

# No Questions While We Pray

by Liz Lydic



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Fariba Miller died the day after the Referential Oscillators' spring showcase. A sudden, unexpected death. Upon sending a soy candle to Fariba's family via Amazon, the devised dance group's remaining members researched 'aneurysm' and exchanged emails debating whether their website should reflect a statement on inclusivity for individuals with underlying but undiagnosed medical conditions.

"I can't believe we saw her just before it happened," said Board President and Tolerance Ambassador, Brooklyn. The group was gathered in the church hall they rented for weekly rehearsals.

"Yes! I didn't want to say anything, but I had this ... feeling during the show that she knew her death was imminent." Treasurer and Self-Awareness Administrator, Sabrina, counted ticket stubs.

"I was thinking the same thing," said Phoenix, the group's Accountability Committee Chair. "Like, she expressed her pending death through physical narrative."

"I'd like to respectfully add that by exiting from this life, she was releasing herself from the subjugation of male normative behaviors." Jude Regus spoke while organizing the showcase choreography notes, one of her responsibilities as Vice-President and External Oppressive Threats Task Force Leader.

At a distance from the other members, Secretary and Honesty Officer Santosha, opened her mouth to argue whether Fariba could have consciously known she would die shortly after the showcase, but Brooklyn spoke quickly.

"I think we should create a piece in her honor. We can do some of her choreography and —" her voice caught in an emotional tremble, and she covered her face.

The room was silent for a beat. Jude Regus' head dipped, the heels of her hands digging into her eyes. When she looked up, her smooth face was red. "That is an incredible idea of commemoration for an underheard spirit."

"No!" Santosha said. "No way. I'm not doing her choreography again." All heads turned toward where she was sorting scarves, ribbons and fabric scraps. "What? You guys, that choreography sucked."

Brooklyn re-found her voice. "Santosha, Fariba is dead! The woman has died, and you are being completely cruel about her."

"No. I'm saying her choreography was terrible. Her piece. She jumped from one sequence to the next with no transitions. It was nuts, trying to complete an eight count. And also? The staging was an afterthought — we were all bunched center for way too long." Santosha's mouth was tight.

Sabrina used the bottom of her oversized flowing pants to dab her eyes. "It's not right for you to say those things about Fariba. She was such a caring person. Remember the vegan lemon bars she always made us? It's not right!"

"Oh god, Sabrina, just because I didn't like her choreo doesn't mean I didn't like her."

"You can't separate the human from the art, Santosha. They run parallel—" "You can be mad if you want. I bet some of you guys agree. She had passion and confidence, but her work was always basic as hell."

Each woman sat up straight, posture easily culled from years in the rigid worlds of ballet and modern dance that they had since shunned in favor of the collaborative, improvisatory structure of devised performance. "Challenging the destructive hierarchical tendencies of western movement, Referential Oscillators strives to demonstrate neo-freedom through choreography that embraces the intersection of non-male-identifying expectations and assumptions," read the group's mission statement.

"Go on," said Jude Regus, her chin lifting in a gesture of curiosity.

"Her choreo wasn't like anyone else's. It was unfocused. Too many ideas in a single piece. Everything was rushed and sloppy." Santosha paused, surprised to be uninterrupted. "I want to do good work, so what? I don't want to be in a devised dance collab that loses its artistic responsibility."

At once, the group erupted. "Oh, you're saying we're not good now?" "Who are you?" "Your name literally means 'acceptance' in Sanskrit and you are being the opposite!" "No artistic responsibility? What the actual hell?" "I'm responsible as fuck! I have my own car. You don't even have a car."

When the commotion died down, Jude Regus blinked several times. "Santosha, it's our observation that you do not wish to continue to be part of this collective, due to your personal expectations and aspirations." Jude Regus looked around at the other members, who nodded.

Santosha's chin jutted out in surprise. "Wait, what? Did you just vote on me?" Her face flushed red as her voice raised.

"The choice is yours. We are not here to tell you to decide whether participating in this group is more significant to your spiritual life than the outcome of our artistic endeavors." Jude Regus raised a ringed pointer finger. "Only you decide that. We are an inclusive space for all curious experience-seekers."

Santosha looked around at the other dancers. She blinked several times, remembering when she had first shown up at the church five years ago, welcomed and encouraged to create. It was a vast change from the cattle call auditions that were part of her long-standing attempts to 'break into' the dance world. At some point, Santosha began to slip. The less her professional life thrived, the more pressure she put on Referential Oscillators to push her toward success.

So she made her apologies, lying about Fariba's death being a temporary escape from grounding. The meeting continued, as did the clean-up and tucking away of the performance, Fariba's last.

Santosha, on her way to the church the next Tuesday, crossed a busy street, hyper-aware of the movements of other humans. Her mind went to Fariba's offensive choreography: the frantic, unfinished movements, disordered amidst the rest of the showcase. Santosha replayed the chaos of the piece over and over in her mind, looping images of exaggerating motions that mugged and fell short of completion in limited counts of eight. The street's abundance of sound and smells added to her anarchy, whiffs and voices coming and going with unsubstantial time to process. In this spiral, she arrived at the church and lingered at the door for several beats before deciding to continue on.

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