

can pray to God. Let's wait and see,' he said. 'We're not going to operate at this stage.'

My father became more agitated. In Swat the doctors had told him this was something simple, now it seemed very serious. And if it was serious why weren't they operating? He felt uncomfortable in a military hospital. In our country, where the army has seized power so many times, people are often wary of the military, particularly those from Swat, where the army had taken so long to act against the Taliban. One of my father's friends called him and said, 'Get her moved from that hospital. We don't want her to become *shaheed millat* [a martyr of the nation] like Liaquat Ali Khan.' My father didn't know what to do.

'I'm confused,' he told Colonel Junaid. 'Why are we here? I thought we'd go to the civil hospital.' Then he asked, 'Please, can you bring in Dr Mumtaz?'

'How would that look?' replied Colonel Junaid who was, not surprisingly, offended.

Afterwards, we found out that despite his youthful appearance he had been a neurosurgeon for thirteen years and was the most experienced and decorated neurosurgeon in the Pakistani army. He had joined the military as a doctor because of their superior facilities, following in the footsteps of his uncle, who was also an army neurosurgeon. The Peshawar CMH was on the front line of the war on the Taliban and Junaid dealt with gunshot wounds and blasts every day. 'I've treated thousands of Malalas,' he later said.

But my father didn't know that and became very depressed. 'Do whatever you think,' he said. 'You're the doctor.'

The next few hours were a wait-and-see time, the nurses monitoring my heartbeat and vital signs. Occasionally I made a low grunt and moved my hand or fluttered my eyes. Then Maryam would say, 'Malala, Malala.' Once my eyes completely opened. 'I never noticed before how beautiful her eyes are,' said Maryam. I was restless and kept trying to get the monitor off my finger. 'Don't do that,' Maryam said.

'Miss, don't tell me off,' I whispered as if we were at school. Madam Maryam was a strict headmistress.

Late in the evening my mother came with Atal. They had made the four-hour journey by road, driven by my father's friend Mohammad Farooq. Before she arrived Maryam had called to warn her, 'When you see Malala don't cry or shout. She can hear you even if you think she can't.' My father also called her and told her to prepare for the worst. He wanted to protect her.

When my mother arrived they hugged and held back tears. 'Here is Atal,' she told me. 'He has come to see you.'

Atal was overwhelmed and cried a lot. 'Mama,' he wept, 'Malala is hurt so badly.'

My mother was in a state of shock and could not understand why the doctors were not operating to remove the bullet. 'My brave daughter, my beautiful daughter,' she cried. Atal was making so much noise that eventually an orderly took them to the hospital's military hostel, where they were being put up.

My father was bewildered by all the people gathered outside – politicians, government dignitaries, provincial ministers – who had come to show their sympathy. Even the governor was there; he gave my father 100,000 rupees for my treatment. In our society if someone dies, you feel very honoured if one dignitary comes to your home. But now he was irritated. He felt all these people were just waiting for me to die when they had done nothing to protect me.

Later, while they were eating, Atal turned on the TV. My father immediately turned it off. He