

# GRACE

A MOTION PICTURE PROPOSAL

PAUL GORDON



## WHAT GRACE LOOKS LIKE

Preparing for his final performance, sixty year old Sergei Koshevoi, the world's most famous dancer, longs desperately for one last moment of gracefulness.

Instead, he confronts public humiliation, debilitating injury, existential dread and utter despair.

It is only then that he discovers a different possibility – something he thought was lost forever – the possibility of not just gracefulness but of grace itself.

The film interweaves four cinematic styles: live action, nature documentary, dramatic documentary and animation.

Using different styles is not arbitrary; it is central to the story and the dance our characters create.

In a time of End of Days anger, confrontation, and violence, this is a different vision: a story about love; a movie about what grace *looks* like.

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## PROLOGUE

*January 15th, this year. Animation:* tight on the muscles and bones in SERGEI KOVSHEVOI's angry jaw. Changing to live action, we are in the New York City rehearsal space of the Katherine Roberts Dance Company. Standing next to Sergei, age sixty, is the ballerina LISA MARIE SULLIVAN, thirty-six, and the choreographer, KATHERINE (KATE) ROBERTS, forty-two. A documentary is being made of the rehearsal and CAMERAMEN move in and out.

Sergei is extremely upset. It is seven weeks before the performance; the new dance is anything but ready and time is very limited.

Kate is worried; this is bad. Lisa puts her arms around Sergei's shoulder, but Sergei won't be consoled. *Nature documentary* from Kate's point of view: *Mary is holding Jesus in Michelangelo's Pieta*. Mary's posture is the same as Lisa's as she holds Sergei, and Kate reacts with surprise at the image.

*Dramatic documentary:* Sergei bites off, "This is it for me, Lisa! We should never have used her!" *A pack of wolves pass an old country cemetery where a small boy, crying piteously, is being dragged toward an empty gravesite.*

Kate tells her assistant, HOLLY BARNES, to play the tape at a quicker tempo. Sergei and Lisa begin to dance with Kate circling around them. *The wolves have seen an aged stag; the chase begins. Trying frantically to get away, the stag leaps over a boulder and, as he falls in slow motion animation, the bones of his right ankle dislocate.* Sergei, sweat flying, attempts a jump that is more than he can handle. He tries to correct in midair but is coming down on his ankle and in the split second before he lands, we cut away.

## ACT ONE

*February, the previous year.* The door reads "Richard Morris and Associates: Dance and Sports Physical Therapy." It is evening and as Sergei enters the large, modern office, no one is in sight. In a smaller, private office, his forty-eight year old partner, dance therapist RICHARD MORRIS, works intently at the computer. Sergei gets a cup of water, tiptoes behind him, and pours the water down his neck. Richard howls, chases him through the office, finally tackling and wrestling him to the floor. There is considerable affection between

them. Sergei asks Richard to go to the theater with him; Kate Roberts' new dance is opening. Richard has to finish his book, his publisher is complaining. Sergei tries to talk him out of working but Richard won't go.

Backstage, Kate paces in the wings and those around her are concerned. Behind the dancers, various *images* are displayed on large screens. In the audience, seated alone, Sergei watches the dance intently. As it ends, the applause is encouraging. Relief.

The next morning Kate listens to Holly read a review. Holly tries to soften the harsher words but the comments cut. "Until three years ago we thought Katherine Roberts was on her way to becoming one of the world's best choreographers. Sometimes edgy, often funny, always elegant, her multi-media productions were hugely successful. And then came *La Vie En Rose*. Coinciding with a divorce from her husband, long time lead dancer Peter Levinson, it was, to be charitable, pretty awful. Last year's *Songs for a Summer Night* was much worse. It was a disaster. No one doubts Robert's brilliance but sometimes an artist can think too much. While not up to her best, *Homeward Bound*, her new dance, shows more of Kate Roberts..."

Out of the blue, Sergei arrives. He brusquely invites Kate to lunch the following week and then leaves. Kate looks at Holly: what the hell was that about? She knows Sergei slightly, but they have never worked together. At lunch, he asks her: "You know those times when you're onstage, it gets so quiet, you're floating through space and you feel you could go on forever? I want you to make me a dance about that."

"A dance about peak performance? About being graceful?" "It's more than that; it's magic, the greatest thing in life. Who knows why it happens? You're dancing along and then suddenly you feel like the light changes. It's all around you: so peaceful, like being held inside a beautiful golden bubble." Kate says the dances she makes are not like the romantic pieces he's used to; she's busy, she has commitments. He doesn't listen. She is becoming annoyed when he says that he will dance it with Lisa Marie Sullivan. Kate is astonished – everyone knows what happened with them. Sergei says it will be "our last performance. We'll do some of our classic pieces and finish with a new dance by Katherine Roberts." Still not convinced, Kate agrees to think about it.

Holly is amazed Kate would consider making a dance for Sergei. "He's totally over

the hill. And besides, he's a pain in the ass." Kate asks if she knows Lisa and Holly answers, "Only by reputation. I hear she doesn't talk much. But when she does, people listen." Kate thinks a moment and then says, "I know you're right about Sergei. But he can be sweet, too. And fun. And its Koshevoi and Sullivan – there's never been anyone like them. Anyway, all I said was I'd think about it. Maybe it'll work out."

Lisa and her husband Kevin, a building contractor, are in their house in Boston. Their twin sons, age five, are playing around them as Kevin says, "He's crazy, Lisa. He screams at you. God, he broke a chair! It's a good thing he didn't hit you with it." Lisa says quietly, "He would never hit me, Kevin." Kevin knows that arguing won't get anywhere and accepts.

Sergei, very excited, is seated with Lisa in an exclusive Boston restaurant. This is their first meeting in six years and she has been concerned about him. He has been dancing, he says, "in some pretty shitty places." He asks forgiveness for the way he treated her; when he learned she and Kevin were pregnant, he'd made a huge scene. "I couldn't wait for you, Lisa. I thought you were gone forever...You know, they said I should quit dancing before we met...You gave me nine more years. You were so young and lovely...But now I have to stop. It tears my heart; it tears it. But I have to." She touches his cheek.

Lisa hears about Kate and is surprised. Sergei says Kate wasn't his first choice and admits to being turned down by two other choreographers. Lisa agrees it could be brilliant, and certainly different. She has also been considering retirement and says, "Maybe we'll do it together." Sergei calls her his "Blessed Marie" and says, "We'll shoot the moon. It'll be great! And Lisa, we'll do one performance only." Lisa's face expresses the unconditional love a mother has for an enthusiastic, delightful, wayward child.

*July.* In her New York loft apartment, Kate is meeting with Holly. Pictures of Zen archers and huge enlargements of galaxies being created are on the walls. She says, "Sergei has booked the Lincoln Center for March 7th. He's hired Henry Elliot to make a documentary. I'd love to pull out but I can't now. Sergei's like fucking Peter Pan. He wants a dance about being graceful but all I see is this sixty year old guy. He wants to keep being a kid. Well, the big question is whether Peter will fly his last flight as a boy or as a man. There's a dance in that." Holly: "Good luck getting Sergei to do it."

On bicycles, laughing, with arms spread like they're flying, Sergei and Richard careen

around Ibiza. Shopping for a grand dinner Sergei is preparing for a group of friends, they watch a shopkeeper's eight year old daughter dance flamenco. Sergei, generous and charming, very knowledgeable about dance and art, joins the dancing child. To everyone's delight, he is very good.

He is also an excellent cook as he makes the dinner with two helpers. At the party later, he flirts with one of the male guests. A friend of both Sergei and Richard notices, looks over to Richard and rolls his eyes. Richard, who has seen this all before, is tolerant though not pleased.

