

I AM THE REFUGEE

WHO DREAMED

A REFUGEE'S JOURNEY OF HOPE

To Muhammad Al-Ali



Dedication

To the souls of children forcibly displaced... To every refugee who carried their name as an identity, and their tent as a temporary homeland... To every hand that offered help in the darkest of times... To my mother, who made solitude a warm embrace, and a tent a home bustling with hope... To all who believed in dreams, and knew that will creates the impossible...

Chapter One:

The Journey

into the Unknown

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Everything seemed normal... just another day of my childhood, where I ran without restraint in the vast wilderness in front of our small house. Only three rooms, yet they were enough to contain me, enough to hold my small dreams and our big laughs, enough to be my entire world. Their crumbling walls bore the etchings of old days, each scratch a story told by my grandmother, and every corner carried the **warm scent of my mother's bread in the early morning**, mixed with the ancient dust of our village. The sunlight would seep in through the single kitchen window, painting golden lines on the earthen floor where we played, and in the room's corners lingered the tales my grandmother used to tell us before bed, about ghouls and heroes, about the simplicity of life and the strength of spirit dwelling within our ancestors.

Our world didn't extend beyond those green hills that surrounded our homes, and I genuinely believed that the universe began and ended where our boundless play areas started.

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I vividly recall the morning routine, which began before sunrise.

The distant crow of a rooster, then the gentle footsteps of my

mother in the kitchen, as she lit the fire in the clay oven. We

would wake up to the aroma of fresh bread, filling the air,

mingled with the warm milk my grandmother had just milked

from the sheep. This simple routine gave me a deep sense of

security, as if time had stopped at these eternal moments. After

that, I would rush to the house's courtyard, where the sheep

gathered, running among them and laughing, their soft wool

brushing against my small hands, and their monotonous

bleating filling my ears, their tiny bells playing a daily symphony

that brought us peace. Sometimes, I would race with the young

lambs, falling and getting up, my laughter scattering in the open

air, without a single worry or care. My biggest concern was only

when I would return home to watch my favorite shows on the old

television, which seemed like a magic box opening to other

worlds, and eat the food my mother prepared with love, that food

into which she poured more of her soul than ingredients. The

smell of maqloubeh or raw kibbeh would spread through the

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house, announcing the nearing hour of return to the warmth of home and my mother's tenderness, where security enveloped us like a thick blanket, and our small family was our impenetrable fortress.

Our village wasn't large, perhaps a few dozens of scattered houses nestled amidst the green hills that rose like guardians around it. It was like a natural work of art, every corner telling a story, and every ancient olive tree holding the wisdom of years in its branches. But it was everything to me. We knew each other, no one needed to introduce themselves, for everyone knew everyone. A simple smile was enough to open hearts, and the word "my neighbor" meant more than any contract. We didn't need the complexities of the city, we didn't know its annoying noise or its exhausting expenses. Everything was simple, everything was clear like a clear spring of water from which sheep and the thirsty drank. We didn't own much in material possessions; our cupboards weren't filled with gold, nor were our pockets heavy with money, but we never felt a lack at all. For

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we had **security** that money couldn't buy, and psychological comfort that surpassed all earthly treasures, and a deep belonging to roots deeply embedded in the good earth. We had neighbors whose doors were never closed to those in need, and relatives whose visits never ceased during occasions or ordinary days. Our lives were one single fabric, every thread binding us to each other, to our land, and to our ancestors who lived and died here, leaving us an invaluable legacy of customs and values, which made us feel truly rich.

I remember a few days before that fateful day, specifically in the last week of the short summer holiday, I went with my father to buy school supplies. My heart danced with joy, for the first semester had ended successfully, and I had excelled in some subjects. I was excited for the new school year, which held the promise of learning and new adventures. Our small village market was bustling with life, the sounds of vendors mingling with children's laughter, and the scent of fresh fruit mixing with the aroma of spices. I had my annual school photo taken; I stood

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proudly in front of the camera, wearing the new blue school uniform my mother had carefully bought for me, as if I were growing up and stepping towards the future with confident, unwavering strides. I bought **new, white notebooks, as pristine as my dreams**, and colorful pens that shimmered under the sunlight, just like my smile that never left my face, promising a new day full of drawing and writing, as if each pen held within it a thousand unwritten dreams. I thought the world had smiled upon me, that I was safe amidst my unending dreams and games, and that tomorrow would be like today, and today like yesterday. I used to plan to play with my friends after school, and to finish my drawings on the outer walls of our house. All my thoughts were confined to this beautiful, small world.

But that night, something was different. I didn't understand it then, but I felt it like a slight tremor in the depths of the earth before a great earthquake, like a strange sound of the wind playing an unfamiliar, melancholic tune on the edges of our wooden windows. There was a **strange tension filling the air**,

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like black clouds gathering on a clear horizon, suffocating the cold night's breath. The faces of the adults looked more serious, lines of worry etched onto their foreheads as if they were maps of blocked roads, and their whispering was not ordinary, but a heavy whisper, laden with unknown fear, breaking the usual silence of our village. They exchanged furtive glances, their eyes saying what their tongues could not, as if they were hiding a heavy secret they feared revealing. My father sat silently in a corner, staring into space, while my mother nervously moved her hands as she prepared tea, her hands trembling slightly. I didn't ask, perhaps because I didn't want to spoil my happiness, which was slowly slipping away from me, like a grain of sand falling from a punctured bag. Or perhaps because I was a child confident that tomorrow would bring another day of play, study, and laughter, and that all this would pass like any temporary disruption, dissipating like morning fog. I buried my head in my pillow, trying to push away these heavy feelings, and wished for morning to come quickly to sweep away all these clouds.

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I woke up in the morning, but I didn't find myself in my warm bed. I didn't smell my mother's bread or hear my grandmother preparing tea. Instead, there was a strange smell of gasoline, sweat, and fear. I was in an old car, shaking us on rough, unfamiliar roads, and the sounds of the car's wheels on the gravel were the morning's music instead of birds chirping or sheep bleating. I didn't know its destination, nor why we were in it, nor why my bed was no longer my place. Around me were many people, familiar faces from our village, some holding their child tightly as if fearing to lose them, others looking with lost, pale eyes, and lips sealed as if they hadn't tasted conversation in a long time. There was no laughter echoing or talk of harvest seasons or the sheep we left behind, or even of school and its homework. There was a **heavy silence enveloping everyone**, the sound of the car's engine tearing through its veins, and anxious glances searching for an answer no one possessed, not even the adults whom I had always thought knew everything. The air was thick, laden with the scent of despair and fear mixed with

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the endless dust of the road. Whenever I tried to say something, my throat felt dry, and the words froze on my lips.

After long hours that felt like an eternity, we arrived with the sunrise, with the first streaks of light that revealed a sight my eyes couldn't comprehend... Our house wasn't there. Nothing I knew was there. No olive trees that shaded our courtyard, no rocks where my grandfather used to sit and tell us stories, no familiar scent of our village. Instead, there were endless rows of **white caravans, lined up next to each other** as if they were identical copies, lifeless, without memory, without warmth. They were merely cold metal structures, like large matchboxes scattered in a barren desert. I didn't know this place, and I didn't know who I would be in it. Would my beloved old name be forgotten? Would I become just another number in this white sea of lost faces and unknown stories? I felt as if I had stepped out of a vibrant painting into a monochrome sketch devoid of life.

I got out of the car, my steps heavy as if dragging invisible shackles. I gazed at everything around me... the strange

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caravans staring with empty, glass eyes, the strange people exchanging bewildered looks, or sitting silently as if they were statues of sorrow. The dry, barren land, unwatered for ages, cracked like the hearts of its inhabitants. The sky seemed different from what I saw in my village, as if it were another sky that held neither the same promises nor the same shining stars that guided us on dark nights. I turned to my younger siblings, and I saw their bewildered gazes; they were like me... confused, uncomfortable, not understanding what was happening, but they clung to me and to our parents as if we were their last refuge in this new world that had swallowed our old one and cast us into this void. Their small hands gripped mine, cold and trembling, as if searching for an answer in my silence, or for a warmth they had lost.

I watched my mother unload the bags, placing the few belongings we carried into the small caravan, each item seemingly carrying a piece of our scattered memories. Her movements were slow and heavy, as if she bore the weight of the

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world on her shoulders, and every piece of cloth she placed in the caravan carried with it a part of her exhausted soul. I wanted to ask her: "Mother, when will we return to our home that we left open? When will we return to my grandfather's sheep and our neighbors' laughter?" But I didn't ask, perhaps because I knew the answer deep down without her having to utter it, perhaps because silence spoke louder than any reply. Or perhaps because I saw **her smile that tried to appear reassuring**, but it was a shaky smile, carrying a thousand mixed feelings, a thousand stories of fear, hope, and unending fatigue, a thousand unshed tears. I didn't understand the big words like "war" or "displacement" then, but I felt something strange... something akin to being lost, yet not completely lost; it was more like trying to grasp something that was fading between your hands without being able to stop it, like a beautiful soap bubble bursting in the air, or a lovely dream evaporating with the first ray of sun, leaving behind only a feeling of loss.

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I sat by the cold metal caravan door, which trembled with every gust of wind, staring at the new place that had become my destiny, at this cramped square that would hold our lives and new stories. Is this my home now? Just one room for all of us, no space to play or run, no corners to hide from my younger siblings, not even a place for the new school notebooks I loved? No walls holding my childhood memories, no pictures of loved ones I left behind, no window from which to gaze at my old world that had vanished, no smell of my mother's bread in the morning as I was used to, but the smell of metal, dry earth, and despair, mixed with the scent of the unknown that awaited us. I felt a biting cold seep into my bones, not from the weather, but from the loss of the warmth I had grown accustomed to.

In one single moment, I felt everything had changed... The happiness that had enveloped me just days before vanished, as if it had never existed, as if it were just a beautiful dream from which I suddenly awoke to a nightmare I never imagined. Joy became merely something that appeared on my face when an

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adult smiled at me or I saw a simple toy, but it wasn't real; it was a fragile mask worn by a small body missing its soul, trying to adapt to a harsh reality. I no longer knew anything... I no longer knew myself. How could a child's world change overnight? How could everything disappear so quickly?

Who am I in this strange place? Where am I in this vast void that replaced my old world? Who will I be here among these identical caravans, in this place they call "Azraq Refugee Camp"? Why this long and complicated name?

I had no answer... only the echo of lost questions that the silent sky received, leaving me to face an unknown I was unprepared for, an unknown stretching before me like an endless desert, and I stood alone in its midst.

Chapter Two:

Searching for the Meaning of Asylum

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I don't know how time passed, nor did I feel how the first week in this new place, this white void that swallowed my world, slipped away. Days repeated without me noticing, as if time had stopped or become meaningless. I would wake up every morning to the hurried footsteps outside the caravan, and to the murmurs of neighbors seeping through the thin walls like secrets I couldn't understand. Each day was an identical copy of the last: scorching sun during the day, and cold nights enveloping us in their eerie silence. I no longer found joy in playing; ball games faded, and my desire to run in the wilderness had died under the weight of the rubble and barbed wire surrounding the camp. I would sit for long hours by the caravan door, watching people come and go, their faces bearing the same weariness I saw in my mother's eyes, and I would wonder: Where are they going? What are they doing?

After days passed, during which my mother and father became worried about my prolonged silence, my parents decided to enroll us in school. It was as if they were trying to bring some

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semblance of normal life back to us, to throw us a lifeline in our sea of loss. "School is your path to the future, my son," my father said in his tired voice, patting my shoulder. "There you will find friends and learn new things." His words were a desperate attempt to paint hope on my face, which had been overcast with clouds of sadness.

We went to school; it was a collection of large caravans, nothing like the warm, earthen walls of my old village school. We stood in a long line under the scorching sun, rows of children with the same questions in their eyes. We handed over papers that barely contained our names and birthdates, papers that held no mention of our past, where we had been, or what we had lost. Then I found myself in the first grade of primary school. It wasn't new to me; I had been a diligent student in my village, loving reading and writing, and the colors of new notebooks. But school here wasn't like before. I felt no passion filling me, I didn't find that enthusiasm that used to overwhelm me when I went to my old school, where the sounds of our laughter filled the

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classrooms and mingled with the rustle of papers and the voices of teachers. Here, it was a dead feeling, as if I was doing something without a soul, without purpose. The classroom caravan walls were cold and metallic, the light entered through small windows, and the green blackboard lacked the magic of my old school's blackboard. I no longer wanted to study, I had no dreams, there was nothing to push me forward except that I was forced to go, that I went merely to pass the time, to escape the emptiness of the caravan, not to learn.

