

BROTHERHOOD
BEYOND
the
YARD

Sally Fernandez

DUNHAM
books

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THE DARKEST HOUR

The ground floor of the White House was shrouded in darkness, except for the slight glow under the door of the room where the Secret Service agents relax and the illumination from the corner office on the northeast side of the building. It was the office of Hamilton Scott, director of the States Intelligence Agency, or the SIA, of the United States government.

His office was only a stairway from the president.

Director Scott began his career in 1985, in the Foreign Service, working for the U.S. Diplomatic Security Service, the DSS, headquartered in Washington, D.C. In 1987, the DSS transferred him to Rome, Italy, to manage the security detail for the American embassy. Almost a decade later, in 1996, he was transferred back to the States to work for the Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, Virginia.

In 2003, the head of the CIA appointed Director Scott to head up the SIA, an agency newly established in reaction to the September 11 terrorist attacks. The charter of this new agency was to coordinate information throughout the intelligence community and to establish priorities to ensure the protection of American citizens.

The personnel of the SIA are exceptional men and women with military and law enforcement backgrounds. They have operated in high-risk situations and carried out complex operations for both the intelligence agencies and the private sector.

The president, through his initiative, signed an executive order granting the SIA top security clearance for all aspects of domestic, foreign, and defense intelligence. It is the intelligence gathering, the assessments, and the high-risk security solutions that are paramount to achieve its goal.

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It was April 6, 2009, at 2:10 a.m. eastern daylight time. Director Scott had been sitting for hours at his large executive desk, with file folders stacked and papers scattered on top. Behind him was a long, slender fluorescent light casting a glow over two secure computers stationed on top of the credenza.

The door to the office was locked from the inside.

The director was alone, having just finished recording the events of his last and most crucial investigation. He reconstructed those events chronologically, piecing them together from his notes along with the evidence he had gathered over the years. Most of the evidence came to him by way of his associate and the testimonies of those directly involved. He had transcribed in infinite detail as best he could the actions he had taken, using his written summation, and at times referring to his notes to guide him.

The director began by describing how the U.S. citizens were slowly coming out of one of the worst economic disasters of their time, a time when the country was still engaged in the war on terror or “man-made disasters,” as referred to, incredibly, by a high-ranking official in the administration.

“I believe the administration had encouraged the use of these euphemisms, even though it put our national security at risk,” he said to the computer. “However, this was not a time to engage in more adversity.”

Hamilton’s primary role as director had always been to protect the U.S. citizens, not only from enemies abroad but also from enemies within. For these reasons, he had chosen to take certain precautions; had he not, the security of the United States would have been in grave jeopardy.

To maintain the utmost security, he dictated directly into his computer using the latest voice recognition techniques. “After recording the details of this case I will transfer this statement and copies of the evidence to a flash drive,” he voiced. “The flash drive, along with six memory sticks containing the video-recorded testimonies that support the facts, will be stored in a place of safekeeping.”

Using the Department of Defense’s secure delete standards, under Section 5555.2-M, Hamilton used LSoft Technologies’ Hard Disk Scrubber to remove his declaration from the computer’s hard drive. He then destroyed all the original evidence, including his copious notes, and the summary he created containing his talking points.

Although he had painstakingly recorded the details of his last investigation, he would not release his statement until an undetermined time in the future. “My intent is not to change the course of history, but

I am prepared to withhold these facts until the country has sufficiently healed and the American people are equipped to cope with the impact that which will surely follow.”

“The time is not now,” he recorded, completing his statement.

Director Scott had prepared instructions, however, and arranged with a third party to release the information sooner, should either he or his associate, the only people who knew the totality of this case, meet with an untimely death or any other suspicious events.

Or, if the president did not live up to his commitment.

Secured with the flash drive and memory sticks, containing the evidence, is a copy of a letter that reads as follows:



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
States Intelligence Agency

April 6, 2009

News Corporation
1211 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10036

Attn: Current CEO of Fox Television Stations Group

My recent disappearance or death now triggers a series of actions vital to the future of the United States.

Enclosed is a flash drive containing a detailed statement and copies of substantiated evidence, along with a set of memory sticks with video-recorded testimonies. In combination, the evidence describes the most horrific crime ever perpetrated against the American people.

I trust you will divulge this information in its entirety and in the most appropriate way.

With deep regret,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hamilton D. Scott".

Hamilton D. Scott
Director

cc: Managing Editor, Wall Street Journal
Enclosures: (1) flash drive, (6) memory sticks

Hours earlier, the director had met with the president.

The president fully comprehended what the director had done and understood the severity of the consequences if he did not follow his directives.

While speaking with the president, Director Hamilton Scott tendered his resignation, to be effective April 30, 2009.

