

THE BOOK  
OF  
ALCHEMY

A CREATIVE PRACTICE  
FOR AN INSPIRED LIFE

SULEIKA  
JAOUAD



RANDOM HOUSE

## GESTURES FROM THE SOUL

Behida Dolić

The year after my son died, I watched my dreams fall, one by one, like autumn leaves leaving their branches bare and without any color. This was the hardest year of my life, and I became obsessed with fragile things that persevere in the harshest conditions. In my darkest days, I began creating little pieces of art that no one but me would ever see—little gestures from the soul.

During rainstorms, I opened a window and arranged the sheer white curtains in exactly the right position so I could see them ripple as I lay in bed at night. I wrote joyful memories on hundreds of little scraps of paper, then stacked them to form an arch that, I imagined, was preventing my bedroom wall from falling in on me. Using twine and tacks, I pinned the outlines of shadows to the wall before they disappeared in the passing afternoon light. I painted in watercolors on my window, then watched as the rain washed them away. I placed flowers in a frigid lake and watched them freeze beneath the ice, like grief trapped, no place to go.

These were my ways of tethering all of the little pieces of my soul left behind; of remembering what it felt like to love and be loved, to be safe. These impermanent pieces of art reminded me of times when I was not lonely. They whispered in my ear, “Everything will be all right. You, too, will persevere.”

There are endless forms these conceptual, ephemeral pieces can take. Some examples:

Make ten-second films. Download an app on your phone that imi-

tates a vintage super 8-mm camera, or a 16-mm camera. Then, overlay a beautiful piece of piano music that touches your soul.

Close your eyes, and let your body fall into movement. Into poetry in motion.

Write one sentence or word on a corner of a page, perhaps in your favorite book. Fold it over. Write one every day until the book is swollen with folded corners. Your soul carefully placed on a page that someone, someday, hundreds of years from now, will pick up and think, *My goodness. I wish I had known this person. I would have loved her so much!*

These gestures from the soul don't require an immense amount of energy to complete. But they can mend your life back together, tether you to happiness, make you feel free.

### THIS IS YOUR PROMPT:

Make a piece of impermanent art. Create a little gesture from the soul, something free. You can choose one of the prompts above, or dream up your own. Then write about what you created, how it made you feel, how it will live on.