

apologised for having tormented him. When my father tells me stories of his childhood, he always says that though *Baba* was a difficult man he gave him the most important gift – the gift of education. He sent my father to the government high school to learn English and receive a modern education rather than to a madrasa, even though as an imam people criticised him for this. *Baba* also gave him a deep love of learning and knowledge as well as a keen awareness of people's rights, which my father has passed on to me. In my grandfather's Friday addresses he would talk about the poor and the landowners and how true Islam is against feudalism. He also spoke Persian and Arabic and cared deeply for words. He read the great poems of Saadi, Allama Iqbal and Rumi to my father with such passion and fire it was as if he was teaching the whole mosque.

My father longed to be eloquent with a voice that boomed out with no stammer, and he knew my grandfather desperately wanted him to be a doctor, but though he was a very bright student and a gifted poet, he was poor at maths and science and felt he was a disappointment. That's why he decided he would make his father proud by entering the district's annual public speaking competition. Everyone thought he was mad. His teachers and friends tried to dissuade him and his father was reluctant to write the speech for him. But eventually *Baba* gave him a fine speech, which my father practised and practised. He committed every word to memory while walking in the hills, reciting it to the skies and birds as there was no privacy in their home.

There was not much to do in the area where they lived so when the day arrived there was a huge gathering. Other boys, some known as good speakers, gave their speeches. Finally my father was called forward. 'I stood at the lectern,' he told me, 'hands shaking and knees knocking, so short I could barely see over the top and so terrified the faces were a blur. My palms were sweating and my mouth was as dry as paper.' He tried desperately not to think about the treacherous consonants lying ahead of him, just waiting to trip him up and stick in his throat, but when he spoke, the words came out fluently like beautiful butterflies taking flight. His voice did not boom like his father's, but his passion shone through and as he went on he gained confidence.

At the end of the speech there were cheers and applause. Best of all, as he went up to collect the cup for first prize, he saw his father clapping and enjoying being patted on the back by those standing around him. 'It was,' he says, 'the first thing I'd done that made him smile.'

After that my father entered every competition in the district. My grandfather wrote his speeches and he almost always came first, gaining a reputation locally as an impressive speaker. My father had turned his weakness into strength. For the first time *Baba* started praising him in front of others. He'd boast, 'Ziauddin is a *shaheen*' – a falcon – because this is a creature that flies high above other birds. 'Write your name as "Ziauddin Shaheen",' he told him. For a while my father did this but stopped when he realised that although a falcon flies high it is a cruel bird. Instead he just called himself Ziauddin Yousafzai, our clan name.