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The Valley of Sorrows

IT ALL SEEMED like a bad dream. We had been away from our valley for almost three months and as we drove back past Churchill's Picket, past the ancient ruins on the hill and the giant Buddhist stupa, we saw the wide Swat River and my father began to weep. Swat seemed to be under complete military control. The vehicle we were in even had to pass through an explosives check before we could head up the Malakand Pass. Once we got over the other side and down into the valley it seemed there were army checkpoints everywhere and soldiers had made nests for their machine guns on so many of the rooftops.

As we drove through villages we saw buildings in ruins and burned-out vehicles. It made me think of old war movies or the video games my brother Khushal loves to play. When we reached Mingora we were shocked. The army and Taliban had fought street to street and almost every wall was pockmarked with bullet holes. There was the rubble of blown-up buildings which the Taliban had used as hideouts, and piles of wreckage, twisted metal and smashed-up signs. Most of the shops had heavy metal shutters; those that didn't had been looted. The city was silent and emptied of people and traffic as if a plague had descended. The strangest sight of all was the bus station. Usually it's a complete confusion of Flying Coaches and rickshaws, but now it was completely deserted. We even saw plants growing up through the cracks in the paving. We had never seen our city like this.

At least there was no sign of the Taliban.

It was 24 July 2009, a week after our prime minister had announced that the Taliban had been cleared out. He promised that the gas supply had been restored and that the banks were reopening, and called on the people of Swat to return. In the end as many as half of its 1.8 million population had left our valley. From what we could see, most of them weren't convinced it was safe to return.

As we drew close to home we all fell silent, even my little brother, Atal the chatterbox. Our home was near Circuit House, the army headquarters, so we were worried it might have been destroyed in the shelling. We'd also heard that many homes had been looted. We held our breath as my father unlocked the gate. The first thing we saw was that in the three months we'd been away the garden had become a jungle.

My brothers immediately rushed off to check on their pet chickens. They came back crying. All that remained of the chickens was a pile of feathers and the bones of their small bodies entangled as if they had died in an embrace. They had starved to death.

I felt so sad for my brothers but I had to check on something of my own. To my joy I found my school bag still packed with my books, and I gave thanks that my prayers had been answered and that they were safe. I took out my books one by one and just stared at them. Maths, physics, Urdu, English, Pashto, chemistry, biology, *Islamiyat*, Pakistan studies. Finally I would be able to return to school without fear.

Then I went and sat on my bed. I was overwhelmed.

We were lucky our house had not been broken into. Four or five of the houses on our street had been looted and TVs and gold jewellery had been taken. Safina's mother next door had deposited her gold in a bank vault for safekeeping and even that had been looted.

My father was anxious to check on the school. I went with him. We found that the building opposite the girls' school had been hit by a missile but the school itself looked intact. For some reason my father's keys would not work so we found a boy who climbed over

the wall and opened it from the inside. We ran up the steps anticipating the worst.

'Someone has been in here,' my father said as soon as we entered the courtyard. There were cigarette stubs and empty food wrappers all over the floor. Chairs had been upended and the space was a mess. My father had taken down the Khushal School sign and left it in the courtyard. It was leaning against the wall and I screamed as we lifted it. Underneath were the rotting heads of goats. It looked like the remains of someone's dinner.

Then we went into the classrooms. Anti-Taliban slogans were scrawled all over the walls. Someone had written ARMY ZINDABAD (Long live the army) on a whiteboard in permanent marker. Now we knew who had been living there. One soldier had even written corny love poems in one of my classmate's diaries. Bullet casings littered the floor. The soldiers had made a hole in the wall through which you could see the city below. Maybe they had even shot at people through that hole. I felt sorry that our precious school had become a battlefield.

While we were looking around we heard someone banging on the door downstairs. 'Don't open it, Malala!' my father ordered.

In his office my father found a letter left by the army. It blamed citizens like us for allowing the Taliban to control Swat. 'We have lost so many of the precious lives of our soldiers and this is due to your negligence. Long live Pak Army,' he read.

'This is typical,' he said. 'We people of Swat were first seduced by the Taliban, then killed by them and now blamed for them. Seduced, killed and blamed.'

In some ways the army did not seem very different to the militants. One of our neighbours told us he had even seen them leaving the bodies of dead Taliban in the streets for all to see. Now their helicopters flew in pairs overhead like big black buzzing insects, and when we walked home we stayed close to the walls so they wouldn't see us.

We heard that thousands of people had been arrested including

boys as young as eight who had been brainwashed to train for suicide bombing missions. The army was sending them to a special camp for jihadis to de-radicalise them. One of the people arrested was our old Urdu teacher who had refused to teach girls and had instead gone to help Fazlullah's men collect and destroy CDs and DVDs.

Fazlullah himself was still at large. The army had destroyed his headquarters in Imam Deri and then claimed to have him surrounded in the mountains of Peochar. Then they said he was badly injured and that they had his spokesman, Muslim Khan, in custody. Later the story changed and they reported that Fazlullah had escaped into Afghanistan and was in the province of Kunar. Some people said that Fazlullah had been captured but that the army and the ISI couldn't agree on what to do with him. The army had wanted to imprison him, but the intelligence service had prevailed and taken him to Bajaur so that he could slip across the border to Afghanistan.

Muslim Khan and another commander called Mehmud seemed to be the only members of the Taliban leadership who were in custody – all the others were still free. As long as Fazlullah was still around I was afraid the Taliban would regroup and return to power. I sometimes had nightmares, but at least his radio broadcasts had stopped.

My father's friend Ahmad Shah called it a 'controlled peace, not a durable peace'. But gradually people returned to the valley because Swat is beautiful and we cannot bear to be away from it for long.

Our school bell rang again for the first time on 1 August. It was wonderful to hear that sound and run through the doorway and up the steps as we used to. I was overjoyed to see all my old friends. We had so many stories from our time as IDPs. Most of us had stayed with friends or family but some had been in the camps. We knew we were lucky. Many children had to have their classes in tents because the Taliban had destroyed their schools. And one of

my friends, Sundus, had lost her father, who had been killed in an explosion.

It seemed like everyone knew I had written the BBC diary. Some thought my father had done it for me but Madam Maryam, our principal, told them, 'No. Malala is not just a good speaker but also a good writer.'

That summer there was only one topic of conversation in my class. Shiza Shahid, our friend from Islamabad, had finished her studies in Stanford and invited twenty-seven girls from the Khushal School to spend a few days in the capital seeing the sights and taking part in workshops to help us get over the trauma of living under the Taliban. Those from my class were me, Moniba, Malka-e-Noor, Rida, Karishma and Sundus, and we were chaperoned by my mother and Madam Maryam.

We left for the capital on Independence Day, 14 August, and travelled by bus, everyone brimming with excitement. Most of the girls had only ever left the valley when we became IDPs. This was different and very much like the holidays we read about in novels. We stayed in a guesthouse and did lots of workshops on how to tell our stories so people outside would know what was going on in our valley and help us. Right from the first session I think Shiza was surprised how strong-willed and vocal we all were. 'It's a room full of Malalas!' she told my father.

We also had fun doing things like going to the park and listening to music, which might seem ordinary for most people but which in Swat had become acts of political protest. And we saw the sights. We visited the Faisal Mosque at the base of the Margalla Hills, which was built by the Saudis for millions of rupees. It is huge and white and looks like a shimmering tent suspended between minarets. We went on our first ever visit to the theatre to see an English play called *Tom, Dick and Harry* and had art classes. We ate at restaurants and had our first visit to a McDonald's. There were lots of firsts although I had to miss a meal in a Chinese restaurant because

I was on a TV show called *Capital Talk*. To this day I still haven't got to try duck pancakes!

Islamabad was totally different to Swat. It was as different for us as Islamabad is to New York. Shiza introduced us to women who were lawyers and doctors and also activists, which showed us that women could do important jobs yet still keep their culture and traditions. We saw women in the streets without purdah, their heads completely uncovered. I stopped wearing my shawl over my head in some of the meetings, thinking I had become a modern girl. Later I realised that simply having your head uncovered isn't what makes you modern.

We were there one week and predictably Moniba and I quarrelled. She saw me gossiping with a girl in the year above and told me, 'Now you are with Resham and I am with Rida.'

Shiza wanted to introduce us to influential people. In our country of course this often means the military. One of our meetings was with Major General Athar Abbas, the chief spokesman for the army and its head of public relations. We drove to Islamabad's twin city of Rawalpindi to see him in his office. Our eyes widened when we saw that the army headquarters was so much neater than the rest of the city with perfect green lawns and blossoming flowers. Even the trees were all the same size with the trunks painted white to exactly halfway up – we didn't know why. Inside the HQ we saw offices with banks of televisions, men monitoring every channel, and one officer showed my father a thick file of cuttings which contained every mention of the army in that day's papers. He was amazed. The army seemed much more effective at PR than our politicians.

We were taken into a hall to wait for the general. On the walls were photographs of all our army chiefs, the most powerful men in our country including dictators like Musharraf and scary Zia. A servant with white gloves brought us tea and biscuits and small meat samosas that melted in our mouths. When General Abbas came in we all stood up.

