

MUSEUM
OF THE
WILD

EMMA KISIEL

1.

Grandpa and his brothers and friends used to take Dad and his brothers on hunting trips when Dad was small. Dad never killed anything because he says he was a poor shot and the rifle was unwieldy and loud and painful when it fired, but I know it is because he could never bear to hurt anything. He used to tell me a story of a time when the car was full and he was in the middle of the back seat and everyone was looking out the windows for deer. A deer walked across the road right in front of the car, and Dad was the only one to see.

The closet in one of the upstairs bedrooms in Grandma and Grandpa's house was full of boxes of antlers and mounted hooves. When Mom and Dad would take Katie and me there, I would wait until no one would notice my disappearance and sneak upstairs to look at the deer parts and hold them gently in my small hands. They felt secret and magical. Being alone with them was almost religious.

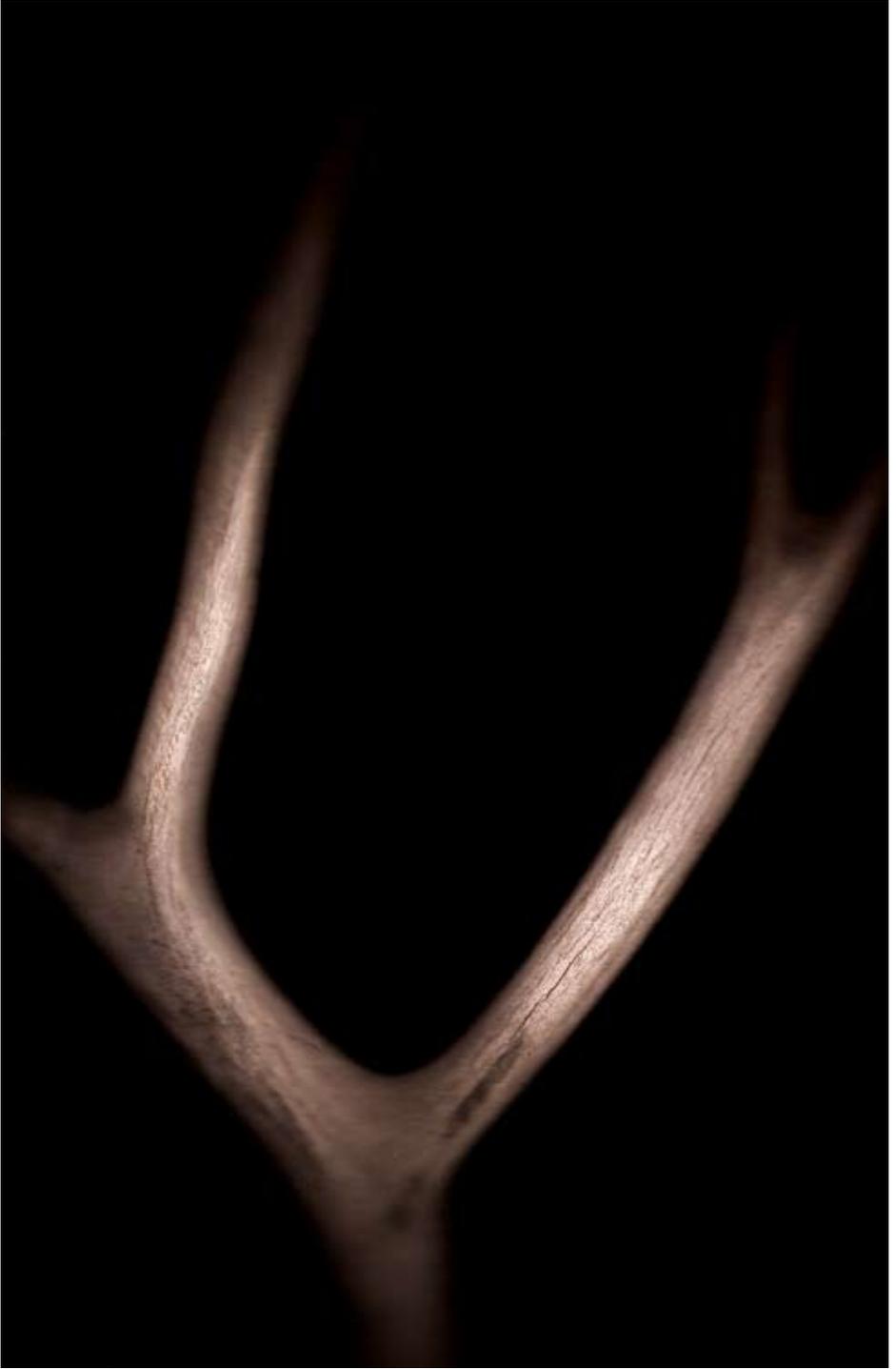


fig. 1.a



fig. 1.b

Dan equated antlers with me, I think because I loved jackalopes. When we stopped talking, the antlers became the deer, which represented me to him more and more. He wrote a poem about me, and the antlered love. I wrote a response claiming the resemblance in the deer's and my personalities.

The deer in Manitou Springs love the Crystal Valley Cemetery. Whenever I go there, I see deer. They walk atop the dead like ghosts. Seeing them there is like a religious experience.

Seeing deer in Maryland feels spiritual and reminds me that I am not alone.



fig. 1.c



fig. 1.d

Deer establish a territory and will not leave it. They are known to starve rather than leave their domain. They prefer to live in “edge” habitats, or areas in which the natural and the man-made meet.

Deer are the only animals that have antlers. Antlers are the fastest growing living tissue on earth.

