



# tabula rasa.

Vanderbilt University  
School of Medicine

Volume XVII  
2024-2025



# tabula rasa

*Tabula Rasa*, Latin for “blank slate,” is Vanderbilt University School of Medicine’s journal of medical humanities. *Tabula Rasa* is dedicated to the idea that the media of pixels, paint, pen, and paper lend individuals the means with which to explore the nature of humanity and enhance their medical experience. The journal is published annually and invites submissions of original poetry, essays, short stories, interviews, artwork, and photography from medical students, residents, faculty, alumni, patients, and members of the greater Nashville community.



## A Note from the Editors:

A common thread for Tabula Rasa works this year is vitality: stories of growth, reflection, solidarity, and remembrance as we all interface with medicine and the everchanging journey of life. Art imitates life, and leafing through the pages of this year's issue demonstrates a bounty of experiences, narratives, and inspirations.

Tabula Rasa is a collective tapestry crafted by the unique contributions of many different artists and writers. Art reminds us of the importance of compassion and connection especially in times of change and turmoil. Through the sharing of these pieces, we hope you—the reader—will become an important part of this story as well.

Thanks to a dedicated team of editors and artists that have shared their talents, we are honored to present the 2025 edition of Tabula Rasa. We are grateful we can carry forward the important tradition of making space for art, introspection, and creative expression amongst our peers, fellow students, teachers, and VUMC community. We hope this year's vibrant collection of works brings a little slice of creativity and joy into your world.

Sincerely,

Two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is 'Jazmyn' and the second is 'Ankita'.

Jazmyn Ayers & Ankita Chatterjee  
Tabula Rasa Editors In Chief 2024-2025



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*With special thanks to Amy Fleming, MD, Sarah Woodall, the Vanderbilt Medical School Alumni Association, and the Vanderbilt Medical School Administration for their continued and dedicated support of the medical humanities.*

The works published in this journal were selected by medical students at Vanderbilt University based on artistic and literary merit. They do not reflect the views of Vanderbilt University or Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

To contact the editorial staff or submit creative work, email [postcallanthology@gmail.com](mailto:postcallanthology@gmail.com).





**Cover Art:**  
**A Shared Soil**  
*by Wasila Sun*

## **Editors' Picks**

### **Art/Photography**

**ic434**

*Katherine Brown*

**Portrait of Henry Bence Jones**

*Lealani Acosta*

### **Poetry**

***Waiting to Burn***

*Wasila Sun*

***House of Her Own***

*Laasya Challa*

### **Prose**

**Aura**

*Joshua Betts*



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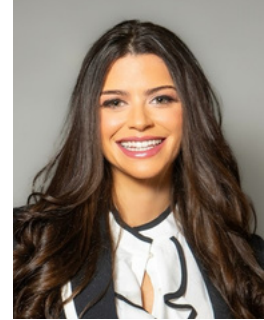
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# Breaking bad news

Lizzy Goldberg



**Elizabeth Goldberg, MD, PhD** is an intern in internal medicine and a member of the Physician Scientist Training Program in Hematology/Oncology. In her spare time, she finds drawing to be the best coping mechanism to reflect on memorable and challenging patient interactions.

# The Seasoned Doctor

Kylie Fletcher

*A cry sounds loud and footsteps pound on tile  
The doc takes stock, instructs, and calms a girl  
She skilf ly guides and soon out glides a child  
Once patted dry in mom's arms soon does curl*

*Another cry, the doctor knocks on door  
A daughter weeps, her dad lies cold and still  
Accepts doc's hand but eyes glaze at the floor  
She savors mem'ries now, against the chill*

*And in the floor above a bell doth ring.  
Their flowing tears of joy for cancer's cure  
But next door only news of suffering.  
All in one place, all in one day. Endure—*

*Life, death, and hurt and peace. How can it be?  
All seasons of a life a doctor sees.*



**Kylie Fletcher** is a 2025 graduate of Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. As a Vanderbilt medical student, Kylie was involved with Shade Tree Clinic, earned a certificate in Biomedical Ethics, and completed a research year in Oncology. She will complete a preliminary year of Internal Medicine at VUMC in 2025–2026.

# Aura

Joshua Betts

To:

CareUnited Health Insurance

19:24 St. Matthew Rd

New York, New York, 10026

Attn: Appeals Department

Subject: Appeal for Prior Authorization Denial – Policy Number: XX5678X

To Whom It May Concern:

I am reaching out to formally challenge the denial of the prior authorization request for intranasal sumatriptan for myself. This denial, received on [redacted] overlooks critical aspects of my medical needs and the explicit recommendations from my physician.

As a medical student, my migraines significantly impact my academic and clinical performance. The severe pain and nausea associated with my migraines often prevent me from attending lectures, seeing patients, or presenting in class. Additionally, the visual aura that often accompanies my migraines creates a blind spot that significantly impairs my vision, causing significant difficulty when reading text. Even without the pain, the nausea severely impacts my ability to study, read patient notes, and take exams. Further, many of my migraine attacks occur at night, disrupting my sleep and extended time looking at text, are often unavoidable given the little control I have over the timing and duration of my attacks during clinical rotations.

Your recommendation of [redacted] medications from your approved generic list, all of which are oral, is not reasonable. As noted by my doctor, nausea and vomiting are two of my main migraine symptoms. Oral abortives typically result in my vomiting up the medication before it can take effect. I would not suffer from the same limitations as a pill and would also be cheaper to use. Parenteral medications such as ubrogepant, erenumab, or botox.

