

& persona

A collaborative experiment with words and images



Poems by Mackenzie Carignan

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Photos by Felicia Ohnmacht

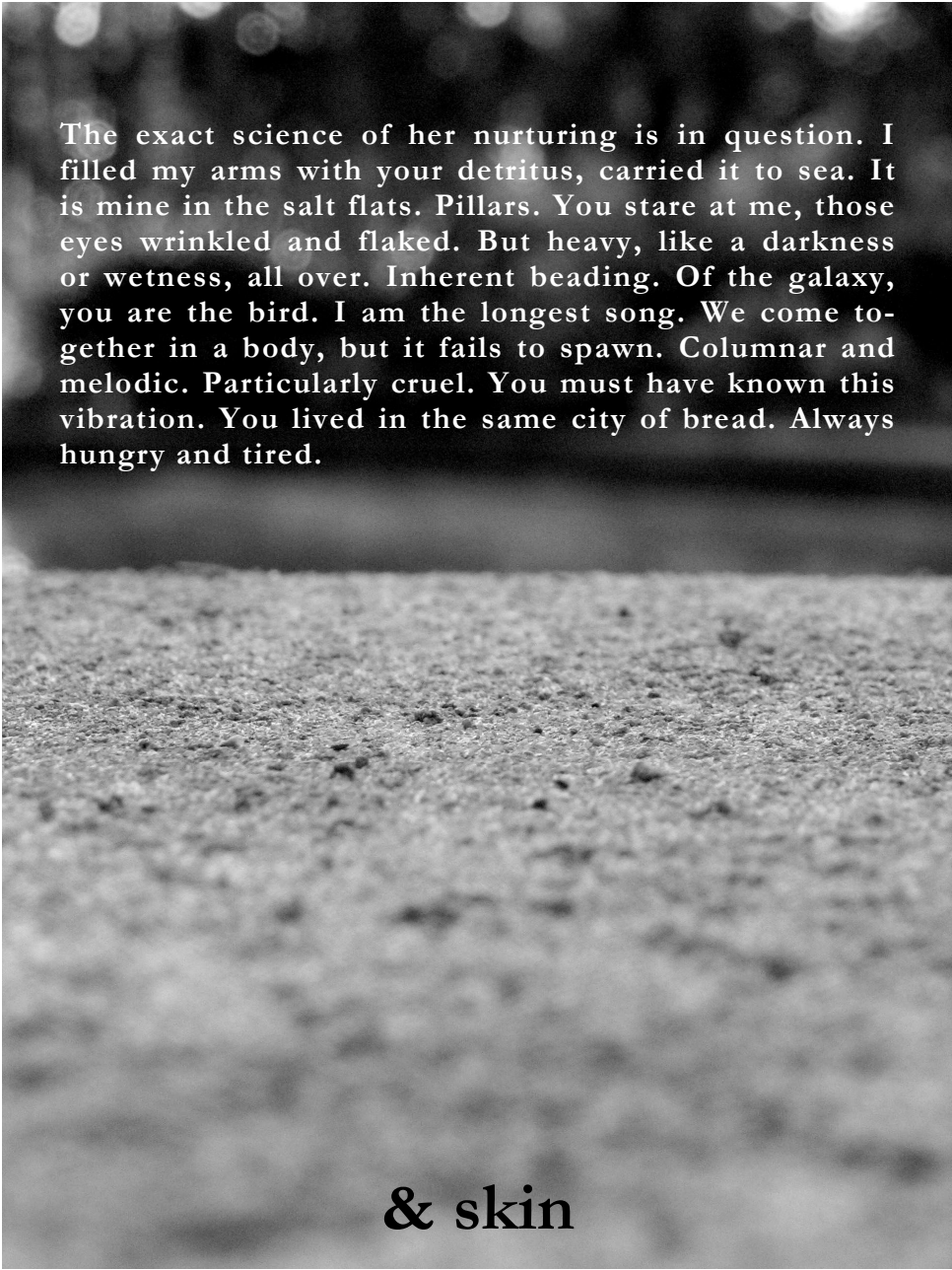
For Brian & Eliot, who love
every one of my selves, despite
the overcrowding.

~MC~

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To James, and all those
who patiently waited for
me to pick up my camera
again.

