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## Amputation Dream

Sommer Sterud

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MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE FOR POETRY

Sommer Sterud  
**Amputation Dream**

*“If all I am is a body, I’m up a shit creek.”*

*-Chana Bloch*

My stump-stilt legs made me a misfit  
ballerina, as though I walked  
on my toes—not sensible  
footwear for fighting  
this phantom. Brother  
said not to worry:  
*It could be worse.* But

never better. I felt  
a slow  
throbbing that thumped  
in time  
with my pulse. Stumbling  
over  
furniture, I wobbled—  
hula girl  
on the dashboard—from one  
side to  
the other, never falling, but feeling  
the phantom pain: memory made physical  
the way the body copes

with loss just like the millions  
of hands that reach for

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the deflated side of the bed, and  
despite the coolness  
that is *empty*, the hands still feel  
warmth  
in the curve of the mattress  
like hot breath  
blown in your hands.

Walking home, I passed construction workers.  
Trying to be the clever, maybe  
even scary, clown  
in Mardi Gras parades, hovering  
above the crowd, I  
was more the Amazing Lady  
with a beard  
who'd never shake her ass

in this lifetime, never  
perform a true hula dance  
while showing off  
a painful tattooed ankle—never  
that pain. Only this haunting  
phantom transformed,  
finally,

into a steel safe (see *vault* or *secret*,  
see *crippled*, *loss*, or *suffocation*, see  
fear) that fell and  
pounded me  
into the ground,  
where I remain  
girl stuck  
to dashboard—who cannot

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even dash; girl who can only  
gyrate hips  
and swish  
her straw skirt.