TRUTH OR DARE

Throughout the first year of adjustment to academic life, some members of the group were fraught with personal dilemmas. Some brought on by themselves; some introduced by others. It was also a time when the group exhausted many hours studying together, coaching each other when necessary, and spending many evenings at Jake's Pub.

Eventually, during the time spent at the apartment and their jamborees at Jake's, this group of men began to feel more like brothers than schoolmates. To outsiders they seemed inseparable, and they were. It was also toward the end of that first year that they began to be more open and personal with each other and the group as a whole.

As for Chase, he was not normally prone to working in such proximity with others, so his desire to be part of this group was atypical. However, years before, Simon had instilled in him the confidence he needed, producing a burning ambition Chase had not previously experienced. His loyalty to Simon was for instilling in him a new desire of wanting to belong.

Similar to Chase, Hank felt a kindred spirit with Simon and the others as well, but on a different level. He sensed they all understood his personal quest, but it was Simon's knowledge of the Internet that provided him access to an entirely new medium for getting out his message.

Seymour's motivation was a little more complicated. With his father's accomplishments overshadowing his own, he always strived to compete, and while the film industry was all he knew, he was becoming more restless about his future. He'd swing from genre to genre, his lust for the epic film being subdued. It wasn't until listening to Paolo ad nauseam that politics crept into his psyche. Along with Simon's understanding of the Internet, Seymour had found his true calling. He felt indebted to the group for his awakening.

Paolo's reason was simpler: he loved being in the group. Maybe it was an Italian "guy" thing. It certainly provided him with a built-in audience that liked listening to what he had to say. Surprisingly, he liked to listen to them as well.

It was one of those nights at Jake's, after they professed their gratitude for being part of the group, that they committed their allegiance to the fraternity.

From the sidelines, Simon concluded the time was ripe. Until that moment, he'd had many opportunities to test their talents. Now, the time had arrived—for the final and most crucial test—their loyalty.

Simon took the opportunity to suggest they engage in a high-stakes version of truth-or-dare, that seemingly innocuous game of placing an opponent in a situation with potentially embarrassing consequences. The high stakes are borne out of the depth of questioning. "It would be an opportunity to cement our relationships further, sharing on an even deeper level some of our secrets," he said, encouraging them.

But it would also be his way to evaluate privately their level of devotion.

It was nearing eight o'clock on a Saturday night after several rounds of beer. So it was clear at that moment why they toasted each other with the words, "Why not!"

Jake's became the scene of their truth-or-dare game where they would divulge some of their inner thoughts and learn some surprising details about one another, but only after they had taken a pledge to maintain total secrecy.

—

Sitting in their booth, Simon spun his empty beer bottle. With the neck of the bottle pointing to Chase, the game began.

Chase opted to turn to Hank, and asked, "Truth or dare?"

"Truth," he responded with a smile.

Chase then posed the question, "Were you aware that the information about the dean was false?"

Hank, the consummate organizer, was surprised that Chase even knew about his ordeal. He explained how he had planned to pull a group together to demonstrate against the administration for its minority scholarship selection process, at which time he was going to implicate the dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Science.

"I received an e-mail with shocking information pertaining to the awards allegedly granted to several of the selection committee's family members, including the dean's," he reported. "Admittedly, I reacted hastily and broke one of my cardinal rules to validate all information."

Unfortunately, by a strange coincidence, the dean's office discovered Hank was the organizer of the protest. The dean, feeling Hank had impugned his reputation, was considering having him stand before the student ethics committee and face the possibility of expulsion.

Actually, Hank was aware that the e-mail was from Simon, who provided the information as a "private" dare, challenging Hank to dispute the administration's actions. All along Simon had known the information was false, but did not enlighten Hank at the time. Brazen as usual, Hank had believed Simon not only could, but also should, help him out of the mess. He knew that Simon was one of the dean's favorites and had asked him to intervene on his behalf. On several occasions, Simon had helped the dean with some crucial problems. Coincidentally, they involved efforts to thwart a computer hacker who wreaked havoc with the campus database.

Hank's misguided position was set straight when Simon appealed to the dean with a passionate defense. He was able to convince the dean it would not happen again, and assured him that Hank would correct the record regarding the authenticity and merits of the minority scholarship program. It was a close call.

"I promised Simon I wouldn't engage directly in controversial issues, a difficult commitment for a dedicated activist." He smirked. He consoled himself by rationalizing the concession was justified by his feeling of indebtedness toward Simon for bailing him out of a jam.

Although, after the episode, Hank did challenge Simon and asked him if he knew that the information was false.