The life expectancy of a deer is 20 years.



fig. 1.e

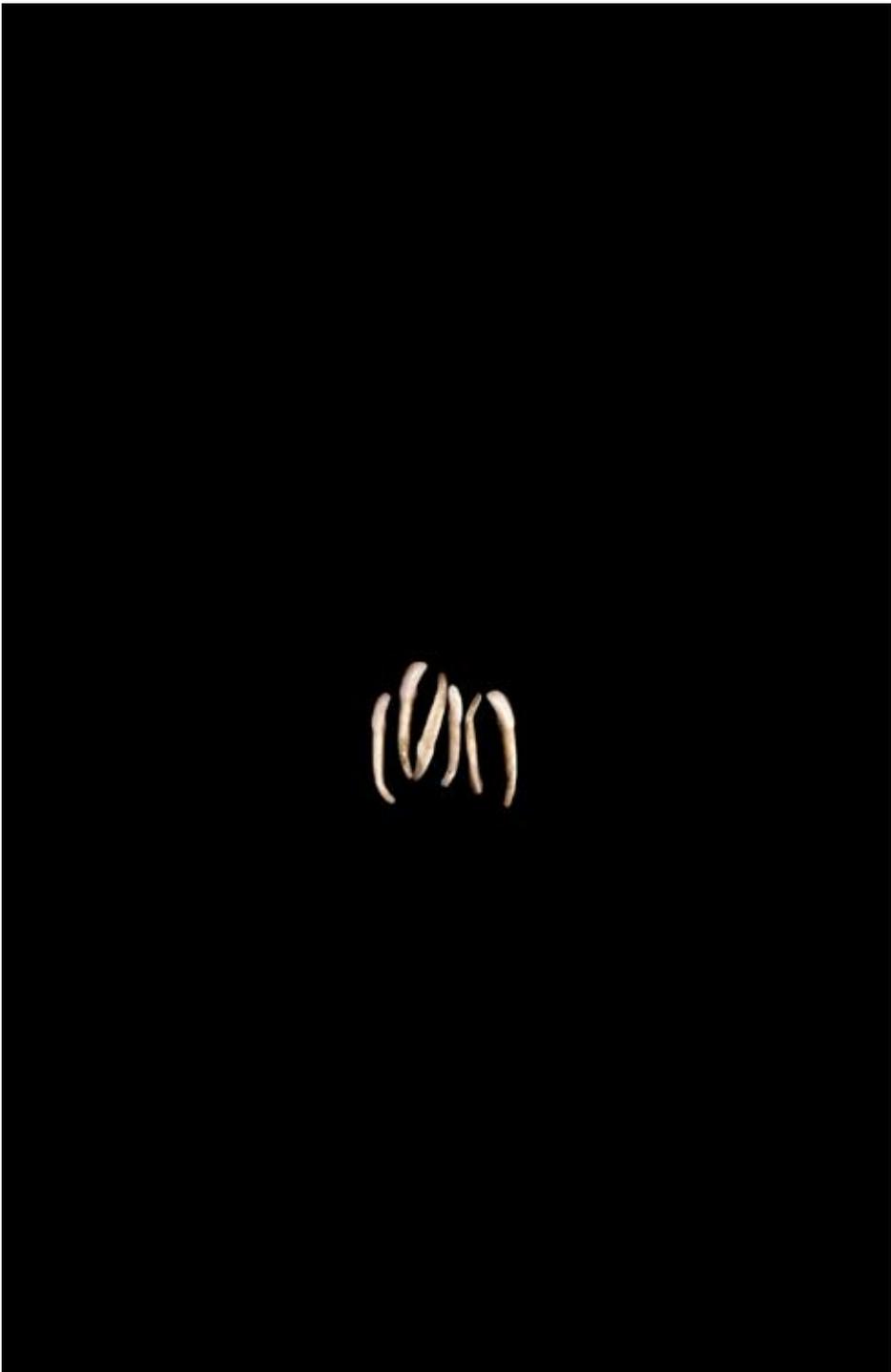


fig. 1.f

2.

Growing up in the house on Rembrandt, I would often awake in the night to the sound of howling coyotes. I felt safe in the house and exhilarated thinking of them talking to each other in the backyard or the driveway.



fig. 2.a

Sometimes in the night I confuse the sounds of
sirens in Baltimore with those of the howling coyotes
of home. It is nostalgic and momentarily heartbreaking.



