

THE BOOK OF ALCHEMY

A CREATIVE PRACTICE
FOR AN INSPIRED LIFE

SULEIKA
JAOUAD



RANDOM HOUSE
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de to the art of journaling— a meditation on the central ons of life—by the bestselling r of *Between Two Kingdoms*

he time she was young, Suleika Jaouad has
s journal. She's used it to mark life's biggest
ions and to weather its most ferocious storms.
aling has buoyed her through illness, heart-
e deepest uncertainty. And she is not alone:
people, keeping a journal is an essential tool
both the personal peaks and valleys and the
enges of modern life. More than ever, we need
uzzling through.

ok of *Alchemy*, Jaouad explores the art of jour-
nales everything she's learned about how this
actice can help us tap into that mystical, seem-
rait that exists in every human: creativity. She
wisdom from one hundred writers, artists, and
ding Hanif Abdurraqib, Jon Batiste, Elizabeth
an Rushdie, Gloria Steinem, George Saunders,
tino. Their insights invite us to inhabit a more

ion through challenging times, *The Book of*
oken into themes ranging from new beginnings
and rebuilding. Whether you're a lifelong jour-
to the practice, this book gives you the tools,
encouragement to engage with discomfort, ask
el back the layers, dream daringly, uncover your
el, in doing so, learn to hold the unbearably bru-
shingly beautiful facts of life in the same palm.

ronology of Water:

o keep straight.”

the sun looked wrong.”

l.”

ie another.”

UR PROMPT:

can grab the nearest one and flip it
n old favorite you've memorized by
on; whatever intrigues. Use it as the
al entry, and let the words flow from

I BEGIN AGAIN

Aura Brickler

My new beginning has yet to happen.

I don't know much about it, but I know it will come with a bang. I know it will hurt like hell even though I have braced myself for years. Some days it feels like I sit and wait for it, daydreaming about what it will feel like. It can show up like a slow-motion video of a head-on collision; as a family comes into focus I realize it is ours. Other times it looks like a storm way off in the distance, a disastrous cloud over an Idaho mountain range while we're being spared a few last rays of the sun's light. When it happens I will scream and cry and whisper to myself, "But you had so much time to prepare."

I will begin again in a suffocating state of mourning. I will smile at others and assure them that I am okay. I will agree that he's better off not suffering, that he is no longer laboring to find each and every single breath. I will hope with all of my might that there is an afterlife, one that has offered him eternal peace after so much pain. I will begin again wanting more than ever to believe in the narrative of heaven, because what else do you tell your young child about where her father goes when his body dies? I will likely tell her that he lives among the stars now, always hovering over her, and when the night sky is the darkest, she'll see him the most.

I will begin again as someone with a lot of regrets. The idea of living every day as if it is the last fades after 3,206 days of trying hard to do so. Cancer has a way of digging in and dragging along. It grabs you by your weaknesses and makes you beg for an ounce of strength. It gnaws at the

foundation of your collective hopes and dreams, allowing despair to fill in the cracks. I will begin again and learn how to forgive.

I will begin again as a narrator, telling stories to keep him close to us. Telling tall tales that protect our daughter from the parts of the story that are too painful. I imagine being left in a fog of uncertainty, fear, and confusion. When the fog begins to lift, I will begin again as grateful—for what we had and what, of him, I still have. I will begin each day like I do now, with a cup of coffee. I will begin again as a widow.

THIS IS YOUR PROMPT:

Have you been bracing yourself for a new beginning? Perhaps one that is daunting yet inevitable, or maybe one that you've been hoping for and dreaming about. What will it take for you to get there? Who will be with you? What will it feel like when you get to the other side?

If you'd like, use the refrain, "I will begin again as . . ."

CHAPTER 2

ON MEMORY

When I was young, my family and I often spent summers in Tunisia. We lived in a house that my dad and two of his brothers built themselves outside of Gabès, their hometown, on a remote plot of land where the Sahara Desert meets the Mediterranean Sea. It was a simple, traditional structure, made of white plaster topped by domes, and rustic—no electricity, telephone, or internet. Neighbors were scarce. There were only one or two other houses like ours, a few fishermen's huts, and a nearby Bedouin camp.

There was very little to do. The sea was at our doorstep and I loved swimming, but given the scorching sun, we didn't go until late afternoon, after it had dipped low in the sky. I spent those early sun-bleached hours alternating between three activities. The first was household chores, like washing the laundry by hand, then hanging it to dry on a clothesline—a task I would've hated back home, but that there, with all of my aunts and cousins chatting and laughing, I actually enjoyed. The second was reading battered old paperbacks, mostly classics left over from my dad's undergraduate days at the University of Tunis. I would lie on my back on the tile floor, the coolest surface I could find, and get lost in sweeping, epic tales by Tolstoy, Dickens, and Flaubert.

The third thing, which will probably not come as a surprise, was journaling. I wrote and I wrote and I wrote and I wrote, filling up who knows how many composition notebooks. Around the house was an