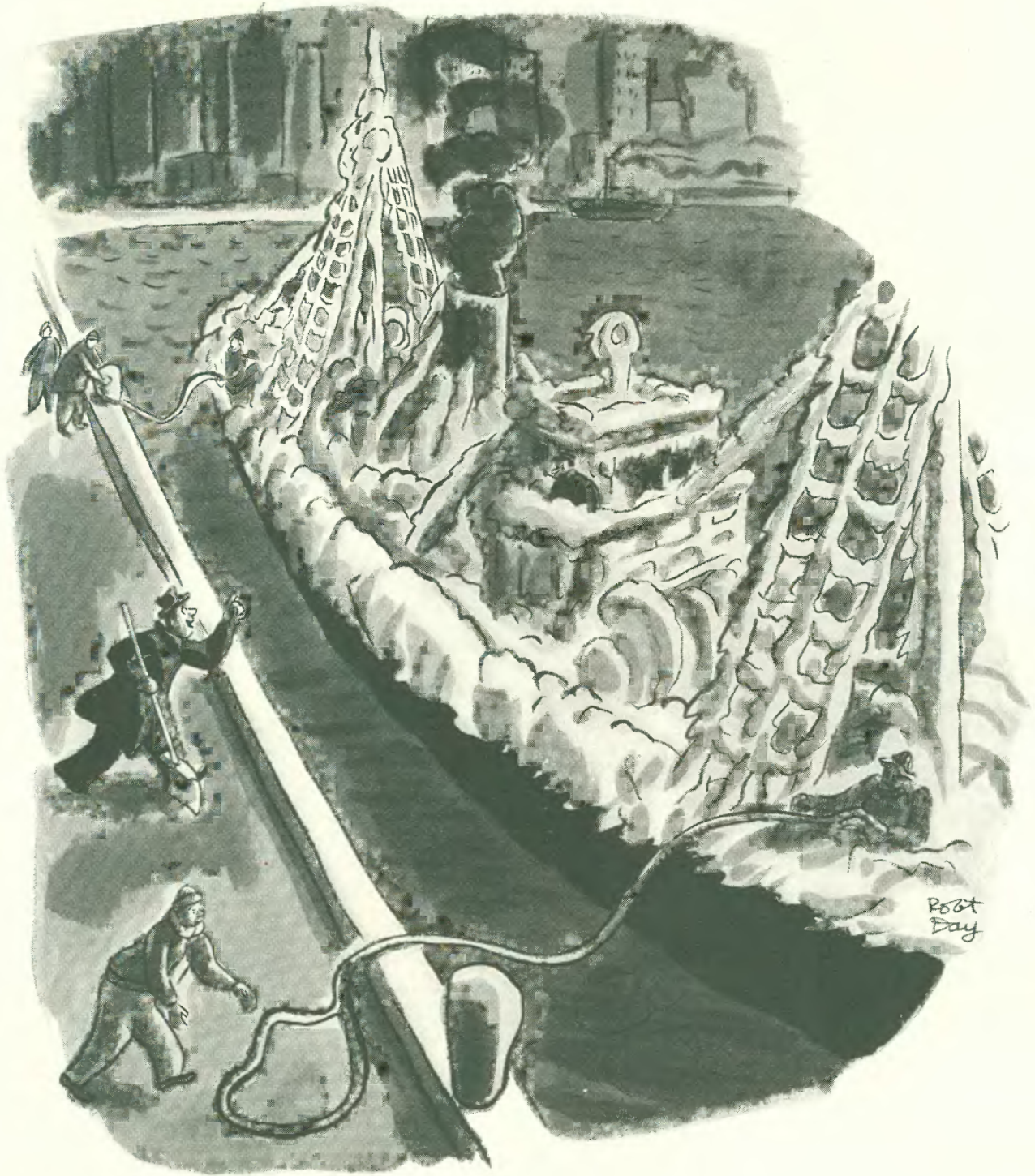
"Indeed?" Mr. Devore said with
cold exasperation. He had made up his
mind. "Our friend Mrs. Kraft," he con-
tinued, "is a kindhearted woman. She is
always generous, but I fear impulsively
so. Like so many kindhearted women"
—even with his self-assurance restored,
he felt it expedient to stress the tribute—
"she is not always aware when obstacles
can be surmounted and when obsta-
cles *cannot* be surmounted. I must con-
fess that there is absolutely nothing I
can do for you. Frankly, it seems to me
that the information you wish can be se-
cured only through consular channels,
with which you are probably more fa-
miliar than I am. I must ask you to tell
Mrs. Kraft how sorry I am that I, in
my very limited sphere, am helpless to
bring such an affair as this to a success-
ful end."

He waited uncomfortably for a dis-
play of histrionics, but none materialized.
Mme. Liapchev showed no sign of an-
ger or even of acute disappointment. She
looked at him dreamily and smoothed
her gloves with exquisite grace.

"You are so sympathetic," she said,
either with rapt admiration or an excel-
lent imitation of it. "So sympathetic and
so good!"

"I—ah—I regret that I can be of no





"Shovel your catwalk, sir?"

assistance to you, but surely you can understand that I am powerless."

"Yes," she said softly. "I regret it so much."

WHEN Mme. Liapchev had departed, Mr. Devore found that he was able to relax a little. But he was

afraid Mrs. Kraft's reaction would be one of chagrin and perhaps something even stronger.

He happened not to meet Mrs. Kraft until almost a month later, when they encountered each other in the lobby of Carnegie Hall. Mrs. Kraft said "Henry Devore!" in a reproachful tone. What

led Mr. Devore to take heart, however, was the fact that at the same time she sounded playfully arch.

"I'm always picking out the perfect wife for you, Henry," she said, "and you never give them the least little bit of encouragement!"

—JAMES REID PARKER