He began by telling us about the military operation in Swat,

which he presented as a victory. He said 128 soldiers and 1,600 terrorists had been killed in the operation.

After he finished we could ask questions. We had been told to prepare questions in advance and I had made a list of seven or eight. Shiza had laughed and said he wouldn't be able to answer so many. I sat in the front row and was the first to be called on. I asked, 'Two or three months ago you told us Fazlullah and his deputy were shot and injured, and then you said they were in Swat and sometimes you say they're in Afghanistan. How did they get there? If you have so much information, why can't you catch them?'

His reply went on for about ten to fifteen minutes and I couldn't work out what his answer was! Then I asked about reconstruction. 'The army must do something for the future of the valley, not just focus on the military operation,' I said.

Moniba asked something similar. 'Who will reconstruct all these buildings and schools?' she wanted to know.

The general replied in a very military way. 'After the operation, first we will have recovery, then rehabilitation, then hold and transfer to civil authorities.'

All of us girls made it clear that we wanted to see the Taliban brought to justice, but we weren't very convinced this would happen.

Afterwards General Abbas gave some of us his visiting card and told us to contact him if we ever needed anything.

On the last day we all had to give a speech at the Islamabad Club about our experiences in the valley under Taliban rule. When Moniba spoke she couldn't control her tears. Soon everyone was weeping. We had enjoyed a glimpse of a different life in Islamabad. In my speech I told the audience that until I had watched the English play I had no idea there were so many talented people in Pakistan. 'Now we realise we don't need to watch Indian movies,' I joked. We'd had a wonderful time, and when we got back to Swat I felt so hopeful about the future I planted a mango seed in the garden during Ramadan as they are a favourite fruit to eat after breaking the fast.

But my father had a big problem. While we had been IDPs and for all the months the school had been closed he had collected no fees, but the teachers still expected to be paid. Altogether that would be over one million rupees. All the private schools were in the same boat. One school gave its teachers salaries for a month, but most didn't know what to do as they couldn't afford to pay. The teachers at the Khushal School demanded something. They had their own expenses, and one of them, Miss Hera, was about to get married and had been relying on her salary to help pay for the ceremony.

My father was in a fix. Then we remembered General Abbas and his visiting card. It was because of the army operation to expel the Taliban that we had all had to leave and found ourselves in this situation now. So Madam Maryam and I wrote an email to General Abbas explaining the situation. He was very kind and sent us 1,100,000 rupees so my father could pay everyone three months' back pay. The teachers were so happy. Most had never received so much money at once. Miss Hera called my father in tears, grateful that her wedding could go ahead as planned.

This didn't mean we went easy on the army. We were very unhappy about the army's failure to capture the Taliban leadership, and my father and I continued to give lots of interviews. We were often joined by my father's friend Zahid Khan, a fellow member of the Swat Qaumi Jirga. He was also the president of the All Swat Hotels Association, so he was particularly eager for life to go back to normal so that tourists could return. Like my father he was very outspoken and had been threatened too. One night in November 2009 he had had a very narrow escape. Zahid Khan was returning to his home from a meeting with army officials at Circuit House late at night when he was ambushed. Fortunately, many of his family live in the same area and they exchanged fire with the attackers, forcing them to flee.

Then on 1 December 2009 there was a suicide attack on a well-known local ANP politician and member of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly, Dr Shamsher Ali Khan. He had been greeting

friends and constituents for Eid at his *hujra*, just a mile from Imam Deri where Fazlullah's headquarters had been, when the bomb went off. Dr Shamsher had been an outspoken critic of the Taliban. He died on the spot and nine other people were injured. People said the bomber was about eighteen years old. The police found his legs and other parts of his body.

A couple of weeks after that our school was asked to take part in the District Child Assembly Swat, which had been set up by the charity UNICEF and by the Khpal Kor (My Home) Foundation for orphans. Sixty students from all over Swat had been chosen as members. They were mostly boys although eleven girls from my school went along. The first meeting was in a hall with lots of politicians and activists. We held an election for speaker and I won! It was strange to stand up there on the stage and have people address me as Madam Speaker, but it felt good to have our voices heard. The assembly was elected for a year and we met almost every month. We passed nine resolutions calling for an end to child labour and asking for help to send the disabled and street children to school, as well as for the reconstruction of all the schools destroyed by the Taliban. Once the resolutions were agreed, they were sent to officials and a handful were even acted on.

Moniba, Ayesha and I also started learning about journalism from a British organisation called the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, which ran a project called Open Minds Pakistan. It was fun learning how to report issues properly. I had become interested in journalism after seeing how my own words could make a difference and also from watching the *Ugly Betty* DVDs about life at an American magazine. This was a bit different – when we wrote about subjects close to our hearts these were topics like extremism and the Taliban rather than clothes and hairstyles.

All too soon it was another year of exams. I beat Malka-e-Noor for first place again although it was close. Our headmistress had tried to persuade her to be a school prefect but she said she couldn't do anything that might distract her from her studies. 'You should

be more like Malala and do other things,' said Madam Maryam. 'It's just as important as your education. Work isn't everything.' But I couldn't blame her. She really wanted to please her parents, particularly her mother.

It wasn't the same Swat as before – maybe it never would be – but it was returning to normal. Even some of the dancers of Banr Bazaar had moved back, although they were mostly making DVDs to sell, rather than performing live. We enjoyed peace festivals with music and dancing, unheard of under the Taliban. My father organised one of the festivals in Marghazar and invited those who had hosted the IDPs in the lower districts as a thank you. There was music all night long.

Things often seemed to happen around my birthday, and around the time I turned thirteen in July 2010 the rain came. We normally don't have monsoons in Swat and at first we were happy, thinking the rain would mean a good harvest. But it was relentless and so heavy that you couldn't even see the person standing in front of you. Environmentalists had warned that our mountains had been stripped of trees by the Taliban and timber smugglers. Soon muddy floods were raging down the valleys, sweeping away everything in their wake.

We were in school when the floods started and were sent home. But there was so much water that the bridge across the dirty stream was submerged so we had to find another way. The next bridge we came to was also submerged but the water wasn't too deep so we splashed our way across. It smelt foul. We were wet and filthy by the time we got home.

The next day we heard that the school had been flooded. It took days for the water to drain away and when we returned we could see chest-high tide marks on the walls. There was mud, mud, mud everywhere. Our desks and chairs were covered with it. The classrooms smelt disgusting. There was so much damage that it cost my father 90,000 rupees to repair – equivalent to the monthly fees for ninety students.

It was the same story throughout Pakistan. The mighty Indus River, which flows from the Himalayas down through KPK and Punjab to Karachi and the Arabian Sea, and of which we are so proud, had turned into a raging torrent and burst its banks. Roads, crops and entire villages were washed away. Around 2,000 people drowned and 14 million people were affected. Many of them lost their homes and 7,000 schools were destroyed. It was the worst flood in living memory. The head of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, called it a 'slow-motion tsunami'. We read that more lives had been affected and more damage had been caused by the floods than the Asian tsunami, our 2005 earthquake, Hurricane Katrina and the Haiti earthquake combined.

Swat was one of the places most affected. Thirty-four of our forty-two bridges had been washed away, cutting off much of the valley. Electric pylons had been smashed into pieces so we had no power. Our own street was on a hill so we were a bit better protected from the overflowing river, but we shivered at the sound of it, a growling, heavy-breathing dragon devouring everything in its path. The riverside hotels and restaurants where tourists used to eat trout and enjoy the views were all destroyed. The tourist areas were the hardest hit parts of Swat. Hill station resorts like Malam Jabba, Madyan and Bahrain were devastated, their hotels and bazaars in ruins.

We soon heard from our relatives that the damage in Shangla was unimaginable. The main road to our village from Alpuri, the capital of Shangla, had been washed away, and entire villages were submerged. Many of the houses on the hilly terraces of Karshat, Shahpur and Barkana had been taken by mudslides. My mother's family home, where Uncle Faiz Mohammad lived, was still standing but the road it stood on had vanished.

People had desperately tried to protect what little they owned, moving their animals to higher ground, but the floods saturated the corn they had harvested, destroyed the orchards and drowned many of the buffaloes. The villagers were helpless. They had no

power, as all their makeshift hydroelectric projects had been smashed to pieces. They had no clean water as the river was brown with wreckage and debris. So strong was the force of the water that even concrete buildings had been reduced to rubble. The school, hospital and electricity station along the main road were all razed to the ground.

No one could understand how this had happened. People had lived by the river in Swat for 3,000 years and always seen it as our lifeline, not a threat, and our valley as a haven from the outside world. Now we had become 'the valley of sorrows', said my cousin Sultan Rome. First the earthquake, then the Taliban, then the military operation and now, just as we were starting to rebuild, devastating floods arrived to wash all our work away. People were desperately worried that the Taliban would take advantage of the chaos and return to the valley.