Days passed, and I felt like nothing more than a body moving through a void, a faded shadow of someone who had once been lively. I would do my homework silently, writing letters and words without interest, without a genuine desire to learn. School held no meaning for me; I only went because my parents wanted me to, and because it was the only remaining routine that resembled life. I watched my new classmates; some laughed, some played, but I felt different, as if an invisible glass barrier separated me from their world, because my world had shattered.

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Then one day, the Arabic language teacher entered the classroom. He was an elderly man, his hair as white as snow, and his eyes held a sad yet wise gaze. He began distributing texts to the students and asked them to read aloud. When he reached me, he handed me a text about the courage of children facing difficulties. I took the paper and began to read. I didn't know that my ability to read fluently and clearly would catch his attention; I had learned to read in my previous school before we left, and I loved books very much. When I finished the text, the teacher looked at me with astonishment, not without admiration, and whispers spread through the class. He said in a loud voice:

"How did you learn to read so quickly and with such proficiency? You are better than most older students!"

I didn't answer; I just stood silent, feeling that the matter wasn't worth the attention or praise. The praise felt strange to my ears, as if I didn't deserve it in this place. But he didn't leave me alone; instead, he made me stand in front of the entire class, placing me in the first seat beside him, as if he wanted to make me an

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example to be emulated, a flame to light the paths of my classmates. But he didn't know that it meant nothing to me; success or excellence held no meaning in this void, because I simply didn't feel that I belonged to this place, or that I deserved any success in it. I just wanted to go back to my seat in the back, to my own world of silence and contemplation.

Days passed, and I felt like a mere body moving through a void, like a wooden puppet manipulated by unseen strings. I couldn't adapt; I couldn't accept the new reality with all its challenges.

Success in school seemed meaningless. What was the point of learning if there was no future? These questions gnawed at my soul. And one day, as I watched children playing freely outside the school, I decided to leave school.

Yes, I left it. I no longer wanted to learn aimless lessons, I no longer wanted to be a student in a place where I felt no belonging, I no longer wanted to search for a future that was no longer clear before me, its features all blurred. I decided to turn to entertainment, perhaps there I would find something that

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would restore some of my lost passion, some of the innocence I had lost in a single night. The entertainment centers within the camp became my refuge, where there were no lessons and no homework, just time passing without responsibilities, without thinking about the unknown tomorrow.

And so began my new journey, away from books that no longer inspired me, away from classrooms that suffocated my soul. I found myself in play and entertainment hubs, wasting time on video games and running here and there aimlessly, where there were no lessons and no homework, just time passing without responsibilities. Two years passed since I left school, two years during which I fled from reality, searching for a moment to forget everything, but something was haunting me, like a shadow that never left me. This something was the sound of a word constantly repeated in my ears, in the conversations of adults when they gathered, in the news bulletins displayed on the small television screens in the hallways, in the words of teachers at

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the centers I sometimes visited. I heard it, but I didn't fully understand it: "Asylum."

I often heard the word "asylum," in the conversations of adults, in news reports that I only understood that one recurring word, echoing. I heard it, but I didn't fully grasp its meaning.

What does asylum mean? Is it a disease? Is it a punishment?

Who are we? How did we end up here? What is this place they call "Azraq Refugee Camp for Syrians"? Why does it have such a long and complicated name? Why wasn't it a name like my village, a simple, familiar, comforting name like "Village of Pomegranates" or "Olive Valley"? I kept asking these questions in my small mind, which could no longer bear any more ambiguity, but I found no clear answer from anyone, not even from my parents, who avoided delving into these painful details.

One day, while I was playing football in the courtyard of the center I frequented, new visitors arrived. I wasn't interested in them at first; they were just other visitors, strangers dressed elegantly, carrying large cameras, who came to take pictures and

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then leave. But this time, they didn't just take pictures; they started giving us an awareness session. So I sat down with the other children on the hard ground, listening with a mix of boredom and curiosity.

One of them, a man with a white beard and kind eyes, spoke about the importance of education and the future. Then he asked us:

"What is your dream? What do you want to be in the future?"

I looked around at the small faces; some said "engineer," others said "doctor," and a girl said "teacher." But I couldn't find an answer to give. I looked at him coldly and simply said, as if stating an inescapable truth:

"I don't know."

I didn't know how I could have a future; I didn't even know who I was to dream of anything. I was just someone living day by day, waiting for it to end, without thinking about tomorrow, or about

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any purpose for my existence. I felt like a blank page, but a torn page that couldn't be written on.

But the speaker didn't stop at my answer. He came and sat beside me, placed his large hand on my shoulder, and spoke in a low voice that still echoed in my ears as if from afar: "My son, don't despair. Life doesn't stop here. You must strengthen yourself, you must learn so you can rebuild our country."

I paused at his words. **Our country?**

Which country? Where is it? Why are we here then? Why didn't we go back there? Why did they let us leave? I raised my hand, which trembled slightly, and asked in a faint voice, barely audible:

"Where is our country? Why did we come here? What happened?"

He looked at me with deep sadness, then told me the truth I didn't want to hear, a truth as heavy as a rock thrown onto my heart:

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"Your country is no longer as it was... Your country is now under maintenance. When it becomes safe, you will return to it."

My country under maintenance? I didn't fully understand the meaning of these strange words. Is it like a broken car? Will it return to its original state? But I felt that I had lost something that couldn't be easily recovered, something bigger than me, bigger than the caravans, bigger than my lost dreams. I felt as if I had lost a part of my soul.

Then he continued, as if passing judgment on my destiny, or pronouncing a verdict I wasn't prepared for:

"As for now, you are a refugee."

A refugee?

I paused at this word. I felt as if something heavy and cold enveloped me and bound me from all sides. I didn't fully understand its meaning, but I felt it was a different word, a strange word, a word that made me feel trapped in an invisible cage. I was no longer me, I was no longer the child who ran in the

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wilderness; instead, I had become something else, a new definition for myself that I hadn't chosen.

A refugee...

The word that shackled my hands and stole the taste of freedom I breathed every morning. The word that bound my dreams, so they became mere thoughts trapped in my mind, unable to turn into reality, unable to see the light. It was like a giant fishing net cast over me, stripping me of the ability to move, to fly.

I don't know... I don't know what it means to be a refugee, but I realized that this word changed everything in my life, and that it would change me too. I felt then that a part of me had died, and that I had been reborn into a world that resembled nothing I had known, a world defined by a single word: refugee.

Chapter Three:

Who Will I Be?

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The word "asylum" began to haunt me from one place to another, from my daily reality to my dreams that had turned into nightly nightmares. It was no longer just a word; it had become a **stamp on my forehead, a chain on my soul, an invisible prison whose key I held in my hand but did not know how to unlock.** It shackled all my small dreams, and all that I aspired to for a bright future. My words to express myself became limited by my location, by the boundaries of this camp that had become my world. It was as if this word branched into many meanings in my thoughts, like a deep, dark ocean in the middle of which a person desperately tries to find land, but sees none and does not know when they will drown, when the waves will pull them into eternal depths.

I became like someone who did not like to introduce themselves, nor define their essence or identity. I feared being asked my name or where I used to live, because I had no answer that satisfied me, or that satisfied the questioner. I no longer found meaning in the dreams that used to fill my head, nor in the

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future that was once a clear goal before me. I was someone living day by day, not thinking about tomorrow, because tomorrow held more of the unknown, and more unanswered questions. I was a child whose biggest concern was for morning to come so he could go through his simple daily routine, and play with the sheep and in the vast wilderness. I didn't know that this child would vanish so quickly, and that his world would collapse in the blink of an eye. I didn't know that I would not be what I wanted, that I would not be able to choose my path, but rather a path I did not desire would be imposed upon me.

Every morning, I would wake up to the sound of the wind embracing our thin metal caravans, its sound like an unending wail, and to the murmurs of my mother as she prepared our simple breakfast—a piece of bread and light tea, a fragile attempt to bring some warmth into this biting cold. We lived in a refugee camp, where days blended into one another like drops of water, and where hope barely seeped through the narrow openings of tents and caravans, and where dreams were

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postponed indefinitely, like deposits in a bank whose withdrawal date we didn't know. Nights were longer, the shadows of fear bigger, and the distant sound of shelling that we sometimes heard always reminded us of the reason for our presence here, cutting off any thread of hope that tried to sneak into our hearts.

At school, I tried to find myself among the books and notebooks, among the faces of other children who seemed less bewildered than I. But the word "refugee" continued to haunt me even there; it cast a heavy shadow over everything I did. It was whispered in hushed tones between teachers, or among older students, but it resonated in my ears like a deafening scream, like an alarm bell that never stopped ringing, reminding me of my status, my limitations, of being a stranger. I would sit in silence, watching the teacher explain, seeing letters and words dance on the blackboard, but my mind was absent, preoccupied with questions larger than the curriculum, questions about existence and identity.

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I dreamed of becoming a doctor, wearing a white coat and healing people from their pains. Or an engineer, rebuilding what time and war had destroyed. Or even a writer, recording stories and changing the world with words. All these dreams echoed in my head like a beautiful song, but they were met with a thick wall of harsh reality, a wall that rose higher every day to block out the light of hope. I saw my peers, some in the camp and others in photos reaching me from elsewhere, achieving their dreams, choosing their paths, while I was forced to postpone mine day after day, indefinitely, as if I stood in an endless queue.

At night, I would look at the clear sky from a small opening in the caravan, counting the twinkling stars that seemed closer and clearer here than in my old village. I would quietly wonder, a question only I could hear: Will I remain here forever? Will I carry the title "refugee" until my death, even if I grow old and my hair turns white? These questions kept me awake, making thoughts collide in my head like an unending storm. I wondered: Is this the fate of every refugee? To remain trapped within the camp's walls,

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or within the walls of a word that defines their destiny? I would tightly close my eyes, trying to see something else, to see my village, our home, the wilderness, but all I saw was endless blackness.

Years passed, heavy years, as if they carried centuries of time. I grew, and not only my body, which became stronger and more resilient, but the word "refugee" grew with me. It became an inseparable part of me, seeping into my depths, unable to be shed. It began to define me, to restrict me, to prevent me from soaring high in the sky of my dreams, like a bird with a broken wing. I felt as if an invisible chain bound me to the ground, to this camp, preventing me from flying towards a wider space.

But despite everything, despite all the despair that surrounded me, I didn't completely lose hope. There was a faint spark deep within me, flickering sometimes, reminding me that I was still alive. I believed deep in my heart that one day I would break free from this cursed word, and achieve my dreams, no matter how harsh the circumstances, and no matter how insurmountable

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the impossibilities seemed. This hidden belief was the only candle that lit my dark nights.

Then one day, as I sat alone in a corner of the caravan, watching my younger brother draw a few lines on an old paper, an idea struck me. Perhaps I couldn't change my external reality now, but I could change my internal one. I decided to start anew. I decided to write my story, not just for myself, but to tell the world about my suffering, about my postponed dreams, about my struggle with this word that almost killed my soul. I decided to be a voice for the voiceless, for every refugee child who felt lost, and to prove that asylum is not the end of the road, but a new beginning, the beginning of a great challenge that can achieve the impossible.

And so, I began to write, and write, and write. My first words were hesitant, heavy, but they emerged from the depths of my soul. I wrote about my stolen childhood, about my shattered dreams, about my suffering in this camp that had become a prison, and about the spark of hope that had not completely faded. I wrote

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to tell the world that despite everything, I still dream, and I still believe that tomorrow holds something better, and I still fight for my right to exist, to be a human being of value, not just a refugee. Every word I wrote increased my strength, intensified my determination, and clarified the vision before my eyes. Every line was a small step towards salvation, towards reclaiming my lost self.

And so, a chapter of my life ended... a chapter of despair, of loss, of wandering. But, within its folds, the seeds of hope began to grow, and I began to find my voice, and find myself, or at least, begin the search for "who I will be."

Chapter Four:

Reclamation of Self

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I was in the first grade of primary school when everything began... when life was just the dusty road to school, the scent of new notebooks waiting for their first shy letters, and a mother gently combing my hair, her tender fingers stroking it as she packed a small sandwich of cheese and olive oil, wrapped in brown paper and tucked into my small backpack like a treasure. These were the details of my world, the unchanging pillars of my day, granting me a deep sense of stability despite everything.