*December.* Lisa is joyously performing The Nutcracker as a guest artist with the Royal Ballet in London. Sergei and Richard, in a cab in Phoenix, pull up in front of a musical comedy theater. A sign proclaims: "The Nutcracker with Sergei Koshevoi and the Arizona State Ballet." Sergei moans in dismay and Richard tries to cheer him up.

In a hot and overcrowded room, Sergei is leading his agreed upon class. He is miserable. Later, he is warming up on an empty stage; the stage manager tries to get him to stop – the performance should be starting in ten minutes. Sergei stares at her and keeps stretching.

The performance begins. A man in the audience says something about Sergei looking pretty old. As Sergei and the others take their final bows, a young dancer says, "He should have played the Grandfather," and another one giggles. Hearing the exchange, Sergei is stunned and outraged. He storms past the terrified dancers; almost knocks over a stand of lights that are in his way and swears at the irritated stage hands. Down long, empty hallways, completely lost, he finally finds his dingy, crowded dressing room. Gasping for breath, he can barely talk intelligibly. Richard, who has followed behind, stands at the door, not speaking. Sergei glances at him and then lets his head fall, totally humiliated.

A beautiful dog is chasing a Frisbee. Kate, her physician father GEOFFREY ROBERTS, and LADY, her parents' Labrador, are in Central Park. Gently, Geoffrey asks Kate about her ex-husband's recent remarriage. Kate still regrets the failure of their marriage. "I let us down. I didn't give him what he needed – or deserved." Lady starts to limp. As Geoffrey removes the thorn in Lady's foot, they talk about how animals and humans respond to pain and suffering. Kate wonders what might have happened to Sergei to make him the way he is. We watch Geoffrey's face as he silently wonders what might have happened to her.

*January 15th.* Lisa's room in a New York hotel is overflowing with flowers as Sergei arrives bearing even more. The last few months have been hard but their first rehearsal with Kate Roberts is finally here!

Meanwhile, Kate is being interviewed by HENRY ELLIOT, the documentary director. She has some general ideas for the dance and describes what peak performance and being graceful feel like. *Interweaving film styles, we see images:* people dancing, running, skating effortlessly.

"There are four components. First is a perception of expansion and spaciousness that seems to go on forever. Second, you're not in the future or the past; it's here and now. The third is a feeling of almost liquid, flowing, ease. Finally, there's a settling in the body, as if something inside us says, 'Yes, this is right.' Sergei says 'it's magic, like being held in a golden bubble.' Dancers, athletes, soldiers: they all talk about being 'in the zone.' I knew a guy whose job in Vietnam was to go out behind enemy lines and knife people in the dark. He said he never felt so alive." A pause, then: "That much is pretty clear; I'm just not sure what the dance is."

Lisa and Sergei have left the hotel and are laughing in his limousine. More flowers. Returning to Kate, she says with her company she will usually work on something like this for months. She has never worked with either Sergei or Lisa and they have very little rehearsal time. Holly announces that they have arrived, and Henry, who has filmed Sergei in the past, says he hopes she gets it soon because Sergei hates surprises. Kate says she knows.

We show some of the opening sequence and this time finish it with Sergei falling to the floor, grasping his leg, screaming.

## ACT TWO

An ambulance takes Sergei to the hospital with everyone following behind. Looking at the x-rays, MARC ISAACS, the Chief of Orthopedics and Dance Medicine who has been Sergei's physician for years, asks, "Is this the one you broke when you were a kid?" Sergei mumbles some answer. "Will I be able to dance? The performance is in seven weeks." Isaacs says he should keep icing his ankle, they'll know more when the swelling comes down. As Kate and Holly leave the hospital, Kate acknowledges that at least part of her is relieved.

That night, in Richard's office, a banner announces his new book: *Getting Better*. Richard – much more gently than Dr. Isaacs – tests Sergei's movement. Maybe it will be OK; it's not as bad as he thought. The next morning Dr. Isaacs agrees with Richard and tells Sergei to "do whatever Richard says." Sergei makes a joke about Isaac's recommendation and Richard is embarrassed.

At the studio, Kate holds a meeting; this will mean a major loss of income and they have nothing in the works for four months. Lisa calls: maybe Sergei can dance after all. Kate, not sure what she wants, heads over to Richard's.

In Richard's office, Sergei is being treated; Henry films. As Richard works, he tells Kate and Lisa he can track a person's progress when they get better. Sergei is impatient – the conversation's not about him – but Kate wants to hear more. Richard says if people want to get better, they have to do three things: find out exactly what's wrong, fully commit to the process of change, and then take an action that moves them in the right direction. It doesn't matter if the problem is in the ankle, back or anywhere else. If they keep doing those three steps over and over, they'll get better. Lisa says it's the same for becoming a better dancer and Kate adds, "Or for making a better dance." The women get up to go with hugs and words of encouragement.

Walking back to the studio, they discuss the dance. Kate's original thought was that the piece would be about the creation of a dance. "I had all these ideas but they were just ideas; I never got any further. I tried to explain it at the rehearsal but I wasn't very clear." Now she doesn't know what to do. "Maybe the dance could be about Sergei's recovery...At least I hope it'll be his recovery...Maybe build it on the steps Richard talked about."

She continues: "There's something else I thought about – the way you hold him when he's feeling bad. It's like the *Pieta*." Lisa replies simply, "Sergei loves being held." Kate stops and looks at her. At the studio, Kate shows what she'd had in mind. Lisa begins to follow her; there is a sense of progress.

The next day Kate calls Lisa and suggests they take a walk; Kate has ideas about balance and architecture she's been considering. Lisa has to go to Boston but says Kate should call Sergei – he has a great appreciation for art and might be helpful. Doubtful, Kate agrees.

Kate and Sergei, accompanied by Henry and his cameramen, meet in a New York

park. Hobbling around on crutches, Sergei is really angry. Kate acknowledges that her not having the dance worked out contributed to his accident, and he softens slightly. She asks how he's doing and he grunts that it's improving – slowly. *Interweave film styles*: wary of each other, they travel around the city, looking at buildings, art galleries, Japanese gardens – all *images* used later in the dance. Kate says there is something about the geometry of balance and its relationship to peak performance.

She suggests the dance be about his recovery; he thinks it's a terrible idea. "It's going to be about stretching and exercises? I thought this was going to be about something beautiful. I thought it would have some nobility." Kate makes a crack about nobility and suffering. That does it. Standing in the middle of the sidewalk, with passers-by watching in amazement, he screams that she is "a fucking failure. Your dances are shit. You've lost it." "I've lost it? You goddam baby. Make the fucking dance yourself." If he could kill her, he would; but he knows he has no choice. "You know I can't make this dance."

Kate's gone too far; they need each other. She kind of apologizes. Sergei asks, "What if I don't get better?" Kate says they would show that too. Sergei thinks that's an even worse idea. Kate: "Well, what else are we going to do? You want a dance about being graceful but we've got to work with what you are." He glares at her and then asks what part Lisa would play. Kate says Lisa would be the balance his character aspires to. They part with a grudging acceptance.

In Richard's busy office, Sergei is working off by himself. Richard comes over and makes a slight adjustment in his exercise; Sergei nods his thanks.

Kate has begun to make the dance with Lisa and Christopher, one of her other dancers. With Henry filming, they convert into dance steps her ideas about our reaction to pain. We see *images*: also characterized by four perceptions – contraction, retraction, immobilization and evasion – protection against pain is the direct opposite of freedom and balance. Sergei, on crutches, watches. He's not happy but doesn't say anything.

His leg is getting better. The dance is in five weeks; he wonders if he'll be OK. Treating him, Richard asks about the rehearsals and Sergei makes a comment that Christopher is pretty. Richard is annoyed and says so.

