

CAT
BROWN

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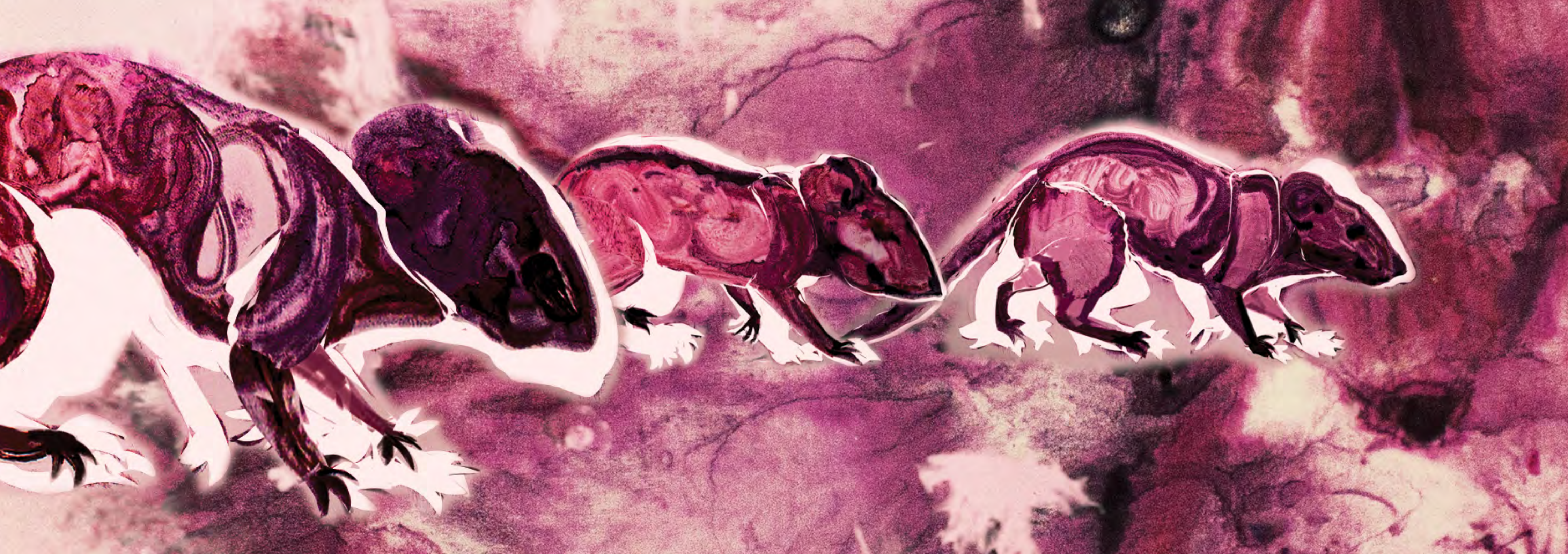
Ruth's Tale.



People have always been storytellers, passing down folklore from generation to generation.

These stories form the threshold by which we articulate ourselves and our relationship to the world around us illustrating an inherent interconnectedness grounded in common moral truths.

My curiosity in folklore emerges in the uncanny embedded in parental cautionary tales.