Life was simple, even if the tent I lived in wasn't a real house with solid walls and high foundations. It was merely a thick piece of canvas and metal poles, but it provided us with shade and warmth on cold camp nights, and concealed our vulnerabilities from the eyes of strangers. I saw it as a small fortress protecting our fragile dreams. But now, with the passing years, everything had changed. I was no longer that small child who saw the world through innocent eyes.

Yet, I grew up. Years passed as if crawling through the sands of time, slowly and harshly. Year after year, the camp remained the

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same, the caravans identical, and I was here, standing in the same place where my world had begun to crumble. And here I am today, in the fifth grade, in the same camp, but with different eyes – eyes that had seen much sadness and weariness – and a heart heavier than a ten-year-old child should bear. Pain had etched its small wrinkles onto my face, as if I were an old man in a child's body.

With the start of this academic year, a small change came, yet it had a particular impact. I was transferred to a new school, a little closer to where I lived. I didn't care much; I had grown accustomed to not becoming attached to any place, to not putting down deep roots, for nothing lasts, and everything I loved seemed to disappear suddenly. I always wondered: Will this change follow me? Will this school also become just a fleeting stop in a journey whose end I don't know?

And on a warm summer morning, I walked through the dusty alleys of the camp, the sun scorching my face, and the smell of dust filling my lungs. I entered the classroom for the first time;

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the quietness of the place felt strange to my ears after the clamor of the alleys. The new teacher was waiting for us with an unusual smile, a wide smile that carried a certain light within it. I didn't know if it was genuine, stemming from the heart, or merely a professional duty imposed by his work. But it was different; it was unlike the smiles of pity I had grown accustomed to seeing on adult faces.

His face was bright like the midday sun, possessing a dignity that compelled you to listen attentively, and a kindness and tenderness that made you want to confide all your secrets to him. His eyes were as deep as the sea, holding the wisdom of years and the warmth of fatherhood. He sat behind his old wooden desk and began introducing himself to the students one by one, asking about their names and their dreams that innocently danced on their small lips. Each child mentioned a name and a dream: "doctor," "engineer," "teacher," "I want to rebuild our old house."

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When it was my turn, he asked my name. I told him as I usually did, "Mohammed." But something inside me was faint, as if I was uttering something I didn't believe in, as if that name no longer belonged to me. I no longer knew if I had the right to have a name, to own a definition for myself, to be a person with features distinct from others, not just another refugee in this large camp. My name was just a word, without a soul.

Then he asked me the question I had heard hundreds of times before, in composition books, during morning school broadcasts, on the posters hanging on classroom walls: "What do you want to be in the future?"

I fell silent. No word came out of me. My heart fell silent before me, as if refusing to answer. I felt as if I were lost in a vast desert, seeing no path or destination. I looked at his large hands, at his eyes that held all that warmth, at the dusty ground beneath my feet... but I couldn't utter a sound. Words froze on my lips; I tried to form a sentence, any sentence, but they shattered before they could escape.

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The teacher said to me calmly, his voice flowing like fresh water:

"What's wrong? Answer me, my son, don't you dream of being something? Don't you see a place for yourself in this world?" His tone carried a mix of compassion and encouragement, not a reprimand.

I told him in a low voice, barely audible, as if coming from a deep well: "No... I don't want to be anything. Life is just this day I live, this morning I wake up to, and this night I close my eyes. I don't want yesterday to return with all its painful memories, and I don't think tomorrow will bring me anything new, nor do I see it holding any hope." This was my firm conviction at that moment; I saw life as a single point, without a past or a future.

A look of astonishment, not without deep sadness, appeared on his face. He hadn't expected such an answer from a child my age. He came and sat beside me, slowly, tenderly, like a father sitting beside his broken child. He whispered to me in a fatherly voice, not a teacher's, a warm voice that pierced the walls of my heart: "Listen to me, my son... Goals are not made from comfort,

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nor plucked from branches of security. Goals are born from the womb of difficulties, sharpened by challenges. Life was not created for us to live passively, surrendering to circumstances, but it was created for us to overcome it, to chase after it with passion, to conquer it with all our strength. You were not created for life; rather, life was created for you, for you to write your story in it, for you to determine its course."

He paused for a moment, looking directly into my eyes, as if seeing into the depths of my soul, then continued: "Days may restrict you, circumstances may place you in a cell without windows, in a camp, in exile, but your heart... your heart, my son, no one can imprison it, no one can limit your dreams. Your mind is your true freedom, and your faith is your compass. All of Jordan is your home now. Are you a refugee? Yes, that is a fact, but you are a son of a great nation, a son of dignity that cannot be dishonored, a son of a story that has not yet ended, a story whose first chapter began here. Pray to your Lord, for He answers the prayers of the distressed and opens closed doors.

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And always remember that destinies are written, and if you saw the unseen and what God has decreed for you, you would be content with what God has written for you and your heart would be at peace. Stand up and rise. Shake off the heavy cloak of despair. Do not disappoint your original country that awaits your strong return, nor this country that embraced you, nor those who love you, nor your Lord. You did not leave your homeland, Mohammed. You left to gain strength, to build yourself, to become stronger, and then one day you will return to rebuild what was destroyed, to heal the wounds, to protect lives, and to plant flowers that will bloom from your tears and sacrifices."

That conversation was not just words spoken in a classroom; it was the sound of knocking on the walls of my locked heart, awakening something within me that had almost died forever.

Every word was like a stone dropped into a stagnant pond, creating widening circles that eventually engulfed my entire soul.

I felt as if I was waking from a deep sleep, from a long slumber. I did not sleep at all that night. His words echoed in my head, a

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distant but clear and audible resonance, like a song that never leaves one's memory. I pondered every letter, every piece of advice, this hope he had suddenly planted within me.

The next day, I woke up early, even before the roosters crowed, and before the sound of the wind on the caravans. I washed my face with cold water that woke me up even more, washing away the remnants of despair that clung to me. I put on my simple school clothes, and carried my backpack on my shoulder as if I were carrying a new weapon – the weapon of knowledge, the weapon of hope, the weapon of defiance – and I walked to school with quick, steady steps.

I was ready to meet a new life, a life I had thought was over.

I began to study with a diligence I had never known before. My perspective on things changed radically. I no longer saw "refugee" as a mark of deficiency or humiliation, but as a sign of challenge, a hidden strength, a source of inspiration from which I must draw my determination. I began to see every challenge as an opportunity, and every difficulty as a path to growth. I became

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one of the top students in my class, even in my entire school. My grades were always among the highest, bringing joy to my heart and my mother's. I started reviewing my lessons by myself, writing more than was required for homework, asking questions I had never dared to ask before, seeking answers in books and any source I could access, becoming excited about every new piece of information as if I had found a treasure. I no longer went to school just to pass the time, but to drink from the well of knowledge that had begun to quench my thirst.

And after a while, excellence alone was no longer enough for me. I felt that I wanted to expand, to understand beyond the lessons, beyond the school curricula. I started reading about the vast cosmos and its secrets, about living cells and their wonders, about the wars that destroyed my country and about the peace that everyone dreams of. I developed an endless passion—a passion for knowledge, a passion for life, a passion for building a future for myself and for others.

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And in a moment, between one paper on which I drafted my dreams and another, between a stroke of ink and a new piece of information I acquired, I found my true self. I saw my true reflection in the mirror of my soul. I knew who I was, or rather: who I would be.

I will be one about whom history is written, not one whose fate is written upon him. I will be one who teaches others not to stop where they have fallen, but to rise stronger. I will be the strong voice that shouts hope, not the faint echo that fades away.

And so, I moved on... running towards my dream, embracing it with all my being, stumbling at times, but rising faster, and moving forward again with unwavering steps.

And whenever I met a new teacher in my educational journey, or in the training courses I began to attend, I would tell them that there was a man who once sat beside me, whispered words into my ear that were not just words, but medicine for my soul, and restored my self that had almost been lost in the crowds of exile.

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And so... I reclaimed myself. I reclaimed the child who thought life had stopped in a tent, and that his dreams were buried under the camp's dust. I reclaimed the faith that had been lost amidst despair, and I reclaimed the genuine smile that hadn't graced my face for a long time. And I was no longer just a "refugee"... But a story. A story of hope and determination, a story of resilience in the face of storms.

Chapter Five:

The Awakening

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It was never my intention to be different; I didn't wake up one day and decide to be exceptional. Circumstances simply shaped me. But life, with its unpredictable turns that I no longer found a logical explanation for, taught me a harsh yet beautiful lesson: that doors don't always open by themselves, and opportunities don't always come to you. Instead, you must create them yourself, carve them out of the rock of despair, and walk towards them, even if your steps are faltering. This lesson didn't come from a book, but from the depths of experience, from the soul's struggle with its reality.

I was still living in that camp, which, with the passage of time, was no longer just rows of white caravans and dusty alleys. It had, in a way, become something akin to a homeland, a miniature homeland, but one that pulsed with a rhythm similar to mine, a spirit akin to my own spirit of resilience and survival. The camp was expanding, embracing countless stories, familiar faces that had become a part of my daily life. Here, I grew up,

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learned, cried, laughed, and saw hope ignite in the eyes of children despite everything.

In one of those new moments of awareness, those moments that gleam like floodlights in the darkness of the soul, I found myself breathing a dream I hadn't known existed, waking up to an ambition that never left me, that consumed me. I felt that the time had come... to truly awaken from the long slumber of loss that had lasted for so long, to see the world with greater clarity, to know what I needed to do. The awakening wasn't just an idea; it was a call from the depths of my heart, crying out for change.

I began to search ravenously, moving with steps that grew more confident, inquiring from everyone around me, extending my hand to every possible source that could ignite a spark of knowledge within me, or open a small door in this thick wall of the unknown. There were no clear paths, but there was an unwavering determination. Soon, I discovered that there were organizations for care and education within the camp, working quietly, away from the spotlight. They offered courses in self-

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development, training workshops on life skills, and supplementary classes in the subjects I had neglected.

I didn't hesitate for a moment. I didn't refuse any opportunity. I was never late for any appointment. I saw every course as a small window overlooking a larger world, and every workshop as a new ladder to climb. I would wake up at eight in the morning, not because someone woke me or forced me, but because something in my heart was pushing me, an internal, tireless engine, and a new passion that burned like fire. I would put on my simple clothes and head to the center, learning with an unfamiliar seriousness, listening to every word spoken with focus, jotting down notes in my small notebook that had become my constant companion. Then, I would play a little, as children do during lunch breaks, but always with a different gaze, a gaze that saw beyond the play, a gaze that carried a burden greater than mere amusement.

I would return home around twelve noon, quickly eat some of the simple food my mother prepared, then head to my school, where

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formal lessons, routine, and books, which I had begun to see as an inexhaustible treasure, awaited. I balanced my formal studies with external courses, physically exhausted, but my spirit grew more vibrant.

And at three in the afternoon, when everyone else returned home to nap or play in the alleys, I would begin my moment of reflection: How could I make my camp a better place? How could I plant something that would leave my mark? How could I leave an imprint in this place that had embraced me? I no longer saw the camp as merely a prison, but as a space for change, a vast laboratory where great ideas could be born and transformed into realities.

I would brainstorm dozens of ideas: a project to teach children reading and writing, a plan to beautify the place where we had lived for so long, an initiative to collect used books and establish a small library, awareness sessions for children about the importance of education or hygiene. Ideas flowed endlessly in my mind like a waterfall, each idea more beautiful than the last.

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But always, there was the silent, massive, solid obstacle: **age**. I was too young, in the eyes of adults who were accustomed to seeing me as a child playing. "You are still a child, Mohammed, just focus on your studies," they would tell me with a tender tone, but it hid an invisible barrier. I didn't feel like a child who needed protection or guidance in everything. I felt that within me was a man, a man who had doubled his age, carrying burdens heavier than his generation, and striving for goals far beyond his years. This conflict between what I saw in myself and what others saw in me was a new challenge.

Thus, I lived my days, between studying and learning at the centers, and postponed dreams that glowed within me like embers beneath ashes, until I reached sixteen years of age. At this age, I was no longer that child who swallowed his sadness in silence, or ran away from his reality.

I had begun to transform... I had begun to become me, the person I had been searching for for a long time, the person my teacher had spoken of in Chapter Four. I grew, and not only my

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body, which became stronger and more resilient, but my consciousness too. I began to comprehend my surroundings more deeply: Why are we here? What does "asylum" mean in all its details? And what can be done to change this reality? The questions no longer frightened me as they once did; instead, they motivated me, pushing me to seek answers, to find solutions.

