



I Am the Beggar of the World: Landays from Contemporary Afghanistan

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An eye-opening collection of clandestine poems by Afghan women

Because my love's American,
blisters blossom on my heart.

Afghans revere poetry, particularly the high literary forms that derive from Persian or Arabic. But the poem above is a folk couplet—a *landay*, an ancient oral and anonymous form created by and for mostly illiterate people: the more than 20 million Pashtun women who span the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. War, separation, homeland, love—these are the subjects of *landays*, which are brutal and spare, can be remixed like rap, and are powerful in that they make no attempts to be literary. From Facebook to drone strikes to the songs of the ancient caravans that first brought these poems to Afghanistan thousands of years ago, *landays* reflect contemporary Pashtun life and the impact of three decades of war. With the U.S. withdrawal in 2014 looming, these are the voices of protest most at risk of being lost when the Americans leave.

After learning the story of a teenage girl who was forbidden to write poems and set herself on fire in protest, the poet Eliza Griswold and the photographer Seamus Murphy journeyed to Afghanistan to learn about these women and to collect their *landays*. The poems gathered in *I Am the Beggar of the World* express a collective rage, a lament, a filthy joke, a love of homeland, an aching longing, a call to arms, all of which belie any facile image of a Pashtun woman as nothing but a mute ghost beneath a blue burqa.

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