Simon had matter-of-factly responded, "Yes, but you didn't know that at the time, and that was the point. You rallied around a cause, and you've demonstrated once again your ability as a great organizer."

Hank suspected from the beginning that it was a test, an initiation rite of some kind. He admitted to himself that he foolishly went along, thinking it was worth the risk. He wanted to become part of this exceptional group, with members he admired and had become fond of, including Simon.

Hank took the "truth" option, but with a slight variation—he omitted the part Simon had played.

In Simon's mind, Hank had proven his ability by rallying the troops around a cause, and had proven his loyalty by not implicating him in his "private" dare. He admired Hank's passion and fiery determination to fight injustice, but thought it best not to encourage him further and put the group potentially at risk. Those vital gifts and skills that he recognized in Hank were essential to the study group.

It was Hank's turn to spin the bottle, and that time the neck pointed in Paolo's direction.

Paolo turned to Seymour, "Truth or dare?"

Seymour, ready to take him on and with nothing to fear, said, "Truth."

Paolo asked straight out, "Do you have a serious gambling addiction?"

Clearly, the questions were becoming a bit more personal.

Seymour, with full confidence, responded, "No more!" He went on to explain that several months ago he was at an after-hours club, in the posh neighborhood of Beacon Hill, participating in an illegal high-stakes poker game. He admitted he didn't even have sufficient funds beyond the opening ante. True to form, he believed he was unbeatable.

Seymour, looking around at the others, said, "Then there was a police raid and they arrested me." He bragged that he was ahead at the time, but as luck would have it, his winnings were confiscated. Then, in a slight whisper, he said, "I had no recourse so I reached out to Simon and asked him for help." He had needed Simon to bail him out, which he did the next day. Seymour quite humbly admitted, "I can't remember a time when I was so terrified. Spending the night in police lockup; being in a cage with real sleazy types was more than I could bear."

Then, he continued on an even more personal level, saying, "I also have a confession. I'm broke." He said he knew they all thought he was some rich kid from Beverly Hills, but the fact was his father had him tethered to an exceedingly tight financial leash. Since the stunt he played at UCLA, his father paid the tuition directly to the university and parceled out a measly allowance to him, which was in part why he continued to gamble.

Looking directly at Simon, he said, "The reason I don't gamble anymore is that Simon has been functioning as my informal sponsor for Gamblers Anonymous." It was clear that he was grateful to Simon for his friendship.

Seymour was happy to unleash a personal burden to a group of people he felt he could trust. He took the "truth" option without reluctance. It didn't negate the fact that, at the time, he had a suspicion that Simon had something to do with the raid. Actually, the night of the game, he had invited Simon to join him, only to have him reply that he might meet up with him later and asked for the address where they were holding the game. The day after the arrest, Seymour asked Simon if he was involved, and he admitted that he had alerted the police.

Simon quipped, "Think of it as shock therapy." Actually, Simon knew a police officer in the Beacon Hill precinct. He told him he would provide him with information on the after-hours club's activities, if he would agree to arrest Seymour and keep him overnight but not charge him, and the police officer agreed.

"I did it for your own good," Simon insisted, "and I was only trying to

help you overcome your addiction.”

Seymour was angry beneath the surface, for several weeks, but eventually he appreciated Simon’s intervention. He never divulged to the group Simon’s involvement in the raid, only about the bail.

Perhaps this time, Simon’s motives were altruistic.

In any case, Simon didn’t need to test Seymour’s proven talents in the filmmaking industry. What was more imperative was that he passed the loyalty test. He worked closely with Seymour to calm his wild streak and redirect his creativity to more worthwhile activities, those directed specifically toward the group.

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Unfortunately, for Paolo, Seymour spun the bottle and the neck pointed to Simon. As Simon adjusted his seat to face Paolo, he had already surmised the question Simon would pose, and there was no way Paolo would risk taking a dare from him. He planned to respond with an emphatic “Truth.”

As predicted, Simon, in a jocular way, asked, “With all your dalliances, have you ever gotten a girl pregnant?”

The others in the group were somewhat aghast at how personal the questions actually had become, but Paolo knew Simon was just setting him up, again.

Paolo’s predicament had required money and smooth talking. He could handle the latter, but he had needed Simon for the other. He revealed to the group that he had a friend who was pregnant and seeking to have an abortion immediately. He discovered the procedure was expensive, costing upward of \$500, money he didn’t have because all his savings had gone to his tuition.

Looking in Simon’s direction, he said, “I trusted Simon would lend me the money if he thought a loan would resolve my dilemma.”

Never one to miss an opportunity, Simon had loaned Paolo the money.

