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DARED

MALALA YOUSAFZAI

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While this book is a work of nonfiction, a few literary elements, such as
brief dialogue, have been imagined by the author in order to make the
narrative more relatable and immediate.

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CHAPTER 1

A DOCTOR IN THE MAKING

The marketplace was a blur of colors and motion. With her mum, Malala (pronounced Mah-lah-lah) walked amongst the sights and sounds and smells. The aromas of gasoline, fresh bread, and grilled meat filled her nose. Banners stretched from one side of the paved street to another, with words written in Urdu, the official language of the country of Pakistan. Awnings jutted out above the road. A bright red rickshaw, with one wheel in front and two wheels in the back, zoomed past a man on a motorbike, who

honked loudly. More men and women scurried on foot, zigzagging between the automobiles. There was energy in the warm autumn air.

A man peddled his goods. “CDs! DVDs! Books!”

That last word caught Malala’s ear. She was almost done with the Twilight series and she’d need another book soon. Reading was important to her. Education was, in general. It was in her blood. Her father was a teacher and even started Malala’s school.

Chickens clucked from inside a wooden cage on a cart. Another man called, “Cumin! Turmeric!”

Her mum stopped, needing spices. Like ant-hills, the spices were piled high in varying shades—red, yellow, orange, green. One strong gust of wind could’ve sent the seeds and seasonings flying, coating the many stands, carts, and Malala’s mum.

Malala noticed a girl of probably seventeen—around seven years older than her—plucking apricots from a great mound of fruits, stacking one after another in her basket. The girl stretched her arm, her large belly getting in the way. From the girl’s young age, Malala guessed it was her first child and she hadn’t been married long.

The next day at school, Malala thought about the girl from the market. Malala wondered how long ago the girl had stopped going to school so she could care for her husband. At fifteen? Sixteen? It made Malala’s shoulders sag; girls should be able to finish school. But most Pakistani women’s futures went in one of three directions: housewife, teacher, or doctor—with housewife being the most common.

For herself, ten-year-old Malala had already chosen the third direction: a doctor. Being a housewife was respectable; Malala saw how hard her own mum worked to care for their family.

And her father taught her how important teachers were. But Malala yearned to pursue a different path. She wanted to help people in her own way.

So Malala sat up straight in her blue uniform, thankful to be wearing it, and turned the page of her textbook, following along with her teacher at the front of the classroom. It didn't matter what subject was being taught—she loved them all—but today her teacher lectured on the parts of a plant.

Malala read in her textbook, *The roots of a plant also absorb water and nutrients that are needed for growth.*

She was in Year 4 of school, and Malala had many years of schooling ahead of her, especially in science. Science was an important pillar of a doctor's education. Her finger slid across the book as she read along, flicking her eyes between the words on the page and her teacher. Malala was in her happy place.

What Malala didn't know was that everything was about to change.

The girl in the market had stopped going to school because she chose to marry, have children, and cook for her husband. But soon, Malala would be *forced* to stop going to school, all because of an organization that called itself the Pakistani Taliban.

At first, Malala heard only gossip about a group of men who, out of nowhere, started to appear in the northwestern part of the Swat Valley, a region of Pakistan surrounded by sky-high mountains. The Swat River wound through the valley from north to south, with little villages and towns on either side. Mingora, the only city in Swat, was farther south. That was where Malala lived with her parents and two brothers.

The men hadn't come to her city yet. But soon Malala saw them on the news on TV. They were shown in the markets, in the streets, in the hills and forests of the valley. *Strange-looking*, that

was Malala's first impression of them. She looked between the men on the TV and her father, comparing. Her father chose to keep his dark hair short. Theirs was long. Her father had only a mustache. Some of his friends had beards, but they were trimmed. These strange new men had long, straggly beards.

And while her father often wore a shirt and trousers, these men wore camouflage vests over their traditional shalwar kamiz (pronounced shal-war ka-meez), baggy, pajama-like pants and a long shirt.

Like so many others, Malala wasn't sure what to think of these intruders. But how could their arrival be good when they carried knives and rifles? Or when they sometimes wore stockings over their heads with holes for their eyes?

At times, they also wore turbans. While Malala's father didn't wear a turban, some men did. The intruders seemed to wear turbans only in black, though. Whispers traveled from one ear

to the next, nicknaming the strange men the Black-Turbaned Brigade.

But why was this brigade in her valley? What did they want?

On their chests, they stuck black badges that promoted Sharia (pronounced Sha-ree-ah) law, the principles Malala and other Muslims followed as part of their faith.

Those words on the black badges confused Malala. She asked her father, “Aba, aren’t we already loyal Muslims?” Malala studied and followed the Quran (pronounced Kor-an), the religious text of Islam. “Why would they threaten us?”

Malala would soon learn that the Black-Turbaned Brigade didn’t interpret the Quran the same way as Malala or her family. The way the brigade interpreted the Quran meant they wanted to change Pakistan. Forcefully. And if they were successful, it would destroy Malala’s hopes and dreams forever.