Mingora, the main city of Swat, but also those like the Taliban who think girls should not go to school.

That morning had begun like any other, though a little later than usual. It was exam time so school started at nine instead of eight, which was good as I don't like getting up and can sleep through the crows of the cocks and the prayer calls of the muezzin. First my father would try to rouse me. 'Time to get up, *Jani mun*,' he would say. This means 'soulmate' in Persian, and he always called me that at the start of the day. 'A few more minutes, *Aba*, please,' I'd beg, then burrow deeper under the quilt. Then my mother would come. '*Pisho*,' she would call. This means 'cat' and is her name for me. At this point I'd realise the time and shout, '*Bhabi*, I'm late!' In our culture, every man is your 'brother' and every woman your 'sister'. That's how we think of each other. When my father first brought his wife to school, all the teachers referred to her as 'my brother's wife' or *Bhabi*. That's how it stayed from then on. We all call her *Bhabi* now.

I slept in the long room at the front of our house, and the only furniture was a bed and a cabinet which I had bought with some of the money I had been given as an award for campaigning for peace in our valley and the right for girls to go to school. On some shelves were all the gold-coloured plastic cups and trophies I had won for coming first in my class. Only twice had I not come top – both times when I was beaten by my class rival Malka e-Noor. I was determined it would not happen again.

The school was not far from my home and I used to walk, but since the start of last year I had been going with other girls in a rickshaw and coming home by bus. It was a journey of just five minutes along the stinky stream, past the giant billboard for Dr Humayun's Hair Transplant Institute where we joked that one of our bald male teachers must have gone when he suddenly started to sprout hair. I liked the bus because I didn't get as sweaty as when I walked, and I could chat with my friends and gossip with Usman Ali, the driver, who we called *Bhai Jan*, or 'Brother'. He made us all laugh with his crazy stories.

I had started taking the bus because my mother was scared of me walking on my own. We had been getting threats all year. Some were in the newspapers, some were notes or messages passed on by people. My mother was worried about me, but the Taliban had never come for a girl and I was more concerned they would target my father as he was always speaking out against them. His close friend and fellow campaigner Zahid Khan had been shot in the face in August on his way to prayers and I knew everyone was telling my father, 'Take care, you'll be next.'

Our street could not be reached by car, so coming home I would get off the bus on the road below by the stream and go through a barred iron gate and up a flight of steps. I thought if anyone attacked me it would be on those steps. Like my father I've always been a daydreamer, and sometimes in lessons my mind would drift and I'd imagine that on the way home a terrorist might jump out and shoot me on those steps. I wondered what I would do. Maybe I'd take off my shoes and hit him, but then I'd think if I did that there would be no difference between me and a terrorist. It would be better to plead, 'OK, shoot me, but first listen to me. What you are doing is wrong. I'm not against you personally, I just want every girl to go to school.'

I wasn't scared but I had started making sure the gate was locked at night and asking God what happens when you die. I told my best friend Moniba everything. We'd lived on the same street when we were little and been friends since primary school and we shared everything, Justin Bieber songs and Twilight movies, the best face-lightening creams. Her dream was to be a fashion designer