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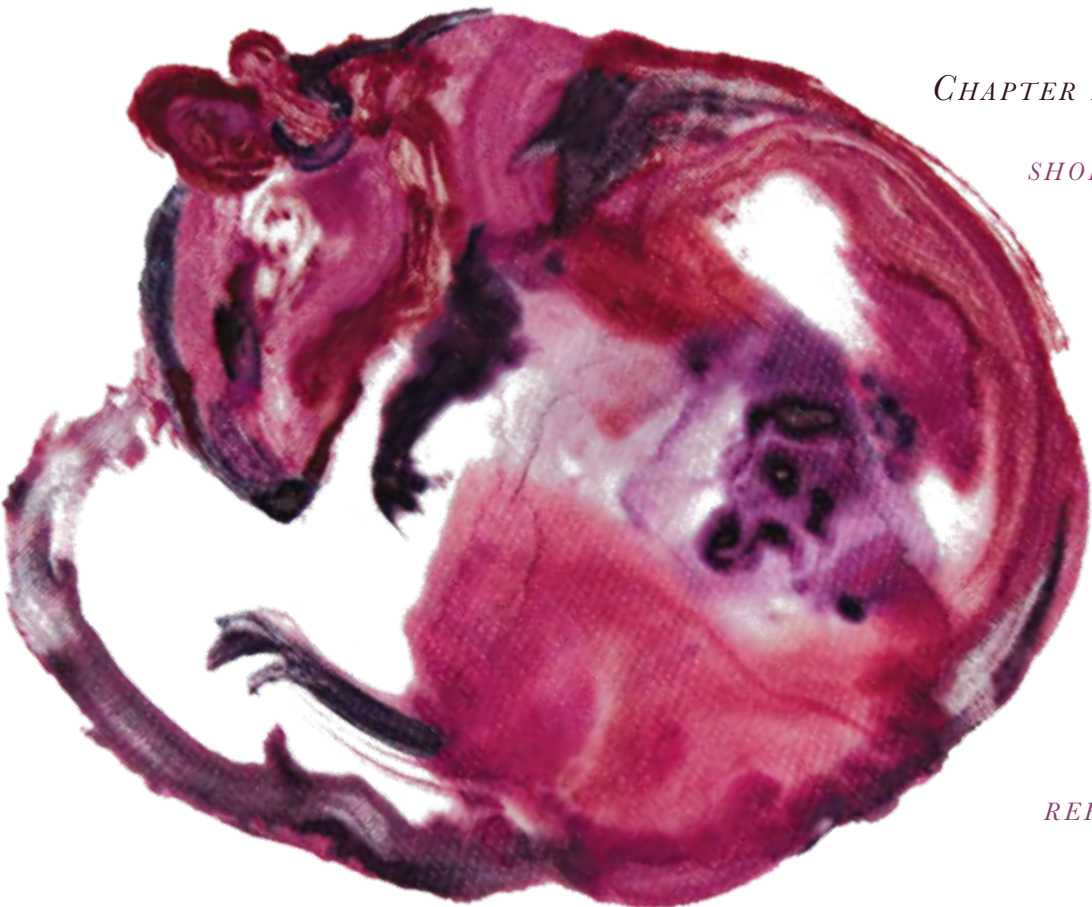
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CHAPTER 1: A RAT'S TALE

WRITTEN BY CAT BROWN
EDITED BY ANDREW MUNNIC



The lip of a tiny tunnel formed a path into the cold, solid ground. Tufts of red and brown patterns traced the walls of the cavity. Amidst the darkness, a Little rat scurried playfully in the pocket of earth.

The Little rat sharpened its claws and rubbed its throbbing incisors. Its tail trailed without patience. Its ears were poised up towards the light, shuffling for any sign of its kin to come back. The hole was small and rough, the walls withered and worn.

A scuffling sound trickled from the surface, and little grains trickled down from the light above.



Two scrawny figures squeezed through the mouth. The three exchanged gentle nuzzles as their whiskers greeted. Their pelts scraped against the walls of the space as they settled against one another, lining the hovel with their woven bodies. The hole, as if in response to their presence, seemed to sink and shrink around them, leaving little space for play.



The Mother rat's claws were dull and worn, her teeth jagged and swollen. Her lip was crinkled, and her snout was decorated red. The other's body was smaller and complemented the same lines along the Mother Rats.

The three pushed and pulled against each other, claws scraping at each other's pelts as they strained to settle against the tight walls. An iron metallic taste as natural as the earth held it.

