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ROBERTO VACCA

CRUDE AND EVIL



An economics-fiction divertissement of oil, sheikhs,
blackmail, love, business & intrigue.

2007

FOREWORD

I wrote this novel in 1975 – a couple of years after the Kippur war and the first steep increase in the price of oil. Gasoline was rationed in Italy or, at least, gas pumps were closed on weekends or took turns. So I asked myself:

“How could one blackmail the Arab sheiks to get more oil at a reasonable price?”

The idea was not very sensible, but led to my conceiving a science fictional story. I thought that the very notion on which it was based was way-out, fantastic. In recent times it appears that perhaps that idea is not so outlandish. Recent discoveries and prospections seem to indicate that oil may well be found at great depth just about anywhere on earth. So my notions may well have been prophetic – a knack I don’t seem to be losing in my old age.

I have not changed settings nor customs. You will get a whiff of what life was like three decades ago. Back then:

- you could board a plane under a false name as security measures were non existent
- personal computers were awkward to use, but crafty users were able to perform remarkable feats with them.
- manuscripts had to be typed – and re-typed after editing
- telephone systems were antiquated and inefficient
- people still sent telegrams and it took a long time even to dictate them to a telephone operator
- a dollar was worth a lot more than it is now.

Of course I have done some editing of the text. It is unavoidable when you re-read something you wrote in the past. I found it was also highly appropriate – in the last 30 years I have learnt how to write a lot more legibly.

Roberto Vacca

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I

GRIGORI SEMËNOVITCH IVANOV HAD A FUNNY FEELING

Grigori Semenovitch Ivanov had a funny feeling just because he was walking freely around the streets of a German city.

As a young man he had fought the Germans for a few months, but the war years had made a deep impression on him. He still felt deep down as if the war was still going on. War was real. The thirty years after the war - his whole adult life - were just makebelieve.

He felt quite a daredevil walking alone and sure footed in the enemy city. His scientific mind realized, of course, that nobody was going to challenge him. He was a Soviet scientist. He had been invited to give a paper at an international congress in Munich. If you want to be a good scientist you need a lot of imagination Grigori Semenovitch liked to imagine his own private little games.

The chubby German cop with his white cap, who was strolling up and down the Platzl, had an ugly face. Had he been a Nazi cop, and had this been 1945 - how would Grigori have gone about killing him?

He wondered. His long training as a geologist was not the best preparation for commando work. His little game was not so funny after all. Grigori's thoughts began to wander. He watched idly the shops, the stones in the pavement. He read the street signs. He rehearsed briefly a passage of the paper he was going to deliver next day. He looked at the people in the street: there were few, because it was almost midnight and he had followed a random path which had taken him into a maze of little alleys. He noticed a man walking with a limp and leaning quite heavily on his cane at every step.

Grigori's previous train of thought had helped put him in a defensive mood.

Suddenly the man with a limp began to walk straight and he took quick steps towards Grigori. Without a word he lifted his cane and hit Grigori a mighty blow. Grigori tried to dodge and the cane hit him on his left shoulder with a dull thud on the thick material of his heavy top coat. He felt a sharp pain and realized he had been hit not by any ordinary cane, but by a length of steel reinforcing rod.

Grigori was astounded and from that moment he had the impression time was passing very very slowly. He looked inquisitively into the determined face of his non-descript assailant and at the same time he was debating in his mind whether he was being robbed or whether it was a mugging with no reason or motivation. He had read that hooligans would attack perfect strangers without purpose and without provocation, but he thought that such things happened only in America.

While the man lifted again his heavy rod, Grigori was thinking that his shoulder would now be hurting for days and he was imagining clearly the white, sticky embrocation he would have to rub on his skin every night until he was well again.

The second blow was something different. The tip of the rod whipped across Grigori's face causing unbearable pain. He had raised his hands trying to grab the rod - but succeeded only in taking a weak hold of it after it had struck. He let go at once and brought up both hands his face. He felt the warm blood flowing over his chin and spurting out of his facial artery. Through the blood he felt the big gash and could touch broken teeth and jagged cheekbones. He felt that most of his nose was missing and realized only then that he would never heal.

The words formed in his mind:

"*Eta peremena - neobratima.*" This change is irreversible."

That was his last thought. The next blow crushed his skull and bit deep into his brain. Grigori Semenovitch Ivanov never knew who had killed him or why.

The Bavarian police and the Soviet secret service were equally unable to find the murderer or even to imagine a motive for the murder.