The next day, Christopher and Lisa are rehearsing and Sergei complains about one of

the steps. Kate, irritated at being questioned, changes it. To her surprise, it's better and she nods appreciation. Later, Sergei announces he has cancelled his other appearances; this will be his only dance. Lisa says she will also cancel some engagements. They are in it together.

They get into a conversation about where they are going. If Sergei is supposed to represent humanity and Lisa is the place of balance, what connects them? *Images*: Kate sees life as an ongoing flow of living and dying; individuals have hope, joy, pain and suffering but life itself keeps moving on.

At the end of the day, Sergei speaks to Lisa about the two classic pieces they are to dance. He should be ready by the end of the week to rehearse them. At Richard's office, he ices his ankle assiduously.

In a different rehearsal studio, Lisa and Sergei are working on their "old war horses." Trying to protect his leg, Sergei clearly wants to dance full out. They stop for a moment; she asks how his ankle is. He admits it is sore. Lisa: "We shouldn't even try to dance the way we used to; neither of us can play them that big anymore. People are coming because they loved us and want to say good-bye." Sergei cries that they're coming to see *Marguerite and Armand* and he is going to show them Armand or die trying. Gently: "Sergei, we can't do it; we have to be who we are." Looking at his worn image in the mirror, he cries: "This is not who I am! It's not!" And then, "God, I hate this. I hate it; I hate it."

Richard and Sergei go to Dr. Isaacs, who gives Sergei a cortisone shot. Isaacs asks Richard whether he gave injections when he was a Navy medic. Richard says he did, but "it was just a punch in the ass; I never had to be careful like you do." Isaacs says three shots are the limit he can give. More than that risks serious injury. Sergei: "How serious?" Isaacs responds, "It weakens the tissue. Another fall could make it...well, certainly not good."

The following week, *interweaving styles* as they look at photographs, news clippings, *images* from art that she has collected, Kate talks about how potential changes with pain; how we act out to get away from it; how suffering becomes rigidified in our bodies. We see the lifespan of plants, animals, humans. Sergei asks how the piece will end. "I just die? Is that my life?" Kate isn't sure; but whatever it is, it's got to be true. Sergei asks how she'll know and Kate says it's the same as peak performance: "My body will relax and I'll feel it. I'll know. We'll all know." They create more steps; Sergei's ankle is a little stiff but not too bad.

At Dr. Isaacs' office, Sergei gets his second shot. Richard isn't there. Isaacs says he should take it as easy as possible and Sergei tells him the dance is in just over three weeks. Isaacs nods understanding.

Sergei dances his part for the first time; Henry films. Sergei's character will be both a symbol of humanity and an individual lifetime. They create the section of the dance where he is stuck forever unless he makes a choice to change. At the end of the day, everyone is feeling more upbeat. Sergei tries to get the others – including Christopher, at whom he has made a half-hearted pass – to go out with him. They each beg off and finally, Sergei leaves. Kate invites Lisa to spend the night at her place. As they go, Kate tells Holly she's ready to meet with ERIK LEEDS, her visual-media associate.

Richard is working on Sergei's leg and Sergei very casually asks about his book. "You don't want to hear about my book." Sergei replies that yes, he does.

In Kate's apartment, Lisa is looking at the photos that cover the walls. What might they have to do with the central question of her and Sergei's characters? Kate isn't certain what she means and Lisa says her part is the point of balance. What's so special about balance? Kate starts to give an intellectual answer when Lisa interrupts: she's been thinking about Richard's steps. They have to understand the diagnosis; what the underlying problem is. "I'm not sure the answer's in your mind, Kate. I keep wondering if you're holding something back. Is there a part of you you're not letting us have?" Kate is upset and the conversation ends. Later that night Kate is in bed, staring at the ceiling. In the spare bedroom, Lisa snores loudly and contentedly. Kate listens, sighs, and shakes her head.

At Erik Leeds' office Kate is looking at some of the *pictures* seen earlier: amoebas, animals reacting to injury, runners and skaters moving gracefully, a stag being chased by wolves. More *footage*: the wolves in the snow, running by an old, country cemetery. A small, crying boy, surrounded by peasant women dressed in black, is being dragged toward an empty grave by an obviously drunken man. Erik tells her he shot the film in the forests north of St. Petersburg. Kate says that Sergei is from that area; could they use it?

Kate is sitting alone, thinking, when Henry, Sergei and Lisa arrive at the studio. "I've been saying the dance is about recovery and being graceful but maybe it's more than that." Henry films and Kate figures it out as she speaks: "What if your character isn't looking to fix

his leg but he's trying to reach something else? What if he starts out looking for recovery and being graceful but ends up searching for... what? Redemption? Grace? Maybe that's what your golden bubble is, Sergei: it's grace. Those descriptions I've been using – spaciousness and all the rest. That's what grace feels like. Right? Those same four things, except grace has this ...this feeling of love...this sense of awe."

"In the beginning your character, Lisa, will be gracefulness." They choreograph the steps. "We'll use the film Henry has been shooting of you doing your exercises, Sergei. You try to get better but eventually you realize that it will never be enough. You are worse than miserable. And then you see that there is something else. Lisa begins to transform and become part of the universal – something beyond life and death. She becomes..." Kate stops and looks at Lisa. Finally understanding, slightly stunned by the implication, Kate says: "She becomes...love...not just loving but love itself...she becomes grace."

Kate turns to Sergei: "You see her, Sergei...you long for the connection but don't know how. We change the lighting – make it more golden when you finally turn toward her. We can use a lot of what we have because no matter what you're looking for, you do the same things: you figure out what's wrong – what's really wrong, what's underneath. You reach this 'Oh, fuck moment' when you know you have to do something about it and then...you do it."

Sergei: "You think grace is something you can earn? You can't make it happen. It's a blessing; a gift." "You're right. But maybe if you live a certain way, if you find out what's really true, you really change, maybe it will come more often." Lisa says, "It's not just a word: grace. We have to be it...As best we can." Kate waits for Sergei but when he's silent, she says, "Good; let's try it."

In a few days they are to move to the Lincoln Center for final rehearsals. At a break, Kate announces members of her company will be background dancers, representing the cosmos, eternity. *Interweave styles* as they lay out the section of the dance where Lisa's character comforts the suffering Sergei. As he lies on the floor, she takes him into her arms. We see old photographs of Sergei as a young boy. He is being held gently by his mother in a *Pieta*-like pose. In another: Sergei's father, a humorless man in an army uniform. Kate wants Lisa to hold him like Mary in the *Pieta* and Sergei says, "No one holds you like that." Kate looks

at him and then at Lisa but nothing else is said.

That night Sergei teasingly tries to get Richard to cater to him. When he won't, Sergei say he bets Christopher would do things for him. Richard has reached his limit and yells at him to "just grow up." Sergei cries, "Everyone wants me to grow up. Be who you are! Fuck your grow up! I'm a dancer! This *is* who I am! You want me to stop this; stop that. You want me to die. You all want me to die! I don't want to die!" Richard, very gently: "I don't want you to die, Sergei." Getting off the table, Sergei trips and falls. Richard catches him and leans him back upward. He is exhausted, completely spent.

Sergei is lying in bed, very sad, looking at his sleeping partner. Richard awakes and sees him. "I want to feel that light, Richard. One last time." Richard takes the tearful dancer into his arms; he is held but still not consoled.

## ACT THREE

In Kate's studio Sergei's ankle is heavily wrapped but he is able to move. Kate says the wounds that eventually kill us are often built on our adaptations to earlier wounds. What caused Sergei's character the first wound? Too quickly, he says, "I broke my leg." Kate pauses as we linger on Sergei's face. Soon after, the rehearsal ends; he's limping.

