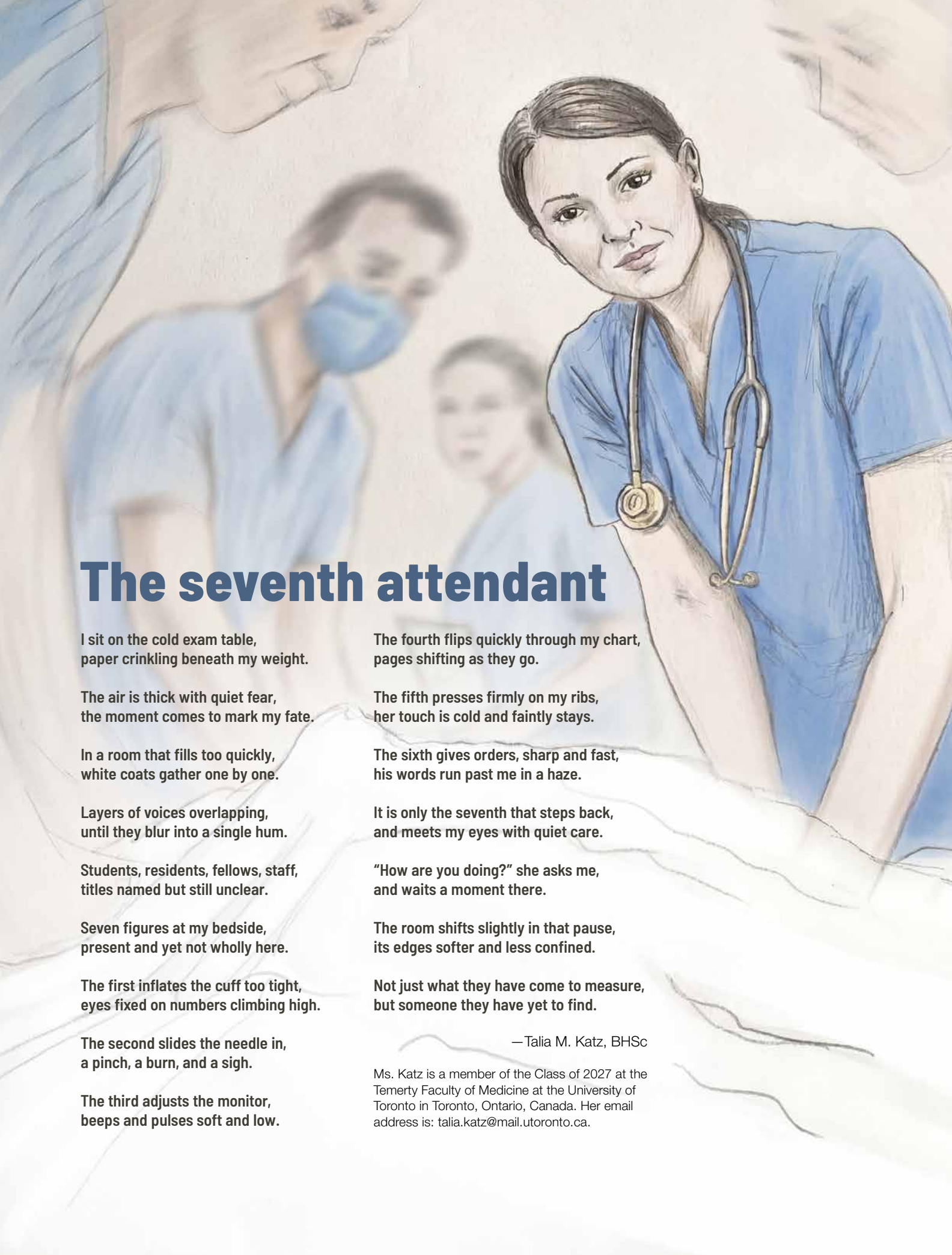




The seventh attendant

I sit on the cold exam table,
paper crinkling beneath my weight.

The air is thick with quiet fear,
the moment comes to mark my fate.

In a room that fills too quickly,
white coats gather one by one.

Layers of voices overlapping,
until they blur into a single hum.

Students, residents, fellows, staff,
titles named but still unclear.

Seven figures at my bedside,
present and yet not wholly here.

The first inflates the cuff too tight,
eyes fixed on numbers climbing high.

The second slides the needle in,
a pinch, a burn, and a sigh.

The third adjusts the monitor,
beeps and pulses soft and low.

The fourth flips quickly through my chart,
pages shifting as they go.

The fifth presses firmly on my ribs,
her touch is cold and faintly stays.

The sixth gives orders, sharp and fast,
his words run past me in a haze.

It is only the seventh that steps back,
and meets my eyes with quiet care.

"How are you doing?" she asks me,
and waits a moment there.

The room shifts slightly in that pause,
its edges softer and less confined.

Not just what they have come to measure,
but someone they have yet to find.

— Talia M. Katz, BHSc

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