Hikikomori: Term used in Japan to refer to teenagers who lock themselves in their room, making no attempt to connect with the outside world.

I am a psychiatrist and the other day I encountered a case which sent a chill down my spine. Sometime ago a new family moved in my neighbourhood; a couple in their sixties and their son, who was about 30 years-old. The son was a so-called hikikomori\* and was seldom seen outside his home. Naturally I couldn't ask the family directly but it was obvious that they had moved to the new place to escape from the social stigma.

Days had passed and the son went out less and less until he would not leave the house at all. He was now a complete hikikomori. Every night the mother was heard screaming at him in his bedroom. When I sometimes chanced to meet the mother she greeted me with a smile but she always looked pale and haggard.

A half year had passed since I last caught a glimpse of the son when his father came to me and said, "could I ask you to visit us tomorrow?" I had never been involved with them personally or as a doctor but since we were neighbours and neighbours were supposed to help each other, I agreed to come.

The next day when I visited them both father and mother welcomed me at the door. "Please, come this way," the mother said as she lead the way to her son's room. When we came to the front of the room the mother suddenly shouted, "I'm going to open the door!" As soon as she burst in she shrieked, "why are you still sleeping? Get up!" She tore the duvet off the bed. I saw what was lying there and was struck dumb with disbelief. There was only one faceless, unclothed mannequin lying on the bed. Then the father told me, "the person I want you to see is my wife, who can not bear to accept the reality."