Simon grinned as he looked at Paolo, and interjected, “I know you’re a ladies’ man and always assumed one day it would lead to complications of one kind or another.” Simon held that he was pleased to support one of his brothers, and of course, money was not an issue.

Paolo, ignoring Simon’s boast, continued. “As it developed, I had a friend who was indeed pregnant, but not by me,” he assured. A minor detail he had left out when asking Simon for the money. While he felt a trifle dishonest for deceiving Simon, he felt the end justified the means. He glanced at Simon for his reaction; there was none.

“I won’t tell you her real name, but let’s call her Alicia.”

Paolo explained the father of the child was her boyfriend, Josh, the

son of a U.S. senator. Josh, evidently a pathetic person, was deathly afraid of being disowned by his father if he ever discovered the pregnancy. Josh had begged Paolo for his help to make the problem “go away,” something to which Alicia reluctantly agreed. Paolo didn’t respect Josh, who he considered rather spineless. The request for money further sanctified his feeling toward Josh.

After receiving the money from Simon, the solution proved to be more complicated. Paolo knew it could be a high-risk game for all of them, especially Alicia. It was 1996, and the reported level of violence and public disruption against abortion providers had elevated in terms of protests, hate mail, bomb threats, and, up to that time, eighteen murders, as reported by the National Abortion Federation.

Danger aside, the following day, Alicia entered a clinic on the other side of town to meet with an abortion doctor, escorted by Josh and her faithful friend Paolo. Shortly after Alicia was ushered into the treatment room, Paolo became extremely distressed.

“I had to prevent Alicia from making an irreversible mistake, but, not wanting to intrude further, I didn’t act because it was Josh’s responsibility.” Paolo, however, was able to convince Josh to retrieve Alicia and stop her from going forward with the procedure, after assuring Josh that he would help them find a solution to their problem.

“Fortunately, Josh was able to intervene in time,” he said with relief.

However, just as they were about to leave the building, the senator arrived in a rage and headed straight for Josh. Alicia, still shaken from what had almost occurred, was then facing an entirely new trauma.

Happily, for all concerned, Paolo used his charm and persuasive manner to slice through the anger, and was finally able to appeal to the senator’s sense of duty as a father and soon-to-be grandfather. “Ultimately, Alicia decided to have the baby, Josh agreed to marry her after graduation, and the senator was looking forward to welcoming his new grandchild. It was the most exhausting emotional encounter I’ve ever experienced.” Paolo let out a deep sigh of relief.

The consummate ladies’ man proved to be decent to the core. Paolo’s version of the truth was substantially accurate, although he had left out the actual names of the parties involved and he downplayed his ability to resolve the situation. There was one thing that plagued him, though, and that was the arrival of the senator at the clinic. The only other person who had known the time and the location of the clinic was Simon. Paolo never challenged Simon, partly because he was guilt-ridden for misleading him in the beginning, and in the end, with a successful conclusion, it seemed pointless. Paolo liked to think Simon’s motives were honorable, but his doubts didn’t leave him immediately.

Simon, on the other hand, was immensely pleased. Paolo proved not only worthy of his reputation but also for his loyalty. His seductive nature and artful persuasion were skills Simon had prized and particularly needed in the group.

Hours had gone by, and there were empty beer bottles to spare, one of which was pointing directly at Seymour. Steering away from Simon, his Gamblers Anonymous sponsor, he posed the option to Chase. He logically assumed Chase would choose truth; a dare would have been too risky, and out of character.

Seymour asked his straight-laced brother, “Did you ever commit an unethical act at the bank where you formerly worked?”

The only incident Chase had to offer was a bank account he had established for himself without following the proper banking regulations. He explained it was an education fund he’d set up to store the money he had taken out as a loan to pay for his expenses at Harvard.

It seemed rather mundane, compared to the other confessions, but that was Chase—loveable, but perhaps a bit dull.

Simon had no need to test his abilities. However, Chase once again validated his loyalty.

Simon was pleased and proud of the group of scholarly brothers he had personally assembled, so he took the opportunity to offer his own sort of “dare.”

As they sat in their booth, both private and quiet, away from the lively crowd below, Simon expressed his views to the others. He praised them for their honesty and the trust they showed by sharing their experiences. Most of all, he said he was most honored by their loyalty, adding, “Each of you understand my meaning.”

Then, following a sip of his beer, the moment came when he suggested they cement their friendship, formalizing their commitment to each other. He suggested they form a secret society similar to those that already existed on campus.

It was an eerie few seconds for the others, who were somewhat struck by his statement about loyalty, but also because they had reached the same conclusion individually, about formalizing the group by various routes. It was as if Simon had psychic powers.

However, before anyone had any opportunity to endorse his proposal,

Hank chimed in with, “Simon, you were never presented the challenge; truth or dare?”