My father sent food and aid to Shangla using money collected by friends and the Swat Association of Private Schools. Our friend Shiza and some of the activists we had met in Islamabad came to Mingora and distributed lots of money. But just like during the earthquake, it was mainly volunteers from Islamic groups who were the first to arrive in the more remote and isolated areas with aid. Many said the floods were another reproof from God for the music and dancing we had enjoyed at the recent festivals. The consolation this time, however, was that there was no radio to spread this message!

While all this suffering was going on, while people were losing their loved ones, their homes and their livelihoods, our president, Asif Zardari, was on holiday at a chateau in France. 'I am confused, *Aba*,' I told my father. 'What's stopping each and every politician from doing good things? Why would they not want our people to be safe, to have food and electricity?'

After the Islamic groups the main help came from the army. Not just our army. The Americans also sent helicopters, which made some people suspicious. One theory was that the devastation had

been created by the Americans using something called HAARP (High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program) technology, which causes huge waves under the ocean, thus flooding our land. Then, under the pretext of bringing in aid, they could legitimately enter Pakistan and spy on all our secrets.

Even when the rains finally ceased life was still very difficult. We had no clean water and no electricity. In August we had our first case of cholera in Mingora and soon there was a tent of patients outside the hospital. Because we were cut off from supply routes, what little food was available was extremely expensive. It was the peach and onion season and farmers were desperate to save their harvests. Many of them made hazardous journeys across the churning, swollen river on boats made from rubber tyres to try to bring their produce to market. When we found peaches for sale we were so happy.

There was less foreign help than there might have been at another time. The rich countries of the West were suffering from an economic crisis, and President Zardari's travels around Europe had made them less sympathetic. Foreign governments pointed out that most of our politicians weren't paying any income tax, so it was a bit much to ask hard-pressed taxpayers in their own countries to contribute. Foreign aid agencies were also worried about the safety of their staff after a Taliban spokesperson demanded that the Pakistan government reject help from Christians and Jews. No one doubted they were serious. The previous October, the World Food Programme office in Islamabad had been bombed and five aid workers were killed.

In Swat we began to see more signs that the Taliban had never really left. Two more schools were blown up and three foreign aid workers from a Christian group were kidnapped as they returned to their base in Mingora and then murdered. We received other shocking news. My father's friend Dr Mohammad Farooq, the vice chancellor of Swat University, had been killed by two gunmen who burst into his office. Dr Farooq was an Islamic scholar and former

member of the Jamaat-e-Islami party, and as one of the biggest voices against Talibanisation he had even issued a fatwa against suicide attacks.

We felt frustrated and scared once again. When we were IDPs I had thought about becoming a politician and now I knew that was the right choice. Our country had so many crises and no real leaders to tackle them.

17

Praying to Be Tall

WHEN I WAS thirteen I stopped growing. I had always looked older than I was but suddenly all my friends were taller than me. I was one of the three shortest girls in my class of thirty. I felt embarrassed when I was with my friends. Every night I prayed to Allah to be taller. I measured myself on my bedroom wall with a ruler and a pencil. Every morning I would stand against it to check if I had grown. But the pencil mark stayed stubbornly at five feet. I even promised Allah that if I could grow just a tiny bit taller I would offer a hundred *raakat nafl*, extra voluntary prayers on top of the five daily ones.

I was speaking at a lot of events but because I was so short it wasn't easy to be authoritative. Sometimes I could hardly see over the lectern. I did not like high-heeled shoes but I started to wear them.

One of the girls in my class did not return to school that year. She had been married off as soon as she entered puberty. She was big for her age but was still only thirteen. A while later we heard that she had two children. In class, when we were reciting hydrocarbon formulae during our chemistry lessons, I would daydream about what it would be like to stop going to school and instead start looking after a husband.

We had begun to think about other things besides the Taliban, but it wasn't possible to forget completely. Our army, which already had a lot of strange side businesses, like factories making cornflakes and fertilisers, had started producing soap operas. People across Pakistan were glued to a series on prime-time TV called *Beyond*

the Call of Duty, which was supposed to consist of real-life stories of soldiers battling militants in Swat.

Over a hundred soldiers had been killed in the military operation and 900 injured, and they wanted to show themselves as heroes. But though their sacrifice was supposed to have restored government control, we were still waiting for the rule of law. Most afternoons when I came home from school there were women at our house in tears. Hundreds of men had gone missing during the military campaign, presumably picked up by the army or ISI, but no one would say. The women could not get information; they didn't know if their husbands and sons were dead or alive. Some of them were in desperate situations as they had no way to support themselves. A woman can only remarry if her husband is declared dead, not missing.

My mother gave them tea and food but that wasn't why they came. They wanted my father's help. Because of his role as spokesman for the Swat Qaumi Jirga, he acted as a kind of liaison between the people and the army.

'I just want to know if my husband is dead or not,' pleaded one lady I met. 'If they killed him then I can put the children in an orphanage. But now I'm neither a widow nor a wife.' Another lady told me her son was missing. The women said the missing men had not collaborated with the Taliban; maybe they had given them a glass of water or some bread when they'd been ordered to do so. Yet these innocent men were being held while the Taliban leaders went free.

There was a teacher in our school who lived just a ten-minute walk from our house. Her brother had been picked up by the army, put in leg irons and tortured, and then kept in a fridge until he died. He'd had nothing to do with the Taliban. He was just a simple shopkeeper. Afterwards the army apologised to her and said they'd been confused by his name and picked up the wrong person.

It wasn't just poor women who came to our house. One day a rich businessman arrived from Muscat in the Gulf. He told my

father that his brother and five or six nephews had all disappeared, and he wanted to know if they had been killed or were being held so he knew whether to find new husbands for their wives. One of them was a *maulana* and my father managed to get him freed.

This wasn't just happening in Swat. We heard there were thousands of missing all over Pakistan. Many people protested outside courthouses or put up posters of their missing but got nowhere.

Meanwhile our courts were busy with another issue. In Pakistan we have something called the Blasphemy Law, which protects the Holy Quran from desecration. Under General Zia's Islamisation campaign, the law was made much stricter so that anyone who 'defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet, PBUH,' can be punished by death or life imprisonment.

One day in November 2010 there was a news report about a Christian woman called Asia Bibi who had been sentenced to death by hanging. She was a poor mother of five who picked fruit for a living in a village in Punjab. One hot day she had fetched water for her fellow workers but some of them refused to drink it, saying that the water was 'unclean' because she was a Christian. They believed that as Muslims they would be defiled by drinking with her. One of them was her neighbour, who was angry because she said Asia Bibi's goat had damaged her water trough. They had ended up in an argument, and of course just as in our arguments at school there were different versions of who said what. One version was that they tried to persuade Asia Bibi to convert to Islam. She replied that Christ had died on the cross for the sins of Christians and asked what the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) had done for Muslims. One of the fruit pickers reported her to the local imam, who informed the police. She spent more than a year in jail before the case went to court and she was sentenced to death.

Since Musharraf had allowed satellite television, we now had lots of channels. Suddenly we could witness these events on television. There was outrage round the world and all the talk shows covered

the case. One of the few people who spoke out for Asia Bibi in Pakistan was the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer. He himself had been a political prisoner as well as a close ally of Benazir. Later on he became a wealthy media mogul. He went to visit Asia Bibi in jail and said that President Zardari should pardon her. He called the Blasphemy Law a 'black law', a phrase which was repeated by some of our TV anchors to stir things up. Then some imams at Friday prayers in the largest mosque in Rawalpindi condemned the governor.

A couple of days later, on 4 January 2011, Salman Taseer was gunned down by one of his own bodyguards after lunch in an area of fashionable coffee bars in Islamabad. The man shot him twenty-six times. He later said that he had done it for God after hearing the Friday prayers in Rawalpindi. We were shocked by how many people praised the killer. When he appeared in court even lawyers showered him with rose petals. Meanwhile the imam at the late governor's mosque refused to perform his funeral prayers and the president did not attend his funeral.

Our country was going crazy. How was it possible that we were now garlanding murderers?

Shortly after that my father got another death threat. He had spoken at an event to commemorate the third anniversary of the bombing of the Haji Baba High School. At the event my father had spoken passionately. 'Fazlullah is the chief of all devils!' he shouted. 'Why hasn't he been caught?' Afterwards people told him to be very careful. Then an anonymous letter came to our house addressed to my father. It started with '*Asalaamu alaikum*' – 'Peace be upon you' – but it wasn't peaceful at all. It went on, 'You are the son of a religious cleric but you are not a good Muslim. The mujahideen will find you wherever you go.' When my father received the letter he seemed worried for a couple of weeks, but he refused to give up his activities and was soon distracted by other things.

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In those days it seemed like everyone was talking about America. Where once we used to blame our old enemy India for everything, now it was the US. Everyone complained about the drone attacks which were happening in the FATA almost every week. We heard lots of civilians were being killed. Then a CIA agent called Raymond Davis shot and killed two men in Lahore who had approached his car on a motorbike. He said they had attempted to rob him. The Americans claimed he was not CIA but an ordinary diplomat, which made everyone very suspicious. Even we schoolchildren know that ordinary diplomats don't drive around in unmarked cars carrying Glock pistols.

