

NO TRACE LEFT

My patient got up to leave the room at the end of the consultation. Instead of heading towards the door, she walked over to the examination couch and ran her hands over the leather upholstery, peering intently, as if searching for something.

"What are you looking for?" I asked.

"Where are the marks left by my brother?" she asked.

Immediately, I understood and felt bad for her. It happened nine years ago at the exact spot where she was now standing; I remembered it as if it were just yesterday.

Her late brother, who was 23 years old at that time, stepped into my office in the middle of a very severe asthma attack. As his airways began to close, he gasped desperately for air. Like the *Incredible Hulk*, he tore open his shirt as he started to suffocate, sending his shirt buttons flying everywhere, and he clawed at the upholstery of my examination couch, leaving long parallel scratches on the leather. It was a very dramatic and frightening scene. Cold sweat beaded on my forehead, as I feared the young man was going to expire in front of my eyes before the ambulance could arrive.

"Stay with me, stay with me," I pleaded, and in my desperation I said, "Open, please open!" as if his airways could hear me and obey.

Miraculously, I managed to keep him alive till the ambulance arrived, pumping him with every emergency drug at my disposal. He was subsequently discharged from the hospital. Unfortunately, he passed away two years later from another attack in his own home before he could be attended to.

I can't remember how his older sister came to know about the scratches that her late brother left on my couch, but she was looking for them now. I had to explain apologetically that the couch had gotten so grungy and worn that I had had it reupholstered recently, removing all traces of him. ♦

WHERE ARE THE MARKS LEFT BY MY BROTHER?

she asked.

PROFILE



TEXT BY

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