

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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