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Ali from Aleppo

Raeed Chowdhry

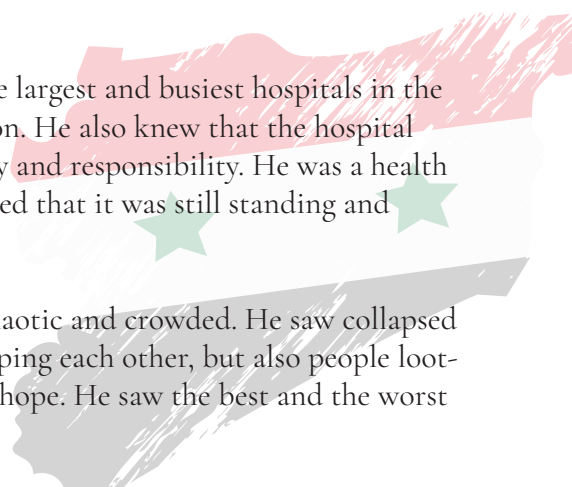
The ground shook violently, waking up Ali from his sleep. He grabbed his phone and checked the time. It was 4:17 a.m. He felt another jolt and heard a loud rumble. He jumped out of his bed and ran to the door. He opened it and saw his neighbors running down the stairs, screaming and panicking. He followed them, hoping that his apartment building would not collapse.

Ali reached the ground floor and ran outside. He looked around and saw chaos and destruction everywhere. Buildings were cracked and crumbling, cars were smashed and overturned, power lines were snapped and sparking, and people were injured and bleeding. He heard sirens and screams, and felt aftershocks and tremors. He realized that he had just survived a massive earthquake, one of the worst in Turkey's history.

He checked his phone again and saw that he had no signal. He tried to call his wife and children, who were still in Aleppo, Syria, but he couldn't get through. He felt a surge of fear and anxiety. He wondered if they were safe, if they had felt the earthquake, if they had enough food and water, if they had any hope of escaping the war-torn city. He prayed to God to protect them and to reunite them soon.

“Ya Allah, please protect my family. Please let them be safe. Please let me hear from them soon.” He whispered to himself.

Ali was a nurse at the Gaziantep University Hospital, one of the largest and busiest hospitals in the region. He knew that many people would need medical attention. He also knew that the hospital would be overwhelmed and understaffed. He felt a sense of duty and responsibility. He was a health care worker, and he had taken an oath to save lives. He just hoped that it was still standing and functioning.



He got into his car and drove to the hospital. The roads were chaotic and crowded. He saw collapsed buildings, damaged cars, and injured people. He saw people helping each other, but also people looting and fighting. He saw fear and despair, but also courage and hope. He saw the best and the worst of humanity.

He reached the hospital and parked his car. He was relieved to see that it was still intact and operational. He ran to the emergency department and saw a scene of horror: He saw blood, bodies, and bandages. He saw doctors, nurses, and volunteers. He saw pain, suffering, and death. He saw life and death.

He reported to his supervisor and received his assignment. He was to assist in the triage area, where he had to sort the patients according to the severity of their injuries and the urgency of their treatment. He had to make quick and difficult decisions. He had to prioritize who to save and who to let die.

He took a deep breath, put on his mask and gloves, and got to work.

He worked non-stop for the next twelve hours. He treated hundreds of patients, most of them with serious and life-threatening injuries. He performed triage, first aid, wound care, IV therapy, CPR, and other procedures. He used his skills, knowledge, and experience to provide the best possible care. He also used his empathy, kindness, and patience to provide comfort and support. He listened to their stories, their fears, their hopes. He related to them, as he had gone through similar situations in his own life. He had witnessed the horrors of war, the violence of bombs, the cruelty of bullets. He had fled his homeland, leaving behind his family, his friends, his memories. He had sought refuge in Turkey, hoping for a better life, a safer life, a peaceful life. He understood their pain, their suffering, their trauma. He also understood their resilience, their strength, their faith. He admired them, as they had taught him how to survive, how to cope, how to live.

He tried to comfort the patients and their families, as well as his colleagues and himself. He tried to be calm, kind, and supportive. He tried to be human.

“Please, please, save my son. He’s only seven years old. He’s all I have left.” A woman begged him, holding her son’s hand.

“I’m sorry, ma’am. Your son has severe internal bleeding and organ damage. We don’t have the equipment or the staff to operate on him. There’s nothing we can do,” he said, with tears in his eyes.

