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Journey into the Unknown

I WAS SHOT ON a Tuesday at lunchtime. By Thursday morning my father was so convinced that I would die that he told my uncle Faiz Mohammad that the village should start preparing for my funeral. I had been put into an induced coma, my vital signs were deteriorating, my face and body were swollen and my kidneys and lungs failing. My father later told me that it was terrifying to see me connected to all the tubes in that small glass cubicle. As far as he could see, I was medically dead. He was devastated. 'It's too early, she's only 15,' he kept thinking. 'Is her life to be so short?'

My mother was still praying – she had barely slept. Faiz Mohammad had told her she should recite the *Surah* of the Haj, the chapter of the Quran about pilgrimage, and she recited over and over again the same twelve verses (58–70) about the all-powerfulness of God. She told my father she felt I would live but he could not see how.

When Colonel Junaid came to check on me, my father again asked him, 'Will she survive?'

'Do you believe in God?' the doctor asked him.

'Yes,' said my father. Colonel Junaid seemed to be a man of great spiritual depth. His advice was to appeal to God and that He would answer our prayers.

Late on Wednesday night two military doctors who were intensive care specialists had arrived by road from Islamabad. They had been sent by General Kayani after the British doctors had reported back to him that if I was left in Peshawar I would suffer brain damage or might even die because of the quality of the care and the high risk of infection. They wanted to move me but suggested that in the meantime a top doctor be brought in. But it seemed they were too late.

The hospital staff had made none of the changes Dr Fiona had recommended, and my condition had deteriorated as the night went on. Infection had set in. On Thursday morning one of the specialists, Brigadier Aslam, called Dr Fiona. 'Malala is now very sick,' he told her. I had developed something called disseminated intravascular coagulation (DIC), which meant my blood was not clotting, my blood pressure was very low and my blood acid had risen. I wasn't passing urine any more so my kidneys were failing and my lactate levels had risen. It seemed that everything that could go wrong, had. Dr Fiona was about to leave for the airport to fly back to Birmingham – her bags were already at the airport – but when she heard the news, she offered to help and two nurses from her hospital in Birmingham stayed on with her.

She arrived back in Peshawar at lunchtime on Thursday. She told my father that I was to be airlifted to an army hospital in Rawalpindi which had the best intensive care. He couldn't see how a child so sick could fly, but Dr Fiona assured him that she did this all the time so not to worry. He asked her if there was any hope for me. 'Had there been no hope I would not be here,' she replied. My father says that in that moment he could not hold back his tears.

Later that day a nurse came and put drops in my eyes. 'Look, *Khaista*,' said my mother. 'Dr Fiona is right because the nurses put eye drops in Malala's eyes. They wouldn't put drops in if there was no chance.' One of the other girls who had been shot, Shazia, had been moved to the same hospital and Fiona went to check on her. She told my father that Shazia was fine and had begged her, 'Look after Malala!'