Our media claimed Davis was part of a vast secret army that the CIA had sent to Pakistan because they didn't trust our intelligence agencies. He was said to be spying on a militant group called Lashkar-e-Taiba based in Lahore that had helped our people a lot during the earthquake and floods. They were thought to be behind the terrible Mumbai massacre of 2008. The group's main objective was to liberate Kashmir's Muslims from Indian rule, but they had recently also become active in Afghanistan. Other people said Davis was really spying on our nuclear weapons.

Raymond Davis quickly became the most famous American in Pakistan. There were protests all over the country. People imagined our bazaars were full of Raymond Davises, gathering intelligence to send back to the States. Then the widow of one of the men Davis had murdered took rat poison and killed herself, despairing of receiving justice.

It took weeks of back and forth between Washington and Islamabad, or rather army headquarters in Rawalpindi, before the case was finally resolved. What they did was like our traditional *jirgas* – the Americans paid 'blood money' amounting to $2.3 million and Davis was quickly spirited out of court and out of the country. Pakistan then demanded that the CIA send home many of its contractors and stopped approving visas. The whole affair left a lot of bad feeling, particularly because on 17 March, the day after Davis

was released, a drone attack on a tribal council in North Waziristan killed about forty people. The attack seemed to send the message that the CIA could do as it pleased in our country.

One Monday I was about to measure myself against the wall to see if I had miraculously grown in the night when I heard loud voices next door. My father's friends had arrived with news that was hard to believe. During the night American special forces called Navy Seals had carried out a raid in Abbottabad, one of the places we'd stayed as IDPs, and had found and killed Osama bin Laden. He had been living in a large walled compound less than a mile from our military academy. We couldn't believe the army had been oblivious to bin Laden's whereabouts. The newspapers said that the cadets even did their training in the field alongside his house. The compound had twelve-foot-high walls topped with barbed wire. Bin Laden lived on the top floor with his youngest wife, a Yemeni woman named Amal. Two other wives and his eleven children lived below them. An American senator said that the only thing missing from bin Laden's hideaway was a 'neon sign'.

In truth, lots of people in Pashtun areas live in walled compounds because of purdah and privacy, so the house wasn't really unusual. What was odd was that the residents never went out and the house had no phone or Internet connections. Their food was brought in by two brothers who also lived in the compound with their wives. They acted as couriers for bin Laden. One of the wives was from Swat!

The Seals had shot bin Laden in the head and his body had been flown out by helicopter. It didn't sound as though he had put up a fight. The two brothers and one of bin Laden's grown-up sons had also been killed, but bin Laden's wives and other children had been tied up and left behind and were then taken into Pakistani custody. The Americans dumped bin Laden's body at sea. President Obama was very happy, and on TV we watched big celebrations take place outside the White House.

At first we assumed our government had known and been

involved in the American operation. But we soon found out that the Americans had gone it alone. This didn't sit well with our people. We were supposed to be allies and we had lost more soldiers in their War on Terror than they had. They had entered the country at night, flying low and using special quiet helicopters, and had blocked our radar with electronic interference. They had only announced their mission to the army chief of staff, General Ashfaq Kayani, and President Zardari after the event. Most of the army leadership learned about it on TV.

The Americans said they had no choice but to do it like that because no one really knew which side the ISI was on and someone might have tipped off bin Laden before they reached him. The director of the CIA said Pakistan was 'either involved or incompetent. Neither place is a good place to be.'

My father said it was a shameful day. 'How could a notorious terrorist be hiding in Pakistan and remain undetected for so many years?' he asked. Others were asking the same thing.

You could see why anyone would think our intelligence service must have known bin Laden's location. ISI is a huge organisation with agents everywhere. How could he have lived so close to the capital – just sixty miles away? And for so long! Maybe the best place to hide is in plain sight, but he had been living in that house since the 2005 earthquake. Two of his children were even born in the Abbottabad hospital. And he'd been in Pakistan for more than nine years. Before Abbottabad he'd been in Haripur and before that hidden away in our own Swat Valley, where he met Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, the mastermind of 9/11.

The way bin Laden was found was like something out of the spy movies my brother Khushal likes. To avoid detection he used human couriers rather than phone calls or emails. But the Americans had discovered one of his couriers, tracked the number plate of his car and followed it from Peshawar to Abbottabad. After that they monitored the house with a kind of giant drone that has X-ray

vision, which spotted a very tall bearded man pacing round the compound. They called him the Pacer.

People were intrigued by the new details that came every day, but they seemed angrier at the American incursion than at the fact that the world's biggest terrorist had been living on our soil. Some newspapers ran stories saying that the Americans had actually killed bin Laden years before this and kept his body in a freezer. The story was that they had then planted the body in Abbottabad and faked the raid to embarrass Pakistan.

We started to receive text messages asking us to rally in the streets and show our support of the army. 'We were there for you in 1948, 1965 and 1971,' said one message, referring to our three wars with India. 'Be with us now when we have been stabbed in the back.' But there were also text messages which ridiculed the army. People asked how we could be spending $6 billion a year on the military (seven times more than we were spending on education), if four American helicopters could just sneak in under our radar? And if they could do it, what was to stop the Indians next door? 'Please don't honk, the army is sleeping,' said one text, and 'Second-hand Pakistani radar for sale . . . can't detect US helicopters but gets cable TV just fine,' said another.

General Kayani and General Ahmad Shuja Pasha, the head of ISI, were called to testify in parliament, something that had never happened. Our country had been humiliated and we wanted to know why.

We also learned that American politicians were furious that bin Laden had been living under our noses when all along they had imagined he was hiding in a cave. They complained that they had given us $20 billion over an eight-year period to cooperate and it was questionable which side we were on. Sometimes it felt as though it was all about the money. Most of it had gone to the army; ordinary people received nothing.

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A few months after that, in October 2011 my father told me he had received an email informing him I was one of five nominees for the international peace prize of KidsRights, a children's advocacy group based in Amsterdam. My name had been put forward by Archbishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa. He was a great hero of my father for his fight against apartheid. My father was disappointed when I didn't win but I pointed out to him that all I had done was speak out; we didn't have an organisation doing practical things like the award winners had.

Shortly after that I was invited by the chief minister of Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif, to speak in Lahore at an education gala. He was building a network of new schools he calls Daanish Schools and giving free laptops to students, even if they did have his picture on their screens when you switched them on. To motivate students in all provinces he was giving cash awards to girls and boys who scored well in their exams. I was presented with a cheque for half a million rupees, about $4,500, for my campaign for girls' rights.

I wore pink to the gala and for the first time talked publicly about how we had defied the Taliban edict and carried on going to school secretly. 'I know the importance of education because my pens and books were taken from me by force,' I said. 'But the girls of Swat are not afraid of anyone. We have continued with our education.'

Then I was in class one day when my classmates said, 'You have won a big prize and half a million rupees!' My father told me the government had awarded me Pakistan's first ever National Peace Prize. I couldn't believe it. So many journalists thronged to the school that day that it turned into a news studio.

The ceremony was on 20 December 2011 at the prime minister's official residence, one of the big white mansions on the hill at the end of Constitution Avenue which I had seen on my trip to Islamabad. By then I was used to meeting politicians. I was not nervous though my father tried to intimidate me by saying Prime Minister Gilani came from a family of saints. After the PM presented me with the award and cheque, I presented him with a long list of

demands. I told him that we wanted our schools rebuilt and a girls' university in Swat. I knew he would not take my demands seriously so I didn't push very hard. I thought, *One day I will be a politician and do these things myself.*

It was decided that the prize should be awarded annually to children under eighteen years old and be named the Malala Prize in my honour. I noticed my father was not very happy with this. Like most Pashtuns he is a bit superstitious. In Pakistan we don't have a culture of honouring people while they are alive, only the dead, so he thought it was a bad omen.

I know my mother didn't like the awards because she feared I would become a target as I was becoming more well known. She herself would never appear in public. She refused even to be photographed. She is a very traditional woman and this is our centuries-old culture. Were she to break that tradition, men and women would talk against her, particularly those in our own family. She never said she regretted the work my father and I had undertaken, but when I won prizes, she said, 'I don't want awards, I want my daughter. I wouldn't exchange a single eyelash of my daughter for the whole world.'

My father argued that all he had ever wanted was to create a school in which children could learn. We had been left with no choice but to get involved in politics and campaign for education. 'My only ambition,' he said, 'is to educate my children and my nation as much as I am able. But when half of your leaders tell lies and the other half is negotiating with the Taliban, there is nowhere to go. One has to speak out.'

When I returned home I was greeted with the news that there was a group of journalists who wanted to interview me at school and that I should wear a nice outfit. First I thought of wearing a very beautiful dress, but then I decided to wear something more modest for the interview as I wanted people to focus on my message and not my clothes. When I arrived at school I saw all my friends had dressed up. 'Surprise!' they shouted when I walked in.

They had collected money and organised a party for me with a big white cake on which was written SUCCESS FOREVER in chocolate icing. It was wonderful that my friends wanted to share in my success. I knew that any of the girls in my class could have achieved what I had achieved if they had had their parents' support.

