

THE CREATURE IN MY NECK

by TORANJ NASIRI



I am sitting in the *Wartezimmer* of a *Neurologiepraxis*, surrounded by elderly patients waiting on a regular weekday. I should be at work, but instead, I'm here for yet another doctor's appointment. (I'd guess I've spent half of my 27 years in waiting rooms.) For my neck pain of course. *Nackenschmerzen*, *Gardan Dard* - by now, I know all the vocabulary related to neck orthopedics in multiple languages. But a neurologist? That's a new adventure for me.

This is uncharted territory, a little exciting even.

I am reading *Life Ceremony* by Sayaka Murata while waiting, making the experience even more ominous. The white-haired couple who have been staring at me strangely while I scribbled furiously on the back of a praxis brochure have just been called in. Will I still be here, sitting in a waiting room when I am 72, still trying to figure out why I always have this pain in my neck?

"It's nothing," everyone says. My orthopedist in Iran used to tell my dad, "Toranj has anxiety problems. That's why she's in pain." Does that mean I haven't been un-anxious for even a single day in the past four years? It's always there. It's here now - in my wrist. Yes, it moves at times. It crawls into my hand. Confuses me. Right now, it fights me, fights me while I try to write. It has always fought to stop me from living.

I have often surrendered, lain in bed for months, not going out unless forced to. I haven't washed dishes. I have thought of killing myself or killing the creature in my neck - the thing that has ruptured my life. Does it ever weaken? Does it ever stop using me as a host? Does it ever long for a host body less tortured?

Maybe the creature likes a raptured body, a body tired under years of pain. Ambiguous and alien pain -the kind people eventually think you're lying about. A pain so consistent and so undiagnosable you begin to doubt your own sanity. People will think you're just a lazy, useless set of limbs. No one believes your pain. No one ever believes I have a creature crawling under my skin. Maybe because they cannot feel it move.

A young person just walked in. Maybe I'm not the only young person struggling with chronic pain. Maybe it's not that bad. Maybe it *is* all in my head.

Maybe I love it.