

by Arlene Ang, from Juked #6, Spring 2009

LIKE BLUE LIGHT INSIDE THE MAN
WITH A MISSING ARM

1

The working hand sloughs off the glove.
This is done with the aid of teeth. How cracked
the lips appear when pulled back—
and purpling.

Had the lips been flowers,
they would be crackling with ants.

And the mouth, they say, precludes
silence. There are many ways to make noises.
Eating the apple. Screaming at birds.
Or biting the rim of an empty plastic cup.

Once stripped, the hand takes a violence
of its own. Two moths circle the overturned chair
as if waiting for a flame.

{ sound of wood as it splinters,
sound of splinter as it enters the fragile
cushion of skin under the nail }

The admission of pain comes in secret:
when squashed, the fire ant smudges the page,
but leaves no blood.

The book is left open
on a chapter about how flowers on the parquet
may disappear under pieces of a broken vase.

2

For all its attachment, the arm
prosthesis is platonic. It is in the nature

of physical things to replace
each other.

How — even now — this scar
swallows and dominates the residual limb.

The back of the hand shimmers.
It may be because it is wet. It may be because,
when glass breaks, the fragments have
a powder of their own to recreate the skin.

{ rubbing the eyes to discard tears,
ripping out venetian blinds
to view what lies outside the window }

The wall paintings have been here
before and remember the fingers that held
the hammer. In order to see an apple for the first time,
Cézanne took it upon himself to strip in front
of the apple.

If the loss somehow survives
the dead. One is stranded in the room. One is striking
blue light out of matches. The necessity to hold on.

3

Is it the missing arm that owns
the body. Or is it the man. Is it. The mouth has
so many cavities — each one leading
to drink.

The maggot has moved out
of the apple. And still the apple is.

The working hand throws
the bottle against a wall to conceal
its emptiness. How dry the shards glint
on the floor. And how the floor appears to weep.

The light is dancing a seizure.
In the room inside the man in the room held up by walls
that tell of places where one cannot go.

{ carving initials on the artificial
limb with a knife, coming
to terms with the loss of blood }

Remembrance, like a Barbie doll.
There's a box filled with those under the table—
possessions of a girl that have become
homeless after she stopped
coming home.

More ants have set out.
Their bodies alter the letters on the book
as they gather around to bear the dead away.