Simon grinned as he pronounced, “Truth, of course; it is so much more interesting.”

Hank, quite straightforward, asked, “Have you ever hacked a computer?”

Simon proceeded to stun the group, announcing, “I never formally applied to Harvard.”

Watching their expressions carefully, he could see they were astounded. “A conventional entrance was much too simple,” he bragged. “It was more challenging to break into the campus computer system and manipulate the records.” Simon explained, “I was able to create a record with all my pertinent personal information, indicating I’d completed the acceptance process, and with flying colors, of course,” he admitted with a half smirk. He proudly announced that he was also able to enroll in all his courses at that same time.

Each of them was in a state of shock and disbelief, but then it was a moment of truth, culminating in a sense of relief. Simon was an exceptional person in many ways, and this was just one more aspect of his puzzling character.

When the aftershock ultimately subsided, and after a long pause, Paolo was the first to speak. “If we’re going to be part of a clandestine group, we most certainly need a name.” As the name rolled smoothly across his Italian tongue, the others smiled with implied acceptance.

They swore it would be their own private fraternity.

With a clink of their beer bottles, the group officially became La Fratellanza.

A FLORENTINE ENCOUNTER

After a sound sleep, preceded by a bottle of Chianti and a sizable wedge of pecorino cheese, Hank left his room at the Hotel Lungarno on Borgo San Jacopo. He was invigorated, not just because of the crisp morning air, typical for March, but because of the adventure he was about to undertake.

He crossed the renowned bridge, the Ponte Vecchio, wandered past the Duomo, the towering cathedral in the center of Florence, and up a narrow street leading to the famous Mercato Centrale, Florence's central market. It was there he noticed a crowd gathering in the Piazza San Lorenzo, directly ahead of him. It appeared to be a group of African street vendors, and precisely the place Simon had told him to start looking for their Chosen One.

Hank searched the crowd, singling out several of the street vendors, inquiring as to the whereabouts of a young Libyan named Hussein Tarishi. After his fifth inquiry, he found someone who fortunately spoke English. Equally as fortunate, the vendor was able to give him an exact description of Hussein, and easy directions to where he might find him. Hank found his way to the small café behind the Central Market on Via Taddea, and as the street vendor had accurately predicted, Hussein was there, enjoying his morning espresso.

Hussein, even from his sitting position, appeared to be lanky, with a relaxed face portraying a touch of innocence. Innocent, although he was now several years older than when Simon first discovered him. Hank guessed he was in his late twenties. His physical features defied the colorful rhetoric that Simon had heard over a decade ago. Hank had difficulty imagining that level of oratory coming from this gentle soul.

Hank, before having set eyes on Hussein, decided he would first observe him from a distance over the course of a few days. Then, when he

felt the time was right, he would introduce himself. To avoid staring in the café, Hank sat off to the side as he enjoyed his first real Italian coffee and *cornetto*, the Italian version of a croissant.

In the space of an hour, Hussein left the café and wandered back toward the Central Market, with Hank following not far behind. He watched as Hussein approached the steps on the north side of the Basilica di San Lorenzo, just as Simon described. Minutes later, standing tall on the top step, Hussein gathered a sizeable crowd. Hank counted about forty in the group all looking quite similar but in different sizes, shapes, and shades.

In the moments that followed, Hank finally witnessed the seductive language Simon promised. *It is as if Hussein is standing on his own pulpit, and perhaps he is*, Hank thought.

Anxious to hear what Hussein was saying, and obviously not versed in Italian, Hank managed to overhear one of the onlookers who was fluent in English. Hank asked him if he would give a loose translation of what the man on the top step was saying. The onlooker was happy to oblige. The equally curious observer informed him that the issue of the day was how to cope with the Carabinieri that continued to hassle the street vendors.

After an hour of Hussein parceling out helpful tips, the crowd began to disperse.

Once again, Hank wended his way through the crowd to follow Hussein, staying at a safe distance and out of view. This became his *modus operandi* for the next several days, until he decided the time was right to approach Hussein directly.

It wasn't difficult for Hank to go unnoticed in the busy streets of Florence and he quite enjoyed his undercover role. Actually, during his bobbing and weaving in an attempt to be unobserved, he witnessed one of the supposed raids Hussein had described earlier in his speech. Upon seeing the Carabinieri, the vendors scooped up their goods in their white sheets and ran to the nearest street, dashed around the corner, and hid in the doorways of various palazzos and shops. Minutes later, after the Carabinieri drove by or walked away, the vendors would set up shop in the former location, open for business with a smile.