fig. 2.b

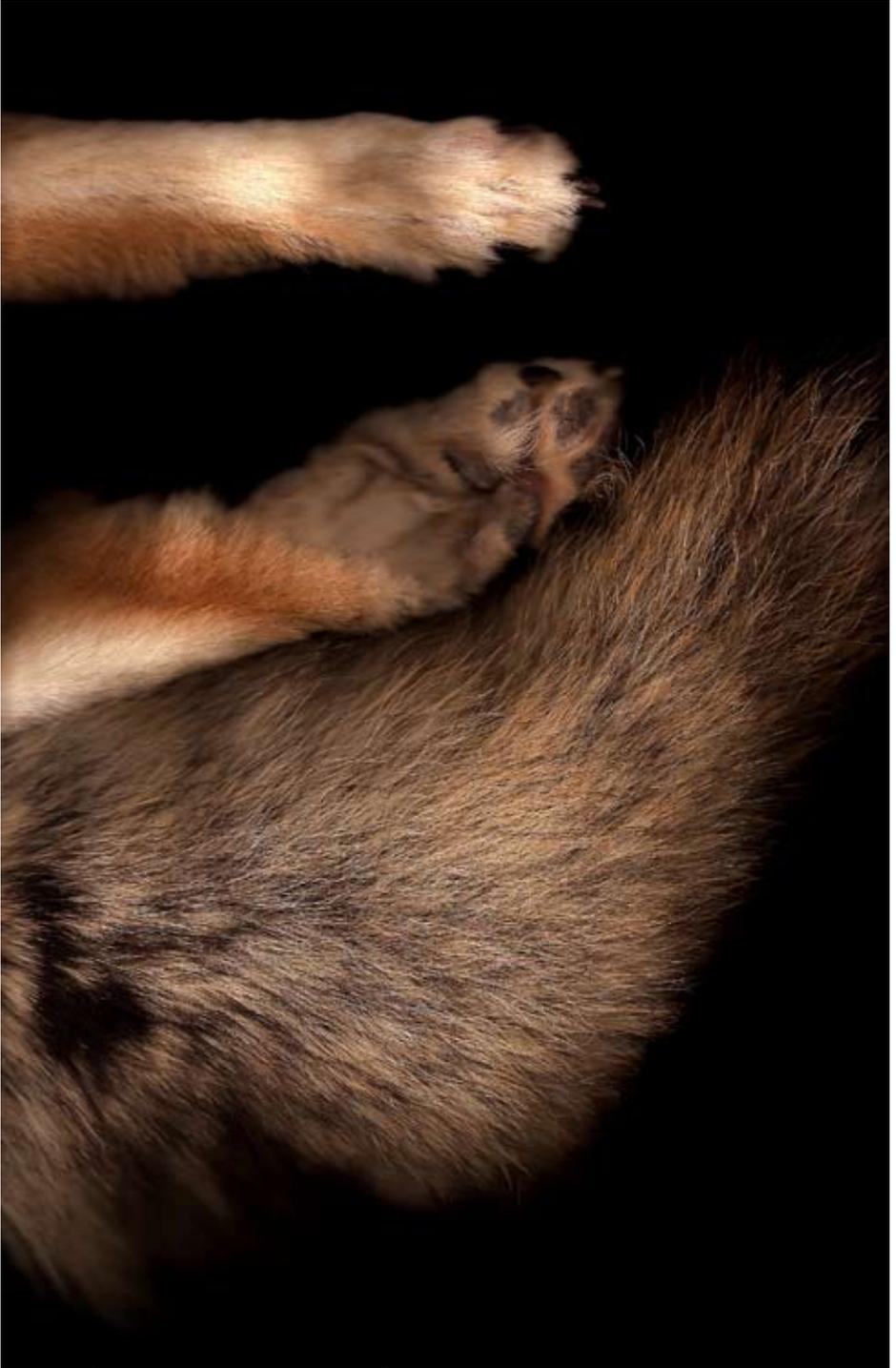


fig. 2.c

Coyotes are often seen as less majestic wolves, less graceful foxes, and more damaging dogs. On walks alone in my neighborhood I more than once confused a coyote for a stray dog.



fig. 3.a

3.

Katie and I used to watch a TV show about a gnome who had a pet fox. Katie had a stuffed animal fox that she named after the character, Swift. I always wanted Swift to be mine.

Once while Dad was driving Katie and me the long way home, we stopped to let a silver fox and her babies cross the road. It was the first and only time I have ever seen living silver foxes in my life. It was beautiful.

Many foxes live in the neighborhood where I grew up. To communicate with each other, they scream. It's a sound I never knew an animal could make until the first time I heard it. It is horrifying.

Ian always loved foxes. Whenever we went for walks, he would talk about how he wished we would find a fox with a hurt leg or a missing mother so we could rescue it. He and I are no longer close, and whenever I see a fox I want to capture it for him.



fig. 3.b

4.

One time when I was little, Mom and I were at a grocery store and she let me get a big stuffed animal raccoon. I named it Ricky after a TV show feature I had seen about a raccoon who stole things from campsites. He was my favorite stuffed animal for a long time. I received a lot of attention for taking him with me everywhere.



fig. 4.a



fig. 4.b

While driving on the main road in my neighborhood one evening, I noticed two dead raccoons on the median. It appeared as if either both were traveling and killed together or one was hit by a car and the other knowingly followed.

I stopped to be with them for a long while.

Female raccoons are monogamous.



fig. 5.a

5.

When Katie and I were little, Grandma made us each blankets that folded into pillows. Katie's was made of red and white handkerchief-like material. She loved it. Mine was made from a pattern of an image of a rabbit. The rabbit's nose and mouth were a combination of lines I couldn't understand. I resented the rabbit image and the blanket altogether and never used it, even though Katie was almost always wrapped in or sleeping with hers.

One day Dad brought home a rabbit hutch that one of the people on his mail route no longer wanted. Soon after, he took Katie and me to the feed store to pick out a rabbit for each of us. We were thrilled. The first night we had them, they slipped through the chicken-wire walls of the hutch and escaped. Katie's came back the next day. Mine never did. We had many rabbits, two at one time. Once my female rabbit and Katie's male rabbit mated. My rabbit had just had a shot to relieve a problem with her neck, and the injection affected the babies inside of her. One day while I was alone at home, I went into the backyard to check on the rabbits. There were five tiny pink babies buried in the wood-chips. They were dead and deformed.

