

was told, 'We need someone to get blood from the blood bank.' He was relieved but baffled. *Am I the only person who can fetch it?* he wondered. One of his friends went instead.

It was about 5.30 a.m. when the surgeons came out. Among other things, they told my father that they had removed a piece of skull and put it in my abdomen. In our culture doctors don't explain things to patients or relatives, and my father asked humbly, 'If you don't mind, I have a stupid question. Will she survive – what do you think?'

'In medicine two plus two does not always make four,' replied Colonel Junaid. 'We did our job – we removed the piece of skull. Now we must wait.'

'I have another stupid question,' said my father. 'What about this bone? What will you do with it?'

'After three months we will put it back,' replied Dr Mumtaz. 'It's very simple, just like this.' He clapped his hands.

The next morning the news was good. I had moved my arms. Then three top surgeons from the province came to examine me. They said Colonel Junaid and Dr Mumtaz had done a splendid job, and the operation had gone very well, but I should now be put into an induced coma because if I regained consciousness there would be pressure on the brain.

While I was hovering between life and death, the Taliban issued a statement assuming responsibility for shooting me but denying it was because of my campaign for education. 'We carried out this attack, and anybody who speaks against us will be attacked in the same way,' said Ehsanullah Ehsan, a spokesman for the TTP. 'Malala has been targeted because of her pioneer role in preaching secularism . . . She was young but she was promoting Western culture in Pashtun areas. She was pro-West; she was speaking against the Taliban; she was calling President Obama her idol.'

My father knew what he was referring to. After I won the National Peace Prize the year before, I had done many TV interviews and in one of them I had been asked to name my favourite politicians. I had chosen Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Benazir Bhutto and President Barack Obama. I had read about Obama and admired him because as a young black man from a struggling family he had achieved his ambitions and dreams. But the image of America in Pakistan had become one of drones, secret raids on our territory and Raymond Davis.

A Taliban spokesman said that Fazlullah had ordered the attack at a meeting two months earlier. 'Anyone who sides with the government against us will die at our hands,' he said. 'You will see. Other important people will soon become victims.' He added they had used two local Swati men who had collected information about me and my route to school and had deliberately carried out the attack near an army checkpoint to show they could strike anywhere.

That first morning, just a few hours after my operation, there was suddenly a flurry of activity, people neatening their uniforms and clearing up. Then General Kayani, the army chief, swept in. 'The nation's prayers are with you and your daughter,' he told my father. I had met General Kayani when he came to Swat for a big meeting at the end of 2009 after the campaign against the Taliban.

'I am happy you did a splendid job,' I had said at that meeting. 'Now you just need to catch Fazlullah.' The hall filled with applause and General Kayani came over and put his hand on my head like a father.

Colonel Junaid gave the general a briefing on the surgery and the proposed treatment plan, and General Kayani told him he should send the CT scans abroad to the best experts for advice. After his visit no one else was allowed at my bedside because of the risk of infection. But many kept coming: Imran Khan, the cricketer-turned-politician; Mian Iftikhar Hussein, the provincial information minister