I started writing more than before. I wrote down every new idea that sparked in my mind, every dream I saw in my waking and sleeping hours, every ache I felt, and every hope that shone. My small notebook became filled with lines telling my story, our story as refugees, stories of resilience and defiance. I read extensively, not just school textbooks. I read about modern education, about sustainable development, about leaders who started from nothing, about minds that changed the face of the world. I searched for myself in them, and found a glimpse of my reflection between their lines, as if seeing my own image in the pages of their lives.

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One day, an opportunity arose to participate in a youth symposium within the camp. This symposium was organized by a local center in cooperation with a major international association, and its theme was "You and Change in Your Community." The title resonated directly with my soul. I didn't hesitate.

I participated, despite all the tension that gripped me. I stood before dozens of young people and adults, my heart pounding in my chest, but my voice was steady, and my words were sincere and came from the depths of my soul. I spoke about my big dreams, about the importance of education as the only means of rising, about children who couldn't find a pen or notebooks, about the camp that needed light, hope, a human touch to restore its soul. I spoke about the importance of being part of the solution, not part of the problem.

After my speech, which lasted several minutes, one of the symposium organizers, a dignified man looking at me with shining eyes, approached me. He said in a quiet voice, but one

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that carried the weight of admiration: "We need people like you, my son... Don't stop this passion. Continue on your path." His words were like new fuel for my soul, a powerful push for my journey.

And from here, the true awakening began. I was no longer just a participant; I became an active contributor. I began to take part in multiple initiatives, helping to organize community events, participating in teaching younger children who resembled me in my early days, drawing with them, reading them stories, writing their dreams with them, and engaging with adults, listening to their experiences. I began to see the impact of what I was doing in people's eyes, in children's laughter. I saw the child who resembled me smiling after understanding a difficult lesson, and I felt that I was planting seeds of change, and that these seeds would one day grow and bear fruit.

Every day I woke up knowing that I had to do something... It didn't matter if it was small; what mattered was that it had an

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impact, that it left a mark on someone's life. I began to believe in the power of small actions to bring about great change.

Two years later, I had turned 18 and was nearing the end of my school journey, on the verge of what is called "Tawjihi" (the final high school year).

When I looked back, I realized that I was not just a lost refugee, but a small project for a big dream, a dream that was beginning to take clear shape. Every course I attended, every word spoken to me that encouraged me, every dose of hope given to me by those around me, made me a completely different person from what I had been at the beginning of my journey.

I no longer felt ashamed of my caravan; instead, I saw it as the cradle of a grand story, the beginning of a tale of resilience worth telling. I no longer feared the word "refugee"; instead, it became a banner I proudly raised, telling the whole world: Yes, I am from there, from the camp, from the land of challenges, but I am going beyond here, to where my dreams lead me, to where I can make

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a difference. This was the awakening that changed the course of my life forever.

Chapter Six:

The First Glimmer of Light

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It wasn't merely a registration at a social innovation center; it wasn't just a paper I filled out with my details and handed to an employee. For me, it was a **knock on a door that perhaps would lead me to a life wider** than the narrow confines of the camp, beyond its barbed wires that wrapped around us like snakes, beyond the accustomed stares of people who saw us as mere numbers in refugee registers. This door represented an opportunity to soar, to break free from the cocoon of despair that had almost consumed me.

On that day, when I signed my name with my own hand on the registration form, my heart beat differently, irregularly, like a small war drum. It was a mix of excitement that flooded me to my fingertips, and fear that gripped me by the throat. Excitement that I was finally beginning something tangible, taking my first steps towards a wider world, and fear that I would be told again those words that had etched themselves deeply into my soul: "You are a refugee; dream within your limits; don't exaggerate your ambitions; this is not your place." These words haunted me

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like a ghost, whispering in my ear whenever I tried to raise my head.

The training began. The sessions were intensive, information flowing abundantly. For the first time, I heard words and terms I had never encountered before, words that seemed to me like secret codes to another world: "entrepreneurship," "project," "funding," "innovation." These terms were strange, but they weren't frightening. On the contrary, they sparked my curiosity, opening up horizons I hadn't known existed. I absorbed them eagerly, like a child seeing the world for the first time, recognizing new colors and shapes. I would jot down every word in my notebook, learn every new concept, and breathe in the idea that I could do something, that I could be a person with an impact, that I could leave a mark on this vast world. I spent long hours reading the training materials, searching for the meanings of difficult words, trying to connect them to my reality, to see how these big ideas could materialize in the corners of my camp.

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After the theoretical training ended, it was time for serious work.

We were asked to submit projects. I gathered three of my closest friends, those with whom I had dreamed as we played in the dusty alleys, and with whom I had shared moments of despair and hope. They were among those who had seen the spark of change in me. We told them with a desperate tone that still held a glimmer of hope: "Let's try, what do we have to lose?" For trying would only cost us some time and effort, and we had plenty of both.

We submitted our project to the evaluation committee. The room was small, but it seemed huge and imposing to me. Three people sat behind an old wooden table, staring at us with serious expressions. We entered the room, and everything in me tensed: my voice, which almost choked in my throat, my hands, which trembled uncontrollably, my gaze, which avoided their eyes and fixed itself on the hard ground. We weren't truly ready. Our words were weak, our vision for the project was shaky and

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unclear; we lacked sufficient confidence. We left after only a few minutes, carrying with us the harsh rejection.

My friends... their spark was quickly extinguished. Despair crept into their hearts like cold ice. They surrendered to reality, backed down from the idea, and bitterly said: "That's it, it's not for us.

This big talk isn't for camp kids." Despair clearly painted their faces. And I was on the verge of following them, on the verge of surrendering to the harsh circumstances, to cast my dreams behind me like everything else I had lost. But I remembered a sentence my teacher had told me one day, when he saw me shattered by a failed exam or a lost game: **"You're not required to succeed the first time; you're required not to give up."**

That night, I returned home, my heart burning with the fire of defeat. I sat alone in my usual corner of the caravan, where my sorrows clung to me. I didn't cry out loud, but something heavy weighed on my chest, like a massive rock almost suffocating me. I felt as if all doors had closed in my face, and that my dreams were merely scattered dust.

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Then I rose. Rising was a difficult decision, as if I were lifting a mountain with my bare hands. I said aloud to myself, in a voice filled with defiance: **"I will try again... even if I'm alone."** That moment was the true birth of my solid will.

I stayed up late. I stayed up until my eyelids cracked from exhaustion, and my eyes were bloodshot. The camp nights were dark and silent, but my mind was ablaze with ideas. I searched for solutions, read everything I could get my hands on—articles and books about projects. I wrote plans on old papers, strategizing every tiny and major detail, reviewing, editing, and preparing... all in complete silence, without external support, without a team to share the burden. I distributed tasks to myself, as if I were a small army of one, an army unwilling to be defeated, no matter the challenges. My energy was inexhaustible, and my passion was my only fuel.

Then I went... and presented my project again. This time... I was different. My words were stronger, my vision clearer, and my self-

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confidence had grown despite the lingering fear. I felt as if I was offering a piece of my soul.

And this time... I succeeded.

The success wasn't just a number in a record, nor merely "funding." It was a hot tear of joy that fell from my eye without me realizing it, washing away years of weariness and despair. It was a feeling that I was alive, that I could, that I was not just a number in refugee records, but a human being capable of making a difference. I felt as if I was catching my breath, breathing life anew.

My practical journey began. My project was not financial, aiming for profit; it was purely moral, aiming to serve my community. It was a **"small innovation"** designed to simplify life for people in the camp. It was a **small electronic trolley (a simple robot) equipped with a display screen** aiming to assist newcomers to the camp, providing them with basic information about the camp, aid distribution points, health centers, and educational facilities. It served as a mobile guide for them in the labyrinth of

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identical caravans. It wasn't an ordinary trolley; it was the embodiment of the idea that technology could be harnessed to serve the simplest human needs.

I worked with my own hands, rushing in every direction, explaining the trolley's idea to newcomers, helping them use it, observing children benefiting from the simplified maps on it, and feeling that I was planting a seed in the camp's dust—a seed of hope and knowledge. Every smile I saw on their faces gave me endless energy. This project of mine was an inner call telling me: "This is just the first step, Mohammed... Keep going! Don't stop now."

And with time, doors began to open for me, doors I had never imagined existed. From a small, simple project... to numerous initiatives, where I became part of larger work teams, to supervising other projects, organizing educational and awareness events, and making a real impact on the lives of many in the camp. I learned new skills every day; I became proficient

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in using computer software, and I learned the principles of management and communication.

One evening, while I was reviewing a file for a new project in my cramped room inside the caravan, my phone rang. It was the voice of a man from a well-known international organization, an official voice, but one that carried a friendly tone:

"Hello, Mohammed, how are you?" "Alhamdulillah, I'm fine."

(Praise be to God, I'm fine) "We have very important news for you. You have been nominated for a global competition for young innovators. You will represent your country (Syria), your camp (Azraq), and your dreams, which we believe in."

My hand trembled; the phone almost fell from me. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. A global competition? Me? I agreed immediately. And I submitted my application, carrying on my shoulders a dream heavier than a young man my age should bear.

I stood among an elite group of young people from around the world, brilliant minds, great ideas. Each of them represented a

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great nation. I suddenly felt so small. Lost in this ocean of geniuses. They had everything: support, resources, advanced education... As for me, I had only "hope," nothing else, and a few simple projects I had done in a camp.

I returned from the interview and waited for the result with anticipation and anxiety. I kept convincing myself over and over: "My project won't be accepted; it's okay... I tried, and that's enough." I was trying to lessen the blow of potential disappointment.

The phone rang again after weeks. The same voice, the voice of the man from the organization: "How are you, Mohammed?"

"Alhamdulillah..." (But my voice was broken, afraid of bad news)

"Why do you sound sad?"

"Nothing... I know the result has arrived."

"Yes, it has. And guess what? **Your project has been accepted.**

You will represent us before 11 nations in the innovation conference."

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The phone actually dropped from my hand this time. I looked at the metal ceiling of the caravan, and a hot tear slid down my cheek, a tear mixed with joy, shock, and gratitude. I succeeded.

And I was still inside the camp, among the alleys and rubble, in this place that had been a prison for me, I had achieved what I thought was impossible.

From here, from the depths of my heart, I learned that dreams are not imprisoned behind walls, no matter how high. They are not confined by camps, no matter how narrow. Dreams, if they inhabit a heart that believes in them strongly, and a mind that plans intelligently, will fly even if they have no wings.

Today, as I move between international conferences, participate in global symposiums, and deliver my speeches in grand halls I never dreamed of entering, shaking hands with figures I had only seen on television...

I tell myself and the world: Everything that happened... began from a moment of truth, a moment of despair, but in it, I said: **"I will not give up."**

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And here, everything was born. Here, in this camp, in this small caravan, my unbreakable will was born.

Chapter Seven:

Building Bridges and Friendships

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After the spark of awakening began to glow within me, and my outlook on life transformed from mere survival to a desire for self-building and proving my existence, excelling in my studies was no longer just a goal I silently pursued between my notebooks and books. Instead, it became a natural consequence of this renewed passion, a reflection of an inner life that had begun to blossom. My high grades were not just numbers recorded in my school registers, but shining proof that the mind can be free, and the spirit can grow and flourish, even if the body is confined by the camp's barbed wires. I would return to the caravan each evening, carrying in my modest backpack the results of my brilliant exams, which brought a smile to my weary mother's face—a smile I hadn't seen often—and lit up my proud father's eyes, which had carried the burden of long years of worry. I didn't feel a unique distinction from my classmates, as I didn't see myself as better than them. Rather, these successes spurred me to be a bridge for them, to share what I had learned, to encourage them to believe in their own hidden potentials. For in the camp, success wasn't solely the property of an individual,

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but belonged to everyone, a glimmer of hope that illuminated the path for all, a message that the impossible was not destiny.

With my academic excellence and my newfound clarity of vision, I began to see the camp through entirely different eyes—eyes that no longer saw just rows of identical caravans and the barbed wire that encircled us like an eternal wall, but saw inherent potentials, a vibrant young community, waiting for someone to awaken its dormant energies. I noticed the young faces that carried within them many forgotten dreams, the working hands that lacked opportunities, the brilliant minds that only needed a spark to ignite. Here, in this confined space, I began to search for ways to transform these idle potentials into tangible realities, into projects that would illuminate the camp's corners. I no longer saw the camp as a large prison limiting my dreams, but as an open arena for learning and work, a vast laboratory where great ideas could be born and transformed into facts.