The next day he and Richard go to Dr. Isaac's for his final shot. As Isaac leaves, Sergei grabs a handful of syringes and cortisone vials. Richard is furious. "What are you doing? Three shots, remember! What if you fall again? Who's going to pick you up if you're a cripple? What about me?" Sergei yells back, "I'm not going to fall. This is insurance. I'm doing this dance." Richard spits, "Fuck you, Sergei." Sergei mutters, "Fuck you, too," and walks out.

At the next rehearsal, Henry films as Kate wonders again about the first injury. "How did you break your leg?" Sergei doesn't answer. Kate says, "You know, this is about this abstraction called humanity but it's about an individual life, a real person, too. It's about you; it's about me. It's about us. Right?"

"And what if this ankle goes out on me again? How do I do the beginning sequence? I'm supposed to be this perfect child. All that stuff about potential. I'm supposed to be so graceful. What if I can't do it? What if I'm all fucked up!?"

Kate waits for him and then softly says, "We can do that part with your arms and hands. If there's something you can't dance, we'll take Henry's film and Erik will animate it. But we need to do it today. You said this dance should have nobility and you were right. I'll give you everything I have, Sergei. We'll find what you're looking for."

A long pause. Finally, he tells her after his mother died, his father, in a drunken rage, beat him very hard...with his fists. He tried to dodge but fell and broke his leg. When they took off the cast, he couldn't walk right for months. "I'd just started dancing. My mother would take me. I loved it so much. After he beat me I thought I'd never dance again. I still can't turn to my right side the way I can turn to my left."

Kate has film of a child in a Russian cemetery; it looks like the child's father is drunk. May they use it? Another pause, Sergei agrees. He tells her he has photographs of his mother when he was small and just beginning to dance. Kate can use them too. "And your father?" Sergei is very quiet. "I wonder... Maybe that's why he got drunk. I don't think he drank before that. He must have loved her. I told him I would never talk to him again and, mostly, I never did. I always thought he was a shit but maybe he was just freaked out. Maybe I've been wrong my whole life." He looks at Kate and finally, nods yes.

The rehearsal ends and Sergei leaves by himself. Walking slowly through the city, he stops at a bench, and looks off into the distance, thinking. He starts to do gentle rotations with his right leg and notices: can he move it a little further than he ever has? Maybe so.

At the office later, Richard is treating Sergei's ankle. Sergei tries to apologize but Richard won't talk to him. "Tell me more about your book." With his head down, Richard says, "I'm not telling you shit." Sergei replies, "I'm sorry, Richard. I really am. Tell me about your second step. Teach me about commitment." Richard looks up and, seeing he is serious, shakes his head and says with a sigh, "You drive me nuts, man."

A short montage: moving to Lincoln Center, meeting with various assistants, dress rehearsals and then: *March 7th*, the morning of the dance. In their condo, Sergei turns to Richard with the syringe and cortisone. "Aw shit, Sergei. What if I hit a nerve? You heard Isaacs. What if you really bust it and can't walk? You think I'm going to hold you while you flirt with the Christophers of the world?" Sergei says there won't be any more Christophers. Richard doesn't believe him. "We'll live on Ibiza or stay in New York if you want. I won't

cheat on you; I promise. Please, Richard. I have to do this dance. I have to." Very reluctantly, very slowly, Richard gives him the fourth shot.

Backstage, preparations continue; the auditorium fills. Henry and his crew make last minute adjustments to cameras and lights. The program sheet lists the new dance's title: Grace. Lisa and Sergei begin with one of their old favorites; the audience erupts. As they dance, Sergei comes down a little hard on his foot. Lisa, Kate and Richard, Dr. Isaacs in the auditorium, all notice. The piece ends and Sergei heads back to his dressing room, Richard a few steps behind. Sergei silently changes his costume. He goes back onstage; everyone noticing his step.

It is difficult but he gets through it. Afterwards, in the dressing room, Richard watches Sergei climb painfully on the table. There is a long moment as they look at each other. Finally, Richard takes out the cortisone and fills the syringe. Sergei follows every move. Richard turns to him and, at last, Sergei shakes his head. "No. Put it down. I can't run away." He looks in the mirror and smiles, "Shit, I can barely walk."

The light begins to change; we hear the first beat of the music that will accompany the performance. "You know I always thought grace just happened. Something would fly down and save me. It's a miracle but maybe it's here all the time. You can't see it because of all the other stuff you look at. Maybe I wasn't ready to see it until now. Kate thinks if you clean up your act – like in your book, if you live a certain way – you'll see it more often." Pause, repeating Lisa's words, mostly to himself: "'We have to be it. As best we can.'" Another smile: "Sounds like growing up to me." He looks at Richard, "What do you think?" Richard shrugs his shoulders as if to say, "That's above my pay-grade."

Sergei brings his leg up on a chair and Richard unwraps the bandage. The leg is just awful: a shocking dark purple and very swollen. Richard looks up at him – what do you want to do? Sergei sighs and says, "It's OK. No – it's good. Wrap it tight." Richard's hands fly as they expertly rewrap the ankle. Sergei climbs off the table and tests it. He looks at Richard: "Thank you. For everything." As Sergei leaves the dressing room, he turns back and grins: "Rock and roll." Richard smiles, "Rock and roll, brother."