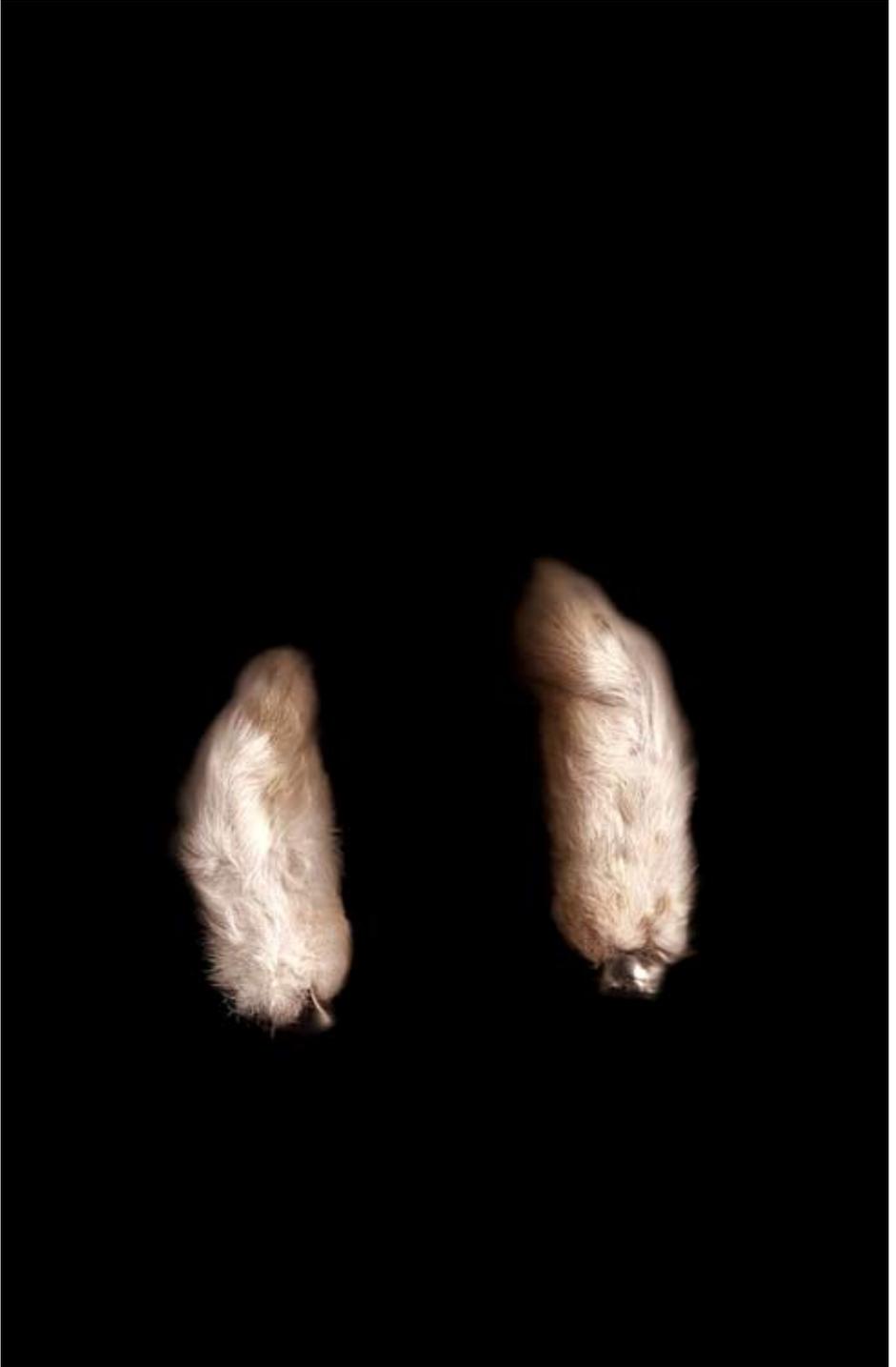


fig. 5.b

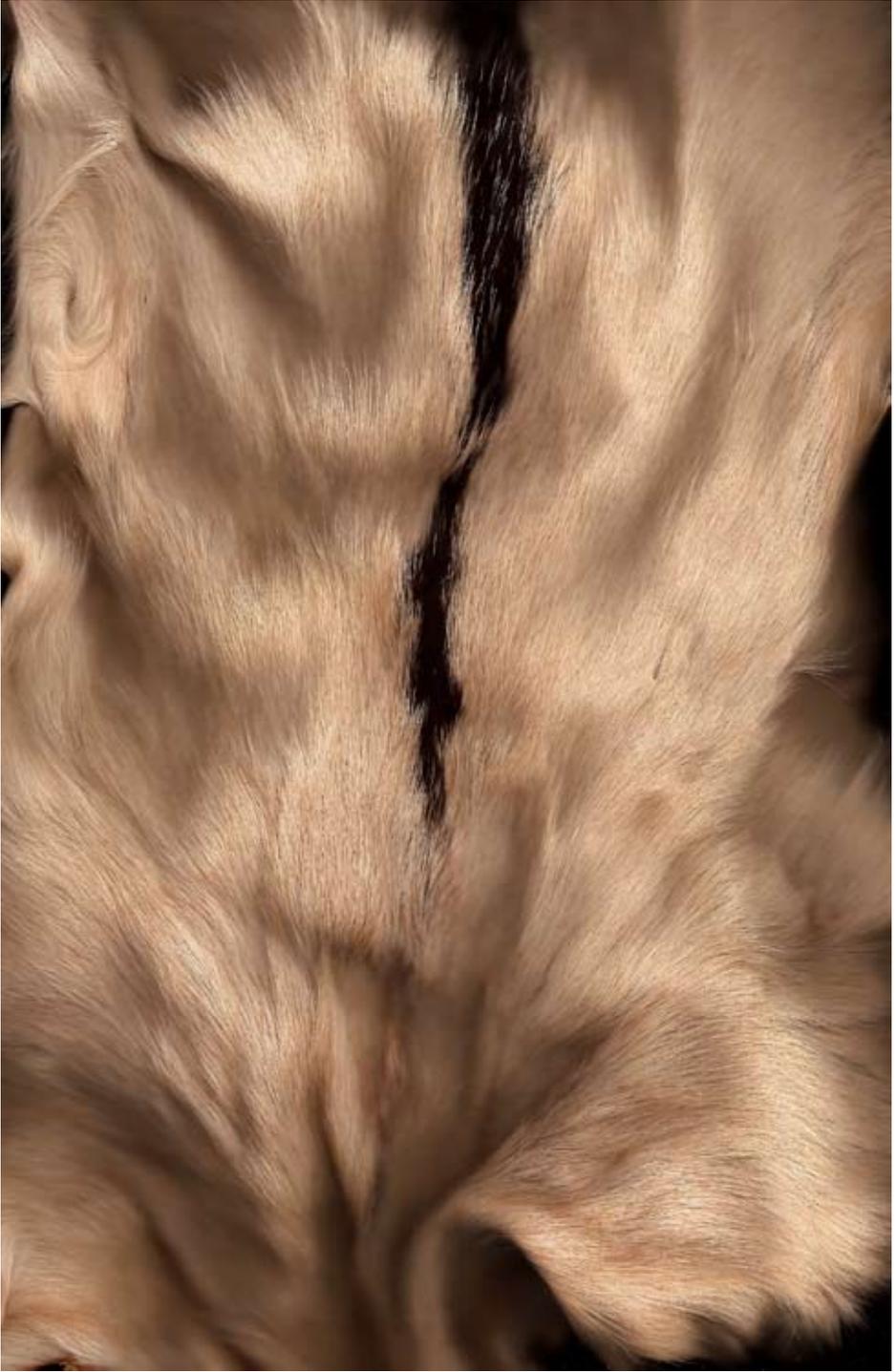


fig. 5.c

Mother rabbits typically feed their kits for only about five minutes a day.