This appeal is not a demand for approval, but a plea for understanding the impact my migraines have on me as a medical student. Approving this medication that offers a chance for improved control of my symptoms will greatly benefit my medical training. Thank you for your prompt attention to my appeal. I look forward to your decision with hopeful anticipation.

Sincerely,

Joshua Betts



# Status Quo

Joshua Betts

Going to medical school at home  
has its disadvantages.

For example, an  
ambulance sounds different  
when you know the person inside, and  
I knew someone who died  
in the Covenant shooting.

There's an old Cuban film, *Memories  
of Underdevelopment*. It starts,  
"It all stays the same.  
Everything here stays the same.  
Suddenly it seems like  
the set of a play,  
a cardboard city."

Today I watched this kid on the local news;  
he saw his classmate die.  
Two actually.  
The anchor asked,  
"Did you think something like this  
would happen at Antioch High?"  
"Yeah.

I knew something was gonna happen,  
just didn't know when.  
People been caught with guns  
in their backpacks, so I felt like  
one day it was gonna happen  
with all the fights and  
the guns."

This wooden town does not accept  
script revisions.  
The scene unfolds just as before.  
Lives that could have been  
catalysts, now but painful  
memories of  
under  
development.



**Joshua Betts** is Nashville native and 3<sup>rd</sup> year medical student at VUSM. He graduated from Davidson College where he received degrees in Mathematics and Spanish. When he is not serving on VUSM's Curriculum Committee or volunteering at Shade Tree Clinic, he is usually playing Wingspan with his wife Olivia and their cat Suki.

# “Froget me not”, with love—Emelio

Johnny Doran



**Johnny Doran** is a 2nd year medical student at VUSM from Omaha, Nebraska. He graduated from the University of Notre Dame where he majored in Neuroscience and minored in Studio Art. He loves live music, good coffee, and quality time with his friends and partner.



# Listening

Vishesh Jain

I listen without a sound  
sitting down next to you  
as refracted sunlight glistens  
on your moving right cheek,  
struggling without its partner  
to speak from your heart,  
to scream out your fears,  
to whisper the dreams  
that are waiting out there.

I listen to you weep  
as the impatient clock  
that you are forced to look at  
clicks away your life's moments  
into minutes and long hours  
across from the confining bed  
in which you sleep but do not rest  
in this pale hospital room  
where you remain but cannot live.

I listen and learn from you  
how much farther you have to walk  
and wonder whether your mind  
will keep flying far ahead of your feet,  
or if it will slowly fall behind,  
willingly or unwillingly,  
in the mists of ancient memories  
casting dark cracked shadows  
down upon your shattered heart.

I listen to the drunken thunder  
stuttering in your chest  
and watch feverish lightning  
zigzag across the monitor;  
I listen to your empty lungs fill  
as I beg you to keep taking  
your inadequate rasping breaths  
and watch your chest fall  
as they escape from your grasp.

I listen to you tell me sternly  
what I cannot possibly imagine  
and what I must never forget,  
what sticks on the tip of your tongue  
and what you tell everyone you meet,  
what happened once upon a time  
and what you wish upon a star,  
what you wish that you had known  
and what you hope you always remember.

# Sun of one thousand flowers

Vishesh Jain



**Vishesh Jain** is a Batson phoenix, LAM fan, and pediatric radiology fellow. He uses art and photography to ground himself in routine experiences of daily life. By maintaining mindfulness in such moments, he hopes to rekindle wonder and delight in himself and in others.

# Adrenal Gland

Emil Iankov

*It is two, by three, by seven centimeters.  
It stays on the top.  
This royal virtuoso is in charge.*

*Participate in a fight with you  
or make you fly away.  
Yes, it is adrenaline.*

*In day and night, control consumption of  
carbs, fat and in extreme events  
even muscle proteins. It is cortisol.*

*In everyday situations, there is a judge.  
In stress, choose who is to be involved;  
cortisol or cortisone.*

*In an instance with notable consequences,  
this virtuoso is a manager and a decider,  
converting soft steroids and personal  
characteristics.*

*This royal virtuoso is an adjuster too.  
In workouts, control and regulates  
water, sodium, potassium and inflammation  
too.*

*This royal virtuoso interacts with many  
systems.  
It is a sender and a receiver, modifies their  
functions.  
Active, effective and significant, but not by  
size,  
applies a spectrum of value functions for life.  
It is known as Adrenal Gland.  
--*



*Emil Iankov previously served as an assistant strength & conditioning coach at Vanderbilt University from 2014 – 2021 where he helped various athletes reach national championships and all-American titles. Before that, he coached the Bulgarian junior Olympics weightlifting team for several years, with his trainees winning multiple medals: two gold, five silver, and a bronze. In addition to his passion for fitness, Emil also enjoys reading about recent advances and breakthroughs in neuroscience.*

# A Metaphor of Healing

Christopher Bickett





# Before Repair

Christopher Bickett





# Tension in the potential space between personal myth and rational thought

Christopher Bickett

My sister Rita died when she was 31 and I was 25. She had fought with leukemia and the side effects of a stem cell transplant for over a year. Her bravery and stoicism over the last several months of her life is worthy of its own story and is what set my feet on the path to be a physician. We start here because Rita saw her illness and impending death as a transition, like a caterpillar forming a chrysalis to later emerge with glorious wings as a butterfly.

