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poem

At the Clinic

Neil Ferguson

In the waiting area between Phlebotomy
and Doctor Abromovitch's Clinic, among
strangers who have something in common,
observe the electronic queue-machine
click 90, 91, 92 one digit at a time
ad infinitum. Here the space between past
and future is almost visible to the naked eye.
Twiddle your thumbs. No point getting anxious.
Your number will be up in due course.

Stare at the walls, at the NHS posters'
advice on smoking, HIV, arthritis;
or at the TV – Richard & Judy Live
with the sound down. Or else peruse
the copy of *The Sun* left on a chair
by someone who has gone before you,
barely glancing at the improbable tits
of Tina from Tyneside. Scandal, rape,
murder, the War – it's a fucking mess,
but not, while you're here, your business.

It's reassuring to be in this dull lull
in your life, even if it's an antechamber
to something worse. Soon enough
the gent in the striped shirt, cufflinks,
bow-tie, with a foreign-sounding name,
will greet you and shake your hand
and like an understanding headmaster
convey with courteous matter-of-factness
the results from your last appointment,
after which everything will be different.

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