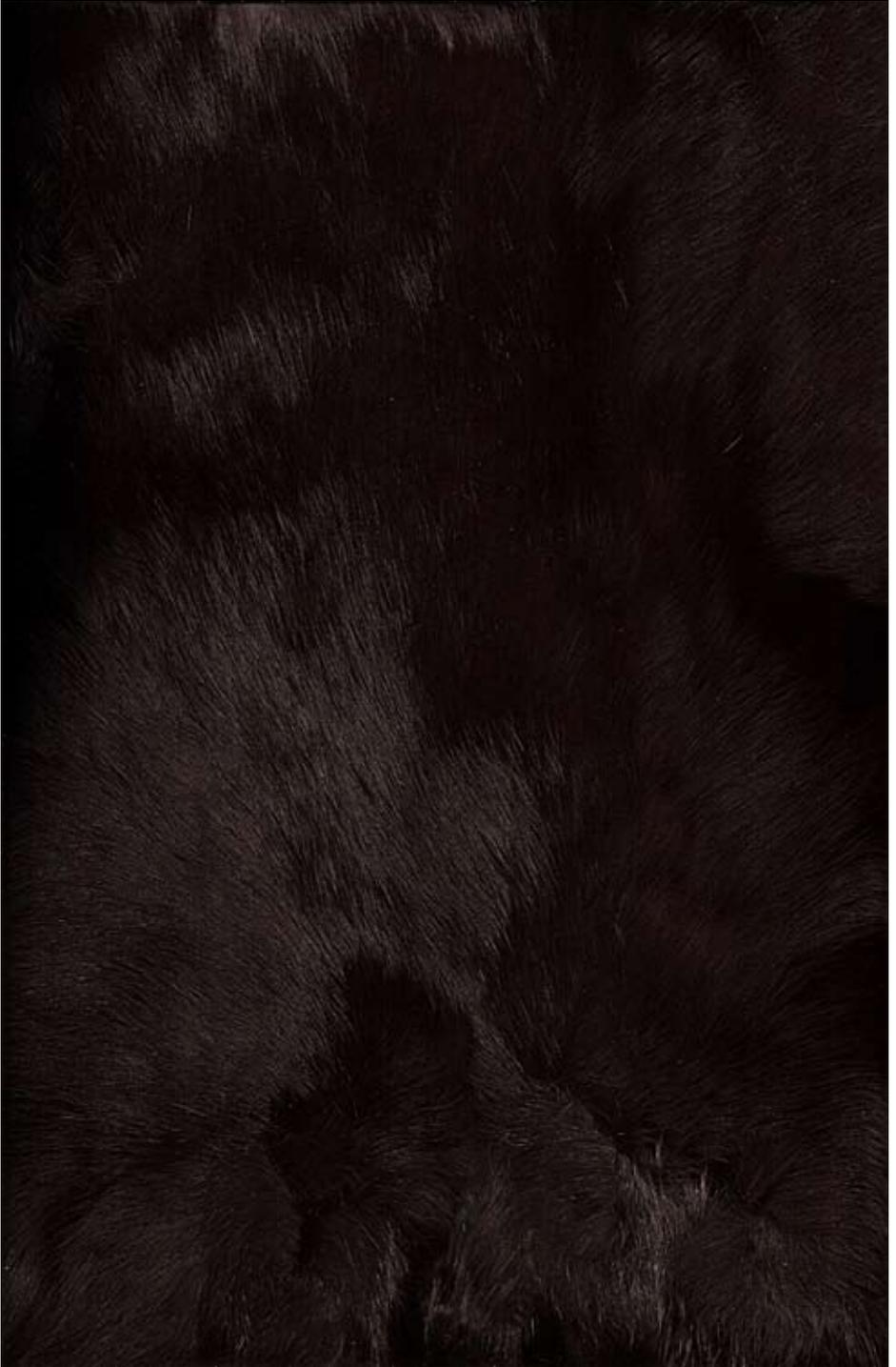


fig. 5.d

6.

I have always explored abandoned buildings. Once in the middle of the night my friends and I walked out to an abandoned ranch house in our neighborhood. We were scared and heard noises. We walked into one of the ranch buildings and all of us felt the presence of someone there. We examined the interior with our flashlights and my camera flash. There was a cow alone with us in the building. It felt sacred to be so close.

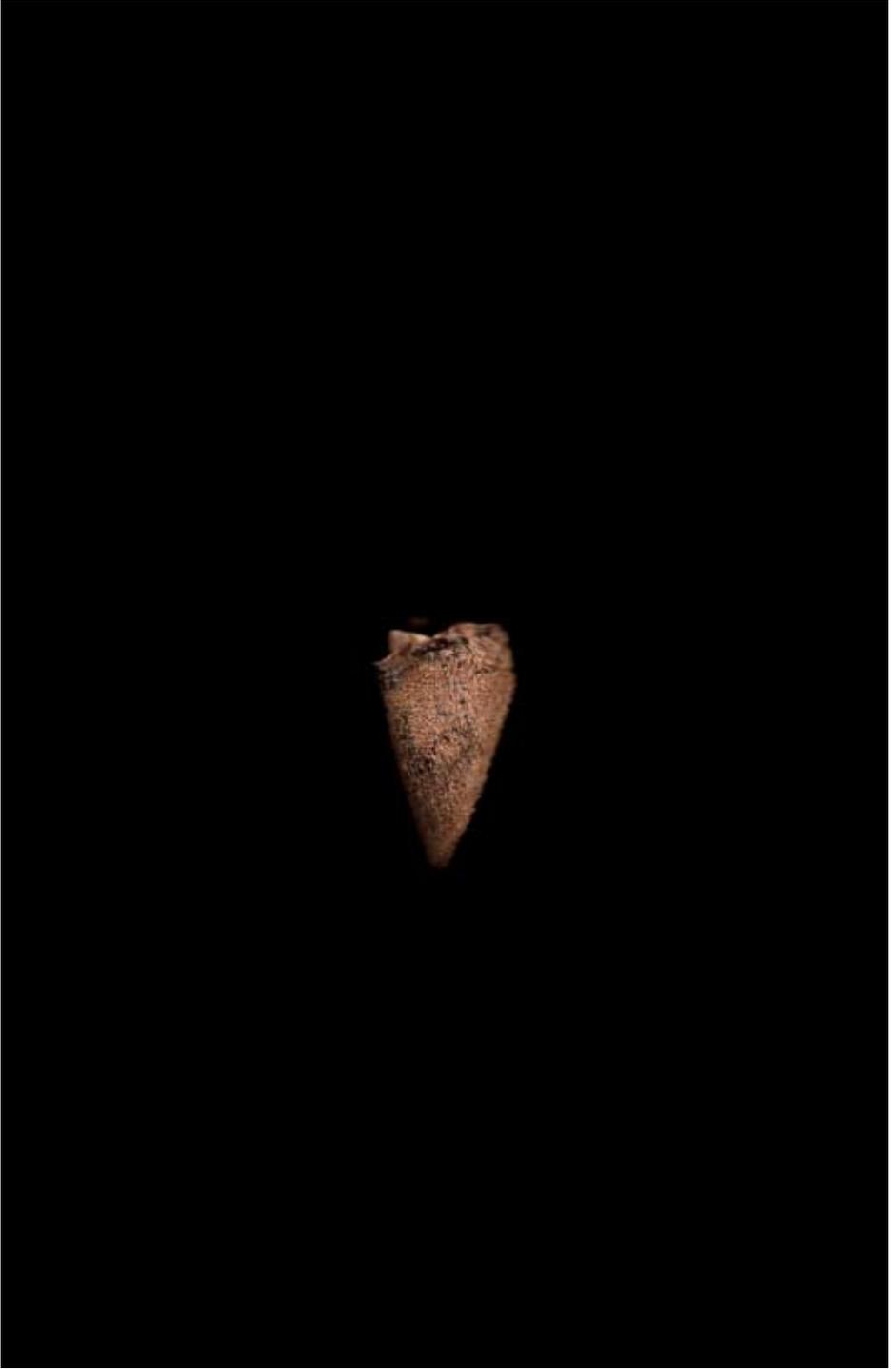


fig. 6.a



fig. 6.b

One time Nathaniel and I were exploring an abandoned building. We noticed that the interior had a horrible stench so we avoided going inside. I took a photograph of the inside of the building through a window and then continued exploring. Nathaniel walked to where I had been standing to photograph and turned his head at a slightly different angle than mine had been and noticed that there was an enormous cow carcass inside the building. He called me over to see it. It was so incredible; it was the largest animal I had ever been so close to.