It has been nearly 20 years since Rita's body died. Every time I see a butterfly I am reminded of her. I am reminded of my own mortality and my belief about what awaits. I see my sister in every butterfly. There have been especially poignant moments when a majestic monarch butterfly joins my day and flits by at the least expected moment. These are a reminder out of the blue that life is amazing, Rita's presence is still felt in the world, she is still keeping an eye on me, and I am reminded to ponder my mortality.

My rational mind will quickly pipe up that it is just a butterfly. I'm seeing a monarch because it is their migrating season, and we will probably be seeing more soon. And of course we are seeing a butterfly, we planted a butterfly bush to attract them, and it is the right time of day and the right temperature for the butterfly to be out feeding.

I know it is just a butterfly. I know that is an essence of my sister Rita letting us know she persists. There is a romantic, paradoxical, mystical tension in the duality that both are true. The pain of the rational mind co-existing with the mystical mind is a burden humanity bears. It is a beautiful burden, and I wouldn't have it any other way.



**Chris Bickett, MD** *is an Assistant Professor of Clinical Emergency Medicine at Vanderbilt. He is originally from South Dakota and spent 8 years in the Marines before medical school. Outside of the hospital, he enjoys painting, writing, tinkering, and trying to keep his two sons from constantly wrestling.*

# Nashville Spring

Trent Rosenbloom



**Trent Rosenbloom** is the Vice Chair for Faculty Affairs and Professor of Biomedical Informatics, Medicine, Pediatrics, and Nursing at Vanderbilt. He is a Vanderbilt lifer who earned his MD, completed residency and a fellowship in Biomedical Informatics, and earned an MPH all at Vanderbilt. Dr. Rosenbloom's photographic muse is the outdoors.

# The Crossing

Laasya Challa

I call his name out again—twice, then thrice. My words dissolve over the hushed hum of machines. He does not stir, restful in slumber. I take in the room, absent of flowers or photos. There are no personal items strewn about by visitors. I take in his wiry gray hair and work-worn hands. His skin is a rich umber, untouched by the pallor often marking the terminally ill. I will return to him later, once the fog of sleep recedes.

Five minutes later, I find myself wandering back past his door. A butterfly sign hangs there, placed by a nurse. Its colorful metallic wings contrast the reality that it signifies: a patient has passed away. Realization washes over me. I remember his skin once appearing rich. Now, the memory is of a waxy sheen, devoid of life, which I somehow missed. I consult my patient information sheet. Fingers trail over the words, as if an answer can be discovered here. “Body to be donated, call (xxx) xxx-xxxx.”

*Body.*

In an instant, he transformed from a person into a husk. It is an absolute and irreversible transition. I have never seen a deceased person before. No—is that no longer true? Did I witness the exact second he slipped from one existence to another, camouflaged among the minutes I spent with him? Crossing the Styx is more silence, less ceremony than I expected. What can I think in the face of such a quiet metamorphosis?

*Metamorphosis.*

Suddenly, the butterfly symbol takes on new meaning.

# House of Her Own

Laasya Challa

She is already halfway through the box of  
caramels  
before I remember the nurse's warning:  
She treats hospice like a hotel and us, like  
concierge  
But I hand over another

She peels the wrapper slowly,  
weighs the candy like a choice,  
then presses it between her molars  
like a vow  
Her jaw works with quiet fury,  
not hunger,  
but ownership

The first time I met her,  
she was mid-argument with her son-in-law,  
who was calling her a tyrant, a witch,  
a war criminal  
and she was laughing so hard,  
she nearly choked  
on a Werther's from her bedside drawer

There was no malice  
Only the strange fluency  
of people who trust each other  
enough to be cruel in jest

She laughed and flicked him off,  
with the poise of someone  
who's crossed borders alone,  
burned her name behind her,  
and lived long enough  
to know what to keep hidden  
and what to sharpen into a joke

Later, I learned she'd lived under another  
name  
New country, new papers,  
new daughter  
She said it the way someone lists  
ingredients in a stew  
they no longer eat

She never asked for pity  
She asked for room-temperature water,  
a better pillow,  
and once, help finding the true crime  
channel  
"It doesn't scare me," she said  
Then added,  
"I already know how people can be."



“I do not want the tube,” she told me one day  
“No matter what. I don’t want her  
to see me like that.  
Mouth open, eyes empty,  
and no words left to give.”  
She taps her throat, as if to say: *Still mine*  
*Don’t take it from me just to keep me here*

That day, I had no caramels  
She settled for two wrapped dark chocolates,  
lined them up on the tray like offerings to herself,  
then asked me to stay

She said her body had always been the house  
that belonged to her alone,  
but only just barely  
She said it  
like she was locking the door from the inside

I didn’t know what to say to that  
I asked if she wanted more chocolate  
She said no  
And for once,  
I believed her

# The Lesson

Laasya Challa

When I first began volunteering, doorways were my crutches. I stood at the threshold of so many rooms, uncertain how to cross, what to say, or how to stay. The air felt thick with things I hadn't learned yet: how to meet grief without flinching and how to soften my presence so it didn't feel like intrusion. I asked my coordinator if I could shadow Josie, a retired schoolteacher and longtime volunteer whose best friend and mother had both been hospice patients. It wasn't just what she said, but how she seemed to steady the room, as if grief could briefly lean against her. She knew to listen with her whole posture.

