

*The Story of Layla and Majnun*  
*An Afghan Story: Pashto*  
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Qays ibn al-Mulawwah was just a boy when he fell deeply in love with Layla Al-Aamiriya. He was sure of this love on the very first day he laid his eyes upon her at maktab (traditional school). He soon began to write beautiful love poems about Layla and he would read them out loud on street corners to anybody who would care to listen. Such passionate displays of love and devotion caused many to refer to the boy as Majnun, meaning madman.

One day, Majnun found the courage to ask Layla's father for his daughter's hand in marriage, but her father refused the request. Such a marriage, the father reasoned, would only cause a scandal. It would not be proper for his daughter to marry a person whom everybody called a madman. Instead, Layla was promised to another – an older man from a neighbouring village.

Majnun was overcome with grief and abandoned his home and family and disappeared into the wilderness where he lived a miserable life of solitude among the wild animals. It was in this wilderness that Majnun spent his days composing poems to his beloved.

Layla was forced to marry this other man, although she did not love him because her heart still belonged to Majnun. But even though Layla did not love her husband, she was a loyal daughter and so remained a faithful wife.

The news of this marriage was devastating to Majnun who continued to live a life of solitude, refusing to return home to his mother and father in the city.

Majnun's mother and father missed their son terribly and longed everyday for his safe return. They would leave food for him at the bottom of the garden in the hopes that one day he would come back to them out of the desert. But Majnun remained in the wilderness, writing his poetry in solitude, never speaking to a single soul.

Majnun spent all of his time alone, surrounded only by the animals of the wilderness that would gather around him and protect him during the long desert nights. He was often seen by travellers who would pass him on their way towards the city. The travellers said that Majnun spent his days reciting poetry to himself and writing in the sand with a long stick; they said that he truly was driven to madness by a broken heart.

Many years later, Majnun's father and mother both passed away. Knowing of his devotion to his parents, Layla was determined to send Majnun word of their passing. Eventually she found an old man who claimed to have seen Majnun in the desert. After much begging and

pleading the old man agreed to pass on a message to Majnun the next time he set off on his travels.

One day, the old man did indeed cross paths with Majnun in the desert; there he solemnly delivered the news concerning the death of Majnun's parents and was forced to witness what a terrible blow this was to the young poet.

Overcome with regret and loss, Majnun retreated inside of himself entirely and vowed to live in the desert until his own death.

Some years later, Layla's husband died. The young woman hoped that finally she would be with her one true love; that finally she and Majnun would be together forever. But sadly this was not to be. Tradition demanded that Layla remain in her home alone to grieve for her dead husband for two whole years without seeing another soul. The thought of not being with Majnun for two more years was more than Layla could bear. They had been separated for a lifetime and two more years of solitude, two more years without seeing her beloved, was enough to cause the young woman to give up on life. Layla died of a broken heart, alone in her home without ever seeing Majnun again.

News of Layla's death reached Majnun in the wilderness. He immediately travelled to the place where Layla had been buried and there he wept and wept until he too surrendered to the impossible grief and died at the graveside of his one true love.

*'I pass by these walls, the walls of Layla  
And kiss this wall and that wall.  
It's not love of the houses that has taken my heart  
but of the One who dwells in those houses.'*

Qays ibn al-Mulawwah