'Now you can get back to school work,' said Madam Maryam as we finished off the cake. 'Exams in March!'

But the year ended on a sad note. Five days after I got the award, Aunt Babo, my mother's eldest sister, died suddenly. She wasn't even fifty years old. She was diabetic and had seen a TV advert for a doctor in Lahore with some miracle treatment and persuaded my uncle to take her there. We don't know what the doctor injected her with but she went into shock and died. My father said the doctor was a charlatan and this was why we needed to keep struggling against ignorance.

I had amassed a lot of money by the end of that year – half a million rupees each from the prime minister, the chief minister of Punjab, the chief minister of our state Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Sindh government. Major General Ghulam Qamar, the local army commander, also gave our school 100,000 rupees to build a science laboratory and a library. But my fight wasn't over. I was reminded of our history lessons, in which we learned about the loot or bounty an army enjoys when a battle is won. I began to see the awards and recognition just like that. They were little jewels without much meaning. I needed to concentrate on winning the war.

My father used some of the money to buy me a new bed and cabinet and pay for tooth implants for my mother and a piece of land in Shangla. We decided to spend the rest of the money on people who needed help. I wanted to start an education foundation. This had been on my mind ever since I'd seen the children working on the rubbish mountain. I still could not shake the image of the black rats I had seen there, and the girl with matted hair who had been sorting rubbish. We held a conference of twenty-one girls and

made our priority education for every girl in Swat with a particular focus on street children and those in child labour.

As we crossed the Malakand Pass I saw a young girl selling oranges. She was scratching marks on a piece of paper with a pencil to account for the oranges she had sold as she could not read or write. I took a photo of her and vowed I would do everything in my power to help educate girls just like her. This was the war I was going to fight.

18

The Woman and the Sea

AUNT NAJMA WAS in tears. She had never seen the sea before. My family and I sat on the rocks, gazing across the water, breathing in the salt tang of the Arabian Sea. It was such a big expanse, surely no one could know where it ended. At that moment I was very happy. 'One day I want to cross this sea,' I said.

'What is she saying?' asked my aunt as if I were talking about something impossible. I was still trying to get my head round the fact that she had been living in the seaside city of Karachi for thirty years and yet had never actually laid eyes on the ocean. Her husband would not take her to the beach, and even if she had somehow slipped out of the house, she would not have been able to follow the signs to the sea because she could not read.

I sat on the rocks and thought about the fact that across the water were lands where women were free. In Pakistan we had had a woman prime minister and in Islamabad I had met those impressive working women, yet the fact was that we were a country where almost all the women depend entirely on men. My headmistress Maryam was a strong, educated woman but in our society she could not live on her own and come to work. She had to be living with a husband, brother or parents.

In Pakistan when women say they want independence, people think this means we don't want to obey our fathers, brothers or husbands. But it does not mean that. It means we want to make decisions for ourselves. We want to be free to go to school or to go to work. Nowhere is it written in the Quran that a woman should

be dependent on a man. The word has not come down from the heavens to tell us that every woman should listen to a man.

'You are a million miles away, *Jani*,' said my father interrupting my thoughts. 'What are you dreaming about?'

'Just about crossing oceans, *Aba*', I replied.

'Forget all that!' shouted my brother Atal. 'We're at the beach and I want to go for a camel ride!'

It was January 2012 and we were in Karachi as guests of Geo TV after the Sindh government announced they were renaming a girls' secondary school on Mission Road in my honour. My brother Khushal was now at school in Abbottabad, so it was just me, my parents and Atal. We flew to Karachi, and it was the first time any of us had ever been on a plane. The journey was just two hours, which I found incredible. It would have taken us at least two days by bus. On the plane we noticed that some people could not find their seats because they could not read letters and numbers. I had a window seat and could see the deserts and mountains of our land below me. As we headed south the land became more parched. I was already missing the green of Swat. I could see why, when our people go to Karachi to work, they always want to be buried in the cool of our valley.

Driving from the airport to the hostel, I was amazed by the number of people and houses and cars. Karachi is one of the biggest cities on earth. It was strange to think it was just a port of 300,000 people when Pakistan was created. Jinnah lived there and made it our first capital, and it was soon flooded by millions of Muslim refugees from India known as *mohajirs*, which means 'immigrants', who spoke Urdu. Today it has around twenty million people. It's actually the largest Pashtun city in the world, even though it's far from our lands; between five and seven million Pashtuns have gone there to work.

Unfortunately, Karachi has also become a very violent city and there is always fighting between the *mohajirs* and Pashtuns. The

mohajir areas we saw all seemed very organised and neat whereas the Pashtun areas were dirty and chaotic. The *mohajirs* almost all support a party called the MQM led by Altaf Hussain, who lives in exile in London and communicates with his people by Skype. The MQM is a very organised movement, and the *mohajir* community sticks together. By contrast we Pashtuns are very divided, some following Imran Khan because he is Pashtun, a khan and a great cricketer, some Maulana Fazlur Rehman because his party JUI is Islamic, some the secular ANP because it's a Pashtun nationalist party and some the PPP of Benazir Bhutto or the PML(N) of Nawaz Sharif.

We went to the Sindh assembly, where I was applauded by all the members. Then we went to visit some schools including the one that was being named after me. I made a speech about the importance of education and also talked about Benazir Bhutto as this was her city. 'We must all work together for the rights of girls,' I said. The children sang for me and I was presented with a painting of me looking up at the sky. It was both odd and wonderful to see my name on a school just like my namesake Malalai of Maiwind, after whom so many schools in Afghanistan are named. In the next school holidays my father and I planned to go and talk to parents and children in the distant hilly areas of Swat about the importance of learning to read and write. 'We will be like preachers of education,' I said.

Later that day we visited my aunt and uncle. They lived in a very small house and so at last my father understood why they had refused to take him in when he was a student. On the way we passed through Aashiqan e-Rasool square and were shocked to see a picture of the murderer of Governor Salman Taseer decorated with garlands of rose petals as though he were a saint. My father was angry. 'In a city of twenty million people is there not one person who will take this down?'

There was one important place we had to include in our visit to Karachi besides our outings to the sea or the huge bazaars, where my mother bought lots of clothes. We needed to visit the mausoleum of our founder and great leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah. This

is a very peaceful building of white marble and somehow seemed separate from the hustle and bustle of the city. It felt sacred to us. Benazir was on her way there to make her first speech on her return to Pakistan when her bus was blown up.

The guard explained that the tomb in the main room under a giant chandelier from China did not contain Jinnah's body. The real tomb is on the floor below, where he lies alongside his sister Fatima, who died much later. Next to it is the tomb of our first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, who was assassinated.

Afterwards we went into the small museum at the back, which had displays of the special white bow ties Jinnah used to order from Paris, his three-piece suits tailored in London, his golf clubs and a special travelling box with drawers for twelve pairs of shoes including his favourite two-tone brogues. The walls were covered with photographs. In the ones from the early days of Pakistan you could easily see from his thin sunken face that Jinnah was dying. His skin looked paper-thin. But at the time it was kept a secret. Jinnah smoked fifty cigarettes a day. His body was riddled with TB and lung cancer when Lord Mountbatten, the last British viceroy of India, agreed that India would be divided at independence. Afterwards he said that had he known Jinnah was dying he would have delayed and there would have been no Pakistan. As it was, Jinnah died in September 1948 just over a year later. Then, a little more than three years after that, our first prime minister was killed. Right from the start we were an unlucky country.

Some of Jinnah's most famous speeches were displayed. There was the one about people of all religions being free to worship in the new Pakistan. And another where he had spoken about the important role of women. I wanted to see pictures of the women in his life. But his wife died young and was a Parsee, and their only daughter Dina stayed in India and married a Parsee, which didn't sit very well in the new Muslim homeland. Now she lives in New York. So most of the pictures I found were of his sister Fatima.

It was hard to visit that place and read those speeches without

thinking that Jinnah would be very disappointed in Pakistan. He would probably say that this was not the country he had wanted. He wished us to be independent, to be tolerant, to be kind to each other. He wanted everyone to be free whatever their beliefs.

'Would it have been better if we had not become independent but stayed part of India?' I asked my father. It seemed to me that before Pakistan there was endless fighting between Hindus and Muslims. Then even when we got our own country there was still fighting, but this time it was between *mohajirs* and Pashtuns and between Sunnis and Shias. Instead of celebrating each other, our four provinces struggle to get along. Sindhis often talk of separation and in Baluchistan there is an ongoing war which gets talked about very little because it is so remote. Did all this fighting mean we needed to divide our country yet again?

When we left the museum some young men with flags were protesting outside. They told us they were Seraiki speakers from southern Punjab and wanted their own province.

There seemed to be so many things about which people were fighting. If Christians, Hindus or Jews are really our enemies, as so many say, why are we Muslims fighting with each other? Our people have become misguided. They think their greatest concern is defending Islam and are being led astray by those like the Taliban who deliberately misinterpret the Quran. We should focus on practical issues. We have so many people in our country who are illiterate. And many women have no education at all. We live in a place where schools are blown up. We have no reliable electricity supply. Not a single day passes without the killing of at least one Pakistani.