One afternoon, we visited a patient together. He was young, only fifty, but cancer had carved years into his face. Still, he greeted us with kind brown eyes, warm in a way that defied everything the world had already taken. Arabic was his first language, but he was fluent in something deeper, the language of connection. He told us about his sons, about my age. He spoke of them with a quiet pride, and I felt a bridge form—between strangers, between ages, and between stages of life.

He had worked for the same company for years, and they had not abandoned him. His colleagues came not with emails or meetings, but with stories and warmth. I felt braver than I had before, more certain of how to stand beside someone whose life was narrowing. I thought I was beginning to understand what it meant to show up for someone.

The following week, I returned alone.

But the moment I stepped into his room, that newfound confidence slipped away. He was visibly weaker, transformed. His voice had become a gravelly hush, and even his kind eyes were dulled by effort. I tried to speak as we had before. I tried to summon the same energy, the same lightness. But my words got tangled. My throat tightened. The room felt suddenly enormous and empty.

Presence feels like absence when you're not sure how to fill the space. As the end draws near, the visitors thin out. Grief isn't something most people know how to sit with. In that silence, I began apologizing—for not knowing what to say, for not being Josie, for not offering the comfort I hoped to bring. He looked at me gently, the corners of his mouth rising just enough to be called a smile.

“Don't be sorry,” he said, his voice thick and slow, like it had to push through molasses. “It is enough... to be here.”

He died not long after.

When I came back, the room felt changed, still and sacred as if it knew. The air held a quiet reverence. Because he was Muslim, a ritual was performed before his body left the space: a final washing, a wrapping, a prayer. I did not understand the words, but I understood the rhythm.

I thought of his voice, barely audible that last day, telling me not to be sorry. Those words echo. They gave me permission to be uncertain—to stay, even when presence felt like it couldn't possibly be enough. I learned that there are moments when no conversation can be salvaged.

Some rooms are lessons.

Some people are teachers.

Even as they are leaving.



**Laasya Chala**, is an undergraduate at Vanderbilt studying biology and medicine, health, and society. She hopes to become a primary care physician. When not volunteering in hospice or daydreaming about health systems reform, she's a part-time poet and collector of stories (written and told), secondhand CDs, and obscure farmers' market produce.

# Waiting to Burn

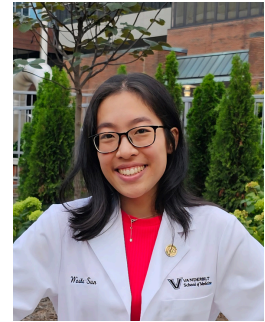
Wasila Sun

I once sat audience to an inferno  
bright yet no one noticed amongst the fluorescents humming sterile hymns, the clock  
melting haphazardly onto the floor, the drip of something helpful and wet  
ache pressed into the walls  
in the pews, flames dancing in my eyes I knew something then

Someday I dream to be made of wax  
to be shaped by what seems forgettable  
busying my hands tracing the lips of the same wick  
fervor in monotonous yet beautiful silence  
as the world tumbles like rocks in a careless stride  
and Nightingale's time passing anyways  
incandescently optimistic that one day  
in the quiet of a starch room, when breath unfastens wispy and free  
from a vestibule strangulated and reluctant to release  
because I once spent an hour as a flame gasping,  
fighting, wily and desperate  
ravenous  
I will remember—  
this, too, is why I dripped and dripped  
hardened in my old mold  
whispered to the ceiling cracks until they grew wary of my smoky lisp  
as the rebellious threads of my quiet glow would have grown strong  
enough to unmake the dark

# A Shared Soil

Wasila Sun



**Wasila Sun** is a first-year medical student at Vanderbilt School of Medicine. She was raised in Kansas City, Missouri and graduated from UCLA. In her free time, she can be found taking photographs, writing and reading, gliding around local ice-skating rinks, and kicking up her boots at the Nashville Palace.



# the memory of your brother stuns you

Nina Zhang

the same damp corner of the comforter  
different pattern now, 5 years since the news  
and you googled the 5-year survival rate

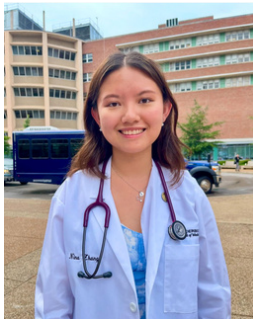
if you close your eyes hard enough  
you might be able to hear his breathing  
you might be able to hear him say “i love you”

if you close your throat against your tears  
you might be able to hear your dad’s  
you might be able to hear him say “i’m sorry”

the same damp corner of the comforter  
follows you no matter how far you move away  
too easily reminded when the night is too quiet –

the words are lost once more, swallowed in your sleep,  
water splashes on your face as the cold morning sun  
spills into your room and you’re confused

