

“The Waiting Room” by Maria Anastasia Corkery

How long have I sat here?

There is the clinking sound of red and blue blocks as they slide down the ring and collide. The turning of a page lets out a rustle. I look around. There are about ten chairs in the room. A grey table is in the middle with two piles of magazines. They have pretty houses on the top covers. The boy in the corner plays with the toy, a bead maze, pushing the wooden blocks one after another around the rings of infinity.

Men are scattered in the chairs, some with magazines open. There is no clock. The door to go through is closed, its sign deters action. Big black print letters order, “see front desk before admittance.” The front desk is abandoned, separated from us with its white-washed bordered window. There is a golden service bell, its top is suspended, waiting to be pressed. The wall beside the desk is littered with pamphlets: “Taking the Next Steps: The Right Palliative Care Program for You.”

Someone sets his magazine down. He gets up to ring the bell. No one comes. The man sits back down. The rest of us steal looks at him. He’ll get used to it. He is close to my age, maybe a little younger. Like me, he wears a black suit. The man beside me stops his tapping and reaches for a magazine. Someone new comes through the entrance doors. He looks around and takes a seat, his suit creasing immediately. Eventually, he’ll ring the bell too.

My feet are now still, my suit definitively wrinkled. I have rung the bell. If I try hard, I can even remember turning the wooden blocks, a distant memory, round and round the ring. But now I sit, my magazine closed. I wait.