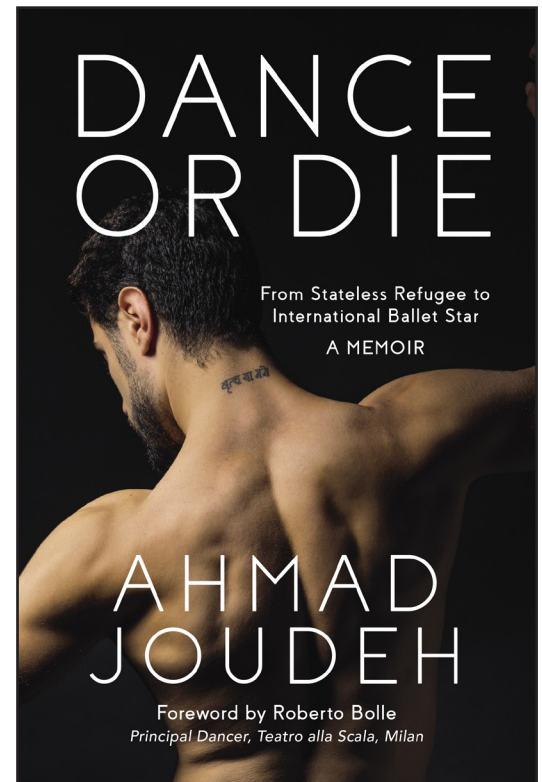


ART IS MY IDENTITY. DANCE IS MY PASSPORT.

About the Book

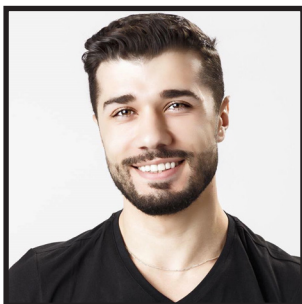
Young refugee Ahmad Joudeh grows up in Syria with dreams of becoming a dancer. Neither bombs nor family opposition keep him from taking classes, practicing hard, and ultimately finding success on a Lebanese reality show. But then ISIS threatens him with death if he continues dancing, his father kicks him out of the house, and the war around him intensifies. Recruited by one of Syria's top dance companies, Ahmad persists in his dream and gets a tattoo on his neck, right where the executioner's blade would fall, that says "Dance or Die."

This powerful autobiography follows Ahmad from Damascus to Beirut to Amsterdam, where he finds a home with one of Europe's top ballet troupes, and where he continues to fight for the human rights of refugees everywhere through his art, his activism, and his commitment to justice.



978-1-62354-513-0 HC

About the Author



Dancer and choreographer Ahmad Joudeh was born in Syria in 1990 and grew up as a stateless refugee in the Al-Yarmouk camp on the outskirts of Damascus. Amid the violence of the Syrian civil war, he pursued his dream as a dancer and appeared on the Middle Eastern version of *So You Think You Can Dance* before moving to Europe in 2016 to dance with the Dutch National Ballet. He lives in Amsterdam and performs throughout the world.

About Memoirs

- How does *Dance or Die* compare to other memoirs you've read?
- Why do you think Ahmad Joudeh chose to write this memoir?
- Discuss the book's structure and the author's use of language and writing style. How does the author draw the reader in and keep the reader engaged? Do you have a favorite line?
- Which scene sticks with you the most? What makes it stand out?
- The events of this book span a wide range of years; how does the author maintain pacing and narrative tension over this timeline?
- Think about the structure of the memoir. What decisions has the author made in shaping the story of his life? What is emphasized? What is left out?
- Family relationships are a key element of this memoir. Do any of Ahmad's relatives remind you of your own?

About Learning & Nonfiction

- Was there anything you looked up while reading the book? Where did you go for information?
- What is one question you'd like to ask the author?
- Consider the locations in which *Dance or Die* is set. How has your understanding of these places changed as you read the book?
- The author's life and family have been deeply affected by historical events, including the Arab-Israeli war and the Syrian civil war. What do you know about these events? Where did you learn about them? What are some events that have shaped your own family history?

About Dance & Expression

- *Dance or Die* is titled after a tattoo the author chose in defiance of death threats. Do you have a tattoo or an idea for a future tattoo with similar deep significance? Discuss the impact of choosing a tattoo or other body modification as opposed to, say, wearing commemorative jewelry or clothing.
- "Losing my spirit made me feel very lonely. I tried to call it back many times by dancing." (p. 42) What is the spirit the author is referring to in this passage? Have you ever felt similarly? Is there something you do in order to call on this feeling?
- Consider the scene on page 153 when Ahmad films a rooftop dance with the help of his sister Rawan. How would you describe the tone of this scene? How does the refrain "Let's see if I die now," affect your reading of this passage?
- Discuss the first meeting between Ahmad Joudeh, journalist Roozbeh Kaboly, and translator Emma. What is the significance of the dabka? What does the author have to say about this wonderfully coincidental moment?