



# The Last Thousand: One School's Promise in a Nation at War

*Jeffrey E. Stern*

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*There, a few thousand students are learning not just to read and write and add, but to question, criticize, make provocative art. To sing, poke fun at one another, to protest. The Teacher named the school "Marefat" because it means "knowledge" but also all its derivatives: "wisdom;" "education;" "intellect;" "awareness."*

Under the protection of foreign forces, a special place has flourished in Afghanistan. The Marefat School is an award-winning institution in the Western slums of Kabul, built by one of the country's most vulnerable minority groups, the Hazara. Marefat educates both girls and boys, embraces the arts, and teaches students to question the world around them, interrogate their leaders, and be active citizens in their quickly-changing country. As the United States withdraws from Afghanistan, this community is left behind, unprotected.

Acclaimed journalist Jeffrey E. Stern explores the stakes of war through the eyes of those touched by Marefat: Aziz Royesh, the school's daring founder and leader; a mother of five who finds freedom in literacy; a clever mechanic; a self-taught astronomer; the school's security director; and several intrepid students who carry Marefat's mission to the streets. We see how Marefat has embraced the U.S. and blossomed under its presence; and how much it stands to lose when that protection disappears.

*The Last Thousand* tells the story of what we leave behind when our foreign wars end, presenting the promise, as well as the peril, of our military adventure abroad. Stern presents a nuanced and fascinating portrait of the complex history of Afghanistan, American occupation, and the ways in which one community rallies together in compelling, heartbreaking, and inspiring detail.

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