

## Chapter VIII

### *... life fell at the hospital by Death's hand*



I had become a doctor with the youthful dream of improving medical practice and above all trying to humanize it. I wanted to be a clinical doctor to get in touch with global medicine, without forgetting anything of all I had studied. My dream began to fulfil when I had been able to obtain a post at the Medical Clinic Residence.

Talking to my father, before he died, he had told me if somebody wanted to be a philosopher, the best thing should be to become a doctor, so he could get in close contact with human drama.

I never understood politics and wasn't interested in it. My yearning was to withdraw from every sort of violence whatever its origin. My only purpose was to work honestly and learn how to cure. Help. "The solace you offer to your fellow-creatures, will be a balm to your own wounds". It was a sentence that moved me deeply and gave me courage.

A huge explosion at the Central Police Headquarters. The conflagration could be heard as far as 10 kms. from the place. The news spreads and arrives at the hospital. They talk about fifty or sixty casualties and no less than three scores of wounded people...

I was sent on the fourth ambulance that sped up to attend the victims. It was my first important mission. It rode at the highest speed preceded by the howling of the siren of the ambulance; our adrenaline flew lavishly.

The whole brutality was exposed. The scaffold of the building seemed drunk and with difficulty they held up bent on themselves. The twisted pieces of iron, in absurd shapes and fragments of masonry, spread everywhere smoking cruelly. They talked about a bomb of 10 kgs of Trotyl...

In some places you could detect pieces of smashed furniture. Even the glazed tiles of distant walls, very far away from the explosion, had been detached by the dreadful expansive wave that erupted death right and left.

Smell of burning, morgue, cemetery, death....every loathsome emanation gathered in only one place at the same moment...

The violence scattered lots of people everywhere causing ruins and fire.

Mutilated bodies, shapeless bits of flesh, members lacking patches of skin; corpses with distorted faces evidencing agony and suffering.

Those rescued among the debris were carried to us. The first one I received was an eighteen-year-old boy with exposed fracture of femur, with a 90 degree-twisted ankle on the other leg. He'd got bits of shrapnel (tiny steel balls and nails) en s Prayer" but he only could recite: "The Introduction of the Constitution".

Rests of arms, burnt buttocks separated from the body, with the two legs hanging, a man's finger with a practically melted wedding ring, that made me think he had a wife and perhaps children. Only a bit of an ear joined to the body because the rest of the head had disappeared. A reddish and black cauliflower was in place of a hand...

Dantesque tragedy that terrified experienced people and horrified the immature ones. It was the very semblance of the war I used to see at the films; with the only difference it was true.

Unbelievably nobody complained or cried painfully until I was taught something I hadn't learnt at the Medical School:

- "The bomb blew up twenty minutes ago, in ten minutes more all of them will begin complaining, doc. Those whom "a pipe" is blown, don't feel anything for half a hour. Get ready, doc". An old ambulance driver who has always worked in "the transport" of the hospital, warned me.

Incredibly, but with mives, but it wasn't the same thing...

We began classifying the casualties to start the evacuation. Serum was applied.

Four of them who are still living, were tubed, and even the most experient surgeon drained a pericardial effusion in middle of the ruins.

A corridor was formed closing flanking streets from the catastrophe to the hospital. Two doctors remained in the place.

Four ambulances together began to return while others were coming. Vans, police-cars, fire engines, and private cars were bringing what and how they could.....

In my ambulance I was taking three still living bodies, but half way only one was alive.

One of them died looking at me. The only thing I could do was to hold his hand...

The hospital was in maximum sizing. The medical chiefs and the head doctor who were of the highest experience, and the place they were appointed at the catastrophes, was the entrance of Emergency Unit. They had the terrible task of deciding who was going first to the Operating theatre, who to Therapy, who to Clinic, who reminded in the Ward... who was dead, whom it was useless to do anything because his condition was irreversible.

And they wouldn't allow themselves to feel guilt...

All the services were at maximum priming. Even at Obstetrics and Gynecology were in Emergency, because the shock, caused by the news, produced a huge number of premature childbirth.

Including at the canteen of the hospital its services were increased to assist relations and friends of the victims.

Lifts going up and down.. to the theatre, Therapy, Surgery to the passageways.....

The arrival of casualties exceeded every conjecture or foresight.

A fire engine, located at the exit, where the victims were discharged; with "hosepiping of water" washed, from the inside of the ambulances, the scraps of flesh, blood, pieces of clothing, hair, one or two shoes and the remains of buccal prothesis. Then the whole staff went into the car again (driver, doctor, nurse, and bearer) and returned to the place of the catastrophe, looking for more victims.

Inside the hospital everybody was desperate to do their best as possible, even the impossible. The newly graduated doctors were in charge of starting the operations, and at the most difficult moments the experienced surgeons, changed clothes and performed the most complicated surgical passages. As soon as they had finished one, they were ready to start another one.

As a clinic I canalized, intubated dozens of patients. Constantly, perspiration dripped from my forehead and mixed with the victim's blood. Canalize, intubate.....

The surgeons at the theatres weren't enough and I went up to help. An aorta, that was restrained, in a movement from the surgeon, blood poured on a side of my face, while I was holding the separators. It was warm, viscose, sticky.

A nurse cleaned me with plenty of serum. My hands, in their humble task, didn't move an inch...

Weariness was felt more than ever, but we couldn't pay attention, we had to overcome it...

I went and saw my clinical patients...One was lying on a stretcher at the passageway, He had inhaled smoke and was suffering a severe breathing difficulty.... It was hard to set in the mechanical breathing tube, but I got it at last. His slip was mended like mine. Talcum powder and ointment on his feet to fight athlet foot, like mine. They are human beings like me. Perhaps this very morning, we had similar problems and expectations. But, not any more....

In situations of catastrophe, clinical history wasn't written, at first you only wrote on the victim's forehead: M for Morphia; VAT for Antitetanic Vaccine; AMP for Ampicillin.....they were graffitis that told our purpose of putting an end to pain and suffering.

The last ambulances that were arriving, each one more Dantesque than the other. They were loaded with less corpses but more and more human remains.

Some bearers, oxigenatists, secretaries and helpers couldn't resist and vomit.....

Everything similar to a human remain, according to what it was taught at "clearing for disaster" should be taken to the Hospital. Forensic Surgeons had come and try to reconstruct the corpses with the remains in a macabre and frightful puzzle.

At three o'clock in the morning, we had been able to carry out a racconto of survivors and their conditions.....

The time to give the first informations to the families, about those who had been able to be identified, had come.

The second part of the drama to the medical staff began. A mother blamed me she had had her son nine months in her womb and didn't want him to die at eighteen years old...A young fiancée bemoaned her destroyed dreams. All of them looked at the Hospital demanding help. Mothers, wives, children.

Heartbreaking cries.

I received news that a lot of untimely childbirths got complicated. I had the feeling that life came into the hospital by the hand of death.

At five o'clock in the morning of a cold day in July, I went out to the park of the Hospital to have a breath. The Sky was starry and the Southern Cross was shining beautifully. In middle of the silence I wondered myself the meaning of all this and I had no answer.

I believed nobody had it. A gun shot, within violence, had a bit of respectability, it's somebody against somebody.

But a bomb kills anybody who unfortunately is nearby.

Even there was fear on the living people's faces and I thought they considered themselves guilty of being alive. And their silence showed how utterly defenseless the human being was.....

I was shuddering when I returned home. The first thing I did, was to hold my little son in my arms tightly, very tightly....