I bet I could do a back flip right now. I’ve got a feeling they’re not as hard as we think. They’re just dangerous. I’m thinking of going for it right here in my living room with no witness except for the dog, who enjoys watching me practice Tai Chi, as my wife walks through snickering, “What’re you going to do, inner peace ’em to death?”

Let’s say I walked into an appliance store where two men were stealing televisions and I did a back flip, causing one of them to turn to the other and say through his ski mask, “Why do you think that bald guy did a back flip?” and in that moment of hesitation the authorities swoop in to nab them. Or what if I were caught in an embarrassing lie at a dinner party and instead of trying to explain myself I calmly stepped away from the table and executed a back flip, causing my friends to remark, “What an unusual thing for Doug to do. I wouldn’t have expected that.” Thus revealing a facet of myself more worthy of discussion than the embarrassment moments earlier, all because of a back flip which, as I say, I could probably do right now—
and even if you doubt such a claim, we know it’s at least possible, not like when we were kids tying curtains around our necks and sprinting across the backyard pretending to be Superman. There was a boy in the news who believed so hard he could fly they found him in a Superman costume with his arms outstretched at the bottom of a quarry. Anyway I’m saying a back flip is possible—more than possible, for I have maintained bodily flexibility through my 30s and into my 40s, plus I’m generally good at committing to things, which I’m guessing would be a key to effective back flipping.

I see it as no harder than the leap your average television detective makes from one rooftop to another—which only seems like a big deal because it’s high up, plus they’re wearing suits and ties, the pursuit of criminals being a formal occasion. Anyhow I think I could cover that no problemo—not only me but you too, and that’s my point: a lot of us could do a back flip. We just don’t know it! We have no idea what we are capable of, and this is how the world keeps us in check—everyone except for the stunt men, and the ones who run off and join the circus, or tear up their passports and go native, or change their sex and become lounge singers, or stand their ground in front of a tank. If I do this back flip there’s no telling what I’ll do next. Or maybe I’ll keep it a secret, and remain an ordinary civilian, humble and quiet as I’ve been,
though with the knowledge
of what I’m capable of
buzzing inside me.