

there they could arrange everything?

When my father returned to my mother he said to her, 'You are a great woman. All along I thought Malala and I were the campaigners but you really know how to protest!'

They were moved to Kashmir House in Islamabad, a hostel for members of parliament. Security was still so tight that when my father asked for a barber to give him a shave, a policeman sat with them all the way through so the man wouldn't cut his throat.

At least now they had their phones back and we could speak more easily. Each time, Dr Javid would call my father in advance to tell him what time he could speak to me and to make sure he was free. But when the doctor called the line was usually busy. My father is always on the phone! I rattled off my mother's eleven-digit mobile number and Dr Javid looked astonished. He knew then that my memory was fine. But my parents were still in darkness about why they weren't flying to me. Dr Javid was also baffled as to why they weren't coming. When they said they didn't know, he made a call and then assured them the problem was not with the army but the civilian government.

Later they would discover that, rather than do whatever it took to get my parents on the first plane to Birmingham to join their sick daughter, the interior minister Rehman Malik was hoping to fly with them so they could have a joint press conference at the hospital, and it was taking some time to make the arrangements. He also wanted to make sure they didn't ask for political asylum in Britain, which would be embarrassing for his government. Eventually he asked my parents outright if this was their plan. It was funny because my mother had no idea what asylum was and my father had never even thought about it – there were other things on his mind.

When my parents moved to Kashmir House they were visited by Sonia Shahid, the mother of Shiza, our friend who had arranged the trip to Islamabad for all us Khushal School girls. She had assumed they had gone to the UK with me, and when she found out they were still in Pakistan, she was horrified. They said they had been told there were no plane tickets to Birmingham. Sonia brought them clothes as they had left everything in Swat and got my father the number for President Zardari's office. He called and left a message. That night the president spoke to him and promised everything would be sorted out. 'I know what it's like to be kept from one's children,' he said, referring to his years in jail.

When I heard they would be in Birmingham in two days I had one request. 'Bring my school bag,' I pleaded to my father. 'If you can't go to Swat to fetch it, no matter – buy new books for me because in March it's my board examination.' Of course I wanted to come first in class. I especially wanted my physics book because physics is difficult for me, and I needed to practise numericals as my maths is not so good and they are hard for me to solve.

I thought I'd be back home by November.

It ended up being ten days before my parents came. Those ten days I spent in hospital without them felt like a hundred days. It was boring and I wasn't sleeping well. I stared at the clock in my room. The changing time reassured me I was alive and I saw for the first time in my life that I was waking early. Every morning I longed for 7 a.m. when the nurses would come. The nurses and Dr Fiona played games with me. QEH is not a children's hospital so they brought over a play coordinator with games. One of my favourites was Connect 4. I usually drew with Dr Fiona but I could beat everyone else. The nurses and hospital staff felt sorry for me in a far-off land away from my family and were very kind, particularly Yma Choudhury, the jolly director of operations, and Julie Tracy, the head nurse, who would sit and hold my hand.

The only thing I had with me from Pakistan was a beige shawl which Colonel Junaaid had given to