Once while exploring an abandoned ranch with hundreds of animal bones scattered everywhere, I expressed to Nathaniel how badly I wanted to see one of the animals' bodies with flesh still on its bones. Moments later, I walked into one of the ranch buildings and found a cow head at my feet, its coarse red fur and fine eyelashes still present. My breath was taken away and Nathaniel couldn't pull me away from the head for a half an hour.



fig. 6.c

7.

Grandpa raced pigeons for a large amount of his life. I loved going over to his house when I was little and holding the birds he would slowly place into my hands. At one point he also had baby chicks in the cellar beneath his house. The day he led Katie and me down there to hold the tiny baby chicks lit only by warm bulbs was magical.



fig. 7.a

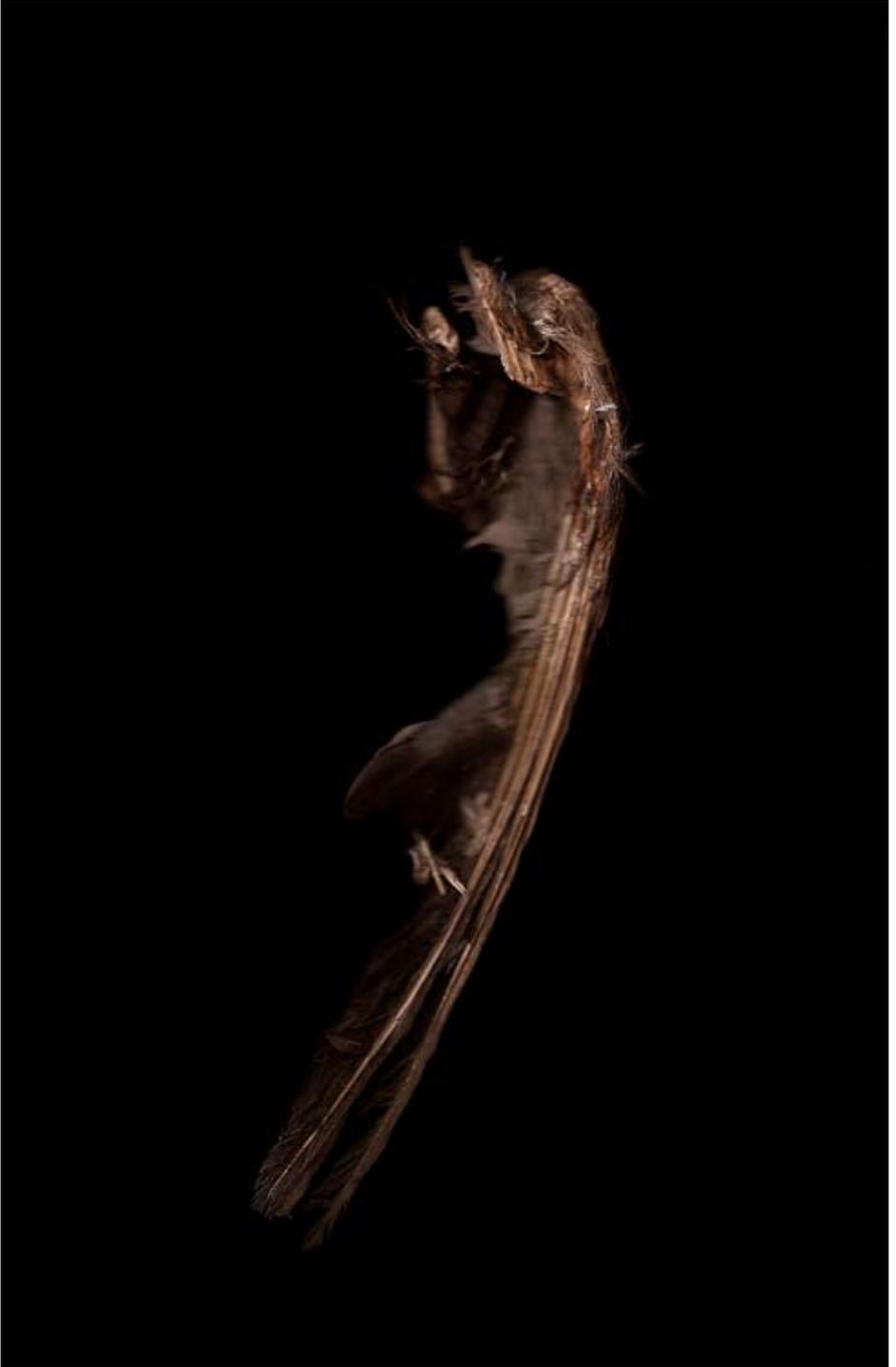


fig. 7.b

The first thing I ever photographed seriously was a dead sparrow that appeared on the front lawn of my house on New Year's Day when I was in 9th grade. Photography has been my greatest passion ever since.



fig. 7.c



fig. 7.d

When I was in Harrisburg, Chelsea and I ventured into a German food shop for fun. Inside, we struck up a conversation with one of the regular customers. When he asked my name and I told him it was Emma he exclaimed, “Aima! All of the seagulls in Germany are called Aima!” Previous to this event, I had always wondered why I loved seagulls so much.