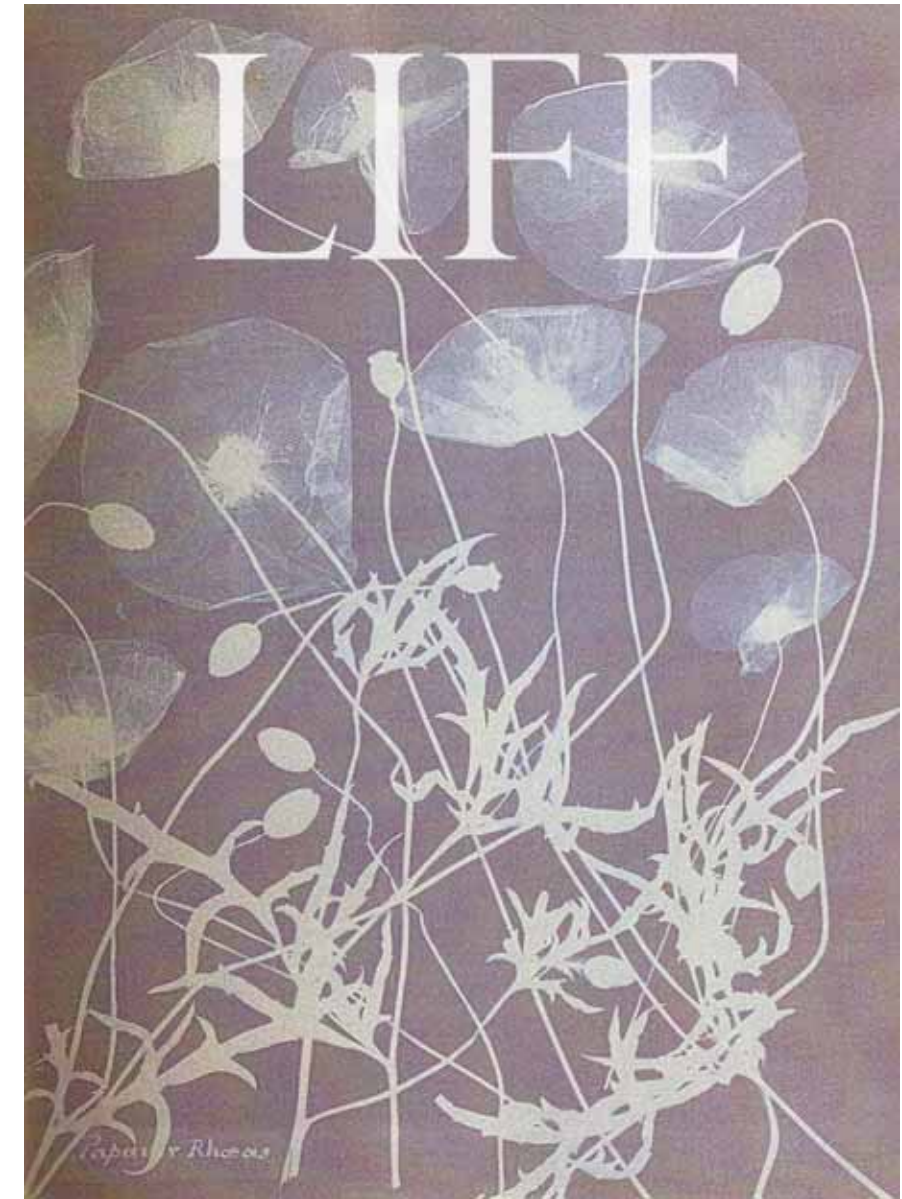
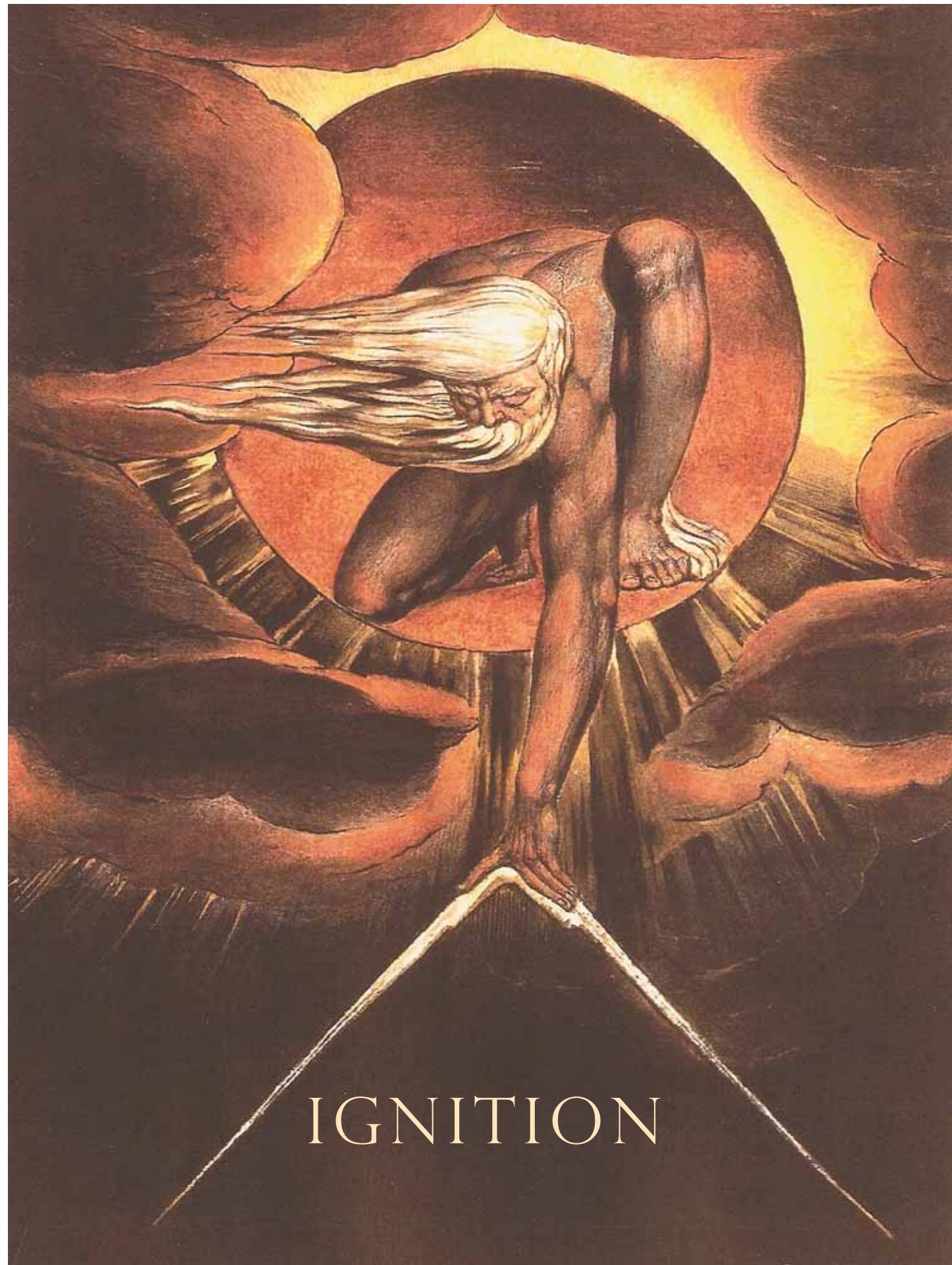
A sweet, tender smile is on his face as Sergei, with both gracefulness and the light of grace, maneuvers his way toward the stage. Where the theater in Phoenix had been dark

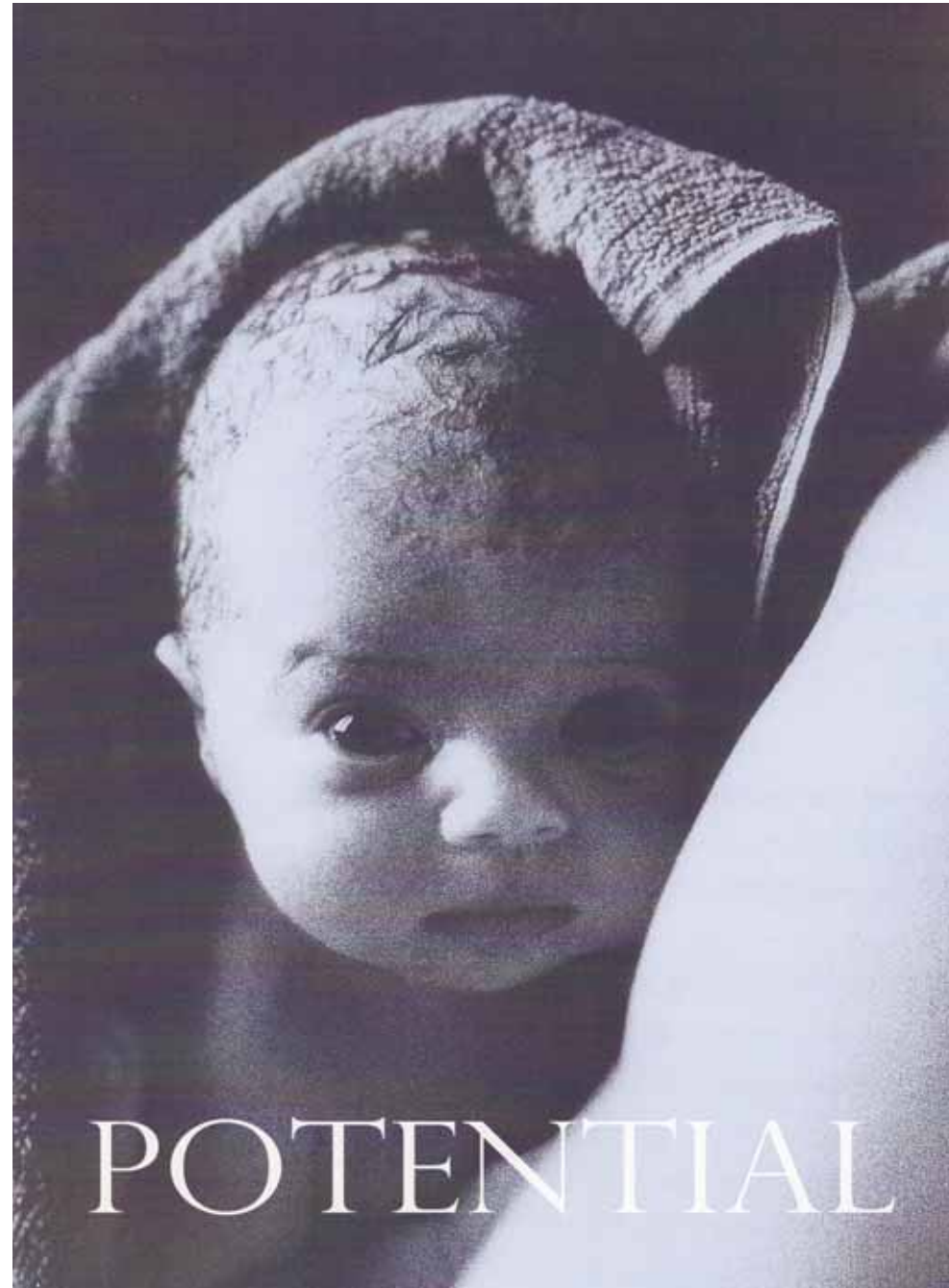
and jarring, here it is the direct opposite. Dancers, assistants, see him and, surprised, smile back. Two stage hands are moving a large prop. He gently swerves around them and nods his head, a gesture they return. In the wings he holds Kate's, and then Lisa's, eyes.

