

symmetrical. Me, who had always cared about my appearance, how my hair looked! But when you see death, things change. ‘It doesn’t matter if I can’t smile or blink properly,’ I told her, ‘I’m still me, Malala. The important thing is God has given me my life.’ Yet every time they came to the hospital and I laughed or tried to smile, my mother’s face would darken as if a shadow had crossed it. It was like a reverse mirror – when there was laughter on my face there was distress on my mother’s.

My father would look towards my mother, who had this big question in her eyes: *Why was Malala like this?* The girl she had brought into the world and for fifteen years had been smiling. One day my father asked her, ‘Pekai, tell me truthfully. What do you think – is it my fault?’

‘No, *Khaista*,’ she replied. ‘You didn’t send Malala out thieving or killing or to commit crimes. It was a noble cause.’

Even so, my father worried that in future every time I smiled it would be a reminder of the shooting. That was not the only way they found me changed. Back in Swat I used to be a very fragile and sensitive child who would cry at the slightest thing, but in hospital in Birmingham even when I was in terrible pain I did not complain.

The hospital refused to allow other visitors even though they were inundated by requests, as they wanted me to be able to concentrate on my rehabilitation in private. Four days after my parents arrived a group of politicians came to the hospital from the three countries that had helped me – Rehman Malik, Pakistan’s interior minister, William Hague, the British foreign minister and Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, foreign minister of the UAE. They were not allowed to see me but were briefed by doctors and met my father. He was upset by the ministers’ visit because Rehman Malik said to him, ‘Tell Malala she should give a smile to the nation.’ He did not know that that was the one thing I could not do.

Rehman Malik had revealed that my attacker was a *talib* called Ataullah Khan who he said had been arrested in 2009 during the military operation in Swat but freed after three months. There were media reports that he had done a physics degree at Jehanzeb College. Malik claimed the plan to shoot me was hatched in Afghanistan. He said he had put a \$1 million bounty on the head of Ataullah and promised they would find him. We doubted that, as no one has ever been caught – not the killer of Benazir Bhutto, not whoever was behind the plane crash that killed General Zia, not the assassin of our first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan.

Only two people had been arrested after my shooting – our poor dear driver Usman Bhai Jan and the school accountant, who had taken the call from Usman Bhai Jan to say what had happened. He was released after a few days but Usman Bhai Jan was still in army custody as they said they would need him to identify people. We were very upset about that. Why had they arrested Usman Bhai Jan and not Ataullah?

The United Nations announced they were designating 10 November, one month and a day after the shooting, Malala Day. I didn’t pay much attention as I was preparing for a big operation the following day to repair my facial nerve. The doctors had done tests with electrical impulses and it had not responded, so they concluded it was cut and they needed to operate soon or my face would remain paralysed. The hospital had been giving regular updates to journalists about how I was doing but did not tell them about this to keep it private.

I was taken into theatre on 11 November for a surgeon called Richard Irving to carry out the operation. He had explained to me that this nerve controlled the side of my face, and its job was to open and close my left eye, move my nose, raise my left eyebrow and make me smile. Repairing the