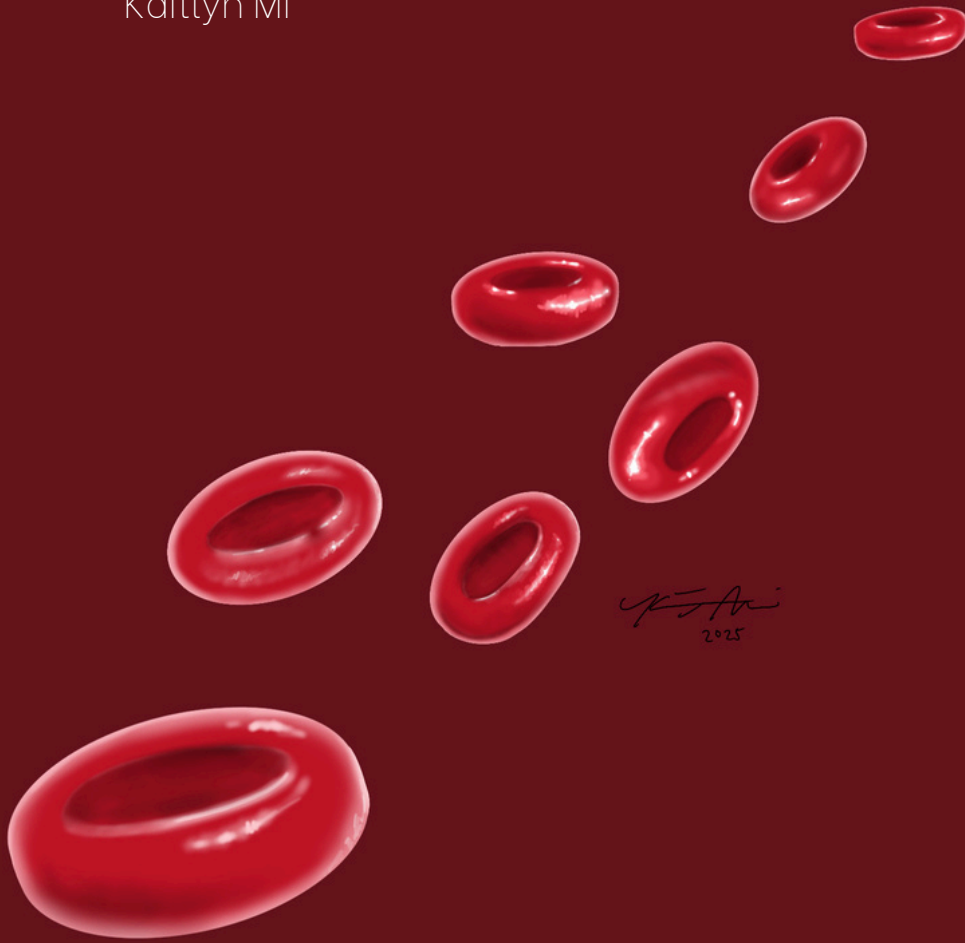
not sure why your eyes are so swollen  
not sure in which pocket you stored last night’s grief  
not sure when you’ll accidentally – or willingly – dig it out again.



*Nina Zhang is a first-year medical student at VUSM. She grew up outside of Philadelphia and graduated from Duke University in 2024 with degrees in Neuroscience and German Studies. She usually writes prose but will sometimes try poetry. She is always looking for book recommendations for her Goodreads challenge. You can convince her to go almost anywhere if there’s free food.*

# Erythrocytes

Kaitlyn Mi



**Kaitlyn Mi** is a Nashville native and second year medical student at VUSM. She dabbles in digital illustration and watercolors. In her free time, she cooks, junk journals, and plays with her cats (Flower and Yolk). She occasionally posts her art on [instagram @mi.space\\_](#)

# Skin and bones

Brian Ward

Skin and bones  
And breaths and sighs  
And emaciated dreams  
And the grinding of teeth  
And parents

He can eat, dad says  
You'll see if you let him  
Just give us the plan.

And brother plays on the couch  
Mom smiles politely  
And the child stares  
One eye towards the father who holds him  
Who has held him for twelve years  
One eye off center looking past his nose  
Looking towards heaven, I guess.

Skin and bones  
And breaths and sighs  
And I stand and smile  
In my broken Spanish  
And my broken spirit

I have no plan to give  
I am just skin and bones  
I am as fragile as your son  
These days.



**Brian Ward** is a former Vanderbilt Pediatrics resident who now practices in Washington state at Seattle Children's Hospital. He has clinical interests in pediatric pulmonology and the care of medically complex children.

# For those who believe doctors should not cry

Shimran Kumar

Doctors are not robots.

Doctors are human.

They are brothers, sisters,  
mothers, fathers, friends.

They see their children, their grandparents,  
in the eyes of their patients.

They see pain, fear, or the empty glaze  
of a life gone too soon.

Doctors are not robots.

Doctors are not God.

They are as feeling and as mortal  
as the patients they serve.