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In this new phase of my life, having found myself, I began to forge new friendships—true friendships that were not based merely on play, as in my childhood, but on shared dreams and similar challenges. These friends became my companions on this journey of awakening. I remember "Ali," a quiet but very intelligent young man, with an organized mind, who loved mathematics and physics as much as I did. We would spend long hours after our formal lessons, exchanging complex ideas and solving difficult problems together. We even drew plans for imaginary projects on the dusty ground outside the caravans, dreaming of technological applications to help the camp residents. And there was "Fatima," an ambitious girl with a strong leadership spirit and unwavering determination. She always encouraged me to move forward and believed in my ability to make a real difference. Fatima was the voice that pushed us all when we faltered. These were not just ordinary friends; they were a second family to me in this place, a support and aid at every step. We would exchange books that we found with difficulty in the few cultural centers, and spend nights discussing the ideas

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that ignited in our minds, planning for a future about which we knew nothing except that it would be better, and that we would be part of shaping it. Those late-night sessions in the caravan, under the dim light of a lamp, were among the most beautiful moments we lived, where we unleashed our dreams far from the harsh reality of the camp.

I started participating in extracurricular activities and initiatives that I had begun after my awakening, but now with greater depth and organization. I was no longer just an ordinary participant; I became an organizer of these activities, supervising small working groups, helping distribute tasks among the youth, and supporting new ideas that emerged around us. The initiatives were simple in their beginnings, but they carried immense value and a profound impact. I remember one of the initiatives we launched, the **"Small Hope Library."** Its idea was simple yet touched many hearts: collecting used books from camp residents and from the international organizations that visited us from time to time, then carefully sorting and categorizing them,

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and establishing a small corner in one of the community centers as a "library" where children and youth could come to borrow and read. This library consisted of a few modest wooden shelves that we built ourselves from old planks, but it contained treasures of knowledge and stories. I would spend long hours after school arranging the books, carefully wrapping damaged ones, and helping children choose their stories, reading aloud to them, and seeing the joy in their eyes as they discovered new worlds. My happiness was immense when I saw a child hold a new book and open its pages with passion and love, as if opening a window to another world, a world without wires or borders.

Amidst these growing activities, opportunities for larger and more ambitious projects began to emerge. Among them was the **"Aquavita" project**. Aquavita was an environmental initiative aimed at educating children and youth in the camp about the importance of water conservation and recycling, in a harsh desert environment that suffered from constant water scarcity.

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The project's idea was simple in its essence but very vital for our community, which relied on water aid. I was part of the core team for the project, working hard to develop simplified educational content suitable for children, and designing colorful drawings and booklets to attract their attention. The challenge was significant, as resources were very scarce, and environmental awareness was not a top priority given the difficult living conditions we faced. But we worked hard and diligently; we held small workshops in the centers' courtyards, collected empty water bottles and reused them to plant small, simple plants, and explained in simple and engaging ways how the camp could be more environmentally sustainable and how we could conserve every drop of water. The project's success was limited in its initial spread, but its impact in instilling environmental awareness in children's minds was significant, as if we were planting seeds that would grow in the future.

This modest success in Aquavita, along with my continuous academic excellence, began to attract attention to me

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significantly. The looks of pity from adults or strangers no longer followed me; instead, they transformed into glances of appreciation and admiration. I was invited to participate in more workshops and seminars, and to speak about my experience at other schools within the camp, and even at some small gatherings outside the camp. I saw myself gradually transforming from a mere listener receiving information to a speaker inspiring others, from a recipient of aid to a giver of hope and knowledge. I felt that my voice was rising, and my story was beginning to be heard.

At the end of the academic year, which saw my outstanding performance, particularly in science and mathematics, a moment I had not expected at all arrived. During an honors ceremony for outstanding students in the camp, organized by the Jordanian Ministry of Education in cooperation with a major international organization, in a hall decorated with flowers and balloons, my name was announced among the top students in the camp. I ascended the stage, my hand trembling slightly, my

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heart beating rapidly, to receive **the Shield of Excellence from the Ministry of Education**. It was not just a shiny metal shield, but a symbol of all the effort, sleepless nights, and tears shed, a symbol that efforts are not in vain, and that hard work bears fruit. This honor meant a lot to me, because it came from an official body, confirming that I was not just an unknown refugee, but a diligent student, a person of value, and a good citizen who could contribute to building the future. It was a moment of pride for me and my family, who sat among the attendees, their faces glowing with joy, and their eyes glistening with sincere tears. I saw the joy in my mother's eyes, a joy that had been hidden for years, as if it had returned to illuminate her face and erase the traces of fatigue, making her forget the bitterness of exile, even if only for a moment.

During this period of growth and development, I learned how to transform the harsh conditions we lived in the camp into **"magnificent things"**, how to turn challenges into invaluable opportunities for building and innovation. For example, the

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scarcity of resources that surrounded us on all sides taught me creativity and innovation—how to find simple solutions to complex problems using the fewest available means. The cramped space in the caravan taught me how to utilize every corner, and how to create my own world of knowledge, reading, and research, a world I could escape to when life became too suffocating. The word "refugee" itself, which once bound me and stole my taste of freedom, now became a source of my strength and inspiration. My story, the story of a refugee who persevered and defied, became what opened doors for me and gave me a platform to speak and inspire others, to prove that a refugee is not just a number, but a human being with countless ambitions and capabilities. This word was no longer a shame to hide; instead, it became a badge of honor I wore proudly, and a motto for a success story.

This chapter of my life was filled with growth, learning, and radical transformation. Building bridges was not just with others around me, with new friends and the community, but with myself

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as well. I began to realize that true strength lies not in external circumstances, but within, in an unwavering will, and in the belief that tomorrow always holds a new opportunity, even if it comes from the heart of a camp that seems like the end of the world. This chapter was the preparation for future stages, a test of my ability to persevere and adapt.

Chapter Eight:

The Pandemic Challenge (COVID-19)

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No one could have predicted that an invisible threat, emerging from the farthest reaches of the Earth, would cast its heavy shadow over our small world in the camp. As I continued my journey of studying and self-development, enjoying the small successes I had begun to reap, and accustomed to the daily challenges of the camp, a new monster appeared. The news first arrived as distant whispers carried through our simple phones that barely caught a signal, then as bold headlines on the television screens in the aid centers we frequented, and finally as a harsh reality knocking on our caravan doors: the COVID-19 pandemic, or as the elders called it, "the relentless plague."

The year 2020 was strange by all measures, a year that brought with it winds of change we were unprepared for. Precautionary measures began to be imposed gradually. At first, they were just instructions for social distancing and wearing protective masks, which we could barely find. Then, they quickly escalated into sweeping lockdowns we had

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never imagined, lockdowns that stifled the flow of life within the camp. Schools closed their doors, community centers—our only outlet—were shut down, and the movement of people in the dusty alleys dwindled until the camp almost turned into a ghost town. Suddenly, life reverted to resembling the first days of our arrival at the camp: a heavy silence enveloped the area, worry etched new lines on people's faces, and a feeling that the unknown was knocking on our doors once again, but this time, it was a different kind of unknown. It wasn't a war between armies leaving destruction in its wake, but a war with a tiny virus invisible to the naked eye, a virus that threatened to snatch away the lives of our loved ones.

The new challenges piled upon our shoulders like heavy burdens, as if we were carrying mountains on our backs. Education, which we had started to get used to and appreciate its importance, transformed into remote learning, and this was almost impossible in the camp environment.

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How could a child learn online when they didn't even own a computer or a smartphone? How could we access lessons and educational platforms without a stable and reliable internet connection, especially when electricity was cut for long hours? Families struggled with scarce resources, and buying a smartphone or a tablet was an unimaginable luxury given the difficult living conditions. I saw despair returning to the eyes of the children who had just begun to find some hope in school, reminding me of my old despair when I first dropped out. I saw the innovations we had started to create grinding to a halt, and the initiatives we had launched faltering, as if the pandemic had come to erase every trace of hope we had painstakingly planted.

For me, the pandemic's impact was much deeper than just lockdowns and external challenges. It profoundly affected my psychology and my dreams in ways I hadn't anticipated. After all I had been through—the awakening, the rise—I felt as if I was back to square one, or perhaps even worse. I

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reverted to that state of relapse and depression I had known in the early days of being a refugee. I lost interest in everything: in studying, which I had come to love, and in the projects I was working on. I felt that all this effort was in vain, and that we were doomed to despair in this place. I would wake up every morning wondering: Why should I keep fighting? What's the point of learning and striving if life itself is going to close all doors in my face?

The fear of illness was another unbearable challenge. The camp, by its nature, was a crowded place; spaces were cramped, and social distancing was almost impossible.

Stories of infections spread quickly among the caravans, and the fear that the virus would reach my family, my mother and father who had minor health issues, kept me awake at night. I would see the few ambulances speeding through the camp, followed by anxious glances, and each time we would wonder: Who is it this time? Who got infected? Every cough

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or sneeze in a neighboring caravan stirred anxiety in our hearts, making us brace for the worst.

During that period, I almost dropped out of school entirely. I felt I lacked the energy to continue, and that hope had evaporated. I saw the future as a black wall that couldn't be penetrated. But in the darkest moments of despair, when I felt I was on the verge of complete surrender, that I would return to the wandering I had lived for years, God's mercy intervened. It wasn't a material intervention, but a hidden light that illuminated my path. Perhaps it was a word from my mother, or a look from my father, or a memory of a sentence my old teacher had said, or even a prayer I heard from a neighbor. I felt as if something was powerfully pushing me from within. I remembered everything I had been through, all the challenges I had overcome, every moment of failure that had turned into success. I remembered that I was not just a refugee, but a story of resilience.

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That moment was the turning point. In the heart of despair, I found a glimmer of hope. I realized that surrendering now would mean that everything I had fought for, everything I had learned, everything I had built, would be lost in vain. This global challenge was another test of my solid will, of my ability to persevere and adapt. The pandemic became a harsh lesson in learning and adapting to difficult circumstances. I learned more patience, learned how to find light in the darkest conditions, and how to keep a spark of hope alive no matter the storms. I realized that my "refugee nature," which I had lived for years, had psychologically prepared me to face unexpected circumstances. I had been living in my own "pandemic" for many years before the entire world understood the meaning of an epidemic. I had been living a life that demanded constant adaptation, absolute flexibility, and the belief that tomorrow would always bring a chance for survival. I had been trained for this type of crisis without even knowing it, and I realized that this advantage was what would bring me back to the right path.

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And my role during the pandemic was not just to survive this relapse. Once I regained my strength, I began to see this crisis as an opportunity to deepen the technological skills I had acquired. With schools closed, remote learning became the only option, and this pushed me to seek creative solutions. I spent long hours searching online, trying to understand how digital educational platforms worked. I started helping my friends and neighbors navigate these platforms, solve the technical problems they encountered, and find free educational resources online. It wasn't easy; the internet connection was weak and intermittent, and electricity was cut for long hours, but my determination was stronger.

One day, I noticed that many children and young people were spending their time playing aimlessly due to the lockdown. So, an idea came to me. I gathered a small group of them and began teaching them basic programming principles using free online software, even if it was simple educational

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games. We would sit in a secluded corner, away from watchful eyes, and explain how they could build their own stories using code, and how technology could be a tool for creativity, not just entertainment, and that it might be a lifeline. This small initiative sparked new passion in them and filled their time with something useful amidst the general stagnation. My happiness was immeasurable when I saw their eyes light up as they succeeded in writing their first line of code, or when they designed a small game themselves.

The lessons I learned from the COVID-19 period were deeper than any book I had read. It taught me that life is full of unexpected surprises, and that psychological readiness to adapt is the most important weapon a human possesses. It taught me the value of family and neighbors, and how human solidarity can overcome all difficulties. It taught me that technology, despite all our limitations, can be a bridge connecting us to the outside world, and a tool for learning and growth even in the direst circumstances. Most

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importantly, it taught me that the "refugee nature" I had lived for years had psychologically prepared me to face unexpected circumstances. I had been living in my own "pandemic" for many years before the entire world understood the meaning of an epidemic. I had been living a life that demanded constant adaptation, absolute flexibility, and the belief that tomorrow would always bring a chance for survival. I had been trained for this type of crisis without even knowing it, and I realized that this advantage was what would bring me back to the right path and help me rise again.

