

# Guilt

by Leona Gom

Your mother giving you a set of dishes  
and all you said was but I move around  
so much and you can never forget  
her hurt face turning away.

The best friend you accused of  
flirting with your boyfriend when  
all the time you knew it was him  
you just couldn't face it.

The argument with your father about  
not having seen his damned magazines  
then finding it in your room  
and never admitting it.

Telling your office mate you  
agreed with her motion then  
voting with the others after all.

Thousands of them, little knots  
you can't shake loose from your memory.

It's too late now to say you're sorry.

They contract along your nerves  
to consciousness, whenever you think  
you are not a bad person, there  
they come, little lumps of guilt  
making their daily rounds,  
like doctors, keeping you sick.

**Commented [MK1]:** Guilt is a definition poem, such that, *Guilt*, begins with a keyword - "guilt," and proceeds to describe situations that contribute to feelings of the particular keyword

**Commented [MK2]:** Hurtful—but one that you are able to walk away from

**Commented [MK3]:** She is clearly feeling guilt about this incident, with the image of her mother's hurt face imprinted in her mind.

**Commented [MK4]:** Another example of "guilt"—but one that the speaker was able to justify to herself, but not openly admit

**Commented [MK5]:** Again, a minor lie that is somewhat trivial to those around her, but one that fills her with remorse.

**Commented [MK6]:** Narrator was able to walk away from these "small" lies/acts of betrayal. Does the guilt remain?

**Commented [MK7]:** These small indiscretions are creating knots inside—the body is the repository for her lies—wonderful imagery.

**Commented [MK8]:** Again, imagery helps to show how deep rooted the narrator's guilt is. Also a metaphor, comparing the burden of guilt to lumps like tumors growing in the body

**Commented [MK9]:** Imagery—the physical self is racked with guilt—there is no sense of control over it

**Commented [MK10]:** The conscious mind tries to rationalize the speakers feelings of guilt

**Commented [MK11]:** Reference to cancer—it is a terminal illness..."keeping you sick" A hopeless state.

**Commented [MK12]:** Personification/Simile: lumps of guilt are like the doctors that keep you sick.

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TASK: Discuss the use of contrast in the poem "Guilt"

## Sample Analysis Paragraph

Straightforward examples of guilt, in the first stanza of Gom's poem, "Guilt," are contrasted with its complex effects of guilt in the second stanza. In the beginning, although the speaker is clearly feeling some guilt about what she has done to the people in her life, she is able to walk away from each individual incident. She knows that she has been wrong: she says she can "never forget/her [mother's] hurt face turning away"(4), and she finds her father's missing "damned magazine"(10) in her room. All the same, she never admits guilt or apologizes. The guilt in each example is brief and fleeting, and easy to get over. The power of these examples is that the reader can see herself in one or more of them; they are all common and often repeated.

The complexity of the guilt is revealed in the way the speaker experiences it well after the events are over. Many people would brush off similar interactions, and never think of them again. Each individual incident in the first stanza is one that could potentially be forgotten, but none is, and they turn themselves into the "little knots" (16) that never seem to leave her; in fact, they add to one another until there are "thousands of them" (16). So

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begins a stanza laden with imagery and metaphor that compares the accumulation of guilt—the knots that become lumps—to malignancy. The language in the second stanza is heavy; there are no anecdotes, there is no narration. It is reflective and yet somehow hopeless in the sense that the guilt is a terminal illness, one that will “[keep] her sick”(24) for as long as she lives; comparing the guilt to a doctor that intends on keeping you ill. The seemingly simple examples of everyday hurtful events has become a devastating disease.