Kate's dancers, dressed in black, are in a circle around the stage. Large screens for the *images* of life, of joy, of suffering, of reaction, of change, hang behind them. A quiet, steady chant and then, arising out of the circle, is Lisa. We see her move fluidly, simply, beautifully. Sergei emerges into life and they begin to interact. On the screens, we see his hands and arms in motion. They are so lovely. And then, the sorrows begin. He reacts, he tightens, he hits back, disaster occurs. Lisa can only watch his suffering as he tries to push away the pain. But she is always there and as he reaches toward her, the light turns golden and a transformation begins. As they dance, we watch the light of eternity and the love that comes through it. The light gets brighter...then darker...then brighter once more...until, at its brightest, it begins to fade.

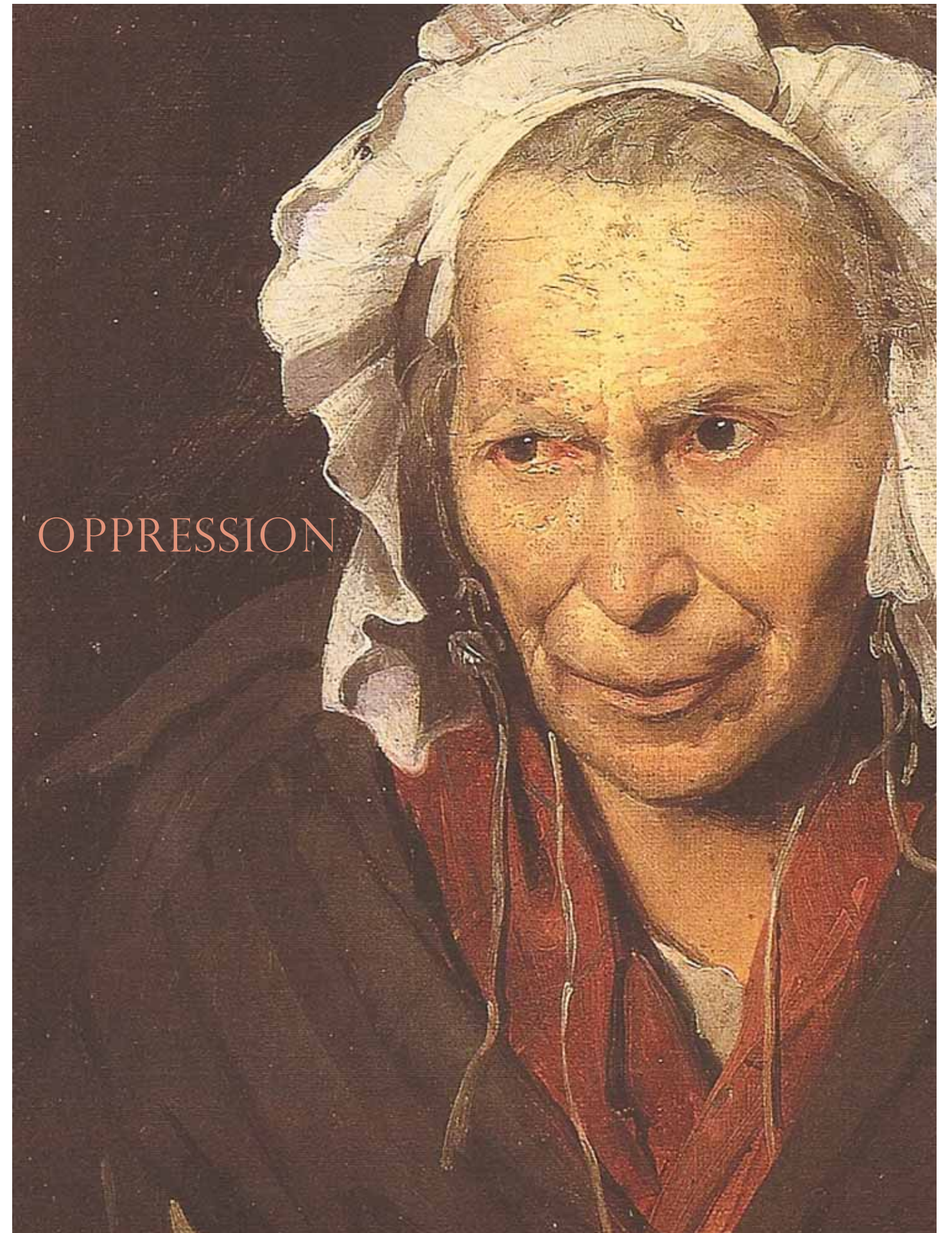
Transcendence.