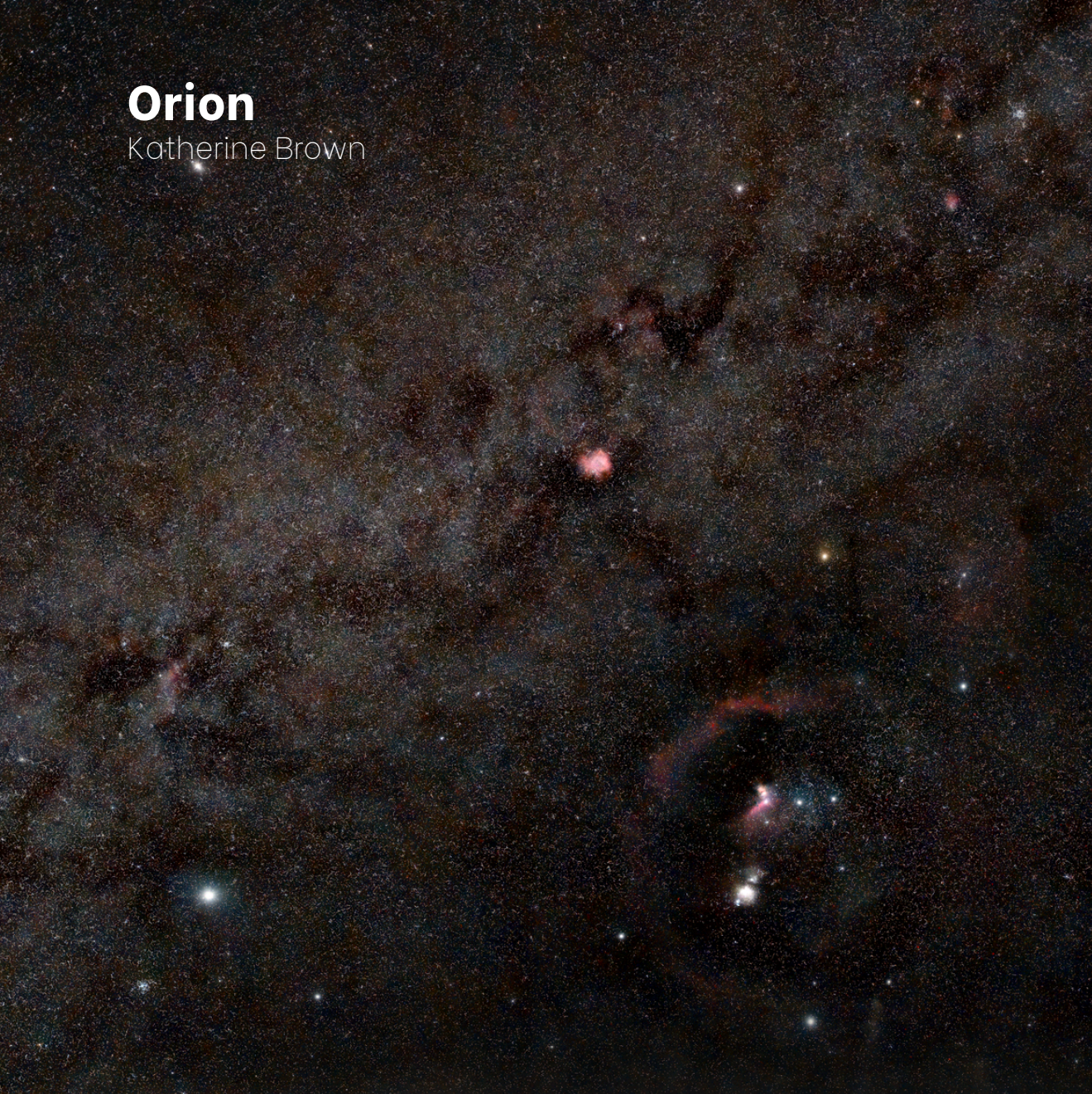


**Shimran Kumar** is from small-town California. She graduated from Vanderbilt School of Medicine this spring and will complete her Emergency Medicine Residency at Harbor-UCLA. She believes in the power of vulnerability and hopes to continue these conversations and pieces in her career.