Hank looked on as one daring African placed his wares, specifically his counterfeit Gucci bags, next to a large tent sign. The sign, written in English, warned tourists not to buy counterfeit goods or they would be heavily fined. At first, he wondered whether it was unintentional or simply a farce, however, after observing it on several other occasions, Hank concluded it was the latter.

On the second day, Hank returned to San Lorenzo and saw Hussein again on the steps, but this time he wasn't standing before a crowd. He was perched on the top step, sitting cross-legged, with an assembled group

seated below him. It appeared he was conducting some sort of training session. Unable to find an interpreter, Hank focused on Hussein's body language and the tone of his speech. He found that he was as impressed as he had been the previous day.

Then, on the third day, at the small café on Via Taddea, Hank took the opportunity to make his introduction.

Hussein was sitting alone at his usual table in the corner, when Hank approached.

Squinting, Hank mumbled, "*Mi scusi che non parlo l'italiano.*" He had been studying his *Say It in Italian; Phrase Book for Travelers* on his flight over, and Paolo had taught him the value of using various Italian facial expressions and hand gestures; a way of communicating in its own right. Hank didn't want Hussein to assume he knew anything about him, so he thought the evasive approach was best.

Hussein looked up, and in perfect English with a pleasant Italian accent, said, "It's not a problem. May I help you?"

It worked like a charm.

Hank proceeded to compliment Hussein on his command of the English language and apologized for the interruption. "I noticed you here the day before, and I saw you again in the Piazza San Lorenzo speaking to the crowd. While I didn't understand what you were saying to the men you had assembled, I was extremely impressed with your delivery."

Hank then asked if he could join him at his table, and Hussein invited him to sit down.

"Thank you. I'm on vacation and visiting Florence for the first time, and I didn't know a soul, until now." He smiled.

Hussein took the cue and asked, "Where do you come from?"

Hank was more than pleased to respond to the question. He said he lived in Chicago and shared a little about the Windy City.

"I read about your Chicago, and one time I saw some photos of the city. It looks like a nice place to live. What kind of work do you do?" Hussein queried.

Hank, happy to give him just enough detail to stimulate his interest, described the Chestnut Foundation. Hussein seemed most interested in the community organizing aspects, asking a series of questions. Hank was forthcoming with his answers.

During the short time they spent together conversing, Hank felt comfortable enough to ask, "Would you like to join me for lunch later in the day?"

“I’d be delighted,” Hussein responded, and then suggested a time and place to meet.

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At 1:00 p.m., they met at the Antico Ristorante il Sasso di Dante, a small restaurant across from the Piazza del Duomo that Hussein had recommended.

At first, they engaged in small talk about Florence, graduating to Hussein’s own community organizing activities. He explained to Hank that when he first came to Florence, the street vendors were loosely assembled factions, usually by country of origin, competing against one another, which often led to violence.

“I fought hard to organize the street vendors into one cohesive group that can work together. I knew this was the only way the vendors could become more profitable.” He was also quite proud of the fact that his efforts contributed to holding down the violence and made it easier for them to deal with the Carabinieri. “Specifically, I taught them how to work the tourist, by one vendor selling high and the other vendor selling low, ultimately striking a middle number, which produced a profit.”

Hussein explained how he assigned a team leader for each group of twenty-five vendors. Currently, his group consisted of 250 vendors, and it was growing. He went on to describe how, at the end of each day, each vendor would turn in the money he had earned to his respective leader. Then the group leaders would meet with him in the evening and deposit their day’s take. At the end of each week, he would pay out the vendors’ salaries in equal shares, minus his ten percent cut.

“Out of the ten percent, I pay myself five and the rest goes into a reserve, as an aid fund in case of medical and or legal needs the street vendors may incur.” He admitted that out of his percentage he paid a meager portion to the Carabinieri. Hussein told Hank that the raids he had witnessed were just a pretense to make it look like the Carabinieri were doing its job. “As long as I’m able to keep the violence down, everyone stays happy. Naturally, the vendors are satisfied with the structure since their earnings had increased and a collective aid fund provided a safety net.”

Hank was impressed with all Hussein had accomplished, and it was obvious that Hussein himself was pleased.

At the close of an enjoyable and informative lunch, Hank gave Hussein a book and asked him if he would read it. “I would be very interested in knowing your thoughts, both about the subject matter and about its author.”

Hussein happily agreed. He promised to read the book that night, and then they could discuss it in the morning, at the café on Via Taddea over

their morning espresso.

The next day Hank waited in the café for Hussein with great anticipation, continuously checking his watch. As he confirmed the hour for the tenth time, he looked up to see Hussein approaching, with his face aglow and a smile that stretched from ear to ear.

