

walked home from school, had turned on the television and seen the news that I had been shot. He had called Khushal, and together they joined the weeping. The phone did not stop ringing. People reassured my mother that although I had been shot in the head, the bullet had just skimmed my forehead. My mother was very confused by all the different stories, first that my foot had been injured, then that I had been shot in the head. She thought I would think it strange that she hadn't come to me, but people told her not to go as I was either dead or about to be moved. One of my father's friends phoned her to tell her I was being taken to Peshawar by helicopter and she should come by road. The worst moment for her was when someone came to the house with my front door keys, which had been found at the scene of the shooting. 'I don't want keys, I want my daughter!' my mother cried. 'What use are keys without Malala?' Then they heard the sound of the helicopter.

The helipad was just a mile from our house and all the women rushed up to the roof. 'It must be Malala!' they said. As they watched the helicopter fly overhead, my mother took her scarf off her head, an extremely rare gesture for a Pashtun woman, and lifted it up to the sky, holding it in both hands as if it was an offering. 'God, I entrust her to You,' she said to the heavens. 'We didn't accept security guards – You are our protector. She was under Your care and You are bound to give her back.'

Inside the helicopter I was vomiting blood. My father was horrified, thinking this meant I had internal bleeding. He was starting to lose hope. But then Maryam noticed me trying to wipe my mouth with my scarf. 'Look, she is responding!' she said. 'That's an excellent sign.'

When we landed in Peshawar, they assumed we'd be taken to Lady Reading Hospital, where there was a very good neurosurgeon called Dr Mumtaz who had been recommended. Instead they were alarmed to be taken to CMH, the Combined Military Hospital. CMH is a large sprawling brick hospital with 600 beds and dates from British rule. There was a lot of construction going on to build a new tower block. Peshawar is the gateway to the FATA and since the army went into those areas in 2004 to take on the militants, the hospital had been very busy tending wounded soldiers and victims of the frequent suicide bombs in and around the city. As in much of our country, there were concrete blocks and checkpoints all around CMH to protect it from suicide bombers.

I was rushed to the Intensive Care Unit, which is in a separate building. Above the nurses' station the clock showed it was just after 5 p.m. I was wheeled into a glass-walled isolation unit and a nurse put me on a drip. In the next room was a soldier who had been horrifically burned in an IED attack and had a leg blown off. A young man came in and introduced himself as Colonel Junaid, a neurosurgeon. My father became even more disturbed. He didn't think he looked like a doctor; he seemed so young. 'Is she your daughter?' asked the colonel. Maryam pretended to be my mother so she could come in.

Colonel Junaid examined me. I was conscious and restless but not speaking or aware of anything, my eyes fluttering. The colonel stitched the wound above my left brow where the bullet had entered, but he was surprised not to see any bullet in the scan. 'If there is an entry there has to be an exit,' he said. He palpated my spine and located the bullet lying next to my left shoulder blade. 'She must have been stooping so her neck was bent when she was shot,' he said.

They took me for another CT scan. Then the colonel called my father into his office, where he had the scans up on a screen. He told him that the scan in Swat had been done from only one angle, but this new scan showed the injury was more serious. 'Look, Ziauddin,' he said. 'The CT scan shows the bullet went very close to the brain.' He said particles of bone had damaged the brain membrane. 'We