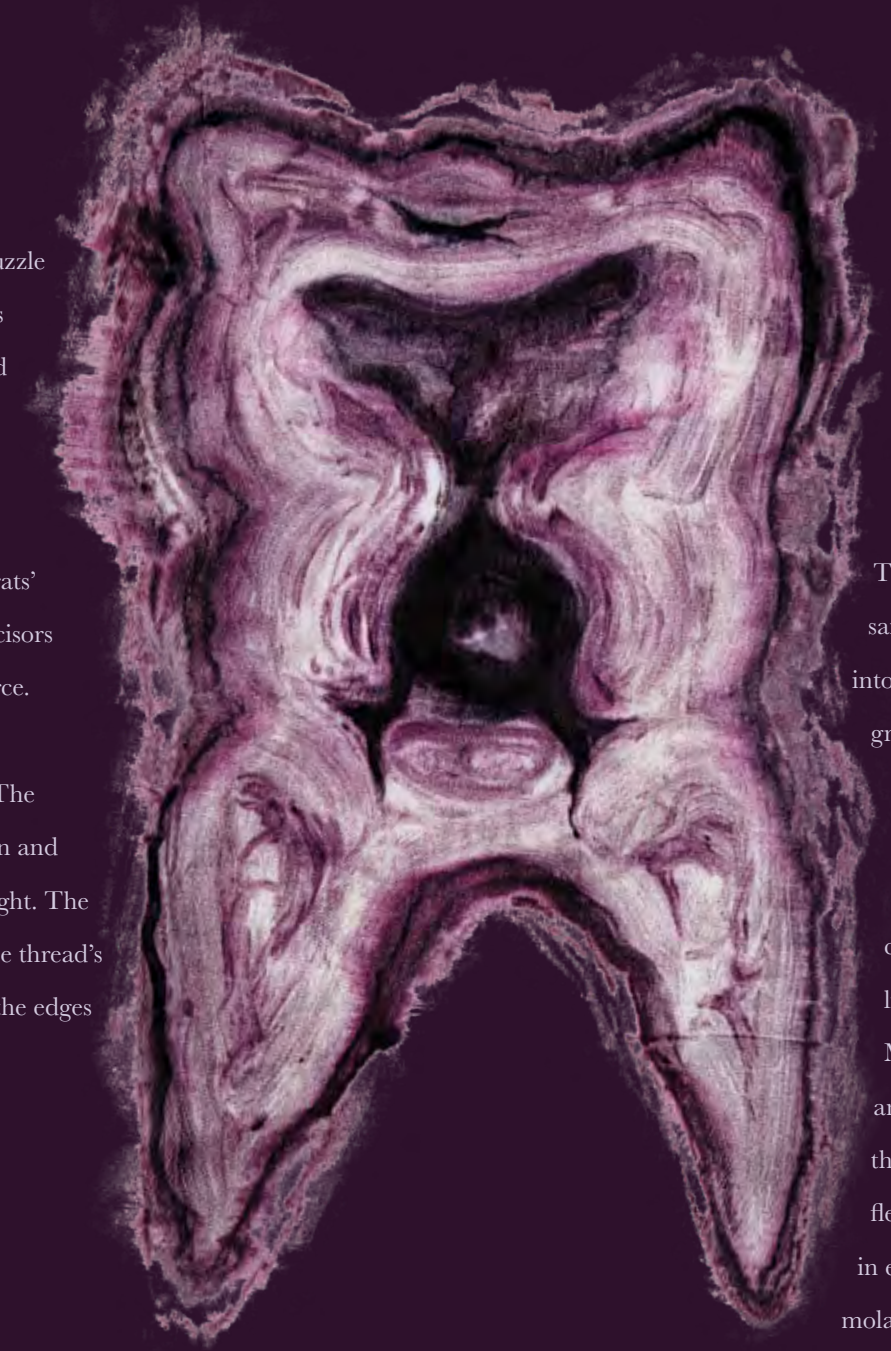


As days passed, the hole
sculpted around their
bodies, pushing between them
& forcing the small creatures
out for the day.

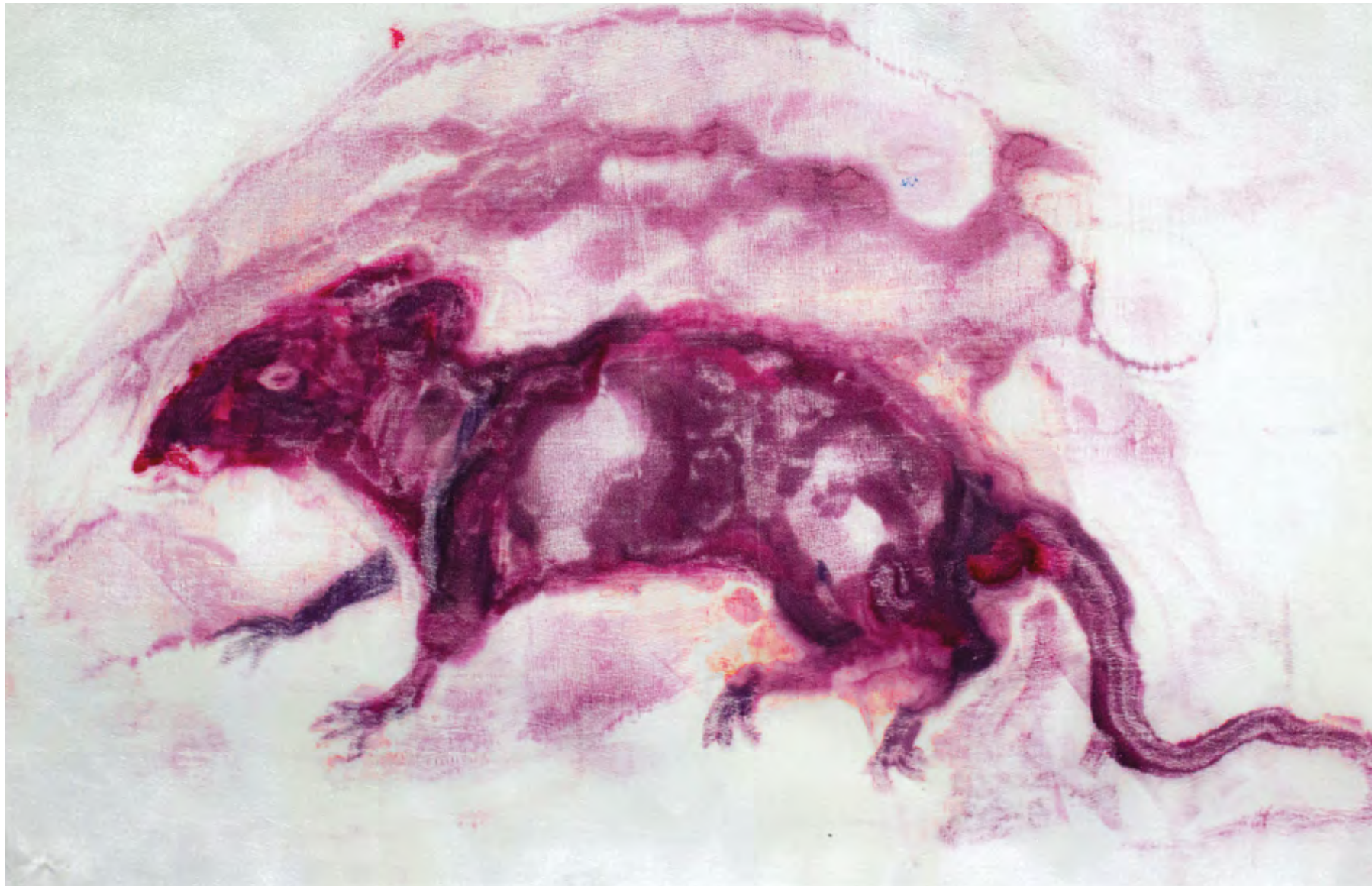
Mother Rat led ahead, her body heavy and
demanding. On her tail, the second followed, muzzle
shut and eyes weary. Little rat followed after, eyes
wide and toes exposed to the cold. They followed
as steadily as a droplet down a window, careful
around any ridge or hard edge. A faint thread
raised from the earth, guiding their feet towards
something familiar, something bittersweet. The rats'
tooth-ache grew as the fibre tied around their incisors
pulled taut, drawing their paths towards the source.

