

Brace

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Synthetic microfibers intertwine beneath the grey
surface. Wires coil inward until the buckle clicks shut
around me. Telescopic hooks catch on the worn
fabric, pricking my skin. A grey-blue vest dulls
under the fluorescent light. I learn, again, to breathe
inside a thing built to hold me
straight.

Scratchy nylon drags along the wooden floor.
Spiderweb mesh channels air through narrow
seams. A hidden zipper splits the front panel open.
For one second I am
out.

But I fold back the velcro straps again and again because without it my back
unlearns the line, curves again.

Loose threads fray near my left shoulder. The arc, the x-rays say,
caves as the cage rights my spine. So I lie
braced for a sleep that won't come. A dream I won't have, where I
kick it off under the blanket

for good because my spine has hardened enough not to bend anymore—
Free. Though I wonder if I'll still reach for it some night years from now,
Spine lifted and certain, for a cage I don't need.
Just to be sure I don't wake up crooked.