# Orion

Katherine Brown





**ic434**

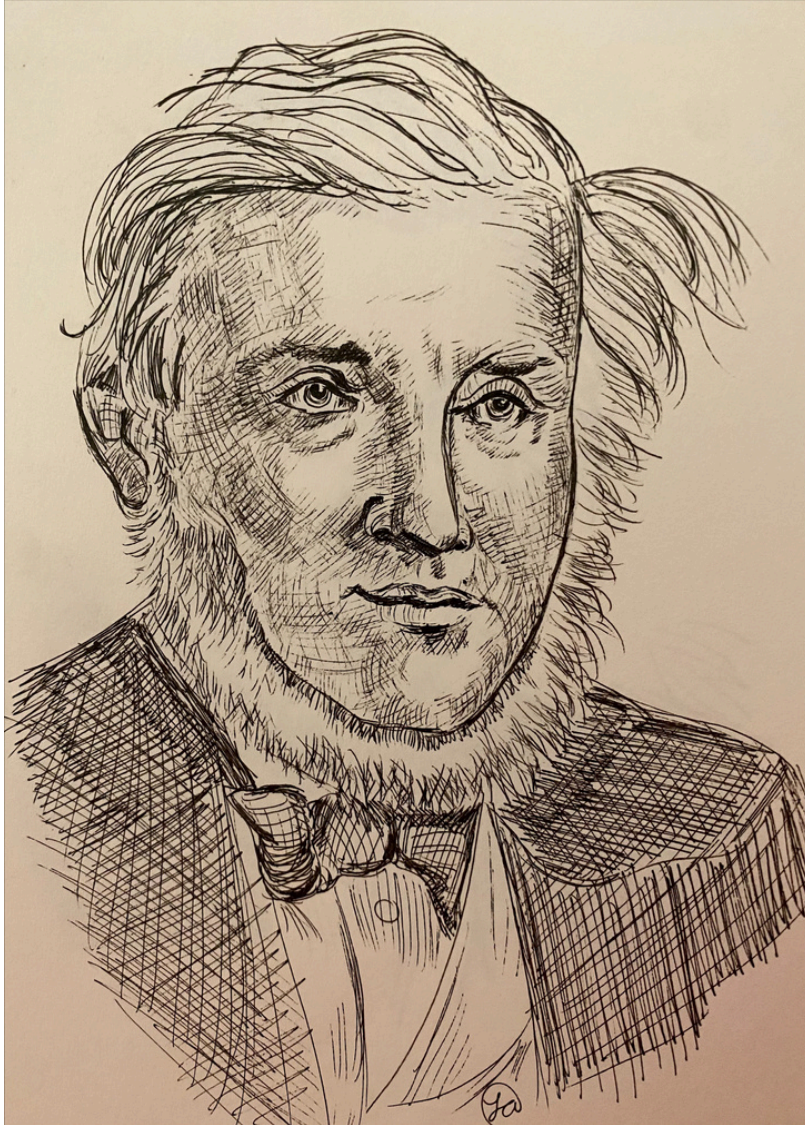
Katherine Brown



**Katherine (Katie) Brown** is a second year postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Biomedical Informatics at VUMC. In addition to astrophotography, she enjoys digital and film photography of her dogs (Chewie and Yoda) and road trips with her family. Her astrophotography can be found on Instagram @katie.stargazer

# Portrait of Henry Bence Jones

Lealani Mae Acosta



# Lemons

Lealani Mae Acosta

Life is full of lemons: depending on what's made,  
Sometimes we get the pits, sometimes lemonade.  
Savor all the sips while the flavor remains sweet.  
And if you get the pits, plant them beneath your feet.  
What fruit will grow, we do not know, but sow we must to find  
The truth behind what is to come, both in our world and mind.  
Tears of sorrow and of joy water common ground.  
As you conquer day by day, I hope you will have found  
Some sweet relief, some hope, some peace,  
That juice – and life – is worth the squeeze.



*Beyond honing her artistic pursuits, **Dr. Acosta** enjoys exploring the neuroscience behind the humanities (e.g, Heilman KM, Acosta LM. Visual artistic creativity and the brain. Prog Brain Res. 2013;204:19–43). Photo of her wearing her fiber arts Phineas Gage model by his skull and tamping rod at the Harvard medical museum.*





## Layers of bark

Catherine Fuchs

Is it the wisdom of the trees to give perspective on disruptive change?  
Crevices filled with shadows,  
coveting rain as if an urn within the angle of the bark,  
a random quirk of nature folded in upon itself,  
feeding the host and hidden creatures.

Sheets both thick and thin invite imagination to the passing years.  
A complex pattern,  
uniquely different with each glance,  
changing with a nuance, dancing to the world,  
connections inviting wonder.

The messiness of the tree, catching my eyes, a guiding thread to life.

# Sensations

Catherine Fuchs

I see the geese, upheld by unseen currents of the sky  
and am reminded  
That I know so little while I hear and feel so much.  
The chimes report to those who know the shifts that mark  
impending change  
No guarantee of understanding.  
And what of drafts with highs and lows  
A sensory jolt of unseen  
Power well beyond my human hand,  
Stirring the global streams, my special thread  
Experience I call life.



**Catherine Fuchs, MD** is a Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences and Pediatrics who specializes in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. She is a graduate of Vanderbilt School of Medicine. Her hobbies are reading a wide range of books, hiking, and traveling. She loves to spend time with her family and friends. She finds poetry to be a way to learn new perspectives on the world and to convey her own questions and thoughts.



# Sunrise Amelia Island

Amy Fleming



**Dean Amy Fleming** is a pediatrician and educator at Vanderbilt university school of medicine. She grew up in Portland, Oregon, served in the United States Air Force, and has lived in 9 different states. She enjoys quilting, art, music, time with her three daughters, and hiking with her Labrador Lily.

# City Song for Past & Future Generations / City Song for You & Me

Tina Chai

In the city  
of gilded billboards and neon signs  
imitating cosmic brilliance,  
I walk in a time before time  
and a time after restless time.

The Big Bang can't explain  
why this silver saran-wrap night  
stretches over high-rise apartment buildings  
like a grandmother cradling her granddaughter,

or how these food trucks  
rolled across the Pacific  
with an endless supply  
of chive dumplings and egg-fried-rice.

This city is a 90s fantasy,  
a *Joy Luck Club* meets the East Coast  
American drama on lives lost and returned,  
backlit with stars and skyscrapers.  
Now the main character rides the subway  
to her nine-to-five, changes her name  
to Emma, and takes a plane  
across the Pacific on holidays.

Under too-warm tunnels,  
I wonder if Quantum Theory can rationalize  
the musty fumes of these old pipes,  
the C train rumbling against iron,  
the wrinkles of well-traveled dollar bills.  
A man and his saxophone rest beside the vent.  
Eyes shut, body swaying, he plays  
the fundamental tune of the universe.

Tonight, on this park bench,  
the skyline is a screen-scape,  
or a glistening exclamation mark  
at the end of a sonnet  
written in broken English.  
It shows me Manhattan, Flushing, Brooklyn;  
it tells me of escape and forgiveness.

And these bridges!  
Spiring over brackish routes  
and cement avenues, curved bodies  
scarred by invisible footprints  
and suspended  
between the moon and its refracted self,  
between my grandmother and me.

