

Jen DeGregorio

INSTINCT

When I was nine, I liked
to take the sheets off my bed
and play nest. I would throw
all my toys in there, sit on them
or tear them to pieces. I knew some birds
killed smaller things. Raptors,
birds of prey. In fourth grade we took
a bus to Raptor Trust. Watched
an owl cling to a man's
black leather glove, spin its head
as if the sight of us
pained it. The next day
we dissected owl pellets, used
tweezers to pull out bones
from the soft cocoons
and had to reassemble them with glue,
skeletons of digested rodents,
on sheets of construction paper
while our teacher watched. Later
she displayed our work
around the room, taped it to walls
so the fleshless mice, chipmunks, rats
seemed to parade around our desks. Looking
at them, I became for the first time
made of parts. My hand taking notes
a contraption. Intricate claw. And my friends,
too, could be taken apart. My teacher
less a teacher than a talking
head, skull dolled up
in curls, pink lips
that opened when she spoke
the black hole of her throat.

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