“No, no, no. You can’t say that. You can’t give up on him. He’s a fighter. He’s a survivor. He’s my miracle. Please, please, don’t let him die.” She cried, clutching her son’s chest.

He hugged her and whispered, “I’m so sorry. I wish I could do more. I wish I could save him. But I can’t. I’m so sorry.”

He felt a pang of guilt and grief. He wished he could save every life. He wished he could heal every wound. He wished he could end every pain. But he couldn’t. He was only human.



He moved on to the next patient, a young man with a gunshot wound in his leg. He recognized him as one of the Syrian refugees who had fled the war and settled in Gaziantep. He asked him his name and how he got shot.

“My name is Omar. I was trying to help some people who were trapped under a collapsed building. But some looters came and started shooting at us. They wanted to take our belongings and our food. They didn’t care about our lives,” he said, with a grimace of pain.

He felt a surge of joy and relief. He was glad he could help someone. He was glad he could make a difference. He was glad he could save a life. He felt alive.

He continued his work, saving some lives and losing others. He did not know how many lives he saved or lost. He did not know if his family was safe or not. He did not know if the earthquake was over or not. He did not know what the future would bring. He only knew that he had to keep working. He had to keep saving lives.

He was a health care worker. He was a hero.

“That’s terrible. I’m sorry you had to go through that. You’re very brave and generous. You did the right thing,” he said, as he cleaned and bandaged his wound.

“Thank you. You’re very kind and helpful. You’re doing a great job,” he said, with a smile of gratitude.

He finally took a break and went to the staff room. He was exhausted, physically and mentally. He had seen too much, done too much, felt too much. He needed a break, a rest, a moment of peace. He sat on a couch and turned on the TV. He wanted to watch something light and funny, something that would distract him and make him laugh. He flipped through the channels, but he couldn’t find anything like that. All he saw were news reports about the earthquake, the aftermath, the rescue efforts, the death toll. He felt a wave of sadness and despair. He wondered if it would ever end, if things would ever get better, if there was any hope for the future.



He stopped at a channel that showed images of Aleppo, his hometown. He felt a pang of nostalgia and longing. He recognized the streets, the buildings, the landmarks. He remembered the times he had spent there, the people he had loved there, the life he had had there. He wished he could go back there, to see his wife and children, to hug them and kiss them, to tell them that he missed them and loved them. He wondered if they were watching the same channel, if they were thinking of him, if they were waiting for him.

He watched as the reporter talked about the earthquake that had hit Syria as well, causing more damage and destruction to the already devastated country. He watched as the reporter said that the situation was dire and desperate, that the humanitarian aid was scarce and insufficient, that the access was difficult and dangerous, that the chances of survival were slim and bleak. He watched as the reporter showed footage of collapsed buildings, trapped people, dead bodies, and crying children. He felt a surge of anger and frustration. He wondered why this was happening, why the world was so cruel, why God was so unfair. He wanted to do something, to help them, to save them, to change things. But he felt powerless, useless, hopeless. He felt like he had failed them, like he had abandoned them, like he had betrayed them.

He turned off the TV and closed his eyes. He tried to calm himself and clear his mind. He took a deep breath and said a silent prayer. He asked God to forgive him and to guide him. He asked God to protect his family and to reunite them. He asked God to heal his patients and to reward them. He asked God to bless his colleagues and to strengthen them. He asked God to end the war and to bring peace. He asked God to stop the earthquakes and to restore order. He asked God to show him mercy and to give him grace.

He opened his eyes and looked at his phone. He saw that he had a signal and a message. He opened it and read it. It was from his wife. She said that they were safe, that they had felt the earthquake, but that it was not too strong. She said that they had enough food and water, but that they were still in danger. She said that they had hope of escaping, but that they needed his help. She said that they loved him and that they missed him. She said that they were praying for him and that they were proud of him.

He felt a wave of relief and joy. He smiled and cried. He typed a reply and sent it. He said that he was safe, that he had survived the earthquake, but that it was very bad. He said that he had enough supplies, but that he was very tired. He said that he had hope of seeing them, but that he needed more time. He said that he loved them and that he missed them. He said that he was praying for them and that he was grateful for them.

He put his phone in his pocket and stood up. He felt a jolt and heard a rumble. He realized that it was another earthquake, another aftershock, another test. He braced himself and waited for it to pass. He told himself that he would be okay, that he would make it, that he would not give up. He told himself that he had a mission, a vision, a passion. He told himself that he had a family, a community, a humanity. He told himself that he had a faith, a trust, a love.

He walked out of the lounge and headed back to the emergency department. He was ready to work again.

