

obsessive / compulsive

if i can love the way a newborn hand grips my finger
i can learn to love the way my brain was taught the word *clasp*
here is how to clutch: clench: hold:
 hard
isn't hard enough
how you do one thing is how you do everything
take locking the door take locking the door take
 locked
isn't locked enough
what was that thing Einstein said about doing the same thing over &
over again ? maybe his problem was that
he only tried twice
how many urges does it take to change
a lightbulb & make it feel changed
make it feel right make the lock locked enough?
I want to learn the word *unbridled*
I want a more interesting way to say i'm tired
of redoing I want to be redone

YOU'RE WELCOME

Try as I might, I am very american. Thus, I love a before-and-after. I scroll through Instagram and watch rich women spin around in salon chairs, seamlessly transitioning from flat-haired and mousy to blown-out, highlighted, 30-second influencers of their own making. Who is the hairdresser? How did we get from *before* to *after*? Don't ask too many questions. Watch how the waves move in the manufactured wind.

If this book were a diet, this would be the part where I shed the weight of Space-Me. If this book were a home renovation reality show, this would be the part where I take a sledgehammer to Space-Me's bedroom wall. If this book were a coming-of-age romance, this would be the surprisingly triumphant break-up. Look at me now, all thin and marble-countered and smiling through tears. Look at me now, pretty and winning!

Try as I might, I am very american. Thus, I erase labor, even my own. How does the package arrive at my door? Who pays for the overnight shipping when I know the answer is certainly not me? I over-perform for friends, partners, supervisors and it is always *no problem*. I shudder at the phrase *you're welcome*, the acknowledgement of my effort and the implication of deserved thanks.

Space-Me visits me often. Sometimes, I try to slam the door in her face but instead find her sitting at my dining room table. *Aren't you going to offer me something to drink?* Sometimes, I feel a warmth for her, a visit from my old, out-of-touch, beloved friend.

My brilliant brother once wrote an analysis of orange juice commercials, how the fruit falls off the branch, into the glass, magically picked and liquified as if it were an act of divinity. Now, when I watch television advertisements, I can't stop thinking about how you never see anybody's hands.

The fact is this: Space-Me kept me alive for 25 years before I ever thought to question her methods. This is not to say that there aren't better ways of managing being alive, but it is to say that she cares for me.

She wants me here. I cannot thank her enough.

Try as I might, I am very american. At my first therapy appointment, I tell my counselor my brain is broken. I am the *before*, and I want to be the *after*. *I want to be Better*. I tell her. Spin me around on this couch. Can you edit the transition seamlessly enough that nobody sees me unshiny? I want *sick*, and then I want *well*. I want *broken*, and then I want *whole*.

Space-Me visits most often at nighttime. She worries for my safety while walking the dog, or locking up the house, or brushing my teeth. I do my best to greet her warmly, and then I remind her: I am safe. I am sure. I love you, and I do not need you.

Life is laborious, and I am tired of lying. Many days, I love the labor of life, but loving your work doesn't make it not-work. Sometimes people talk to me as if I am the orange juice, tangy and present and miraculously bright. After they reach full ripeness, fruits die. Everybody asks me about the vine. Nobody ever asks about the dying.

Here is the thing about being *Better*: I never will be. *Better* as it is widely understood, an antonym of unwell, doesn't exist in this context. *Unwell* and *Better* are not binary states, and I will not be delivered between them. Bodies change size and shape. Homes are remodeled only to require a new roof in five years time. Loves enter and exit and transform throughout our lives. Why should our brains be any different? Why should our healing?

Evan Stewart. 2016. "Simply White: Race, Politics, and Invisibility in Advertising Depictions of Farm Labor. Pp. 130-147 in Crain, Marion G., Winifred Poster, and Miriam A. Cherry, eds. *Invisible Labor: Hidden Work in the Contemporary World*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.