

passed without incident. The swelling had gone down and my blood levels had improved. My family trusted that Dr Fiona and Dr Javid would give me the best possible care.

When my family went back to their rooms sleep was slow in coming. Just after midnight someone knocked at their door. It was one of the colonels who had earlier tried to convince my father to leave my mother behind and travel to the UK. He told my father that he absolutely had to travel with me or I might not be taken at all.

‘I told you last night the issue was resolved,’ my father replied. ‘Why did you wake me? I’m not leaving my family.’

Once again, another official was called to talk to him. ‘You must go. You are her parent, and if you don’t accompany her she may not be accepted into the hospital in the UK,’ he said.

‘What’s done is done,’ my father insisted. ‘I am not changing my mind. We will all follow in a few days when the documents are sorted out.’

The colonel then said, ‘Let’s go to the hospital as there are other documents to sign.’

My father became suspicious. It was after midnight and he was scared. He didn’t want to go alone with the officials and insisted my mother come too. My father was so worried that for the whole time he repeated a verse of the Holy Quran over and over. It was from the story of Yunus who is swallowed by a whale like the story of Jonah in the Bible. This verse was recited by the prophet Yunus when he was in the tummy of the whale. It reassures us that there is a way out of even the worst trouble and danger if we keep faith.

When they got to the hospital the colonel told my father that if I was to be allowed to fly to the UK then there were other documents that needed to be signed. It was simple. My father had felt so uncomfortable and scared because of the secrecy of all the arrangements, the men in uniform everywhere and the vulnerability of our family, that he had panicked and blown the incident out of proportion. The whole episode had been a matter of botched bureaucracy.

When my parents finally got back to the hostel it was with a very heavy heart. My father did not want me to come round in a strange country without my family there. He was worried about how confused I would be. My last memory would be of the school bus, and he was distraught that I would feel abandoned by them.

I was taken away at 5 a.m. on Monday, 15 October under armed escort. The roads to the airport had been closed and there were snipers on the rooftops of the buildings lining the route. The UAE plane was waiting. I am told it is the height of luxury with a plush double bed, sixteen first-class seats and a mini-hospital at the back staffed with European nurses led by a German doctor. I am just sorry I wasn’t conscious to enjoy it. The plane flew to Abu Dhabi for refuelling then headed on to Birmingham, where it landed in the late afternoon.

In the hostel my parents waited. They assumed their passports and visas were being processed and they would join me in a few days. But they heard nothing. They had no phone and no access to a computer to check on my progress. The wait felt endless.