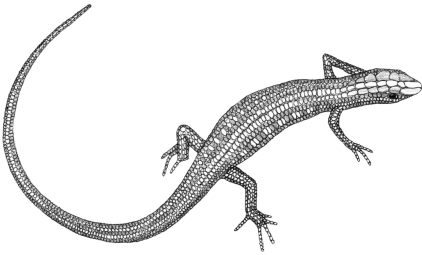


*THE
ART
OF
TAXIDERM*

SHARON KERNOT



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LOVE

At the age of eleven
I fell in love
with death.
I found a gecko
in a dark corner
of a room.
Its lifeless eyes open,
its small bulbous toes
splayed
as if about to leap away.

I wanted to keep it,
to hold on.
I wanted to preserve
its lively expression.
I placed it on my dresser
and watched
its stomach deflate,
its scaly skin dry and curl
and the almost-leap
slowly decay.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

Later, I found a crow,
its feathers so black
they shone
with a blue tinge
in the bright sunshine.

It lay on its side
at the base of a jacaranda—
purple flowers scattered beneath—
as if it had fallen asleep,
floated down serenely
from a branch above.

I stroked its sleek feathers
expecting it to wake,
flap strong wings and fly off,
but it slept on.

I returned later
with a shoebox—
a cardboard coffin—
and carried my sleeping beauty
home to accompany my
withering gecko.

THE COLLECTION

Three brown tree frogs,
two skinks,
one New Holland honeyeater,
one ant-eaten galah,
one dusty sparrow
and one fresh, cat-killed
red-belly black—
perfect,
except for
four small puncture marks.

A GLASS HOUSE

Father bought
a large glass aquarium
to house them,
to contain
the fusty fug of death.

BURIED TREASURE

I discovered a sheep's skull
half-buried in a paddock
not far from the house.

I might never have noticed it
but for a small murder
of crows, feasting.

As I got closer, I could smell
the rotting flesh
and hear the hum of blowflies.

The crows *yarked*
and flapped away.
Blowflies scattered and buzzed.

The exposed side was picked clean
in places by birds and foxes.
White bone glinted in the bright day.

I tucked my nose and mouth
under my jumper
to avoid gagging

and sliced through a small piece
of woolly skin and sinew
until the skull came away.

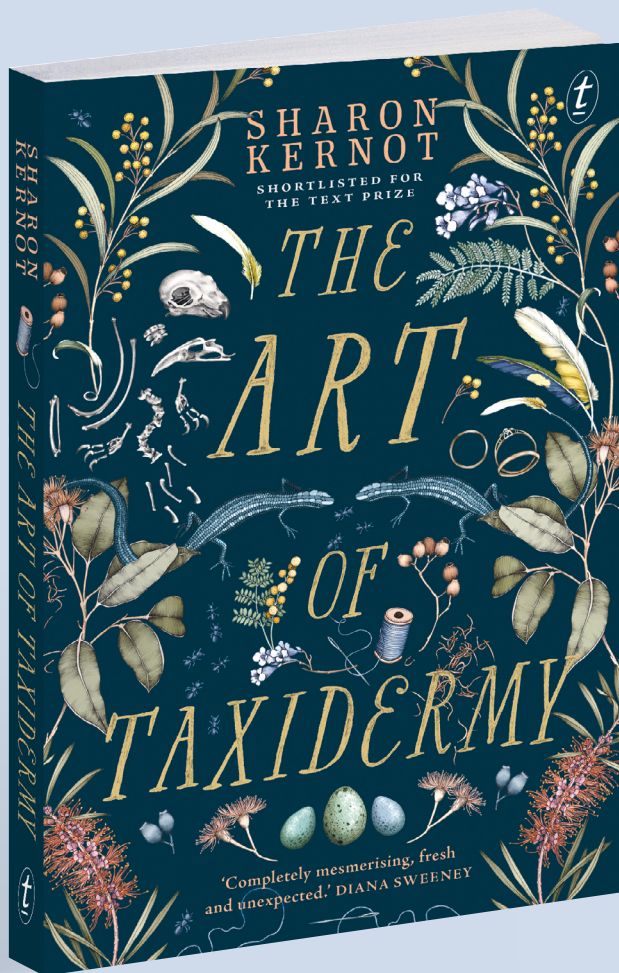
The semi-buried side was damp with
skin and patchy grey wool,
and a withered eye.

ANNIE I

Annie was my best friend.
She was everything
I was not.

Her hair was the colour
of wheat at sunset,
her eyes as blue as a summer sky,
her lips the satin sheen of pink pearls,
her bone-white skin
never tanned.

She was pale and luminous,
a ghostly angel, but,
like me, she had a dark heart.



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