The thread led them to the pink lips of a child. The
Mother rat lodged her claws into the delicate skin and
shoved the jaws open with a powerful gust of might. The
three hurried over into the child's mouth after the thread's
source. A rack of tinted and worn teeth framed the edges
of the flesh, revealing the exposed bones.

WRITTEN BY CAT BROWN
EDITED BY ANDREW MUNNIC



The Mother rat
sank her claws firmly
into the pink flesh and
gritted her incisors
before latching
onto a tooth. The
Little rat watched
carefully, perking its
little ears attentively.
Mother rat pressed
and squeezed its claws
through gummy pink
flesh, digging deep
in efforts to loosen the
molar.



The gum was soft and delicate, easily torn through by the incisors.

After gnawing along the sides, the rat proceeded to clasp its jaw around the tooth. It held the bone firmly between its reddened, slick lips. This followed vigorous twisting and shaking of its head as the rat began to jerk backwards. The rat's hind quarters pressed its claws through the lips of the mouth, maintaining its hold on the chin as it struggled to rip the tooth from the gum. The mother rat clenched and pulled until red liquid seeped along its jawline. A fleshy snap sounded out, and finally, the big rat skidded backwards, a tooth held firmly in its incisors. A threaded, red root trailed from the crevice of tissue it had been torn from. Mother rat calmly shook itself out, dropping the tooth at Little rat's toes before joining the other in extracting further.

The little rat sniffed at the metallic stench. Dark spots covered its ridges, and a familiar iron metallic scent lubricated its base. The rat licked its throbbing incisor, then desperately chomped down on the bone. Its throbbing began to ease between each

gnaw. The rat's lips twisted and eyes strained as it ingurgitated the mulched chunks. And a black sugar seeped out from the tooth between each violent crunch. The dark plasma latched itself in the grooves of the rat's mouth and spread out into its body with every swallow, quietly crystallising within its arteries to form a patient, enclosing cavern. The three licked their eased incisors with quenched desire.

The rats strapped a few teeth up with their tails and returned to their hole in the ground. They no longer struggled to squeeze into the ground with their painted claws and decorated snouts. The hole no longer seemed to choke on their bodies as they pushed themselves through to their shelter. The rats' body frames filed down against the walls of the cold earth, their ribs defining and surrendering to the mould of the hole.

The three turned and shifted in circles until settling quietly into the space. The stillness is temporary, though, broken suddenly when screeching sounds out. The three rats exchange claws and teeth, bashing against each other's weak frames. The rats rip at each other's flesh, pinning one another down and releasing sharp screeches. Snapping jaws and black sugar decorate the walls and their pelts with intricate patterns. Then the rats begin to settle back into the stillness as another layer of iron scent crystallises on the walls.

