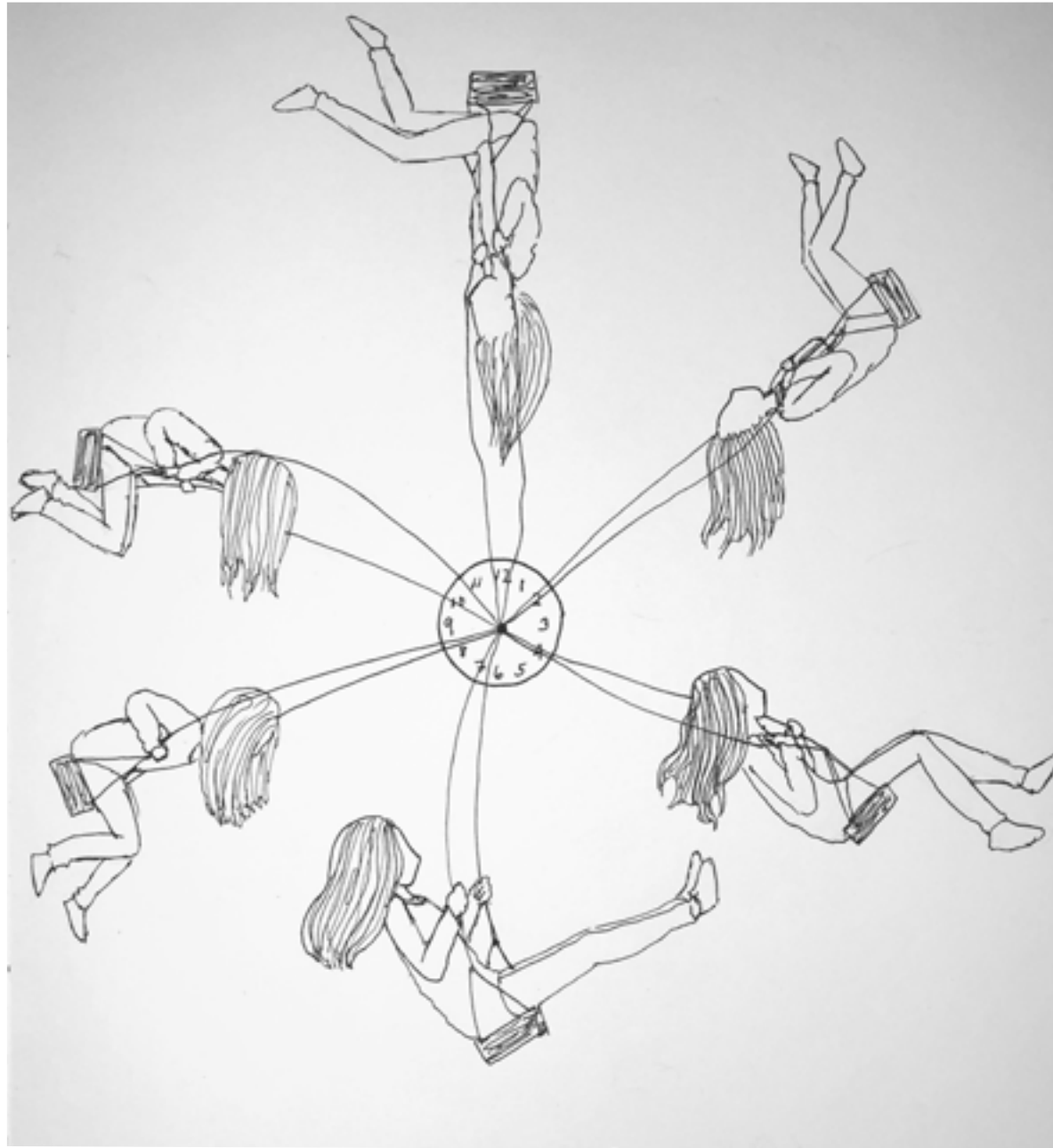


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# MOOD SWINGS

EMILY ZHAO



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# A REGULAR TUESDAY

EMMA WINTERS

House. Recipe.  
Saltine Crackers.  
For soups and salads.  
The flimsy packaging tells me all this  
And breaks  
And slips  
Through my small fingers.

The crackers crunch but quickly become like uncooked dough  
As they cement themselves to the  
Backs of my teeth and the  
Roof of my mouth.  
The globs of thick dough slide down my throat,  
Slowing gliding along its interior walls.  
I turn the now empty packaging over to read the ingredients printed in small black lettering.  
A few words catch my eye:  
Soy.  
Lecithin.  
Flour.  
A light hammer taps on the inside of my forehead, and I divert my eyes to the speckled table below.  
Tap. Tap. Tap.  
The saltines have settled into my stomach.

Not settled my stomach.  
They found their place amid the rumblings.  
My stomach tosses  
And turns  
And ignites once more.  
Acid licks the walls of my stomach  
And crawls its way to top of my esophagus

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Begging to fan  
Up  
And out  
Like a  
Cat  
That wants claw its way  
Out.  
Escape.

Tap. Tap. Tap.  
Six crackers won't foot the bill for a day's work.  
Tap. Tap. Tap.

My eyelids fall from gravity  
And I'm back on the tiled floor,  
Comforted by the smell of cleaning products  
And fresh toilet water.  
Elbows on the toilet seat,  
Ass on the floor,  
Head hanging above water.  
And I can see the shit stains and limescale on the inside of  
the bowl and  
This of all things makes it  
Stop.

Stop.  
10:53am.  
There's no time for such luxurious moments today.

I slide the packages between my fingers a few more times  
And shove them into my pockets.  
They will remind me later  
That I am  
Not  
A  
Superhero.

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# HOSPICE

KELSEY CONNORS

It's madness: frail wrists, whispers of a blizzard tonight,  
a water glass with a clear straw. A snowman outside is sinking

into itself, air writhing in lungs weighed down, heavy  
with mucus. This is what you breathe with

for your life that always, your life that never  
collapsed. Don't go. Don't—go.

A cardinal flashes its red across the window.  
Danielle climbs through snow to be

with you—just this one time. On the stiff couch  
sits a furrowed brow. Her book of poetry is a sad song.

With so much to cry for, it is future  
we settle on. The hours crack open like white eggshells. Your  
dad

quietly cries in the hallway, thumbs on his temples,  
looks at something none of us see. Outside the glass

doors at the hall's end, is a pure white  
world. The earth beyond

these walls clambers with ribs  
tired from laughing and crinkle-eye smiles—not  
here. We wait over your starched linens and think dying  
is all we know of heaven\*. Your breath clings thin  
to strands of air, we watch for your chest to fall  
and rise, hang on each whisper of air.

We were together,  
and that was good.

\*from Emily Dickinson's "my life closed twice..."