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“Pleasant Place” is a dance of hope. The kind of hope that comes from a feeling of trust—trust that the world has its own reason and logic, and whatever challenge comes your way you can survive it.

Petra and I are immigrants. Although we arrived in America decades apart, Dance brought us here and the people we met, and fell in love with, are the reasons we stayed. It takes a bold leap of faith to leave everything, arrive in a new place, alone, and hope to call it home. Even more challenging when, only a few years after our arrivals, we both experienced the death of our partners. A year after her husband’s suicide, Petra began developing “Pleasant Place”. It is dedicated to him, but for Petra, “it is not about him. It is about the women who remain. Those who stay and carry on.”

Life and death: Dance holds these two inseparably. My late friend and mentor Herbert Blau famously asserted that all of theater’s conventions were designed either to intensify our awareness of death, or to deflect it, or to cover up our anxiety by appearing to celebrate it. “The one, simple, elemental undeniable fact . . . that differentiates the theater from any other form” is that “the person performing—is dying in front of your eyes.” Performance theorist Peggy Phelan translated Herb’s observation into her own eloquent claim that the value of performance lies in its very disappearance.

It’s true. To dance is to make peace with the ephemeral, to embrace that you and your work will vanish. But to dance is also to marvel at how each movement and shape comes into existence through your dancing. I once taught a dance class for young children. After the class ended I found a boy on the floor holding a very specific shape. I lay down next to him and asked, “Liam, why are you still holding your shape?” He replied, “I don’t want to lose this!” When we dance each image and action is born into the live, living moment through our body. Liam had just discovered this magic. As we grow older, as we continue to dance, we begin to understand that when one movement ends, another has already begun. In the end, is the beginning. “Pleasant Place” may have begun out of a deep loss, but it is an ode to life. It is a landscape of the mind where life and death intersect, but we carry-on living.

“Again and again, far stranger things happen, than the end of the world.”* Petra may understand this better than most. Growing up in Croatia during the war, she found her mission: “the transformation of pain into landscapes of beauty to benefit humanity.” Petra embraces and celebrates life’s strangeness as if to say, maybe living is the secret after all.

Tonya Lockyer Feb 27, 2019

*Rebecca Solnit from *Hope in the Dark*