Thus, I overcame the pandemic. It wasn't easy; it was a period filled with challenges and fear, but it added a new layer of strength and resilience to my personality. I emerged not just as a survivor, but more aware of my inner strength, and more convinced that the will to survive can conquer any epidemic, and any circumstances, no matter how harsh. I realized that God's mercy surrounded me, guiding me

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whenever I strayed, and bringing me back to my path

whenever my steps faltered.

Chapter Nine:

The First Fruits of Success

Having overcome the COVID-19 pandemic with all its challenges, and having found my way again thanks to God's mercy that pulled me back from the brink, I felt as if I stood on much firmer ground. Life was still not easy, but I now possessed new tools to face difficulties: an unwavering will and a mind that refused to surrender. The years spent in the camp, with all their harshness and despair, had not been in vain. They had been

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fertile ground where I planted the seeds of resilience, and now it was time for harvest, time to pluck the **first fruits of success** that had once seemed a distant dream.

My initial feeling when these fruits began to appear was a mixture of astonishment and gratitude. Astonishment because I never imagined I would reach this point, and gratitude because God never abandoned me in my wandering. I vividly remember the moment I felt I was taking a real step towards self-actualization.

After years of volunteering in small initiatives and becoming an active member of the camp community, genuine opportunities began to emerge beyond the scope of volunteer work.

It started with a new vocational training center that opened in the camp, aiming to prepare young people for the job market. I applied to join an advanced course in electronic device maintenance and networking, leveraging my previous passion for technology that had grown during the pandemic. The

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selection wasn't easy; there were many applicants, but my experience helping my family and neighbors during the lockdown, and my participation in the "electronic trolley" project (the simple robot) I designed to assist newcomers, caught the attention of the trainers. I was accepted, and at that moment, I felt as if a big door had opened before me, a door I had never even dared to dream existed.

The course was intensive and challenging. We learned about complex electrical circuits, communication networks, and how to repair faults in devices that had previously seemed like black boxes to me. I spent long hours studying and practicing hands-on. My hands would get tired from handling the small tools, and my mind would weary from absorbing the vast amount of information, but I didn't care. I saw every new piece of information as a step towards my future, whose outlines I was beginning to discern. The trainers' eyes followed me with interest, seeing in me a passion and determination they were unaccustomed to.

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After months of strenuous training, I graduated from the course with distinction. I didn't stop there; I also received a **certified diploma** that opened doors far wider than I had ever imagined.

This diploma was the first official recognition of a skill I had acquired through my own effort, not just school grades. Only a few days after graduation, a job opportunity arose. An international organization working in the camp was looking for a maintenance technician for its internal devices and networks. I applied for the position, and although I was the youngest among the applicants, I was the most passionate and enthusiastic. I interviewed, explaining how I had learned all these skills under difficult circumstances, and how I believed in my ability to solve problems.

I was accepted. That was the first time I had a real job. I felt as if I was making a giant leap in my life. At the end of the first month, when I received my **first salary**, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It was a modest bundle of money, but it meant the world to me. I was no longer dependent on aid; I was no longer a

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burden on my family. This salary was proof of my independence, of my ability to build something with my own hands and mind. I clutched the money tightly, and hot tears streamed down my cheeks. They weren't tears of sadness, but tears of joy mixed with pride. I ran to my mother, placed the money in her hand, and told her: "This is from my own hard work, Mother, this is my first salary." I saw her eyes gleam with joy, and a wide smile adorned her tired face, more precious than all the treasures in the world.

This success was not the end of the road; it was the beginning of a cascade of opportunities. Soon, I began to receive offers and opportunities to work on other projects within the camp, and even some small online projects with individuals outside the camp. I became responsible for maintaining the computer network in one of the educational centers, and then I developed an electronic booking system for training courses there. Each project added new experience and expanded my network of contacts. I balanced my high school studies with work,

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physically exhausted, but my spirit was ablaze with passion.

Time no longer passed aimlessly; every minute was accounted for, and every effort had its reward.

During this period, I began to see how my story was inspiring others. I remember a moving encounter with a young man my age who had lost hope in studying and working. He came to me one day, his eyes lost, and said: "I've heard about you, Mohammed. How did you do it? How did you manage to rise from all this?" I sat with him for hours, recounting my story from the beginning: about despair, about the word "refugee," about the teacher who changed my life, about God's mercy that guided me, about every step of the struggle. I saw his eyes gleam as he listened, and a shy smile began to form on his face. At the end of our conversation, he said: "You have given me hope, Mohammed. I will start anew." That moment meant more to me than any salary or certificate. I realized that my success was not just for me; it was a message of hope that could light the paths of others.

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And so, my success story began to take shape. It wasn't the story of a superhero, but the story of an ordinary young man, a refugee, who found his path amidst adversity. I had moved beyond "searching for the meaning of asylum" to "creating meaning from asylum." I came to believe that every challenge is an opportunity, and every pain is a driving force. I realized that the true story doesn't begin with success; it begins with the will that refuses to surrender and with the belief that hope can bloom even in the direst circumstances.

Chapter Ten:

The Liberation of the Homeland

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My life had begun to take a different course, a path I had drawn myself with my own hands and mind, far from those initial days of loss and wandering. My academic excellence, my participation in initiatives, and my success in my first job—all of this gave me a feeling that I was rebuilding myself step by step. I was completing my final high school year, **"Tawjihi" (Grade 12)**, in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a year that held the future of every student. This year was a gateway, a narrow bridge that had to be successfully crossed to move to an entirely new phase of life. The pressures were immense; every exam felt like a decisive test, and every grade a step towards the unknown. The long nights I spent studying under the dim lamp in the caravan, while the camp was deep in silence, were my constant companions. My mind was restless, reviewing problems, analyzing equations, chasing knowledge, while my heart carried the weight of past years and the dreams of a future I pursued with all my being.

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During that period, I had reached a degree of adaptation to the reality of the camp. It was no longer a prison, but a world with its own rules, and its people who had become family and kin. I participated in the daily life of the camp, saw the same faces, heard the same stories, and felt its pulse. The camp had become, in a way, a part of me, a place that shaped me and taught me lessons that no university could teach. I had built a strong network of relationships there and had a space for work and influence. This adaptation was not surrender but a product of the will to survive and a conviction that life must continue no matter the circumstances, and that hope lies in building, no matter the place.

But deep inside me, during rare moments of silence and calm that I managed to find amidst the arduous Tawjihi studies, a **hidden longing grew, a silent yearning for the homeland.** I tried not to think about it too much, focusing on my present and future here. But it was like fire beneath ashes, igniting every now and then, especially when I saw a small child drawing a map of

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Syria, or when I heard a folk song speaking of Damascus and its jasmine. Those moments reminded me of my roots, of my land whose details I no longer clearly remembered, but whose image remained etched in my childhood memory. The longing added to the burden of Tawjihi, as my success in it would not only determine my future but perhaps also my future in the homeland I dreamed of returning to.

Then came the news, on **December 8, 2025**, while I was engrossed in revising for my complex physics exam, my mind battling equations, and while the camp was preparing for another quiet night like any other. The news did not come from an official news broadcast on television; instead, it hit like a thunderbolt, like a rapidly spreading rumor that turned into a truth in a matter of minutes. I heard the voices of our neighbors, whom I hadn't heard shouting with such overwhelming joy in years, "Damascus is alive again!" "Syria is liberated!" "Oppression is gone!" The words scattered in the air, racing to my

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ears, hitting my heart violently, and disrupting everything I had been thinking about concerning physics equations.

I rushed out of my caravan, searching for the source of this commotion that had awakened the entire camp, for the truth of what I was hearing, while my physics book lay open on my table.

I saw the entire camp erupt. People streamed out of their caravans, exchanging hugs and cheers. Families gathered in the alleys, and the sounds of tears of joy mingled with loud laughter.

Their eyes gleamed with tears that had turned from sadness to happiness; smiles I hadn't seen for a long time adorned their faces. Women's ululations rose to the sky, and simple fireworks were set off in the camp's dark sky, creating small explosions of joy and delight. I saw children running in the alleys, shouting the word "Syria" as if it had just been returned to them as a precious gift. They distributed the few sweets they had, rushing to congratulate each other, as if a miracle had just happened, a miracle that hearts had been waiting for for many long years.

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All this was beautiful... more than beautiful, it was a true miracle. But my heart... it did not rejoice as I expected it to in this historic moment, it did not dance with happiness like others around me. I was in a state of **utter bewilderment**. A lump caught in my throat; I felt as if I was suddenly caught between two fires consuming my soul: **the raging fire of longing for a land whose details I no longer clearly remembered, a land where my roots and history lay, and the deep fire of belonging to this place that had embraced me all these long years in my exile, and where I was trying to build my future through Tawjihi studies.**

How could I leave a camp that embraced me with all its harshness, yet taught me resilience? How could I leave the land of Jordan, which, despite my exile there, taught me the true meaning of homeland, the meaning of dignity and humanity in my weakest days? How could I leave a land that built me from scratch, a land that witnessed every step of my journey towards maturity, taught me the meaning of dignity in every simple meal I

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ate on its soil, in every cramped classroom I sat in, in every educational center that nurtured my small dream and helped it grow into a project? Jordan had been my surrogate mother, the support that embraced us when the world had abandoned us, when it had turned its back.

Or should I return to the land that gave birth to me, to my roots deeply embedded in history, to Syria that never dies, that still runs in my veins like a lifeline? How could one heart be divided between two loves, between two homelands, at once, especially when I was at the beginning of the most crucial academic stage of my life? I was torn internally, like a tree whose every part is pulled in opposite directions, fearing it would be uprooted. I saw the overwhelming joy in my mother's and father's eyes as they spoke of returning, of rebuilding our old house, but I also saw the long years of fatigue and pain we had endured here, in this camp. I felt that a part of me would remain here, and another part would return, as if I would never be whole, as if a part of me would live in the past and another in the future.

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I couldn't sleep that night. I sat alone in the corner of my caravan, which had witnessed every moment of my life, while the sounds of joy from outside did not stop. And I began to write.

I wrote to empty what was in my chest, to hear the voice of my true heart that was pounding intensely. I wasn't writing to make a decision at that moment, for the emotions were greater than any decision, but to understand my tangled feelings, to bring order to the chaos that had engulfed my soul. I wrote about Syria, which I loved with a mysterious love, and about Jordan, which embraced me with a sincere love. I wrote about the camp that shaped and refined me, and about my friends who were my support.

Then I realized something profound, something that transcended all borders and nationalities: **There is no conflict between the two. There is no denial in love. I can love a country that embraced me in my most desperate days, and yearn for a country that gave birth to me and whose soil I watered with my childhood.** Love is indivisible, and belonging is not split.

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Both are a part of me, and both will remain in my blood, forming my eternal identity.

I decided then: I will complete my difficult Tawjihi year here, and I will succeed in it, God willing. And after I reap the fruits of my hard work, I will return. Not as an escape from the reality I built here, but out of loyalty to roots that cannot be forgotten. I will return to plant jasmine flowers in the soil of my motherland, and I will carry in my heart all the seeds of goodness, knowledge, and innovation that I planted in the camp, to plant them there too. I will not forget Jordan, this great country that raised me when everything else abandoned me, a country that presented me to the world, even while I was behind its walls. I will return to Syria, but I will carry Jordan in my heart, as a second mother whose kindness and benevolence are never forgotten.

Thus, I realized that the liberation of the homeland was not the end of the road, but the beginning of a new chapter of responsibility. The responsibility of rebuilding what was destroyed, and the responsibility of preserving the hope that

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grew in our hearts. This moment, the liberation of Syria, was also a liberation for me, a liberation from the identity struggle, from the burden of the question "Where are you from?". I now knew that my identity was no longer just the word "refugee," but a blend of resilience and belonging, of deep roots and wings that soar in the global sky.

Chapter Eleven:

My Dreams and Plans After Graduation

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After the profound shock of the homeland's liberation, and the immense challenge I faced at the start of my Tawjihi year, I found myself standing at the threshold of a new phase, a phase where emotions intertwined and desires clashed. I realized that returning home, though a long-awaited dream, would not be immediate or easy. There was an entire academic year I had to complete, and a future I had to meticulously plan for here, in the place that had embraced me all these years. My vision was no longer limited to mere survival; it extended to include building a bright future, wherever I might be.