## THE DANCE



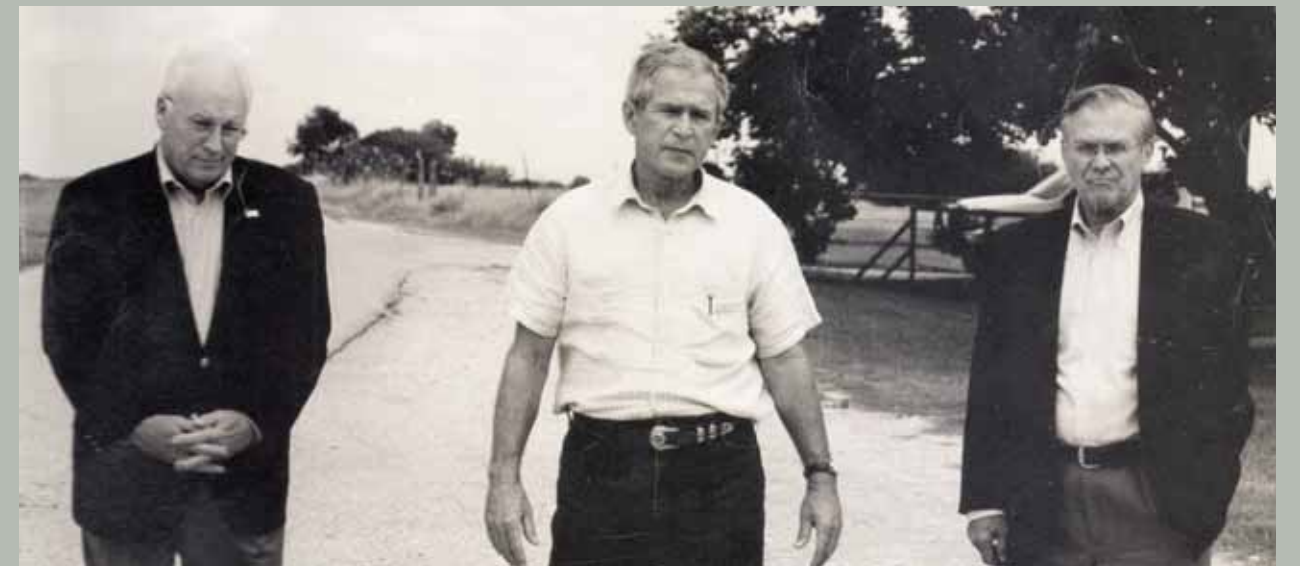


POTENTIAL

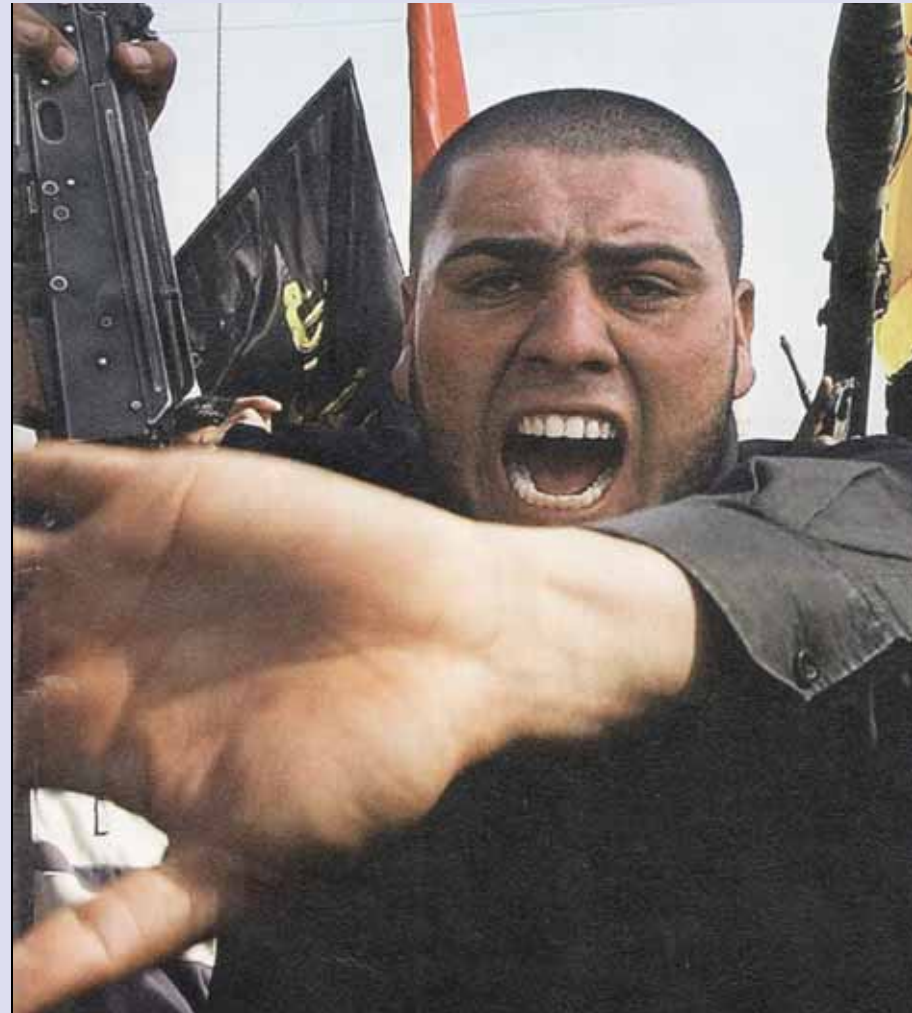


OPPRESSION

# REACTION



RIGIDIFICATION

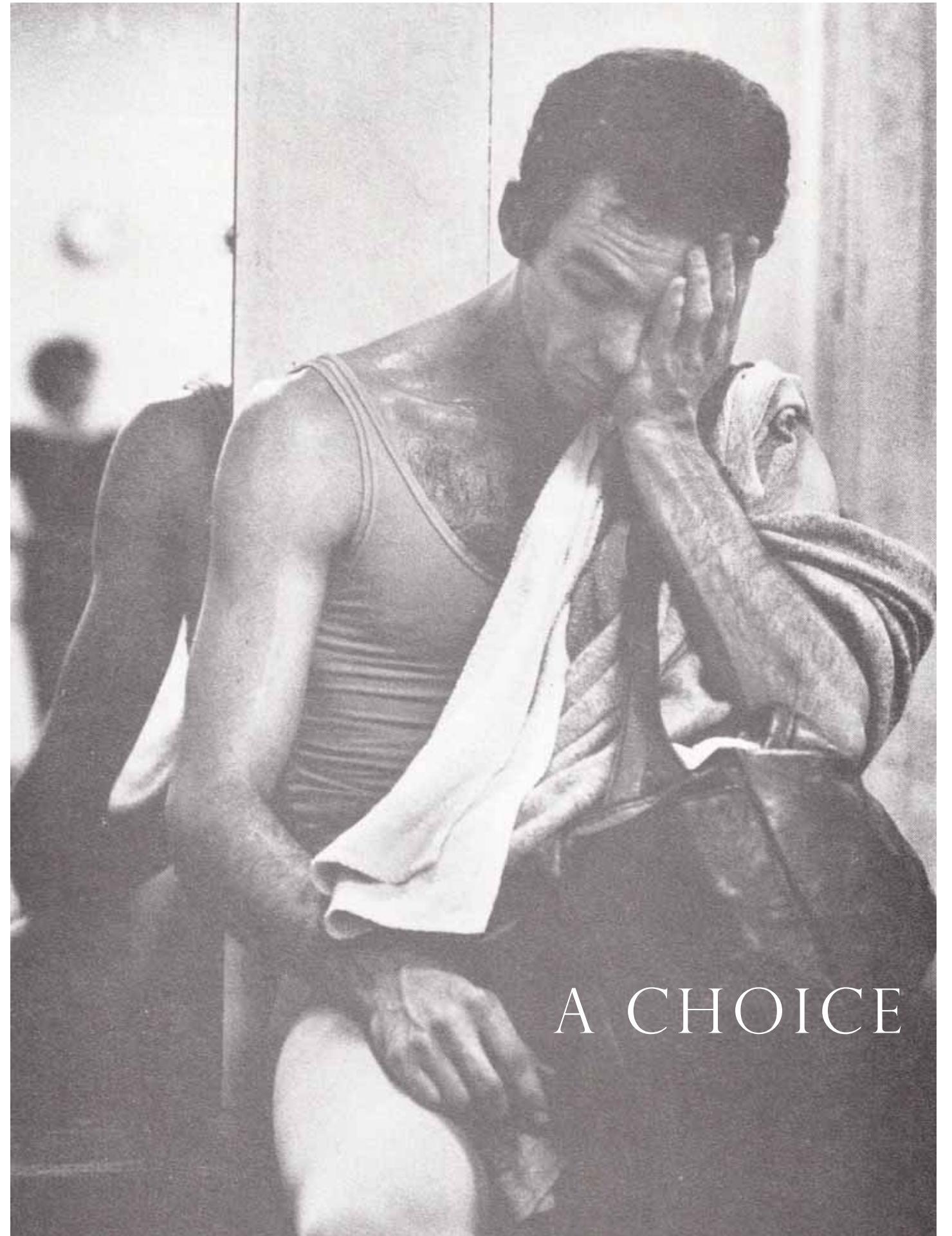


COUNTERREACTION

