PALACE OF DARKNESS

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BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the start of the story, Cassia has been involved in an unhealthy relationship for many years. Why do you think she has stayed with Aretas?
2. Have you ever struggled to walk away from an unhealthy situation? If you were able to get free, how did you accomplish it?
3. In what ways is Cassia’s tendency to find her identity through what others think of her challenged by the events of the story?
4. Cassia is confronted by the truth of the gospel in the course of the story. How did you feel about her acceptance of it? Did you feel there should have been more of a traditional “conversion” scene? Why or why not?
5. In what ways do the locations of the valley of Petra and the High Place mirror Cassia’s emotions and challenges?
6. What character did you most identify with? Why?
7. The events of the Roman conquering of the Nabatean kingdom and its capital, Petra, are historically accurate. How did you feel about the Nabateans submitting to Roman rule? Did you expect something different?
8. This story takes place in 106 AD. How familiar are you with the church’s history in this period? What new things did you learn about the history of Christianity through the story?
9. The end of the story involves some specific intervention by God, showing His power. Do you believe God still works in this way? If so, where have you seen or experienced it?
10. Cassia learns that true strength does not mean resisting connections to other people, or refusing to rely on others for help. But what *does* it mean? How does Malik challenge her to find strength in the right place?
11. How difficult is this truth? Do you struggle with finding your identity and security in what others think of you? What can you do to break free of this?
12. Julian’s home church in Rome was the direct recipient of Paul’s letter to the Romans, and he loves this epistle as a letter from a good friend. How did his view of the book of Romans, and his use of its familiar passages, give you a new perspective on this New Testament book?
13. What does Romans 5:8 teach us about our identity?
14. Romans 8:38-39 talk about God’s love for us. How do these verses directly challenge us to break free of our bondage to the opinions of other people?
15. Petra is considered a “lost city” because its existence was unknown to the scholarly world for many centuries, and only a handful of Bedouin locals knew of its whereabouts. Why do you think we have such a fascination with “lost cities”?
16. In what ways do you feel that the author’s travels through Petra and other ancient lands have informed her writing? Would you like to travel to Petra, in the Muslim country of Jordan? Why or why not?