

The Contortionist Speaks of Dislocation

The trick is not to care about connections. Then there's no pain when ligaments twist and the shoulder pops from its socket, when ribs accordion intercostals or heels bump against the base of the skull and toenails scrape skin from cheeks. The body is abandoned so clavicles can bend backwards and the spine can arch to carry crown to coccyx. Tendons forget and never know how to hold their brother bones. Just a light nudge can push their lax grip to anarchy. They slip away from woman into an avalanche of buckled scaffolding, a game of pick-up sticks, a car crumpled around the Pisa lean of a streetlight, a cherry stem knotted in a closed mouth, a crushed spider. The crowd cheers my collapse.

Once I was frozen. A shoebox under my bed holds photos of a girl who tensed between the steel of family on porch steps, stood stiff at the gate of a Catholic school with books mooring her to the cracked cement, and lay like a stone in the snow. Each shutter snap clipped the same command from the secret face behind it: capture a girl beaten into hands without fidgets and iron-tight braids. Nothing could be out of place. She is always out of place now. Each night before muscles coax flesh to fold inwards and cameras flash to catch this endless metamorphosis, a square of memory is tucked away between the skin and skintight suit. It lies below the left breast and counts the heartbeats of each change. I need it there, I need it after I let go, so the girl braced against picture clicks can remind this body where the bones belong.

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