7 Watch Out, Malala

Over the next few weeks, life slowly began to return to normal. More people came home, the shops reopened, women were allowed to go to the bazaar by themselves again, and music and dancing went on all night. Ziauddin and his friends organized a peace festival in the nearby town of Marghazar as a thank-you to families who had taken people in.

Most importantly of all, **Malala returned to school**. That first day, the classroom buzzed as she and her classmates exchanged stories of where they'd been and what they'd been up to.

Shortly after that, in August 2009, Malala and her classmates left Mingora once more. Happily this time – they were on a school trip to Islamabad, and they had a blast. They did some sightseeing, went to the theatre and **sampled McDonald's for the very first time**! Malala even slipped in a quick TV interview, talking about life under the Taliban on a popular chat show called *Capital Talks*.

Malala had stayed in Islamabad after they were evacuated from Mingora, but this was the first time she was able to pay the city proper attention. The Taliban had set their sights on the capital, of course, but luckily, they hadn't come anywhere near it. Without the dark influence of the Talibs, women were free to walk around with their heads completely uncovered – Malala could hardly believe it!



The girls met female doctors and lawyers and activists. Educated women were still in the minority in Islamabad, but the fact that some existed proved to Malala that **one day her dreams really could come true**. The girls were all buzzing with excitement on the bus ride home.



Malala In Charge

Hundreds of children had lost parents in the recent years of trouble, so the children's charity UNICEF and an orphanage called the Khpal Kor (My Home) Foundation set up the Child Assembly for the Swat district in an effort to give them a voice. The idea was that young people could be elected on to a panel that would listen to the problems of children and young people, then put forward ideas for change.

Early in 2010, the Khushal School was asked to take part. There were 60 places in the assembly and elections to choose a speaker, deputy speaker and secretary. **Malala was thrilled** to be one of just 11 girls picked to join the panel. Then, at the very first meeting, she was elected speaker.



It felt incredible that young people were finally being listened to and taken seriously, and she wasted no time in talking about girls' education to all sorts of important people.

The assembly met every month and passed a number of resolutions about things like:

- Rebuilding schools destroyed by the Taliban.

- Giving street children the right to education — with no parents to look after them, many more children were now forced to forage in city dumps to survive.

- Banning caning as a punishment in schools.

Things seemed to be looking up at last.

Catastrophe!

But it wasn't long before **disaster struck again**.

In Summer 2010, when Malala was 13, a massive monsoon swept through the valley. The rain was relentless. It forced Malala and her classmates to abandon their lessons for the day and, terrifyingly, they could only get home by **wading through water!**



The problem had been made much worse, though, because the Taliban had chopped down so many trees – and sold the wood. They'd left a clear route for the muddy water

to come gushing down the mountains, destroying everything in its path.

Roads were washed away and entire villages submerged. The people of Swat couldn't believe it. They seemed to suffer one disaster after another! In fact, this flood turned out to be the **worst ever** in all of Pakistan's history.

No prizes for guessing who were waiting in the wings. Yes, the Taliban were soon back, grabbing the chance to take control again and claiming the floods were a punishment from God.



Within weeks there was a string of murders and two schools were blown up. The Taliban claimed they were responsible. Malala was so angry she couldn't speak. **This wasn't peace!** Technically the war was over and government rule was supposed to have been restored, but the people of Swat were still waiting for that to happen. Until it

did, even though they weren't patrolling the streets or dominating the radio airwaves any more, the Taliban were still reigning from the shadows.

Malala had dreamed of becoming a doctor when she grew up, but she was starting to change her mind. Pakistan was desperate for good leaders.



A Bit Of Good News

Finally, a chink of light shone through the gloom. In October 2011, a rather exciting email came: **Malala had been nominated for a prize!**

The International Children's Peace Prize is awarded every year to a child whose actions have helped to improve children's rights. Malala had been nominated by world-famous South African human rights activist, Archbishop Desmond Tutu – one of Ziauddin's great heroes!

