Words Across the Adams Street Bridge by Ann Sutera Botash

Doors swing and garage air follows me into the hospital walkway bridge. I inhale pre-morning minutes; winter breath and heated air unite inside this life-sized spacer, inside this connecting corridor.

A few yards ahead, a student risks a pile-up, managing his phone, pulling out earbuds, cramming wires amongst notecards, pens, and probably a granola bar, inside his white coat pocket. Heart sounds memorized, a stethoscope jangles around his neck.

Today's dream, to practice listening to hearts, will need to adjust:

Rock a baby to sleep, change a wet diaper, and remember, next time, to warm that gleaming metal.

Mid-bridge, a window frames the slope of traffic on our road below. Cars lurch and teeter at the Adams Street light; the spot my brother once balanced the clutch,

That year, the hostage crises rose in news with each full moon, to lull us, over and over. Before Sally Ride went to space, or IBM launched home computers; no one had yet demanded *tear down that wall*. Eighties pop rattled tinny speakers, repeating, *Imagine all the People, living for today*.

Ahead now, the student shifts his backpack and eyes his phone again. Pings tremor news reports and a friend texts, "Are you around?" Words push. He walks. He scrolls, swipes, deletes: refugee crises, suicide bombers, mass shootings, daily deals, today's top recipe, You-Tube babies and the bothersome phantom vibes. He tracks right to join the march of unzipped coats and boots while scrubs and smiles pass left. Thumbs rouse with sunrise and fingers warm to Starbucks sleeves.

I pull my gloves, unwind my scarf, and search oncoming faces. A night-shift nurse crosses paths with me. "Hello," Chuck says, like old-times in residency, the world asleep;

we restarted IVs, shared fever checks, and midnight conversation where we spoke ordinary words.

Comfort. Persuade. Explain.

Break bad news. Shed light,
and sometimes tears.

Words heal.
Words spill,
like time,
carrying what matters most-Energy.
Action in compassion,
trust in giving,
answers in the asked.
The cut of the voiceless velar plosive
and of meaningful silence
punctuates.

Residents leaving in cranberry garb flock like scarlet ibis, "How was your night?" a pleasantry passes to pale shadows just emerging under eyes. I wave to Meg, and make a mental note to schedule our next advising meeting.

The student slows, staring right-- the city.

Some stop to trace his gaze, under route 81, toward the baby-pink ski parka of the *dollar-for-the-bus* lady. She pleads as she knocks with her dry cracked hands on car windows of hospital workers turning up this way. Her name is words. She carries words. Homeless Please Help God Bless.

Words hurt. Spare change does not warm her cardboard.

A guy sets a fan to dry soaked carpet where a sideswipe caused a spill. A trotting woman rummages for keys, hurrying home before the school bus comes. Two visitors shuffle by, with swollen eyes and elbows entwined to steady each. We move along. Sunlight spots a face, a man in a wheelchair stops for directions and the student points to show the way. Conjured words connect our thoughts.

Under the bridge a new engine revs.
Each turn of the motor, like my brother's tire, inspiring words, not snow, to move us back outside through a widening gap.
Be yourself. Roll-up some sleeve.
Use words to connect check boxes; spell stories to explain why this disease.

The student will friend off-line, on ground, and we will climb amongst chain of being while sunrays bend around outside to floodlight the violence of poverty. "We are here," we will declare.

Words push. Words connect. Words heal. Shoulders and thoughts brush between doors.