

INKOSI GLOBAL

THE INKOSI QUARTET · BOOK II

THE ALCHEMY

*What If You Were Never
Going in Circles?*

A BOOK CLUB KIT

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Free to print and share with your circle or book club.

The glow is earned.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Four years after the floor of Room 1847, Maya Turner has built the smaller, truer life she wanted: a room above the harbour in Cape Town, eight women in a loose circle, and a book about arrival due in New York on the first of September.

Then, at three in the morning after a perfect circle, the old nothing comes back.

THE ALCHEMY follows Maya through a Cape Town winter and a Georgia summer: to a man who mends boats in a shed at the end of a jetty; to Macon, where her great-aunt Verlene talks only in the in-between hours; and to a cedar chest, and a letter her mother has kept hidden for fifty-five years. Told in Maya's own voice, it is a novel about what happens when healing becomes a new mask, and what it costs to be of no use to the people you love, so that they can finally be seen.

A NOTE BEFORE THE QUESTIONS

This is not a quiz on the book, and there are no right answers in it.

The book was never really about Maya. She is only the lit window you read by. It is about you, and the door you keep arriving at, and the name you have been giving that arrival.

So these questions are built to turn the conversation toward the people in the room, gently and honestly. Use the ones that open something. Leave the ones that do not. And if a question makes the room go quiet, do not rush to fill the quiet. The quiet is usually where the work is.

For the one reading alone: a pen and the margins are enough. For the circle or the book club: let one question breathe for a long time rather than hurrying through all of them.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

If your group wants to locate itself first, each person can take the GLOWTH reading, free and about four minutes, at inkosi.global/growth.html, answering on the one thing they came here carrying. Then let each person name, out loud if they are brave, which of the four places they are actually standing in. It is a hard thing to say in a room. It is also, often, where the room finally becomes a circle.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

On the shape

- 1 Maya's own book has a chapter called "Arrival": a before photograph, an after photograph, an arrow, and nothing in the gap. Before you read *THE ALCHEMY*, what shape did you believe your own becoming was supposed to make? Where did you first learn that shape?
- 2 The book brings Maya back to the same door, at the same hour, with the same nothing, and insists she is one landing lower, not back where she started. Think of a place you have returned to more than once: a wound, a fear, an old voice. Were you the same person each time you stood there? What could you see the last time that you could not see the first?
- 3 Near the end, a stranger writes to Maya, "I did everything right, and I'm back where I started," and Maya answers, "The door is not the proof that it didn't work. The door is the entrance." Is there a return in your own life you have been carrying as proof that you are broken? What changes if you let it be an entrance instead?

On the mask

- 4 Ruth tells Maya, "There's a kind of healed you can perform." Maya comes to see that the founder has only changed into linen and become the guide. Has a mask of yours ever done that: retired in one form and come back, more flattering, in another?
- 5 Maya fills three notebooks mapping her own pattern ("I was a cartographer of my own prison, and the maps were beautiful") and nothing moves. Where in your life can you see a pattern perfectly clearly and still not move? What does the book suggest is required there, instead of more understanding?

On the roots

- 6 Dorothy kept a letter from Howard University at the bottom of a cedar chest for fifty-five years. Later, on the porch, she says, "I always wondered what I'd have studied." Is there an unlived want in your own family, spoken or buried, that you suspect was handed down to you wearing a different name?

- 7** When Maya finds the letter, every tool she has rises in her, and she sets them down. She stays of no use to her mother, and calls it “the most loving thing I had ever managed to do.” When someone you love is hurting, what is your reflex? What would it cost you to be present without fixing?
- 8** Verlene tells Maya, “Sorry’s just the rule wearing a different dress,” and then, “You owe them a changing.” Where might an inherited rule be running through you? What would it take to be the link where it changes direction?

On being seen

- 9** Maya can change on a porch in Macon far more easily than in front of the people the change is for. When her daughter Claire sets a decision on the counter, Maya feels the old disappointment rise and says, “I’m feeling something right now that I don’t want to give you. Give me a second.” In front of whom would it be hardest for you to actually change?
- 10** Claudia, silent for five years, tells Maya, “I just figured you’d call when you were ready to be known again.” Being admired, being needed, being known: which is easiest for you to receive? Which do you flinch from?

On the gold

- 11** Home from Macon, Maya catches herself drafting how to tell it to her circle, stage directions and all, and laughs: “I was about to start performing transformed.” Later she withdraws her own book rather than sell her mother’s letter. Where are you tempted to show a change before it has set?
- 12** On her ninth birthday, Nala climbs onto Eula Mae’s chair to sing, and Maya lets the old family rule die in her: “Sing it as loud as you want, baby... We’re all listening.” The book ends at three in the morning, at the same door, unafraid. What door are you standing at? And are you willing to go down, or do you only want to have gone down?

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