The sensation of throbbing stirs the three rats from their quiet paralysis, again, and a familiar thread tied at their incisors drags them to the surface, demanding to be followed into another day.

And like the chorus of a song the rats...



The song begins to falter as the Little rat claws its way to the surface of the hole, ripping itself away from the others.

It emerges from the cave, this time alone. Its incisor throbs against the pull of the thread.

The black sugar in its arteries slowly loses its sweetness.

A sour tang burns on its tongue.

The Little Rat

clutches its
incisors
&
begins to pull
violently.



A RAT'S TALE

The blackened roots of its bone fighting back, unwilling to be dislodged. A sharp screech erupts as the notes of the song ease in a whisper.

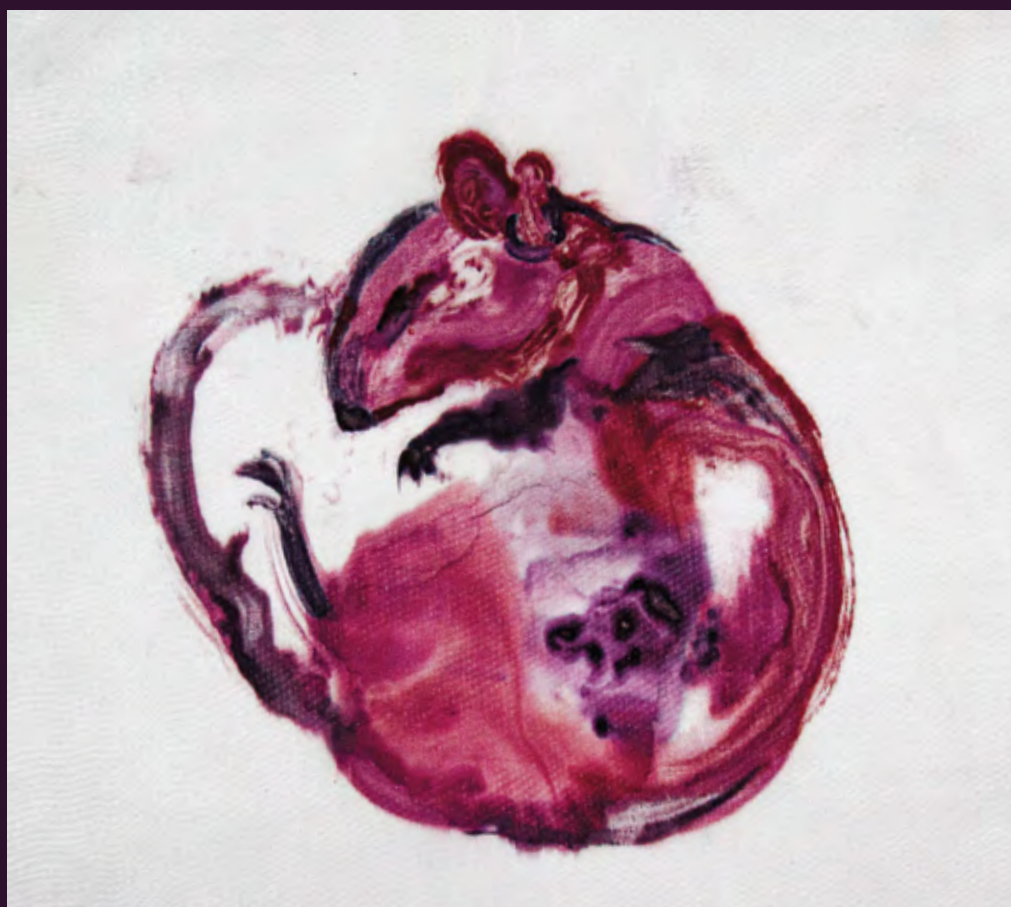
A metallic taste washes down its lips as the incisors rip away from the rat's mouth, out into the dirt.