Before the customary greeting, *buongiorno*, Hussein immediately began to sing the praises of the book Hank had given him. It was music to Hank's ears as Hussein quoted various passages verbatim. It was clear Hussein was mesmerized.

If Hank didn't know better, he would have sworn he was listening to Saul himself. Saul Alinsky's book, *Rules for Radicals*, was Hank's bible, and told him everything he needed to know about how to organize the have-nots to achieve real political power. He believed it was a must-read for all to understand radicalism and how to achieve its goals.

As if his speechifying weren't enough, Hussein also had a photographic memory and was a remarkably quick study. "Alinsky has provided the basis and the structure for true community organizing. I was unaware of many things, and I desperately want to know more!" Hussein exclaimed.

Hank thought it was beautiful—Hussein had found his voice—Hank had found his man.

Within days, Hussein was reciting Alinsky's message in several languages to the crowds, as they gathered on the steps of the Basilica di San Lorenzo. Sometimes he spoke in Arabic, his native tongue, to the Sudanese and Moroccans; other times, it was in French to the Senegalese or English to the Kenyans. Always he would switch back to Italian in an effort to help the other street vendors improve their facility for the local language.

Hank assumed Hussein had learned Italian in his own country, recalling Simon had mentioned that Libya was an Italian colony from 1912 to 1939. In fact, when he spoke in Arabic, his words tended to flow with the hint of an Italian accent, and when he spoke to Hank in English the accent was ever-present. Whatever language Hussein was weaving in and out of, Hank sat back in sheer amazement and admiration.

Within days, Hussein and Hank had established a routine as Hussein carried out his daily schedule. Hank would eavesdrop on his morning oratory, and when he was unable to find an interpreter or understand his words, he focused on his gestures and the faces of his audience. Then Hank

and Hussein would meet for lunch at one of the various restaurants and cafés lining the Borgo San Lorenzo near the church. While they consumed pasta or a pizza, Hussein would reconstruct the general idea of his message for that day. Hank, now with permission, would follow Hussein around during the afternoons observing him performing various duties. For the most part, they would wrap up the day continuing their conversations over dinner.

After several days of following this routine, Hank added something new to the mix.

Hank and Hussein would end their evenings squaring off over a game of chess. Hank, the chess master, prided himself on his ability to strategize and ultimately win. However, with Hussein, he had lost more games than he had won. It was a first for him. While Hussein alleged that he had only played once or maybe twice, Hank wasn't so sure, but he did admire his shrewdness. *Checkmate* evidently was not a new word in Hussein's vocabulary.

After several more encounters, they were becoming fast friends.

Each day Hank discovered facts more interesting than the last about Hussein, which certainly gave him more insight into this amazing man. Hussein, unaware that Hank had any prior knowledge, described his home in Libya, and the loss of his family in the bombing that took place in 1986. Hank learned that before arriving in Florence, Hussein was a senior attending the University of Garyounis in Benghazi, majoring in political science.

"I'm guessing you are in your late twenties, which would mean that you were quite young as a senior in college," Hank said.

"Yes I was sixteen, and considered a genius. My government called me a child prodigy." After a slight pause, he added, "That explains the rest of my story." He continued to describe his home life and the extreme poverty he and his family endured. "However, my intelligence was recognized by the government, and Colonel Qaddafi wanted—or rather insisted—that I work for the government in exchange for a full scholarship to the university. I despise my government!" he exclaimed. "The government restricts many human rights—freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of the press. Worse, the government controls the court system." With his facial expression softening slightly, he said, "Still, the one thing I loved most was to learn, to capture all the knowledge I could, and accepting Qaddafi's offer was my only opportunity to get a formal education and take care of my family."

Hank took notice when Hussein lowered his head slightly, looking down, and in a hushed voice said, "The real reason I accepted the offer was because it included a home for my family." Slightly more emotional, he

recalled that after the bombing there were many newspapers reporting the entire Tarishi family had died in the attack. "It was a devastating moment, but it provided me the only opportunity to leave my country, never to return." He sighed.

Looking up at Hank, he described how he fled Libya as a stowaway on a boat heading for Sicily. He explained that was where he first learned Italian, not in the schools of Benghazi but in the streets of Palermo. Over the years, he managed to wend his way along the coast of Italy, picking up odd jobs until he finally reached Florence, where he decided to stay.

Suddenly, Hussein changed his demeanor and the subject, as he started to talk about his passion for social reform.

As he continued to express his views, it was not only the words, but also the power of his oratory, which confirmed in Hank's mind—he had found the Chosen One.

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Several weeks had passed, and Hank was scheduled to fly back to Chicago the next day. La Fratellanza had made plans to assemble, and were anxiously waiting to hear what Hank had discovered about Hussein Tarishi.