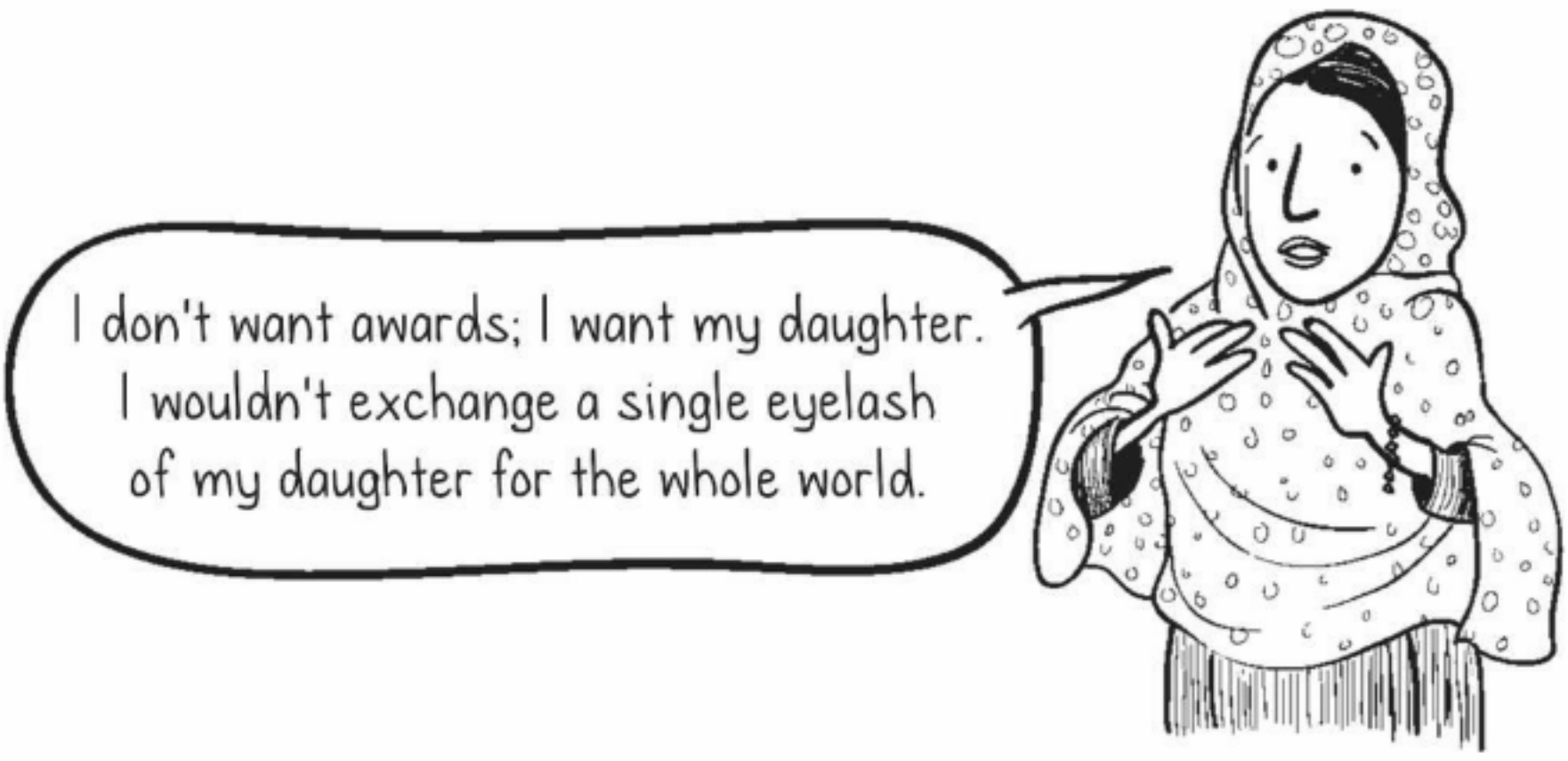
Malala didn't win the prize, but she did win a lot of fresh attention, and just a few weeks later, she discovered she'd been awarded Pakistan's very first National Peace Prize for continuing to speak up for girls' education.