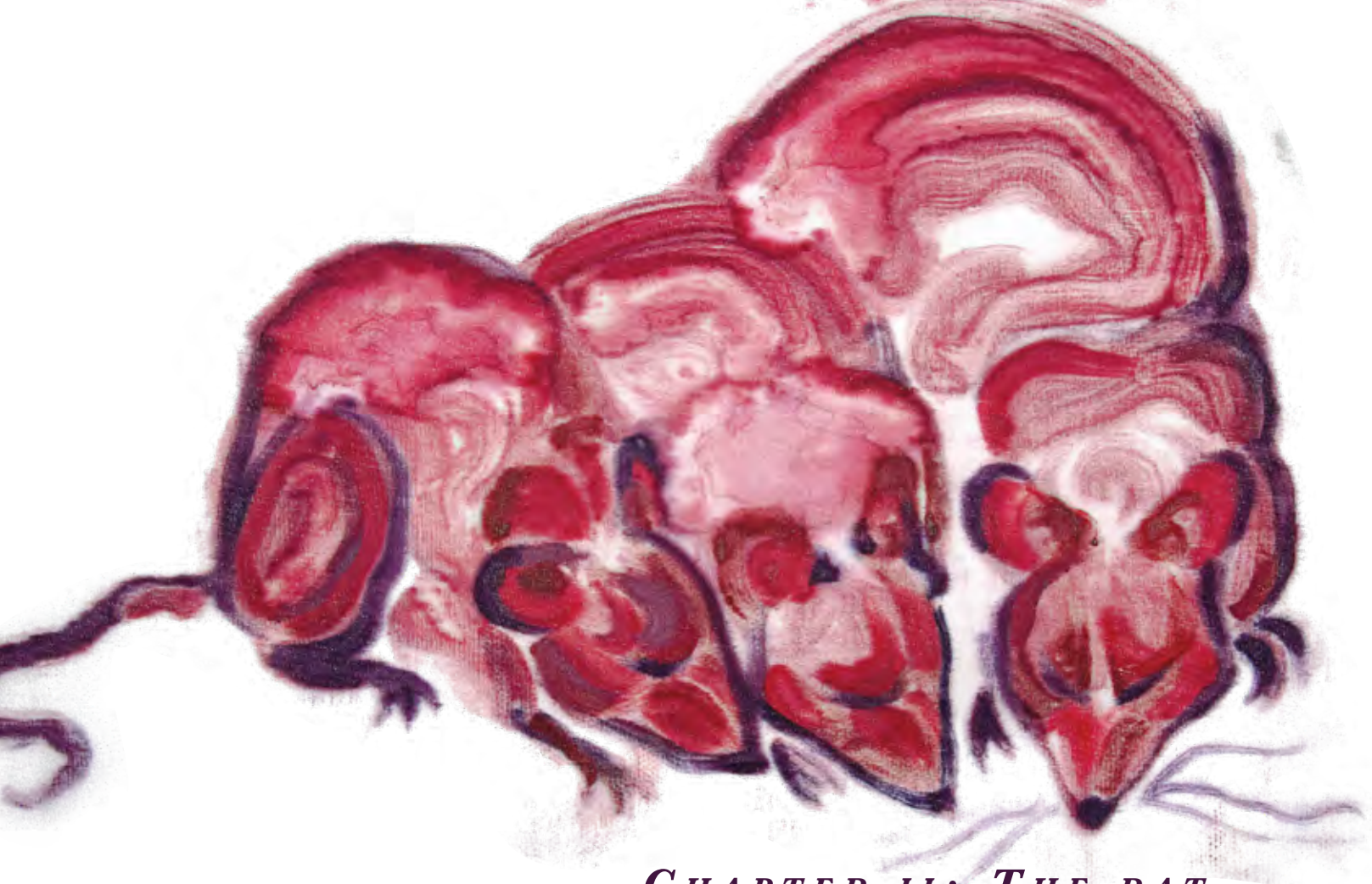
A quietness soothes the rats ill body, then.



The **Little Rat** begins to pad away through the grass, and its raw pads shiver under the smooth and cool textures of the soil.

Its tail vanishes between the blades...





CHAPTER II: THE RAT

My practice adopts the rat as my central non-human figure. Emerging as a recontextualization of the “Tooth Mouse” folklore fairytale and adapting it into an allegory for abuse. The rat confronts domestic abuse and becomes a mode with which to unpack feelings of vulnerability, isolation and desperation. Through this engagement of the rat, I can unpack these sensitivities with a nuanced agency.

The relational boundaries between the non-human and human informs the theoretical premise of my practice. My work gently engages with sensitive themes of generational trauma, domestic and child abuse. Folklore offers the vocabulary in which to reconceptualize these sensitivities and bridging the boundaries between the human and non-human world.

“Would you tell me, please, which way I want to go from here?”

