

## The Unwanted Familiar

By Sarah Gurley-Green

It bores into the left side of her head. Her focus is drawn to it as if by magnetism. Without her being aware, the pain pulls her inward. Her world is inside her head now. Outside she hears her children living their lives without her. It matters to her, but does not affect her. Her son plays the piano quietly; her daughter pulls open her drawers, choosing clothes for school taking advantage of the lack of her mother's veto. The door opens and she can feel the need of her child without opening her eyes. He backs away from her bedside and closes the door silently. They live muted lives.

She hears her husband awkwardly being both mother and father. She imagines herself calling to him to remind the children of their lunches, to brush their hair, to gather their homework, but she does not. She cannot speak; the inside-world of her pain dominates now; it nestles inside her needing her attention. A viscous layer of pain separates her, distorting the world outside. She feels the weight of her head on the pillow, the chink of light burning through her closed eyelids. She knows that she should get up to take her medicine, but it has hold of her now, it is too late to try to kill it.

Did the pain curl around in her skull like a worm before she woke? Does the pain dwell inside her, waiting for a moment to ooze its poison? She feels her husband looking down at her, he puts the well-worn stainless-steel bowl on the bed beside her and he retreats knowing there is no place for him anymore. She is with the dreaded familiar, the hated intimate.

The house is quiet, the children gone to school, her husband to work. Her own work postponed, multiplying as she rocks gently, tears roll down her face and into her ears. Another day consumed. She waits, praying for an end, any end.

She dreams about a small, dusty museum in Mexico. Glass cases full of skulls. They all had holes in them. In the ancient treatment of trepanning, holes were drilled and hammered into the skull to let the pain and evil spirits out. She smiles at those ivory colored skulls, imagines the drilling, finally releasing the fat toxic worm.

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