# DISASTER

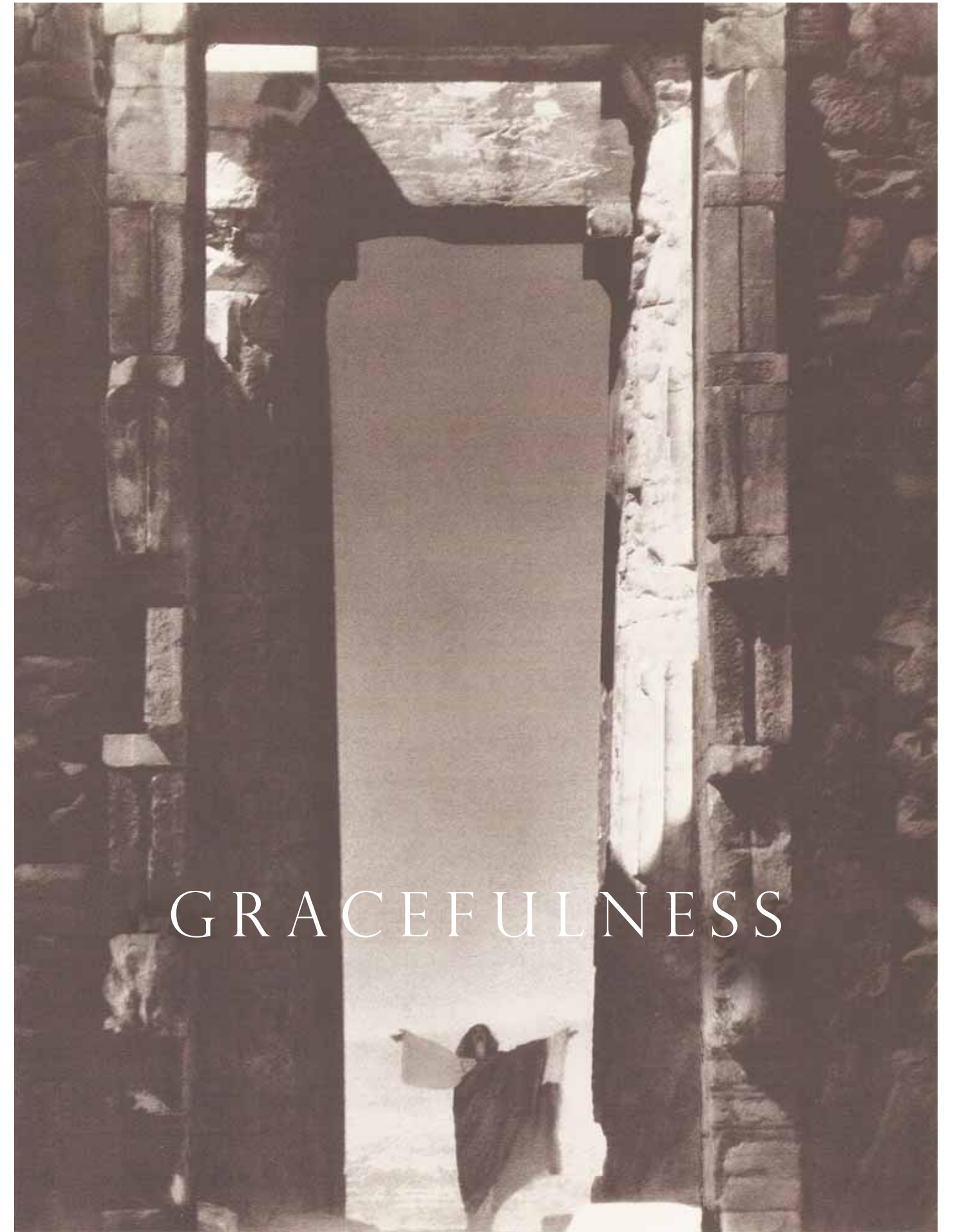


A CHANCE



A CHOICE

THE RIGHT ACTION



GRACEFULNESS



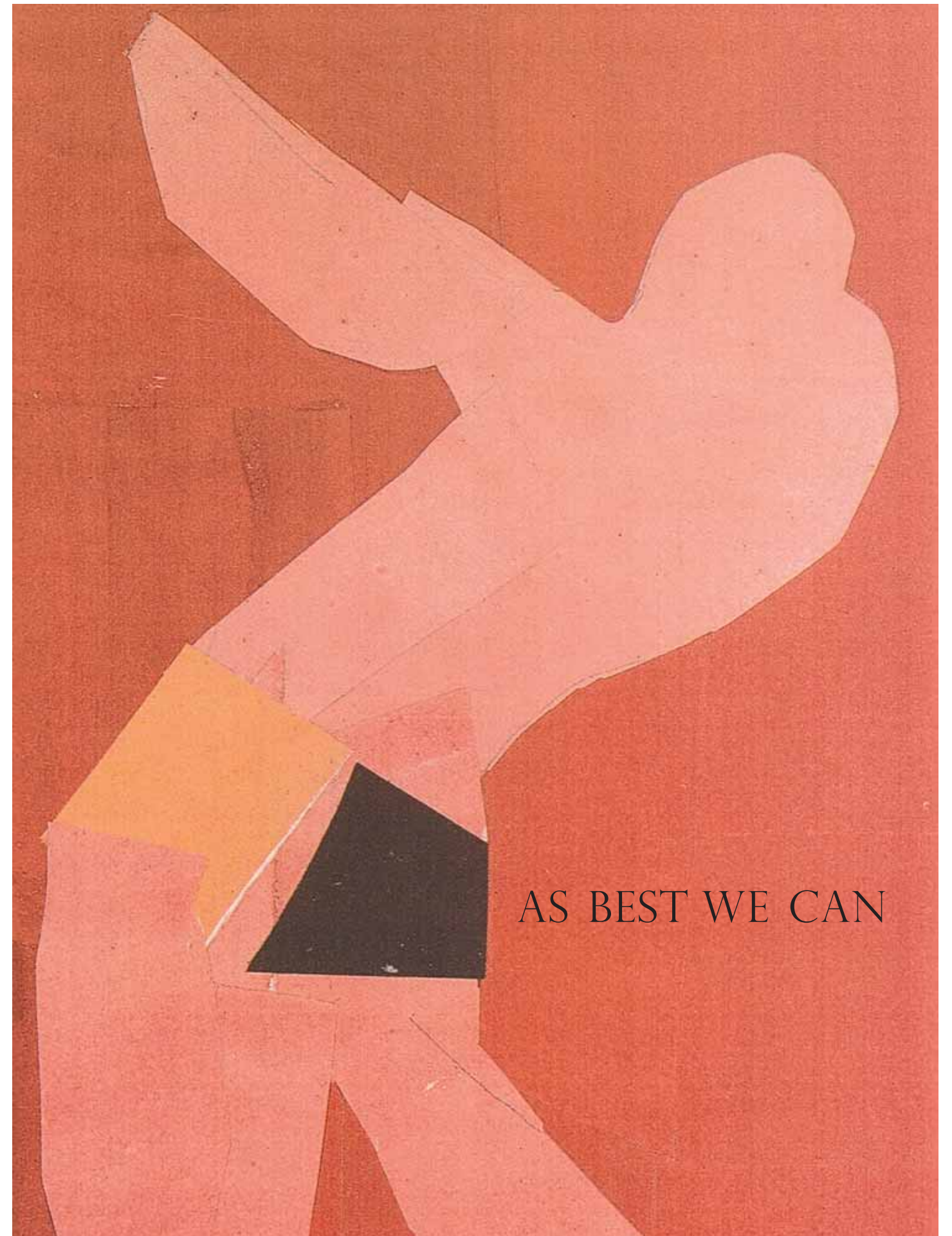
DEBILITATING INJURY



A DIFFERENT POSSIBILITY



COMMITMENT  
TO CHANGE



AS BEST WE CAN