My days after the news of the liberation took on a different flavor. Joy filled the hearts of people in the camp; talks of return increased, and dreams of the future were woven on their tongues. But I, despite sharing in their joy, felt a doubled responsibility. I had to focus on my studies like never before. For my success in Tawjihi was no longer just a personal achievement; it had become a key that would open the doors of universities, and thus determine the type of contribution I could

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make to my homeland when the time for return came, or to the community I currently lived in. I saw every book I studied, and every problem I solved, as a step towards building those bridges between the present and the future.

On quiet nights, after the camp's clamor subsided, and after I finished reviewing my arduous lessons, I would sit alone in my caravan, the dim lamp's light etching on my face. I no longer dwelled on my painful past as much as I pondered **my dreams and plans after graduation**. The dream of university education was the biggest and clearest. I followed all news related to universities in Jordan, searching for specializations that matched my growing passion for technology. These weren't just rosy dreams; they were ambitious plans whose threads I began to meticulously weave.

The field of technology had captivated my heart and mind for some time. My passion for programming, for the ability to build new worlds from code, and for technology's power to solve both large and small problems – all of this pushed me towards this

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path. I saw how technology could make a difference in people's lives, just as my simple "electronic trolley" had done in the camp. Therefore, my first plans after graduation were to study **Software Engineering or Computer Science**. I imagined myself in university lecture halls, learning from esteemed professors, participating in advanced projects, and contributing to the development of innovative technological solutions. I didn't see these specializations merely as a profession, but as a mission, a way to contribute to building the future, wherever I might be.

My dreams weren't limited to academic study alone. After my experience with the "Aquavita" project and the "Small Hope Library," and helping youth during the pandemic challenge, I realized that I wanted to be more than just an engineer or a programmer. I planned to create a **free online educational platform** targeting refugee children and youth, or children in remote areas. A platform that would offer them simplified lessons in programming, computer fundamentals, languages, and even essential life skills not included in formal curricula. I

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envisioned it as a means to overcome the barriers of space and time, to transfer knowledge to everyone who needed it, especially those living in circumstances similar to mine. My vision was for this platform to be a bridge for them towards better opportunities, and to instill in them hope and belief in their abilities.

Furthermore, I planned to develop the **electronic trolley project** (the robot that helps newcomers in the camp) to become more advanced and comprehensive. I imagined it as an intelligent robot, not just providing guidance, but capable of offering health information, or assisting in organized aid distribution, or even providing some entertainment games for children. These ideas filled my mind; each idea sparked a new passion, and every challenge made me search for creative solutions. I would jot down all these ideas in my small notebook, draw imaginary blueprints, and try to visualize how these projects would look in reality.

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But between these dreams and plans, there was a great challenge in how to achieve them. Resources were limited, and opportunities required double the effort and pursuit. I realized that the path would not be strewn with roses, and that I would face many obstacles. But my faith in my abilities, and in the words of my teacher who restored my self, and thanks to God's mercy that guided me in the darkest circumstances, was my fuel. I believed that every diligent person would be rewarded, and that doors would open for those who strove hard.

This period of my life was filled with preparation—psychological and cognitive preparation for the next stage. I tried to develop my skills in all aspects: rapid reading, effective research, complex problem-solving. I saw every passing day as an opportunity to learn something new, to strengthen myself, to get one step closer to achieving my dreams. The future no longer felt like an unknown that terrified me; instead, it became a blank canvas on which I could paint my dreams with my own hands, coloring them with the hues of hope and determination.

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And so, I lived my Tawjihi year not just as a student striving for exam success, but as an architect of my dreams, and as a young man planning his future in a rapidly changing world—a world that opens its doors to innovators and those with strong will. I focused on mastering what was at hand, planned for what was to come, and believed that the future was better, and that days held many opportunities for me to be part of the change I dreamed of.

Chapter Twelve:

The Joy and Pride of Belonging

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After all those years I spent asking myself "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?", and after an arduous journey filled with despair and awakening, wandering and rising, I reached a point where I felt I was finding the answers. The answers were no longer faint whispers; they were emotions flowing through my veins, warming my soul: a **deep sense of joy, and an indescribable pride in my belonging.** This belonging was not confined to one place; it extended to encompass my story of struggle, my small successes, and the people who believed in me.

These feelings manifested in the details of my daily life. In the morning, when I woke up to go to school or the center, I no longer felt like I was going to an imposed duty, but to a place that belonged to me, and to which I belonged. My steps were faster, my smile wider, and my sense of purpose clearer. I would shake hands with my friends and colleagues, and see in their eyes an appreciation and respect I hadn't seen before. I had become an integral part of the camp's fabric, a strong thread in a complex

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tapestry woven by circumstances, but colored by me with hope and determination.

I vividly remember those moments that filled my heart with pride. On one occasion, I was delivering a lecture at one of the educational centers in the camp about the importance of technology in building the future. The audience comprised people of all ages – children, youth, and even elders. I spoke about my journey, about how I started from nothing, about the "electronic trolley" I designed, and about my big dreams to help my community. I saw eyes gleaming and faces smiling, and I felt that my words touched their hearts. After the lecture, an old woman approached me, her face etched with the wrinkles of time, but her eyes shone with hope. She held my hands and said in a trembling voice: "My son, you are our pride. You are our hope in this camp. Never give up." Her words were worth gold; they meant more to me than any award or honor. In that moment, I felt a deep pride, not in myself as an individual, but in myself as part of this resilient community, as an echo of their dreams.

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This pride was not limited to major achievements. Rather, it seeped into my heart even in the simplest things. When I saw a child using the "electronic trolley" I designed to navigate the camp easily, or when I saw a young person opening a book from the "Small Hope Library" which I helped establish, I felt immense joy. These small moments were what rekindled my belief that every effort I made had value and meaning. I realized that my belonging was no longer limited to my village that I left behind, nor to the papers of my identity, but to the impact I leave on the lives of others, to the change I bring about in my small world.

The pride of belonging wasn't just about the camp or the projects I had initiated. It extended to encompass **my identity as a refugee, as a person who persevered in the face of harsh circumstances.** The word "refugee," which once represented a constraint and a prison for me, had now transformed into a badge of honor that I carried with pride. My story, the story of the refugee who dreamed and rose, became what opened doors for me and granted me a platform to speak and inspire others. In

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every conference I participated in, and in every seminar where I delivered a speech, I introduced myself clearly: "I am Mohammed, a refugee from Syria, living in Azraq Camp, Jordan." I saw looks of astonishment in some eyes, but I also saw looks of respect and appreciation. I came to believe that this word, "refugee," does not define my weakness; rather, it defines my strength, my ability to overcome the impossible.

My sense of joy also stemmed from witnessing the change I brought about in the lives of those around me. When I saw students I helped with their lessons achieve good grades, or when I saw young people I trained in programming find simple job opportunities, I felt that I was part of a larger success story, a story of a community rising despite everything. This joy was deeper than any personal happiness, because it was linked to the happiness of others.

Amidst this pride and belonging, I never forgot Jordan. This country that embraced me, that granted me a second chance at life, education, and development. I felt a deep belonging to

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Jordan, as if it were my second homeland. I did not see myself as a guest in it, but as an integral part of its fabric. I appreciated every drop of water, every loaf of bread, every educational opportunity offered to me here. I believed that repaying kindness is not just through words, but through work and contributing to the building of this homeland that was my support in exile.

This period of my life was filled with reconciliation with myself, with the past, and with reality. I reconciled with the fact that I am a refugee, and that this fact does not diminish my value. I reconciled with the idea that homeland can be more than just a geographical location; it can be a feeling of belonging to a story, to a community, to a cause. My identity became richer, more complex, and stronger. I no longer searched for answers; instead, I became the answer, I became the story.

This feeling of joy and pride in belonging did not come overnight; it was the result of years of struggle, searching, falling, and rising. It was the culmination of a long journey, a journey during which I realized that a person is not defined by their place, but by

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their will, their dreams, and the impact they leave on this world. I

became proud of every part of this journey, of every wound and

every victory.

Chapter Thirteen:

Longing for Jordan and My Camp,

My Adopted Home

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With the passing of days, the accumulation of memories, and after all the successes I achieved here, after my soul reconciled with the reality of being a "refugee" living in this place, a new feeling began to grow deep within me. It wasn't merely a passive adaptation; it was a **genuine yearning, a warm longing for Jordan, and for my camp, which I had come to consider my home.** A home built by resilience, watered by tears, and shaped by hands that refused to surrender. This longing was not a replacement for my love for Syria, but an addition to it, a new layer of belonging added to my soul, which had become multi-homeland.

I tried to explain this feeling to myself. How could I long for a place that was once a prison to me? How could the rows of identical caravans, and the dusty alleys that smelled of dust in summer and mud in winter, become an integral part of my identity? The answer lay in every small and large detail I lived here. In the sound of the wind hitting the caravans at night, as if singing a gentle lullaby to me. In the scent of tea my mother

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would prepare in the morning, and in the children's laughter that filled the alleys after school. In the familiar faces of neighbors that became as dear as family members, with whom we exchanged smiles, worries, and joys. This place, with all its harshness, was the witness to my growth, my awakening, my small victories.

I distinctly remember the nights I spent gazing out of my small caravan window, watching Jordan's clear sky, the twinkling stars that seemed closer and brighter here than they did in my old village. I would reflect on the first times I arrived at the camp, and how lost and lonely I felt. Now, everything had changed. I began to see this place as a story, my story. I began to see Jordan not just as a host country, but as a **second mother** who embraced me in the direst circumstances, opening her doors to me despite all the difficulties she herself faced.

The longing for Jordan was not merely an emotion; it was a recognition of a profound debt of gratitude. I remembered how this land offered me educational opportunities when all other

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doors were closed. How the educational centers in the camp provided me with a space to learn and grow. How it allowed me the chance to start my first project, the "electronic trolley," and how organizations and official bodies supported me in my journey. All these details, all these opportunities, were woven into the fabric of my life here. I believed that Jordan had not only provided me with shelter but had also given me an opportunity to redefine myself, to become a person of value, not just a number in refugee statistics.

The matter was not limited to official or material support. It extended to encompass the **warmth of human relationships**. My friends whom I made here, "Ali" and "Fatima" and others, became an inseparable part of my soul. Our shared laughter, our intertwined dreams, the moments of despair we overcame together – all these bonds were stronger than any geographical borders. We lived together, dreamed together, and built together. They were the camp to me; they were the homeland my heart had chosen. We exchanged food, shared ideas, and supported

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each other through hardships. These relationships were more precious than gold, and the longing for them was an indescribable feeling.

Amidst the pressure of Tawjihi, these feelings intertwined in a complex way. I would be reviewing my lessons, contemplating a bright future that could be here in Jordan, or back in Syria. But every time, I found myself thinking about how I could contribute to this country that embraced me, how I could repay its kindness. It wasn't just a duty; it was a deep desire stemming from my heart. I would see Jordanian students in universities and dream of being like them, studying and contributing to building this homeland that had been my support in my exile.

The camp itself, with all its details, held a special place in my heart. The alleys where I used to run as a child, then as a young man carrying dreams, were silent witnesses to my journey. The caravans that once seemed like cold boxes had transformed into homes holding stories, homes of people who endured, defied, and rose. Every corner in the camp reminded me of a moment, a

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lesson, an achievement. I would watch the young children playing, and I would see myself from just a few years ago, wishing them a better future, and realizing that my mission was to light their path, to prove to them that the camp could be a starting point, not an end.

This deep longing for Jordan and the camp did not mean forgetting Syria, my original homeland. Instead, it was a realization that love can expand to encompass more than one place. I understood that my identity had become more complex, richer. I am a Syrian refugee, yes, but I am also a son of Jordan, a son of the camp, a son of a story of resilience that transcends borders. This pride in dual belonging, this intertwined longing, granted me a unique strength. I realized that I carried within me two legacies, two cultures, and two experiences, and this is what made me the person I am today.

These feelings were what nourished my soul and propelled me forward, to excel in my studies, to achieve my dreams, to become a voice for everyone who had gone through the same

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experience as me. For longing is not just a yearning for the past, but a driving force for the future—a motivation to build a better world, where no one is forced to choose between two homelands, and where belonging is a feeling of love and appreciation for every land that embraced the human soul. This longing was my guide on the path back to myself, and my appreciation for the place that helped me discover it.