One day a lady called Shehla Anjum turned up at our hostel. She was a Pakistani journalist living in Alaska and wanted to meet me after she had seen the documentary about us on the *New York Times* website. She chatted with me for a while then with my father. I noticed she had tears in her eyes. Then she asked my father, 'Did you know, Ziauddin, that the Taliban have threatened this innocent

girl?' We didn't know what she was talking about so she went on the Internet and showed us that the Taliban had that day issued threats against two women – Shad Begum, an activist in Dir, and me, Malala. 'These two are spreading secularism and should be killed,' it said. I didn't take it seriously as there are so many things on the Internet and I thought we would have heard from elsewhere if it were real.

That evening my father received a call from the family who had been sharing our home for the last eighteen months. Their previous home had a mud roof which leaked in the rain and we had two spare rooms so they stayed with us for a nominal rent and their children went to our school for free. They had three children, and we liked them living with us as we all played cops and robbers on the roof. They told my father that the police had turned up at the house and demanded to know whether we had received any threats. When my father heard this, he called the deputy superintendent, who asked him the same thing. My father asked, 'Why, have you any information?' The officer asked to see my father when we were back in Swat.

After that my father was restless and could not enjoy Karachi. I could see my mother and father were both very upset. I knew my mother was still mourning my aunt and they had been feeling uneasy about me receiving so many awards, but it seemed to be about more than that. 'Why are you like this?' I asked. 'You're worried about something but you're not telling us.'

Then they told me about the call from home and that they were taking the threats seriously. I don't know why, but hearing I was being targeted did not worry me. It seemed to me that everyone knows they will die one day. My feeling was that nobody can stop death; it doesn't matter if it comes from a *talib* or cancer. So I should do whatever I want to do.

'Maybe we should stop our campaigning, *Jani*, and go into hibernation for a time,' said my father.

'How can we do that?' I replied. 'You were the one who said if we believe in something greater than our lives, then our voices will

only multiply even if we are dead. We can't disown our campaign!'

People were asking me to speak at events. How could I refuse, saying there was a security problem? We couldn't do that, especially not as proud Pashtuns. My father always says that heroism is in the Pashtun DNA.

Still, it was with a heavy heart that we returned to Swat. When my father went to the police they showed him a file on me. They told him that my national and international profile meant I had attracted attention and death threats from the Taliban and that I needed protection. They offered us guards but my father was reluctant. Many elders in Swat had been killed despite having bodyguards and the Punjab governor had been killed by his own bodyguard. He also thought armed guards would alarm the parents of the students at school, and he didn't want to put others at risk. When he had had threats before he always said, 'Let them kill me but I'll be killed alone.'

He suggested sending me to boarding school in Abbottabad like Khushal, but I didn't want to go. He also met the local army colonel, who said being in college in Abbottabad would not really be any safer and that as long as I kept a low profile we would be OK in Swat. So when the government of KPK offered to make me a peace ambassador, my father said it was better to refuse.

At home I started bolting the main gate of our house at night. 'She smells the threat,' my mother told my father. He was very unhappy. He kept telling me to draw the curtains in my room at night, but I would not.

'*Aba*, this is a very strange situation,' I told him. 'When there was Talibanisation we were safe; now there are no Taliban we are unsafe.'

'Yes, Malala,' he replied. 'Now the Talibanisation is especially for us, for those like you and me who continue to speak out. The rest of Swat is OK. The rickshaw drivers, the shopkeepers are all safe. This is Talibanisation for particular people, and we are among them.'

There was another downside to receiving those awards – I was missing a lot of school. After the exams in March the cup that went into my new cabinet was for second place.

19

A Private Talibanisation

'LET'S PRETEND IT'S a Twilight movie and that we're vampires in the forest,' I said to Moniba. We were on a school trip to Marghazar, a beautiful green valley where the air is cool, and there is a tall mountain and a crystal-clear river where we were planning to have a picnic. Nearby was the White Palace Hotel, which used to be the wali's summer residence.

It was April 2012, the month after our exams so we were all feeling relaxed. We were a group of about seventy girls. Our teachers and my parents were there too. My father had hired three Flying Coaches but we could not all fit in, so five of us – me, Moniba and three other girls – were in the *dyna*, the school van. It wasn't very comfortable, especially because we also had giant pots of chicken and rice on the floor for the picnic, but it was only half an hour's drive. We had fun, singing songs on the way there. Moniba was looking very beautiful, her skin porcelain-pale. 'What skin cream are you using?' I asked her.

'The same one you're using,' she replied.

I knew that could not be true. 'No. Look at my dark skin and look at yours!'

We visited the White Palace and saw where the Queen had slept and the gardens of beautiful flowers. Sadly we could not see the wali's room as it had been damaged by the floods.

We ran around for a while in the green forest, then took some photographs and waded into the river and splashed each other with water. The drops sparkled in the sun. There was a waterfall down

the cliff and for a while we sat on the rocks and listened to it. Then Moniba started splashing me again.

'Don't! I don't want to get my clothes wet!' I pleaded. I walked off with two other girls she didn't like. The other girls stirred things up, what we call 'putting masala on the situation'. It was a recipe for another argument between Moniba and me. That put me in a bad mood, but I cheered up when we got to the top of the cliff, where lunch was being prepared. Usman Bhai Jan, our driver, made us laugh as usual. Madam Maryam had brought her baby boy and Hannah, her two-year-old, who looked like a little doll but was full of mischief.

Lunch was a disaster. When the school assistants put the pans on the fire to heat up the chicken curry, they panicked that there was not enough food for so many girls and added water from the stream. We said it was 'the worst lunch ever'. It was so watery that one girl said, 'The sky could be seen in the soupy curry.'

Like on all our trips my father got us all to stand on a rock and talk about our impressions of the day before we left. This time all anyone talked about was how bad the food was. My father was embarrassed and for once, short of words.

The next morning a school worker came with milk, bread and eggs to our house for our breakfast. My father always answered the door as women must stay inside. The man told him the shopkeeper had given him a photocopied letter.

When my father read it, he went pale. 'By God, this is terrible propaganda against our school!' he told my mother. He read it out.

> Dear Muslim brothers
> There is a school, the Khushal School, which is run by an NGO [NGOs have a very bad reputation among religious people in our country so this was a way to invite people's wrath] and is a centre of vulgarity and obscenity. It is a Hadith of the Holy Prophet, PBUH, that if you see something bad or evil you should stop it with your own hand. If you are unable to do that then you should tell others about it, and

if you can't do that you should think about how bad it is in your heart. I have no personal quarrel with the principal but I am telling you what Islam says. This school is a centre of vulgarity and obscenity and they take girls for picnics to different resorts. If you don't stop it you will have to answer to God on Doomsday. Go and ask the manager of the White Palace Hotel and he will tell you what these girls did . . .

He put down the piece of paper. 'It has no signature. Anonymous.' We sat stunned.

'They know no one will ask the manager,' said my father. 'People will just imagine something terrible went on.'

'We know what happened there. The girls did nothing bad,' my mother reassured him.

My father called my cousin Khanjee to find out how widely the letters had been distributed. He called back with bad news – they had been left everywhere, though most shopkeepers had ignored them and thrown them away. There were also giant posters pasted on the front of the mosque with the same accusations.

At school my classmates were terrified. 'Sir, they are saying very bad things about our school,' they said to my father. 'What will our parents say?'

My father gathered all the girls into the courtyard. 'Why are you afraid?' he asked. 'Did you do anything against Islam? Did you do anything immoral? No. You just splashed water and took pictures, so don't be scared. This is the propaganda of the followers of Mullah Fazlullah. Down with them! You have the right to enjoy greenery and waterfalls and landscape just as boys do.'

My father spoke like a lion, but I could see in his heart he was worried and scared. Only one person came and withdrew his sister from the school, but we knew that was not the end of it. Shortly after that we were told a man who had completed a peace walk from Dera Ismail Khan was coming through Mingora and we wanted to welcome him. I was on the way to meet him with my parents when we were approached by a short man who was frantically talking on two different phones. 'Don't go that way,' he urged. 'There is a suicide

bomber over there!' We'd promised to meet the peace walker, so we went by a different route, placed a garland round his neck, then left quickly for home.

All through that spring and summer odd things kept happening. Strangers came to the house asking questions about my family. My father said they were from the intelligence services. The visits became more frequent after my father and the Swat Qaumi Jirga held a meeting in our school to protest against army plans for the people of Mingora and our community defence committees to conduct night patrols.'The army say there is peace,' said my father. 'So why do we need flag marches and night patrols?'

Then our school hosted a painting competition for the children of Mingora sponsored by my father's friend who ran an NGO for women's rights. The pictures were supposed to show the equality of the sexes or highlight discrimination against women. That morning two men from the intelligence services came to our school to see my father. 'What is going on in your school?' they demanded.

