

## First Year

By Anna Harvey Bluemel

*After "Sanity" by Caroline Bird*

I demonstrate empathy. Sign a prescription.  
I put my ear to a patient's mouth and—nothing.  
I decipher handwritten notes. Place a cannula.  
Take blood. I put my ear to the lip of a  
water heater—nothing. Stop drinking so much  
Diet Coke. Jog. I respond to the buzz of the  
ward's double doors, Hello?—no answer.  
I manage sepsis on my own. Run a gas.  
Organize invasive investigations. Refer. Have a  
referral declined. Learn to use a landline  
phone. Reflect. Consider buying an  
expensive pair of scrubs. I put the bell of my  
stethoscope right up to a dead man's chest—  
Scan. Get a drastic haircut. Plead with a  
printer to eject its wares. Look at a set of results  
and recognize catastrophe. Palpate.  
Dream of neat stitches stacking in rows.  
I put my finger on my own pulse—speak to me!  
The quiet thrum screams vitality.  
I never meet the dead again. Or dream  
of embroidery. The lucid specters that  
accompany night shifts. I offer cups of tea.  
Make toast. Learn a profound lesson  
about family relationships. Assess.  
No singing pager. No oxygen tubing hissing  
desperate lungfuls. My mission is over.  
The hospital corridors have sutured me shut.

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