It was to be their last evening together and Hank knew it would be his final opportunity to make an impassioned plea and to raise the ultimate question: Would Hussein be interested in going to the United States to work for him at the Chestnut Foundation?

First, he needed to lay the groundwork.

Hank invited Hussein to join him for dinner at their favorite Antico Ristorante il Sasso di Dante near the Duomo. While they waited for their antipasti, he reminded Hussein of their discussions when he indicated an interest in a career in politics.

"I remember when you explained how some people who hold a political office use their political power to support efforts to effect social change," Hussein said. "It is a position I had never considered for myself, but I find the idea intriguing."

"Yes, but before entering a political career it is best first to involve yourself directly with those activities that effect social change," Hank advised.

Hank then went on to describe some of his organization's "effective" organizing activities, as he liked to call them, as a means to increase their power base. By way of example, he explained, one of the neighborhoods outside Chicago had become infested with drug dealers. So he arranged for the pastors in seven of the churches in the neighborhood to preach a sermon, all on the same Sunday. Each pastor was instructed to admonish

the actions of the drug dealers and urge the congregation members to band together in a fight to rid their neighborhood of these undesirables. Hank had also arranged for members of his organization to attend the sermons and then take to the pulpit. Speaking on behalf of the Chestnut Foundation, these members informed the parishioners that they would support their efforts and would provide the support to neutralize the drug dealers. Some of the Chestnut Foundation members were former convicts, well versed in the ways of the street and in enacting their own sort of justice. It was quite “effective,” but these were details, Hank thought best not to mention. But he did say that the drug dealers relocated, leaving the neighborhood once again safe.

“So, the members of the community were beholden to the Chestnut Foundation and provided an abundance of volunteers for many of your organizing drives,” Hussein surmised.

“Exactly!” Hank exclaimed, still amazed at Hussein’s quick grasp of the issues.

Citing another example, Hank spoke about a series of convenience stores vandalized in a neighborhood by one of the local gangs. He again dispatched members of his organization to solicit support from the local community for a joint effort to clean up the damage inflicted on the stores. The Chestnut Foundation donated funds, and the storeowners were able to restock their shelves. Through the foundation’s efforts, the individual communities were empowered, and with the support of the foundation, were able to keep their streets safe and the criminal elements at bay.

“More important, you had yet another source of volunteers.” Hussein smirked.

“Yes. Then other times, the foundation would use the volunteers for different purposes. Case in point, they would picket banks and other lending organizations in an attempt to force them to provide low-cost mortgages.”

Hank cited a few more instances, each time pointing out how the volunteers played a key role. He counseled Hussein that building a base of support, one neighborhood at a time, provided the power to effect the social change he desired. The volunteers also became an invaluable resource during election campaigns to encourage voters to go to the polls and cast their ballots for Chestnut’s preferred political candidates.

“At times, our methods might have been in question, but the ends always justified the means,” he added proudly.

As Hank was finishing his sentence, a peculiar expression appeared on Hussein face, and he quickly responded. “If you have organized a vast, mass-based peoples’ organization, you can flaunt it visibly before the target to show your power openly.”

Astonishingly, he was quoting Saul Alinsky verbatim.

Again, amazed by Hussein's quick grasp, Hank stopped citing examples. The time was right to pose the question.

In response, Hank saw a different expression on Hussein's face. The ear-to-ear smile returned as he expressed his desire to see the United States for himself. Then he said, "It would be my privilege to work for you, my friend. I have harbored plans to leave my current situation, which has its limitations, to go on to something bigger and better." He confessed that he felt he had accomplished a great deal in the organization of the street vendors, and believed he had sufficiently trained the group leaders to take over and appoint someone in his place.

"Florence initially provided me with the means to expand my horizons, though, after spending time with you, I realized there is so much more that I can attain. Perhaps it is time to move on. I understand now there's nothing more for me here." Hussein also confessed that, after reading a plethora of information about America, "It would be a great opportunity for me to see firsthand how a person can speak out and say anything without fear for his life or the lives of his family. Tell me what I must do to join your organization."

"Leave all of the strategy and tactics to me. I will elaborate on the plan without delay." Hank knew Hussein would be ideal, not only to accomplish the goals of La Fratellanza but also to help him accomplish his own personal goals as well.

It was a productive dinner, although a disappointing chess match for Hank.

With some sadness at leaving, Hank bade his new friend farewell with a traditional two-sided Italian hug, and promised to be in touch very soon.

Exhilaration set in over his burgeoning partnership, and he knew he had just aced his first assignment. That night, back in his hotel room, Hank assembled his notes, and then went to look for an Internet café to fire off an e-mail to La Fratellanza.