In high school I worked at a library with a duck pond in the back. One day a co-worker informed me that a mother goose had been killed and left eggs unattended. After work that day I impulsively snatched the eggs from their nest and took them home with me. I had plans of keeping them warm until they hatched. When I got home I realized this was completely impossible. I felt very childish. The thought of putting the eggs out with the trash made me sad, so I returned them to their motherless nest in the middle of the night.



fig. 7.e

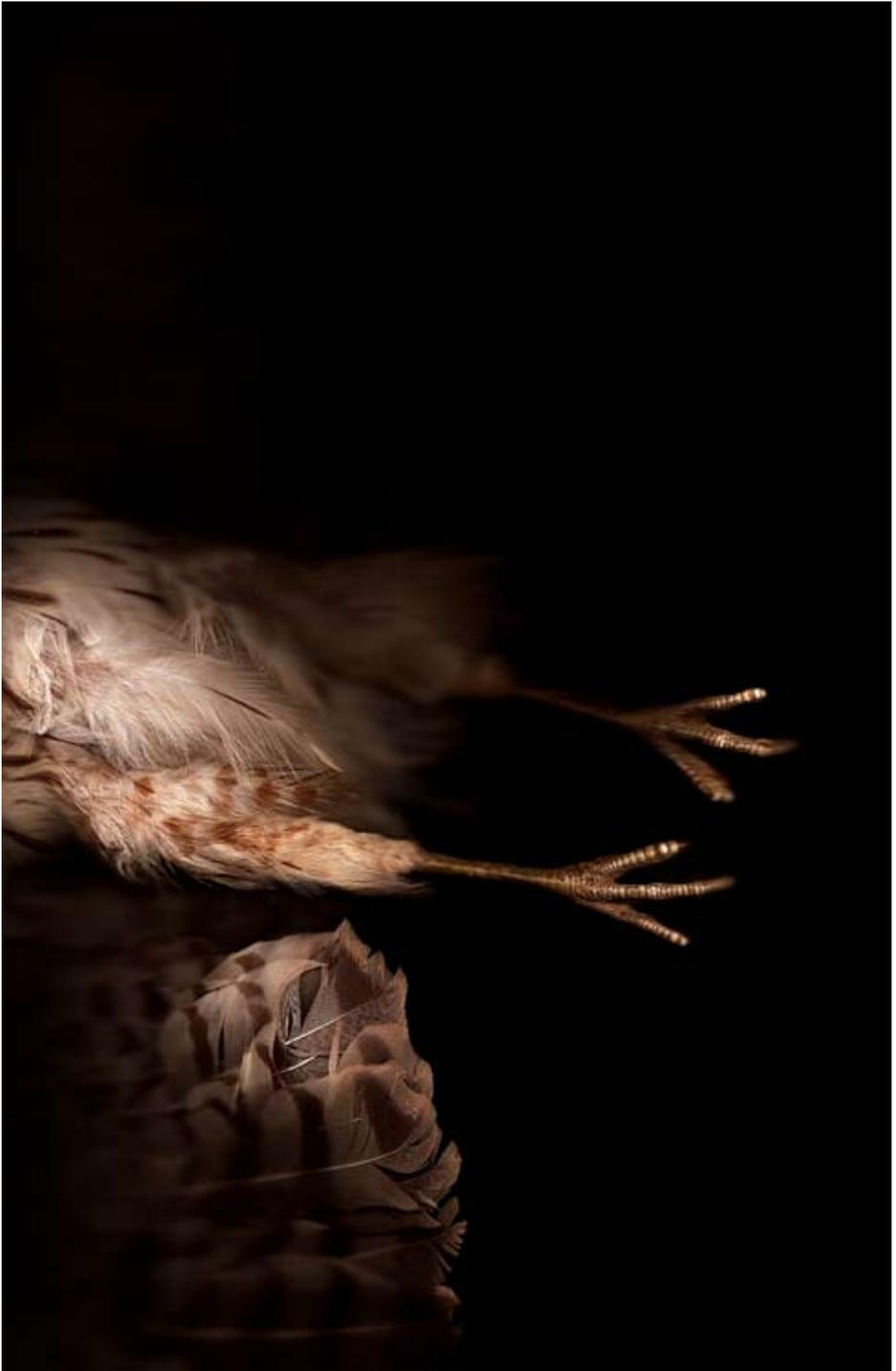


fig. 7.f

One of my most vivid memories from my childhood is one of a hike Dad took Katie and me on while we still lived in Buffalo. We took bird seed with us and at one point of the walk Dad poured some seed into his hand and held it out. Katie and I watched in awe as a bird landed on his hand and ate the seed. Dad poured some seed into my hand and took a picture as a chickadee landed on my little hand. It felt amazing to be holding a tiny life in my hand.

Mom and Dad had pet birds in the basement of one of the first houses they lived in together. They had over twenty lovebirds. The songs the birds sang were not beautiful. Mom and Dad got rid of the birds because they were too loud.



