

couldn't face seeing news of my attack at that moment. When he left the room Maryam switched it back on. Every channel was showing footage of me with a commentary of prayers and moving poems as if I had died. 'My Malala, my Malala,' my mother wailed and Maryam joined her.

Around midnight Colonel Junaid asked to meet my father outside the ICU. 'Ziauddin, Malala's brain is swelling.' My father didn't understand what this meant. The doctor told him I had started to deteriorate; my consciousness was fading, and I had again been vomiting blood. Colonel Junaid ordered a third CT scan. This showed that my brain was swelling dangerously.

'But I thought the bullet hadn't entered her brain,' said my father.

Colonel Junaid explained that a bone had fractured and splinters had gone into my brain, creating a shock and causing it to swell. He needed to remove some of my skull to give the brain space to expand, otherwise the pressure would become unbearable. 'We need to operate now to give her a chance,' he said. 'If we don't, she may die. I don't want you to look back and regret not taking action.'

Cutting away some of my skull sounded very drastic to my father. 'Will she survive?' he asked desperately, but was given little reassurance at that stage.

It was a brave decision by Colonel Junaid, whose superiors were not convinced and were being told by other people that I should be sent abroad. It was a decision that would save my life. My father told him to go ahead, and Colonel Junaid said he would bring in Dr Mumtaz to help. My father's hand shook as he signed the consent papers. There in black and white were the words 'the patient may die'.

They started the operation around 1.30 a.m. My mother and father sat outside the operating theatre. 'O God, please make Malala well,' prayed my father. He made bargains with God. 'Even if I have to live in the deserts of the Sahara, I need her eyes open; I won't be able to live without her. O God, let me give the rest of my life to her; I have lived enough. Even if she is injured, just let her survive.'

Eventually my mother interrupted him. 'God is not a miser,' she said. 'He will give me back my daughter as she was.' She began praying with the Holy Quran in her hand, standing facing the wall, reciting verses over and over for hours.

'I had never seen someone praying like her,' said Madam Maryam. 'I was sure God would answer such prayers.'

My father tried not to think about the past and whether he had been wrong to encourage me to speak out and campaign.

Inside the theatre Colonel Junaid used a saw to remove an eight-to-ten-centimetre square from the upper-left part of my skull so my brain had the space to swell. He then cut into the subcutaneous tissue on the left of my stomach and placed the piece of bone inside to preserve it. Then he did a tracheotomy as he was worried the swelling was blocking my airway. He also removed clots from my brain and the bullet from my shoulder blade. After all these procedures I was put on a ventilator. The operation took almost five hours.

Despite my mother's prayers, my father thought ninety per cent of the people waiting outside were just waiting for the news of my death. Some of them, his friends and sympathisers, were very upset, but he felt that others were jealous of our high profile and believed we had got what was coming to us.

My father was taking a short break from the intensity of the operating theatre and was standing outside when a nurse approached him. 'Are you Malala's father?' Once again my father's heart sank. The nurse took him into a room.

He thought she was going to say, 'We're sorry, I'm afraid we have lost her.' But once inside he