In December 2011, Malala travelled to Islamabad and the prime minister, Yusuf Raza Gilani, presented her with the award. She took the opportunity to reel off a long list of concerns, though she wasn't convinced he'd really listen to them.



Together with her classmates, she used the 500,000-rupee (roughly £3,000) prize money to set up an education foundation. The first people she wanted to help were the street children working at the dump.

This was just the start of Malala's campaign, and she didn't want to waste even the smallest opportunity that came her way. But Toor Pekai was worried...



WANTED – MALALA

Malala was 14 when she **flew on a plane for the very first time**. It was January 2012, and she and her family were bound for the city of Karachi where the local government was renaming a girls' secondary school in her honour! Looking up at the sign bearing her name, Malala was lost for words. It seemed her message was really getting through.

A few days into the trip, a journalist turned up at the hostel where the family were staying. She'd seen Malala in the *New York Times* documentary and was keen to meet her. They chatted away for a while, and then the journalist **dropped a bombshell.**



The journalist brought up the page on her computer, and, sure enough, there was Malala's name alongside another female activist called Shad Begum. Underneath were the words: *These two are spreading secularism and should be* killed.

Reading over her dad's shoulder, Malala felt oddly calm. She was only 14, the Taliban couldn't seriously want to kill her. Her parents weren't quite so relaxed, and suggested she stop campaigning for a while. Malala was adamant. **No way was she giving up.**

When they got back to Mingora, they hurried to the police station and discovered that the police had an entire file outlining the danger Malala was in! Now that her message was really spreading, the Taliban wanted to silence her, no matter what.

Welcome To Adulthood

In July 2012, Malala turned 15. According to the law, girls become adults at 16, and boys at 18, but Islam considers girls to be grown-up at 15. No longer a child, Malala was old enough to leave school, get married and start a family. Some of her classmates had already left to do just that. Malala tried to imagine it, but she just couldn't! More worryingly, as an adult, she was also now **a legitimate target for the Taliban**.

With Malala in danger, and Ziauddin's name high up on the Taliban's hit list, when one of his friends was shot and injured on his way home from prayers one night, Ziauddin worried that he might be next. From then on, he varied his route to work and spent random evenings sleeping at different friends' houses in order to put the Taliban off the scent.

Learning reading speed 58%



The whole family felt jittery and tense, and Malala started having nightmares. She kept her bad dreams to herself, though – her parents had enough to worry about.

Just Another Day

The ninth of October 2012 started out like any other day. Malala tumbled out of bed at the last possible moment. The family ate breakfast together before they all headed off to school. That's right, all of them. Inspired by Malala's campaign, **Toor Pekai was learning to read and write**, and she had her first lesson arranged for that very afternoon.

Malala had a Pakistani studies exam that morning, and she'd been up late revising. It was one of her weakest subjects and she

knew she needed to smash it if she was going to beat Malka-e-Noor to the top of the class again.

In the end, the exam went really well and Malala was buzzing as she left school, chatting happily with Moniba as they waited for the bus home and giggling with delight as the driver showed them some magic tricks. Things may have not been perfect in Pakistan, but Malala was determined circumstances wouldn't bring her down.



Malala's good mood was contagious. As the bus bounced through the streets of Mingora, it was filled with chatter and laughter. Some of the girls even started singing.

The bus climbed the hill, and Malala looked out of the window and frowned. The street was a popular shortcut, usually packed with people and vehicles, but now it was strangely deserted.

Moments later the bus braked suddenly, almost jolting the girls out of their seats. Two men climbed on, front and back … and **Malala's life changed for ever.**