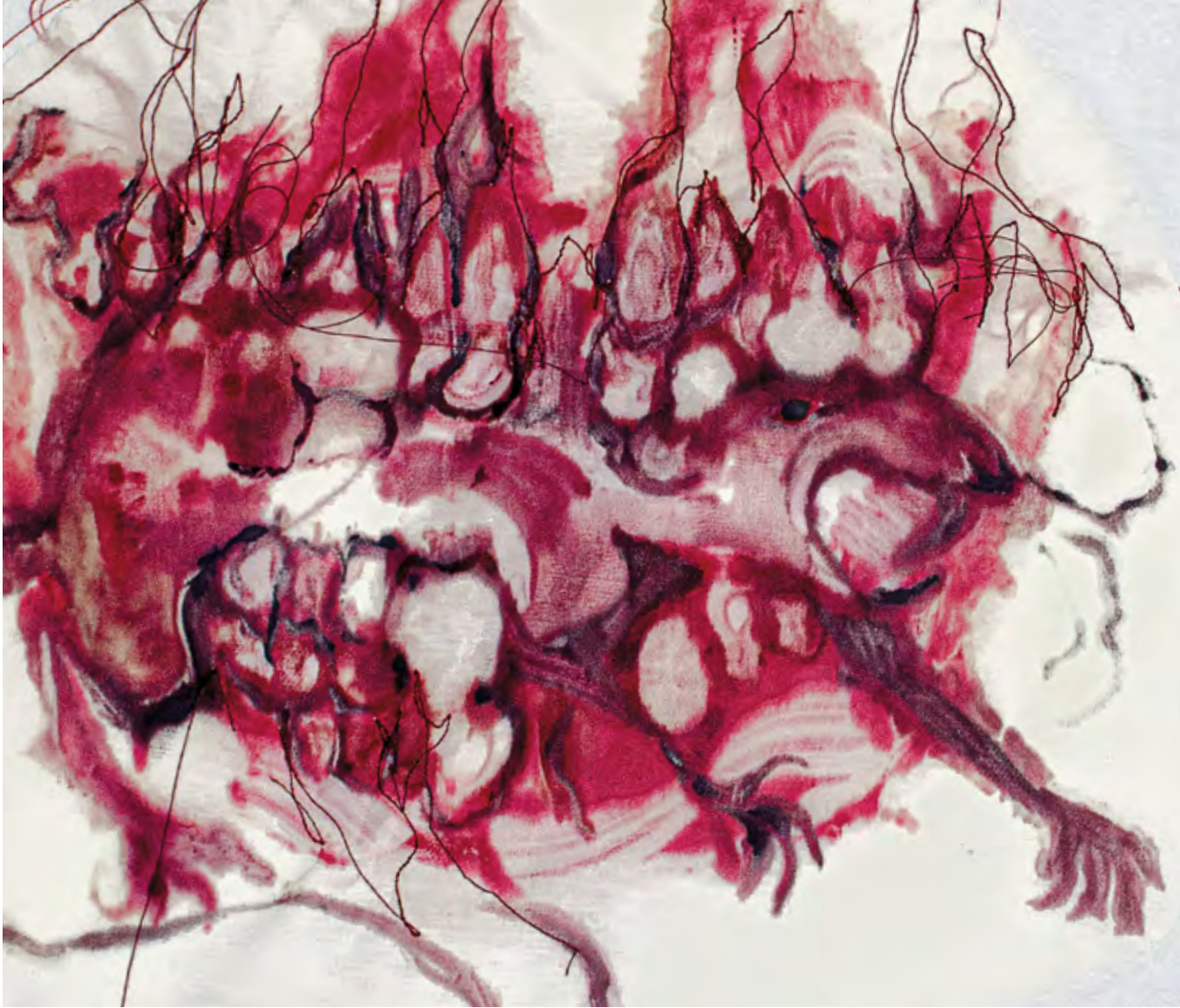
“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where —” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

“— so long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation.

(Carroll, 1982: 62)



I was looking at my childhood photographs and imposing the rat's on them. They became unsettling, but fragile at the same time.

Over the past year, gentle toothache has consistently protruded through my thoughts. My shifting jaw and curiosity of folktale navigated me towards the widespread Western tradition of the “Tooth Fairy”. Adapting the older well-established folkloric figure of the “Tooth Rat” or “Tooth Mouse” into modern tradition. The modern tooth fairy is magical and whimsical, collecting your teeth in exchange for coin under your pillow. This figure is detached from its historical anxieties of witches and the disposal of teeth. A tradition my family shared that celebrates a major milestone in childhood towards adulthood.