'This is a school,' he replied. 'There's a painting competition just as we have debating competitions, cookery competitions and essay contests.' The men got very angry and so did my father. 'Everyone knows me and what I do!' he said. 'Why don't you do your real work and find Fazlullah and those whose hands are red with the blood of Swat?'

That Ramadan a friend of my father's in Karachi called Wakeel Khan sent clothes for the poor, which he wanted us to distribute. We went to a big hall to hand them out. Before we had even started, intelligence agents came and asked, 'What are you doing? Who brought these outfits?'

On 12 July I turned fourteen, which in Islam means you are an adult. With my birthday came the news that the Taliban had killed the owner of the Swat Continental Hotel, who was on a peace committee. He was on his way from home to his hotel in Mingora Bazaar when they ambushed him in a field.

Once again people started worrying that the Taliban were creeping back. But whereas in 2008–9 there were many threats to all sorts of people, this time the threats were specific to those who spoke against militants or the high-handed behaviour of the army.

'The Taliban is not an organised force like we imagine,' said my father's friend Hidayatullah when they discussed it. 'It's a mentality, and this mentality is everywhere in Pakistan. Someone who is against America, against the Pakistan establishment, against English law, he has been infected by the Taliban.'

It was late in the evening of 3 August when my father received an alarming phone call from a Geo TV correspondent called Mehboob. He was the nephew of my father's friend Zahid Khan, the hotel owner who had been attacked in 2009. People used to say both Zahid Khan and my father were on the Taliban radar and both would be killed; the only thing they didn't know was which would be killed first. Mehboob told us that his uncle had been on his way to *isha* prayers, the last prayers of the day, at the mosque on the street near his house when he was shot in the face.

When he heard the news my father said the earth fell away from his feet. 'It was as if I had been shot,' he said. 'I was sure it was my turn next.'

We pleaded with my father not to go to the hospital as it was very late and the people who had attacked Zahid Khan might be waiting for him. But he said not to go would be cowardly. He was offered an escort by some fellow political activists but he thought that it would be too late to go if he waited for them. So he called my cousin to take him. My mother began to pray.

When he got to the hospital only one other member of the *jirga* committee was there. Zahid Khan was bleeding so much it was as if his white beard was bathed in red. But he had been lucky. A man had fired at him three times from close range with a pistol, but Zahid Khan had managed to grab his hand so only the first bullet struck. Strangely it went through his neck and out through his nose. Later he said he remembered a small clean-shaven man just

standing there smiling, not even wearing a mask. Then darkness overcame him as if he had fallen into a black hole. The irony was that Zahid Khan had only recently started to walk to the mosque again because he thought it was safe.

After praying for his friend, my father talked to the media. 'We don't understand why he's been attacked when they claim there's peace,' he said. 'It's a big question for the army and administration.'

People warned my father to leave the hospital. 'Ziauddin, it's midnight and you're here! Don't be stupid!' they said. 'You are as vulnerable and as wanted a target as he is. Don't take any more risks!'

Finally Zahid Khan was transferred to Peshawar to be operated on and my father came home. I had not gone to sleep because I was so worried. After that I double-checked all the locks every night.

At home our phone did not stop ringing with people calling to warn my father he could be the next target. Hidayatullah was one of the first to call. 'For God's sake be careful,' he warned. 'It could have been you. They are shooting *jirga* members one by one. You are the spokesman – how can they possibly let you live?'

My father was convinced the Taliban would hunt him down and kill him, but he again refused security from the police. 'If you go around with a lot of security the Taliban will use Kalashnikovs or suicide bombers and more people will be killed,' he said. 'At least I'll be killed alone.' Nor would he leave Swat. 'Where can I go?' he asked my mother. 'I cannot leave the area. I am president of the Global Peace Council, the spokesperson of the council of elders, the president of the Swat Association of Private Schools, director of my school and head of my family.'

His only precaution was to change his routine. One day he would go to the primary school first, another day to the girls' school, the next day to the boys' school. I noticed wherever he went he would look up and down the street four or five times.

Despite the risks, my father and his friends continued to be very active, holding protests and press conferences. 'Why was Zahid Khan attacked if there's peace? Who attacked him?' they demanded.

'Since we've come back from being IDPs we haven't seen any attacks on army and police. The only targets now are peace-builders and civilians.'

The local army commander was not happy. 'I tell you there are no terrorists in Mingora,' he insisted. 'Our reports say so.' He claimed that Zahid Khan had been shot because of a dispute over property.

Zahid Khan was in hospital for twelve days then at home recuperating for a month after having plastic surgery to repair his nose. But he refused to be silent. If anything he became more outspoken, particularly against the intelligence agencies, as he was convinced they were behind the Taliban. He wrote opinion pieces in newspapers saying that the conflict in Swat had been manufactured. 'I know who targeted me. What we need to know is who imposed these militants on us,' he wrote. He demanded that the chief justice set up a judicial commission to investigate who had brought the Taliban into our valley.

He drew a sketch of his attacker and said the man should be stopped before shooting anyone else. But the police did nothing to find him.

After the threats against me my mother didn't like me walking anywhere and insisted I get a rickshaw to school and take the bus home even though it was only a five-minute walk. The bus dropped me at the steps leading up to our street. A group of boys from our neighbourhood used to hang round there. Sometimes there was a boy called Haroon with them, who was a year older than me and used to live on our street. We had played together as children and later he told me he was in love with me. But then a pretty cousin came to stay with our neighbour Safina and he fell in love with her instead. When she said she wasn't interested he turned his attention back to me. After that they moved to another street and we moved into their house. Then Haroon went away to army cadet college.

But he came back for the holidays, and one day when I returned home from school he was hanging around on the street. He followed

me to the house and put a note inside our gate where I would see it. I told a small girl to fetch it for me. He had written, 'Now you have become very popular, I still love you and know you love me. This is my number, call me.'

I gave the note to my father and he was angry. He called Haroon and told him he would tell his father. That was the last time I saw him. After that the boys stopped coming to our street, but one of the small boys who played with Atal would call out suggestively, 'How is Haroon?' whenever I passed by. I got so fed up with it that one day I told Atal to bring the boy inside. I shouted at him so angrily that he stopped.

I told Moniba what had happened once we were friends again. She was always very careful about interactions with boys because her brothers watched everything. 'Sometimes I think it's easier to be a Twilight vampire than a girl in Swat,' I sighed. But really I wished that being hassled by a boy was my biggest problem.

20

Who is Malala?

ONE MORNING IN late summer when my father was getting ready to go to school he noticed that the painting of me looking at the sky which we had been given by the school in Karachi had shifted in the night. He loved that painting and had hung it over his bed. Seeing it crooked disturbed him. 'Please put it straight,' he asked my mother in an unusually sharp tone.

That same week our maths teacher Miss Shazia arrived at school in a hysterical state. She told my father that she'd had a nightmare in which I came to school with my leg badly burned and she had tried to protect it. She begged him to give some cooked rice to the poor, as we believe that if you give rice, even ants and birds will eat the bits that drop to the floor and will pray for us. My father gave money instead and she was distraught, saying that wasn't the same.

We laughed at Miss Shazia's premonition, but then I started having bad dreams too. I didn't say anything to my parents but whenever I went out I was afraid that Taliban with guns would leap out at me or throw acid in my face, as they had done to women in Afghanistan. I was particularly scared of the steps leading up to our street where the boys used to hang out. Sometimes I thought I heard footsteps behind me or imagined figures slipping into the shadows.

Unlike my father, I took precautions. At night I would wait until everyone was asleep – my mother, my father, my brothers, the other

family in our house and any guests we had from our village – then I'd check every single door and window. I'd go outside and make sure the front gate was locked. Then I would check all the rooms, one by one. My room was at the front with lots of windows and I kept the curtains open. I wanted to be able to see everything, though my father told me not to. 'If they were going to kill me they would have done it in 2009,' I said. But I worried someone would put a ladder against the house, climb over the wall and break in through a window.

Then I'd pray. At night I used to pray a lot. The Taliban think we are not Muslims but we are. We believe in God more than they do and we trust him to protect us. I used to say the *Ayat al-Kursi*, the Verse of the Throne from the second *surah* of the Quran, the Chapter of the Cow. This is a very special verse and we believe that if you say it three times at night your home will be safe from *shayatin* or devils. When you say it five times your street will be safe, and seven times will protect the whole area. So I'd say it seven times or even more. Then I'd pray to God, 'Bless us. First our father and family, then our street, then our whole *mohalla*, then all Swat.' Then I'd say, 'No, all Muslims.' Then, 'No, not just Muslims; bless all human beings.'

The time of year I prayed most was during exams. It was the one time when my friends and I did all five prayers a day like my mother was always trying to get me to do. I found it particularly hard in the afternoon, when I didn't want to be dragged away from the TV. At exam time I prayed to Allah for high marks though our teachers used to warn us, 'God won't give you marks if you don't work hard. God showers us with his blessings but he is honest as well.'

So I studied hard too. Usually I liked exams as a chance to show what I could do. But when they came round in October 2012 I felt under pressure. I did not want to come second to Malka-e-Noor again as I had in March. Then she had beaten me by not just one or two marks, the usual difference between us, but by five marks! I had been taking extra lessons with Sir Amjad who ran the boys' school.