Chapter Fourteen:

My Dreams of Helping Refugees

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My life's journey was not merely a personal story of despair and success, of loss and awakening. Instead, with the passing of days and the accumulation of experiences, it gradually transformed into a **deeper message, a dream too vast to be contained by my small body or the wide boundaries of the camp.** I began to see every step I took forward, and every success I achieved, not just as an individual accomplishment, but as fuel for a higher purpose: **to help other refugees like myself, and those who might face similar circumstances to mine, find their way in this challenging world.**

This dream did not arise overnight. It grew with me gradually, beginning as a faint spark deep within my soul, then transforming into a strong, inextinguishable flame. I vividly remember the moments when this vision solidified. When I saw new children arriving at the camp, their eyes bearing the same bewilderment I had known, and feeling the same sense of loss that had once overwhelmed me. They wore simple clothes, carried few bags, and stared at the white caravans with the same

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puzzled expression that had been on my face. In those moments, I saw myself in them, seeing a child from a quiet village, cast by fate into an unknown world. I realized that my mission was no longer limited to building my own future; it extended to reaching out to these children, to these young people, to help them find their path towards hope.

My dreams of helping refugees took many forms. Primarily, I believed in the power of **education as a tool for liberation**. I dreamed of establishing a comprehensive educational center within the camp, not just routine classrooms, but a space for creativity and innovation. A place where children would learn not only academic subjects, but also life skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving. I envisioned classrooms filled with interactive activities, workshops in programming and robotics, lessons in arts and music—all aimed at preparing a new generation of refugees, a generation that would not see asylum as an end, but as a beginning for a new opportunity. I wanted to provide them with what I lacked in my early days: mentors who believed in

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them, an environment that encouraged them to think and develop, and technological resources to help them keep pace with the world.

Secondly, I had a big dream of **developing technology to serve the refugee community**. After the success of my simple "electronic trolley" designed to help newcomers, I realized the immense potential of technology in easing people's lives in the camps. I dreamed of developing smartphone applications that would provide essential information to refugees: about available services, aid distribution schedules, educational and training opportunities. I envisioned an electronic system to facilitate communication between refugees and organizations, to make their voices heard, and for aid and services to reach them more effectively. The idea was to use everything I learned in software engineering to design innovative solutions for real-world problems people faced every day in the camp. I wanted to prove that technology is not exclusive to wealthy nations; it can be a

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powerful tool in the hands of those living in the harshest conditions.

Thirdly, I dreamed of being a **voice for refugees in international forums**. After my participation in the global competition I mentioned, I realized that my story, and the stories of thousands like me, could make a difference if they reached receptive ears. I imagined myself standing on international platforms, speaking about our suffering, our hopes, our capabilities. I wanted to change the stereotype of the refugee, from being merely a needy number to a human being capable of giving, of innovating, of building the future. I wished to advocate for refugees' rights to education, work, and a dignified life, and to contribute to shaping policies and programs that would effectively support them. This dream required me to master public speaking, broaden my knowledge of international laws, and become capable of effective communication with various cultures.

These dreams were not mere rosy fantasies; they were driven by a deep conviction that I could make a difference. My personal

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experience was my greatest motivator. Every moment of despair I lived, every challenge I overcame, every bit of help I received—all of it instilled in me the desire to give back, not only to Jordan, which embraced me, but to humanity as a whole. I saw that the pain I endured was not in vain; rather, it was a lesson, a school that refined my character and prepared me to be a leader, an inspiration, and a change-maker.

I realized that achieving these dreams would not be easy. I would face many obstacles: lack of funding, bureaucracy, and misunderstanding from some. But I had learned from my experience that will is stronger than any obstacle. I believed that God plants a wish in us only because He knows it is achievable. I saw in every despairing refugee youth, in every orphaned child, in every suffering family, an additional motivation for me to continue the struggle, to prove that they are not alone, and that hope always exists.

As I completed my final Tawjihi year, these dreams filled my thoughts, giving me extra strength to focus on my studies. I saw

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every piece of information I learned, every grade I achieved, as a step towards realizing this vision. I was no longer studying just for my own success, but for their success, to be their voice, to pave the way for them. These dreams were the compass that guided me, and the light that illuminated my path in the darkest circumstances.

I always repeated my old teacher's words to myself: "You were not created for life; rather, life was created for you." And now, I added a new sentence to it: **"And life was created for us to make it better for others, especially those who have lost everything."** This is the essence of my dream; this is my ultimate goal.

Chapter Fifteen:

**Achieving Most of My Goals (A
Message to Refugees and the World)**

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After all those years that passed like days, and all the days that felt like years, after I had drawn the lines of my life with my blood, tears, and determination, and after my soul reconciled with the reality of being of multiple homelands and allegiances, I stand today on the threshold of a new chapter, a chapter unforeseen. My dreams were no longer mere nocturnal whispers that vanished with the first ray of sun; instead, they became tangible realities, **goals I had set my feet upon, and most of which I had reached.** The path was not strewn with roses; rather, it was full of thorns, stumbles, and moments when my spirit almost faltered. But each time, I remembered an old voice that whispered to me: "Don't give up," and another voice that said: "You were not created for life; rather, life was created for you."

The Tawjihi year passed like a raging storm. Nights were long, books were companions, and anxiety was the master. Every piece of news about the liberated homeland ignited a fire in my heart—a fire of longing and a fire of responsibility. I had to

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achieve success here, to prove that a refugee is capable of excellence, and that a camp can produce leaders and innovators. I studied diligently, stayed up late nights, and deprived myself of many simple pleasures of life, until the day of the results announcement arrived. My heart fluttered in my chest like a captured bird. And when the results appeared, when I saw my name among the top achievers, I couldn't believe my eyes. They weren't just grades; they were the culmination of years of resilience, a message that effort is never wasted. That moment was the key, the key to the doors I had long dreamed of passing through.

After graduating from high school with distinction, my destination was clear: **university**. It wasn't as easy as being accepted into a vocational course; university was a bigger dream, its costs were exorbitant, and the competition was fierce. But I had learned not to surrender. I submitted admission applications and scholarship requests, searching every corner, knocking on every door. I remember the nights I spent preparing

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my documents, writing motivational letters, pondering every word, as if I were offering my very soul. And after a long wait, the good news arrived: **I was accepted with a full scholarship in Software Engineering** at a prestigious university in Jordan. In that moment, I felt as if the entire universe was smiling at me, as if every tear shed in the camp had turned into a star illuminating my path. I hugged my mother and father, and tears of joy flooded all our faces. This was the first step towards achieving my greater dreams in technology.

Years of university study were a unique experience. It wasn't just lecture halls and lessons; it was a journey of discovery. I learned more about programming, artificial intelligence, networks, and how to build complex systems. I delved into the world of code, translating ideas into algorithms, and seeing how the language of machines could revolutionize human lives. I didn't settle for academic study alone; I sought opportunities for practical application. I participated in coding competitions, worked on side projects, and always tried to connect what I learned to the

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needs of my community, the refugee community. I saw technology not just as a professional field, but as a powerful tool for providing assistance and bringing about change.

My biggest dream was to **help refugees like myself, and those who faced similar circumstances.** And this dream began to come true step by step. After the success of the simple "electronic trolley" in the camp, I decided to develop it further.

During my university studies, I worked on a new graduation project: **"The Intelligent Guidance Robot."** It was no longer just a trolley with a screen; it became a small, voice-interactive robot, equipped with detailed maps of the camp, and capable of answering newcomers' questions about available services, clinic locations, schools, and aid distribution centers. This robot roamed the camp, providing assistance in multiple languages, and answering people's inquiries in a calm voice. When I saw an elderly person who couldn't read or write use the robot to find their way to the clinic, and when I saw children gathering around

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it with curiosity and joy, I realized that this was not just a graduation project; it was a real embodiment of my dream.

My work was not limited to the camp. After graduating from university with high honors, I began to teach basic programming and technology to refugee children in other camps and remote areas within Jordan. I traveled, carrying my laptop and some simple devices, and taught them how they could create their own worlds through code. I saw in their innocent eyes the same spark that was once in mine, the same desire to learn, the same hope for a better future. I told them my story, about the child who came to the camp lost, and how technology changed his life. Every smile I saw from them, every question they asked, rekindled the passion within me and proved that true impact is not measured by money or fame, but by the hearts you open to knowledge and hope.

I have achieved most of the goals I set out for. I became a software engineer, working at a prestigious company, and contributing to major technological projects. But more

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importantly, I became a voice for refugees, a story told in international forums. I was invited to participate in global conferences, stood on platforms I never dreamed of entering, and spoke before hundreds, even thousands, of decision-makers and inspiring young people. I told my story, not to seek pity, but to inspire them, to tell them that a refugee is not a burden, but a treasure trove of energies and creativity. I advocated for refugees' rights to education, work, and a dignified life, offered technological solutions to their problems, and proved that humanity transcends all borders. Every time I delivered a speech, I felt I carried on my shoulders the dreams of millions of refugees around the world. My voice was their voice, and my words were an expression of their hopes.

My Message to Refugees and the World: Do Not Surrender!

To everyone who reads my words, to every lost soul in the sea of asylum, to every heart burdened with worries, to every eye that has lost its spark of hope: **Do not surrender!**

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I know that pain is real, that exile is harsh, and that the word
"refugee" may seem like a heavy stamp that haunts you
wherever you go. I know that you may lose hope, that you may
feel the world has turned its back on you. You may find
yourselves in a tent or a caravan, far from your beloved
homeland, plagued by doubts: Is this my fate? Is this my end?

But I tell you: **Pain is not the end of the road; it is a new
beginning.** Despair is not destiny; it is a fleeting feeling you can
overcome. Look at me, the child who came to the camp knowing
nothing, whose dreams almost died, who lost faith in himself,
and who almost dropped out of school in the direst
circumstances. But something within me refused to surrender.
Something whispered to me that there is a hidden power, the
power of faith, the power of will, the power of love.

**You are not numbers in statistics; you are not mere figures to
be counted. You are stories, you are dreams, you are latent
energies waiting to be unleashed.** Each one of you carries
within a complete world of capabilities. Doors may close in your

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faces, and you may be deprived of many opportunities, but no one can shackle your minds and spirits. Education is your strongest weapon, and knowledge is your true freedom. Do not stop learning, reading, researching, questioning. Plant the seeds of hope in your children's hearts, teach them that tomorrow always holds a new opportunity.

Turn your challenges into opportunities. Lack of resources?

Teach your children creativity. Confined spaces? Teach them how to build their own worlds in their minds. The word "refugee"? Transform it into a badge of honor, a symbol of resilience and defiance, a story that inspires others. Hold your heads high. You are not helpless; you are strong.

Remember that God does not plant a desire in you unless He knows it is achievable. No matter how distant your dreams may seem, no matter how great the difficulties, trust that there is a way, and that will can make the impossible happen. Seek light in the darkest circumstances, and cling to hope like a lifeline.

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To the entire world, to everyone who sees a refugee as just a

picture on television: Look deeply into these souls. Look at

their energies, their dreams, their abilities to build and give. A

refugee is not a burden; they are a partner in building the future,

a human being who carries stories of resilience worth telling,

and experiences of giving worth appreciating. Grant refugees

opportunities, grant them education, grant them dignity, and you

will see how they will flourish, and how they will change the face

of the world for the better. They are not just victims of war; they

are builders of peace.

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Here Everything Was Born... And Here the Story Is Renewed

Syria has been liberated, and I have achieved most of the dreams I set for myself. I have become an engineer, an innovator, and a voice for refugees. But this is not the end. This is not the conclusion in the literal sense. Life is not a destination; it is a continuous journey, a journey full of new dreams, new challenges, and new opportunities.

Today, I tell myself and all of you: **Continue to dream, continue to work, continue to give.** A person's true impact is not measured by the number of years they lived, but by the number of souls they touched, and by the number of dreams they ignited.

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I carried Jordan in my heart, as a second mother whose kindness is never forgotten. And one day, I will return to Syria, to plant in its soil all the goodness and hope I learned. I will be the bridge that connects yesterday and today, between homeland and camp, between pain and hope.

I ask nothing of you... only if my name, Mohammed Al-Ali, the refugee who dreamed and rose, crosses your path one day, please pray for me. I wish to be loved, even by those who have not seen me. I wish to leave a good impression in people's hearts, just as they left hope and sincerity in mine.

I entrust you to God, whose trusts are never lost. And farewell... to another dream, and a new story. For life never stops... and the path of hope is endless.

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- Mohammed Al-Ali – The Refugee Who Dreamed