My point of interest responds to the strange act by parents in offering their children's exfoliated teeth to rodents as an act of care. A belief that the new adult tooth would adopt the characteristics of that animal. (Parsons et al., 2024) The incisors of rodents are particularly notable. In fact, they are ever-growing and require constant gnawing labor in which to file them down. “This process does not just serve the needs of their bodies for food but also the needs of their teeth, which will grow continuously if broken or unused.” (Burt, 2005: 43)

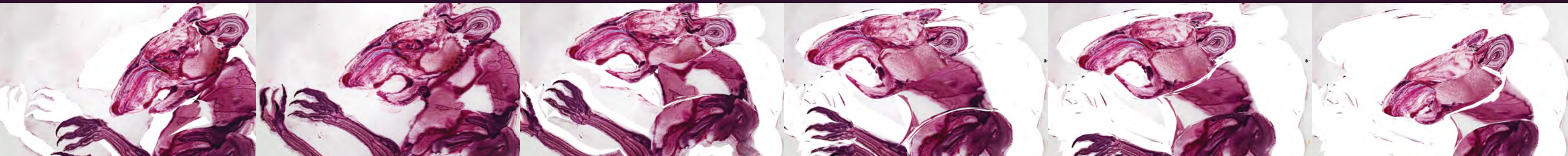
The rat is well likened to engage with the sensitivities covered in my work. Sitting at the intersection between growing up into adulthood and reflecting on our relationships with those who have raised us.



“The voice of the animal is in me, and thereby I undergo the ways that animals change or become.”

(Lawlor, 2008: 170)

FRAME
BY
FRAME



MONOTYPE
PRINT
ANIMATION

*The
cavities
that line my
smile*

*the tooth
that marks a
memory,
a moment in
time*

*where we
begin to leave
our childhood
behind.*



*The notion of
erosion
takes shape in
what I refer to
in my writing
as*

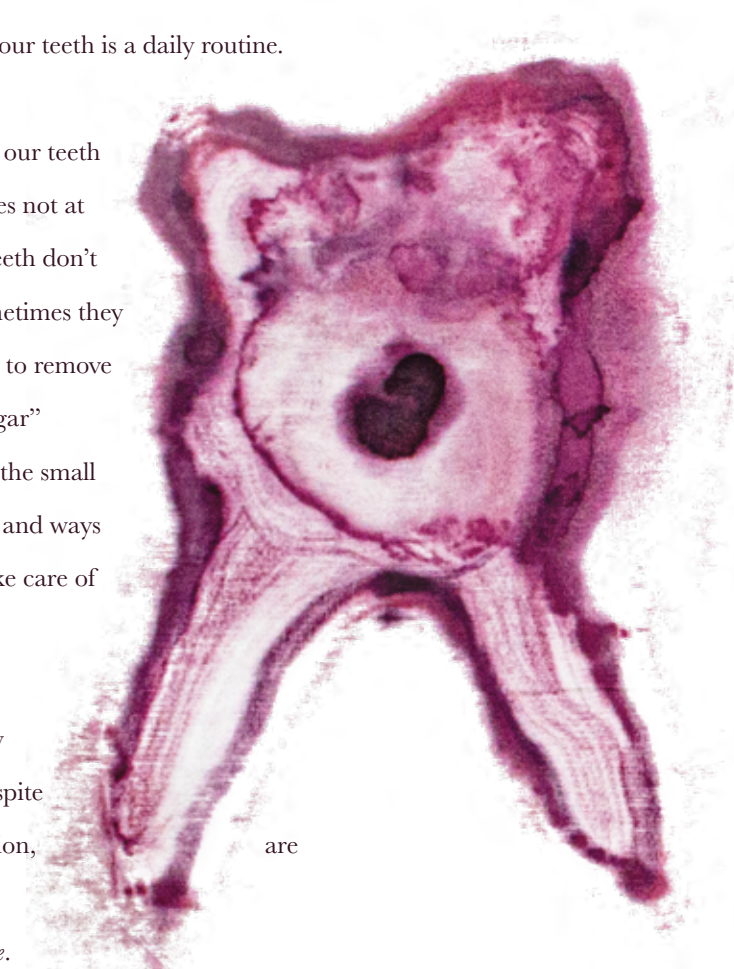
“black sugar”.

THE TOOTH

*T*aking care of our teeth is a daily routine.

Sometimes we brush our teeth too hard or sometimes not at all. Sometimes our teeth don't fit in our mouth, sometimes they hurt us, and we need to remove them. The “black sugar” broadly describes all the small compounding habits and ways in which we don't take care of ourselves.

The cavities we carry behind our smile, despite their pain and intrusion, are familiar and comfortable.



*The erosion
reinforms the
resulting neglect.*

*It describes a
broader habit of
estrangement
and a discomfort
in suspending
the boundaries
between the
human and non-
human.*

CAT BROWN



CAT BROWN

MICHAELIS SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS
2025

ABOUT THE ARTIST

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dearest friends, family & future me,

I hope my work touches you in ways it touches me no more.
Remember that kindness is entangled within our creativity.
Allow yourself space to become curious. To see things within
their multiplicity.

*Thank you to my partner, Pawitirin for making it through Michaelis
together. To my family, even though we fight & heal & hurt. To my
friends, who have taught me so much about what it means to be an artist.*

*Thank you,
Your Cat*

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