The night before the exams began I stayed up studying until three o'clock in the morning and reread an entire textbook.

The first paper, on Monday, 8 October, was physics. I love physics because it is about truth, a world determined by principles and laws – no messing around or twisting things like in politics, particularly those in my country. As we waited for the signal to start the exam, I recited holy verses to myself. I completed the paper but I knew I'd made a mistake filling in the blanks. I was so cross with myself I almost cried. It was just one question worth only one mark, but it made me feel that something devastating was going to happen.

When I got home that afternoon I was sleepy, but the next day was Pakistan Studies, a difficult paper for me. I was worried about losing even more marks so I made myself coffee with milk to drive away the devils of sleep. When my mother came she tried it and liked it and drank the rest. I could not tell her, '*Bhabi*, please stop it, that's my coffee.' But there was no more coffee left in the cupboard. Once again I stayed up late, memorising the textbook about the history of our independence.

In the morning my parents came to my room as usual and woke me up. I don't remember a single school day on which I woke up early by myself. My mother made our usual breakfast of sugary tea, chapatis and fried egg. We all had breakfast together – me, my mother, my father, Khushal and Atal. It was a big day for my mother as she was going to start lessons that afternoon to learn to read and write with Miss Ulfat, my old teacher from kindergarten.

My father started teasing Atal, who was eight by then and cheekier than ever. 'Look, Atal, when Malala is prime minister, you will be her secretary,' he said.

Atal got very cross. 'No, no, no!' he said. 'I'm no less than Malala. I will be prime minister and she will be my secretary.' All the banter meant I ended up being so late I only had time to eat half my egg and no time to clear up.

The Pakistan Studies paper went better than I thought it would. There were questions about how Jinnah had created our country as

the first Muslim homeland and also about the national tragedy of how Bangladesh came into being. It was strange to think that Bangladesh was once part of Pakistan despite being a thousand miles away. I answered all the questions and was confident I'd done well. I was happy when the exam was over, chatting and gossiping with my friends as we waited for Sher Mohammad Baba, a school assistant, to call for us when the bus arrived.

The bus did two trips every day, and that day we took the second one. We liked staying on at school and Moniba said, 'As we're tired after the exam, let's stay and chat before going home.' I was relieved that the Pakistan Studies exam had gone well so I agreed. I had no worries that day. I was hungry but because we were fifteen we could no longer go outside to the street, so I got one of the small girls to buy me a corn cob. I ate a little bit of it then gave it to another girl to finish.

At twelve o'clock Baba called us over the loudspeaker. We all ran down the steps. The other girls all covered their faces before emerging from the door and climbed into the back of the bus. I wore my scarf over my head but never over my face.

I asked Usman Bhai Jan to tell us a joke while we were waiting for two teachers to arrive. He has a collection of extremely funny stories. That day instead of a story he did a magic trick to make a pebble disappear. 'Show us how you did it!' we all clamoured, but he wouldn't.

When everyone was ready he took Miss Rubi and a couple of small children in the front cab with him. Another little girl cried, saying she wanted to ride there too. Usman Bhai Jan said no, there was no room; she would have to stay in the back with us. But I felt sorry for her and persuaded him to let her in the cab.

Atal had been told by my mother to ride on the bus with me, so he walked over from the primary school. He liked to hang off the tailboard at the back, which made Usman Bhai Jan cross as it was dangerous. That day Usman Bhai Jan had had enough and refused to let him. 'Sit inside, Atal Khan, or I won't take you!' he said. Atal

had a tantrum and refused so he walked home in a huff with some of his friends.

Usman Bhai Jan started the *dyna* and we were off. I was talking to Moniba, my wise, nice friend. Some girls were singing, I was drumming rhythms with my fingers on the seat.

Moniba and I liked to sit near the open back so we could see out. At that time of day Haji Baba Road was always a jumble of coloured rickshaws, people on foot and men on scooters, all zigzagging and honking. An ice-cream boy on a red tricycle painted with red and white nuclear missiles rode up behind waving at us, until a teacher shooed him away. A man was chopping off chickens' heads, the blood dripping onto the street. I drummed my fingers. Chop, chop, chop. Drip, drip, drip. Funny, when I was little we always said Swatis were so peace-loving it was hard to find a man to slaughter a chicken.

The air smelt of diesel, bread and kebab mixed with the stink from the stream where people still dumped their rubbish and were never going to stop despite all my father's campaigning. But we were used to it. Besides, soon the winter would be here, bringing the snow, which would cleanse and quieten everything.

The bus turned right off the main road at the army checkpoint. On a kiosk was a poster of crazy-eyed men with beards and caps or turbans under big letters saying WANTED TERRORISTS. The picture at the top of a man with a black turban and beard was Fazlullah. More than three years had passed since the military operation to drive the Taliban out of Swat had begun. We were grateful to the army but couldn't understand why they were still everywhere, in machine-gun nests on roofs and manning checkpoints. Even to enter our valley people needed official permission.

The road up the small hill is usually busy as it is a short cut but that day it was strangely quiet. 'Where are all the people?' I asked Moniba. All the girls were singing and chatting and our voices bounced around inside the bus.

Around that time my mother was probably just going through

the doorway into our school for her first lesson since she had left school at age six.

I didn't see the two young men step out into the road and bring the van to a sudden halt. I didn't get a chance to answer their question, 'Who is Malala?' or I would have explained to them why they should let us girls go to school as well as their own sisters and daughters.

The last thing I remember is that I was thinking about the revision I needed to do for the next day. The sounds in my head were not the *crack, crack, crack* of three bullets, but the *chop, chop, chop, drip, drip, drip* of the man severing the heads of chickens, and them dropping into the dirty street, one by one.

PART FOUR

Between Life and Death

ښېرې به ولې درته نه کړم توره توپکه ورانه وې ودان کورونه

Khairey ba waley darta na kram
Toora topaka woranawey wadan korona

Guns of Darkness! Why would I not curse you?
You turned love-filled homes into broken debris

21

'God, I entrust her to you'

As soon as Usman Bhai Jan realised what had happened he drove the *dyna* to Swat Central Hospital at top speed. The other girls were screaming and crying. I was lying on Moniba's lap, bleeding from my head and left ear. We had only gone a short way when a policeman stopped the van and started asking questions, wasting precious time. One girl felt my neck for a pulse. 'She's alive!' she shouted. 'We must get her to hospital. Leave us alone and catch the man who did this!'

Mingora seemed like a big town to us but it's really a small place and the news spread quickly. My father was at the Swat Press Club for a meeting of the Association of Private Schools and had just gone on stage to give a speech when his mobile rang. He recognised the number as the Khushal School and passed the phone to his friend Ahmad Shah to answer. 'Your school bus has been fired on,' he whispered urgently to my father.

The colour drained from my father's face. He immediately thought, *Malala could be on that bus!* Then he tried to reassure himself, thinking it might be a boy, a jealous lover who had fired a pistol in the air to shame his beloved. He was at an important gathering of about 400 principals who had come from all over Swat to protest against plans by the government to impose a central regulatory authority. As president of their association, my father felt he couldn't let all those people down so he delivered his speech as planned. But there were beads of sweat on his forehead and for once there was no need for anyone to signal to him to wind it up.

As soon as he had finished, my father did not wait to take questions from the audience and instead rushed off to the hospital with Ahmad Shah and another friend, Riaz, who had a car. The hospital was only five minutes away. They arrived to find crowds gathered outside and photographers and TV cameras. Then he knew for certain that I was there. My father's heart sank. He pushed through the people and ran through the camera flashes into the hospital. Inside I was lying on a trolley, a bandage over my head, my eyes closed, my hair spread out.

'My daughter, you are my brave daughter, my beautiful daughter,' he said over and over, kissing my forehead and cheeks and nose. He didn't know why he was speaking to me in English. I think somehow I knew he was there even though my eyes were closed. My father said later, 'I can't explain it. I felt she responded.' Someone said I had smiled. But to my father it was not a smile, just a small beautiful moment because he knew he had not lost me for ever. Seeing me like that was the worst thing that had ever happened to him. All children are special to their parents, but to my father I was his universe. I had been his comrade in arms for so long, first secretly as Gul Makai, then quite openly as Malala. He had always believed that if the Taliban came for anyone, it would be for him, not me. He said he felt as if he had been hit by a thunderbolt. 'They wanted to kill two birds with one stone. Kill Malala and silence me for ever.'

He was very afraid but he didn't cry. There were people everywhere. All the principals from the meeting had arrived at the hospital and there were scores of media and activists; it seemed the whole town was there. 'Pray for Malala,' he told them. The doctors reassured him that they had done a CT scan which showed that the bullet had not gone near my brain. They cleaned and bandaged the wound.

'O Ziauddin! What have they done?' Madam Maryam burst through the doors. She had not been at school that day but at home nursing her baby when she received a phone call from her brother-in-law checking she was safe. Alarmed, she switched on the TV and