

Vinyl Cushion

Category: The Waiting Room

written by Jack Coulehan | April 22, 2016

I arrive in the waiting room nearly a half hour early and confirm my existence with two insurance cards and a questionnaire that asks me yet again to list my illnesses, allergies, and medications. Most seats are occupied by old people, older than me. Or maybe the same age. It's difficult to say who is with whom because those who are not making love to their cell phones are paging through *OK!*, *People* and *Star*. Nobody's eyes are on anyone.

I sit. I wish everyone in the room knew that I am a doctor and, therefore, special. I wish they could understand that I am unaccustomed to waiting. It is almost a mistake, a mere misunderstanding, that I find myself on this side of the door that leads to the inner sanctum. I wish a colleague would come out and ask my opinion. I'm surprised that none of my fellow sitters looks at me. I don't even have a cell phone to excuse me from paying attention.

Next to me, an empty chair. In the vinyl is a faint impression of the former occupant's back and butt. Had the person been called in to see the doctor just before I arrived? I touch the vinyl and imagine it still warm. Maybe the warmth accumulated because the patient sat there for such a long time. Maybe he was seething with anxiety over what the doctor would say, or how his life might soon completely change. He had so much anxiety that it seeped into the vinyl cushions and is now slowly being released—and affecting me. Foolish for *me* to feel anxiety. If these other patients only knew how much *I* know about medicine!

Several magazines lie on the table between me and my absent companion. The top one is open, its pages face down. The cover promises to reveal intimate secrets about men and women whose names I don't recognize. I wonder if my friend was genuinely interested in learning these secrets, or was just paging through to distract his thoughts. He must have been called as he was looking at this particular article. Startled, he put the magazine down and rushed off without closing it. I can imagine his sinking feeling as he walked toward the inner door. His hands might have been cold and clammy, like mine, despite this overheated room. I pick up the magazine to discover the last thing my fellow patient read—a double-page spread, SEVEN EASY STEPS TO A HAPPY LIFE.

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