fig. 7.8

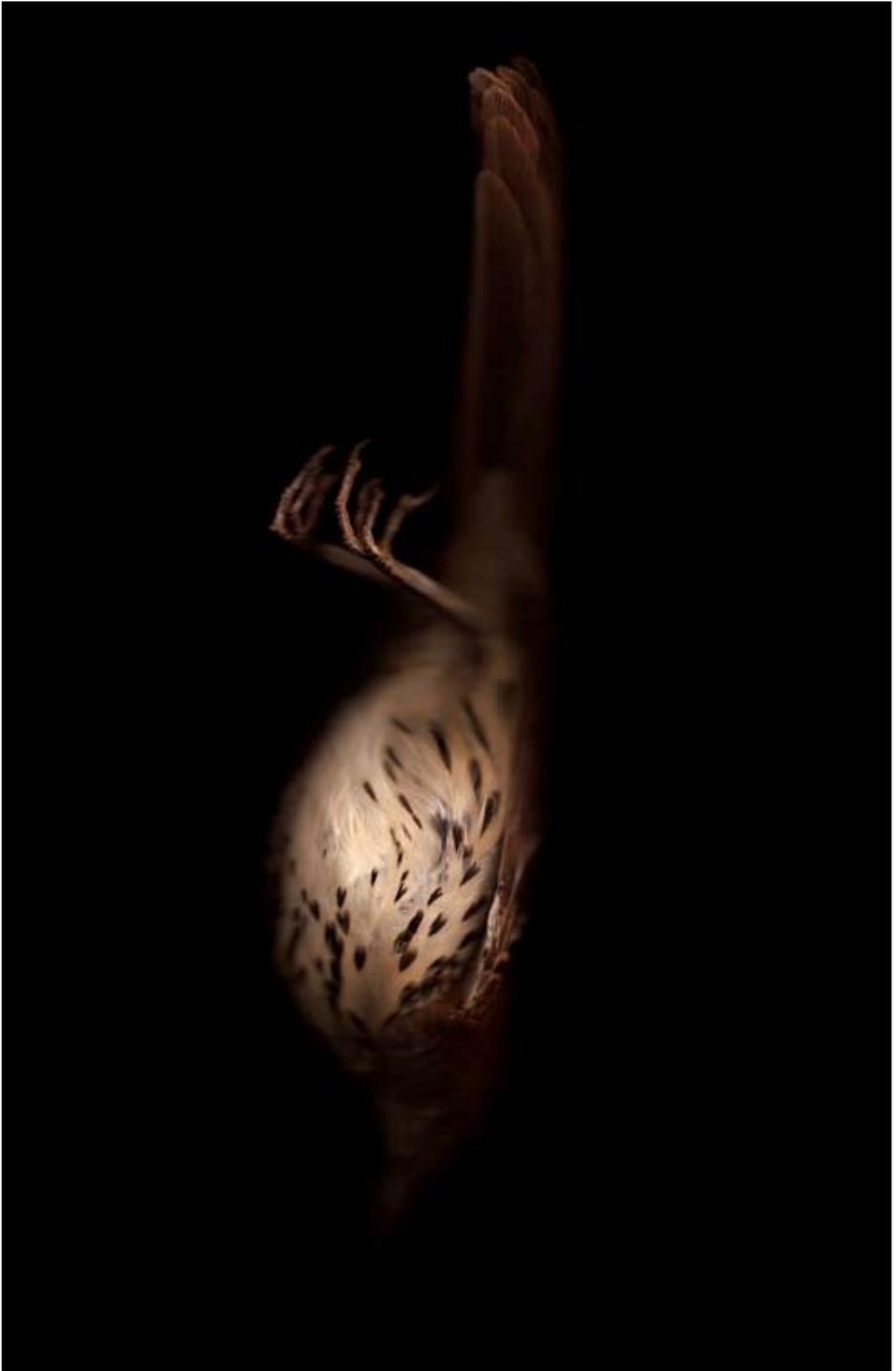


fig. 7.b

One summer while visiting in Buffalo, Grandpa gave Katie one of the canaries he had raised to take home with us. We flew it home on an airplane in a cage inside a cardboard box. We had the bird for years and years. He died while we were away on vacation. When we came home and Katie saw his dead body at the bottom of his cage, she was very upset. I was fascinated and embarrassed of my desire to open the door and hold his lifeless body in my hands.



fig. 7.i



fig. 7.j

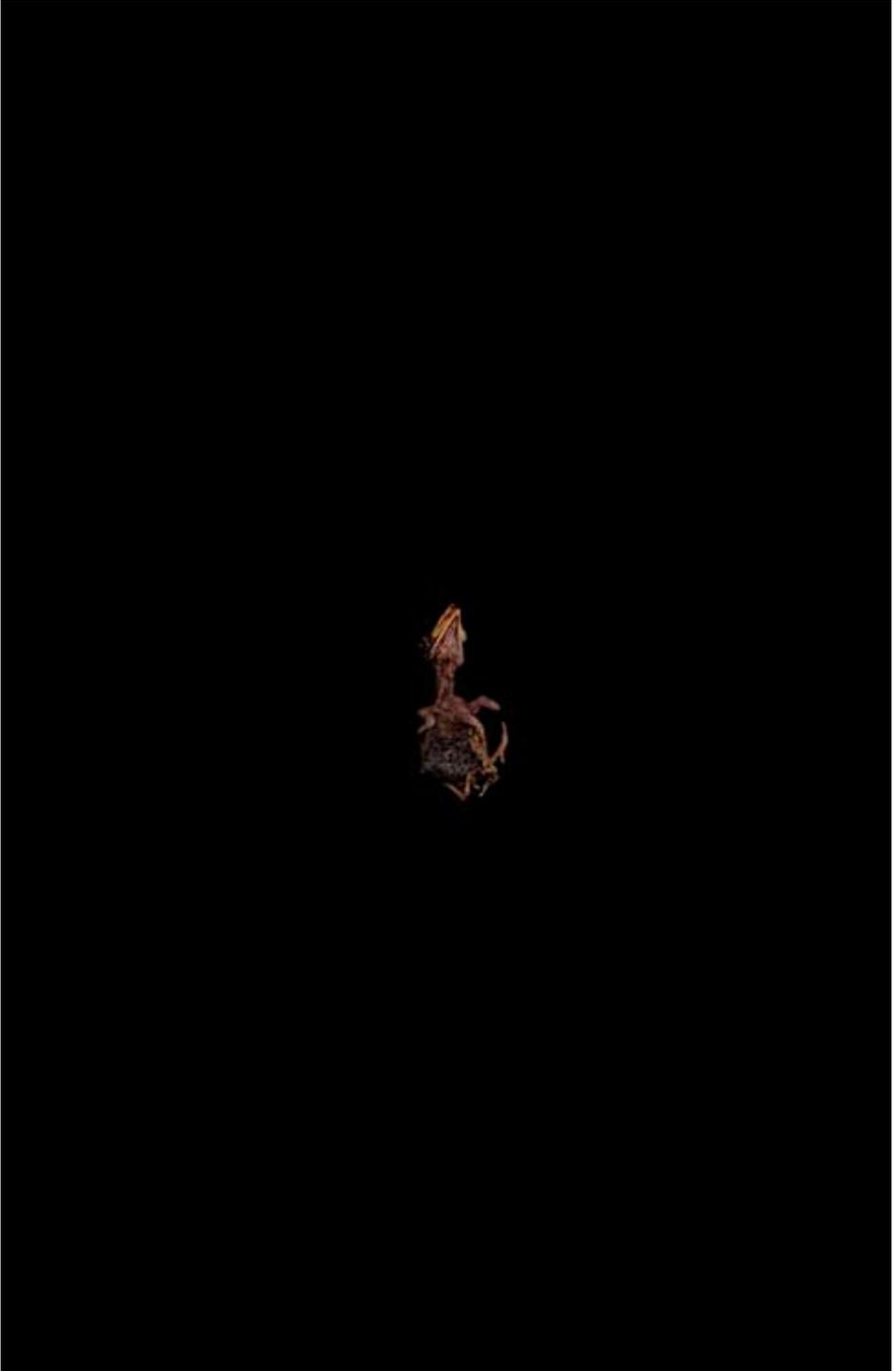


fig. 7.k