Back in the tunnel, the lights  
of the incoming train color this life sepia.  
As the warmest wind brushes my dark hair,  
I remember her blistered palms on my cheeks.



**Tina Chai, MD**  
*recently  
graduated from  
Vanderbilt  
University School  
of Medicine and  
will be  
completing her  
pediatrics  
residency at Johns  
Hopkins. She  
enjoys writing,  
painting, singing,  
yoga, and being a  
plant mom.*

# Two songs by Barcode Angels

Finn Clark

## Key

Thanks for the key  
It's getting late  
Time to leave  
Not much to say

I want to feel  
Like I am in love  
But I feel the same  
Like every day

As I walk down your street  
I am sweating

Said thanks for the

Afraid of time  
Like a big red star  
Thought I heard you say  
t h a t  
A couple times before

Write a song  
Well what's it mean  
Listen ten times  
No twenty

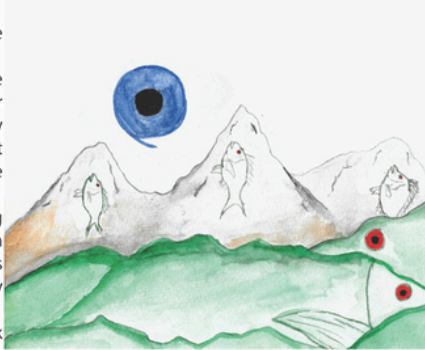
Funny how I'm stuck  
Outside your door  
Knock a little louder  
Wait some more

Through the crack  
Across the chain  
I could say

Thanks for the  
Thanks for the

## Self Checkout

renaissance - much better - abigail - key - gospel kisses - coming home - he is mine



## Coming Home

He's a little bit closer to  
finding answers  
He's a little bit sick of asking  
q u e s t i o n s

He's a miracle of light  
(why don't you say it)

Coming home  
Coming home

Why don't you say it

She's a friend of a friend  
who lost her temper  
She's been wanting to  
believe she's never ending

She's waiting for the night  
(why don't you say it)

Coming home  
Coming home

Why don't you say it



Finn Clark is a first-year medical student at Vanderbilt. He grew up in New York City and studied physics at UChicago. His interests include music, Alex G, animals, genetics, canoeing, and hanging out with friends.





# untitled (colored dog)

Evangeline Raulston



## **Evangeline Raulston**

*is a first-year medical student with an interest in pediatric gastroenterology. She graduated from Georgia Tech with a degree in environmental engineering. She enjoys creating colored pencil artwork, caring for plants, and spending time in coffee shops. Her love of art and nature shapes her unique perspective on medicine.*



# Road to inveroran

Lance Johnson



**Lance Johnson** *has inexplicably absconded from VUSM to pursue a management degree, insisting, “This won’t change who I am, I promise.” Upon sighting on the medical campus, medical students are encouraged to shout, “Do you even go here?!” and barrage him with serpentine hissing.*

# Invasive Species in Spring

Jazmyn Ayers

*weed (noun): a plant that is not valued where it is growing  
[especially one that tends to choke out more desirable plants]*

dandy's head was engulfed in white the day she decided to die.  
at the mercy of magnets,  
she lay with the stillness of death.  
radio waves bombard her body to align her molecules in magnetic fields  
to find what she already knows to be true.  
for death has now bloomed in her head as a tumor  
in a season, overgrown her mind during drug-induced stupor.

*door sign: markdowns on perennials—all sales final*

vibrant colors pulsate pain behind dandy's eyelids  
as foreign roots of her flesh intertwine—inoperable.  
her body withers in the sterile sun of white hospital rooms  
and the paper-thin gown conceals the root rot of her happiness  
as the growth in her mind blossoms at ravishing speeds.  
will she take back control.  
she will take back control.  
take back she will control.

*weed (verb): to clear of weeds—to free from something  
harmful—to remove less desirable portions of—*

so, dandy will nurture her remaining life in the spring air  
and embrace death.

for death is more than a moment, more than a state of mind  
but a mere process of her body's disguise  
in the spring air it becomes a shadow for the living  
and oh did she hope it was forgiving.

*weeds (noun): a dress worn as a sign of mourning (as by a widow)*



**Jazmyn Ayers** is a third-year medical student from Lansing, MI that attended Vanderbilt University for undergrad with majors in MHS and English and she later completed her master's degree in Narrative Medicine at Columbia University. In her free time, she enjoys dabbling in creative writing, reading the trendiest new Rom-coms, and trying to keep her houseplants alive.



# Blue Ridge Parkway: Tree Photo

Edith Costanza



**Edith Costanza** is a professional actor, artist and Human Resource Development trainer. At Vanderbilt, she serves as a Standardized Patient for CELA, but also does this type of work at Belmont and Centerstone. She is incredibly grateful to be able to contribute to the training of future doctors, nurses and mental health professionals. One of her greatest joys at Vanderbilt is to attend the arts showcase led by some of the young medical students. Being with these inspiring young people is so uplifting to her.

# After Rain

Caitlin Hughes



**Caitlin Hughes** is an Assistant Professor of pediatric pathology in the Department of Pathology, Microbiology and Immunology. She is married and has two beautiful daughters. This collage painting was inspired by Eric Carle's work and hangs in her older daughter's room.



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