~FO~



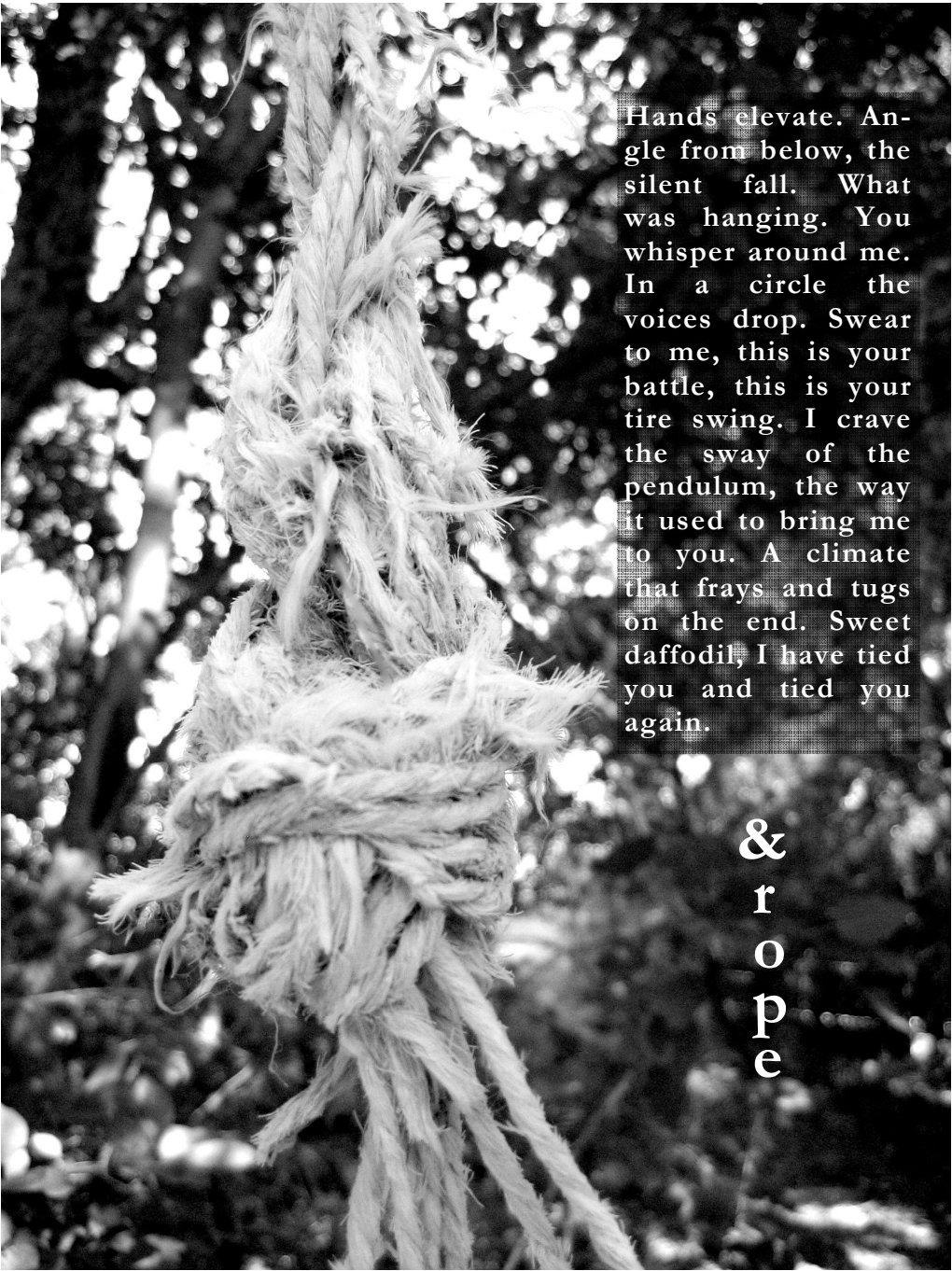
The exact science of her nurturing is in question. I filled my arms with your detritus, carried it to sea. It is mine in the salt flats. Pillars. You stare at me, those eyes wrinkled and flaked. But heavy, like a darkness or wetness, all over. Inherent beading. Of the galaxy, you are the bird. I am the longest song. We come together in a body, but it fails to spawn. Columnar and melodic. Particularly cruel. You must have known this vibration. You lived in the same city of bread. Always hungry and tired.

& skin



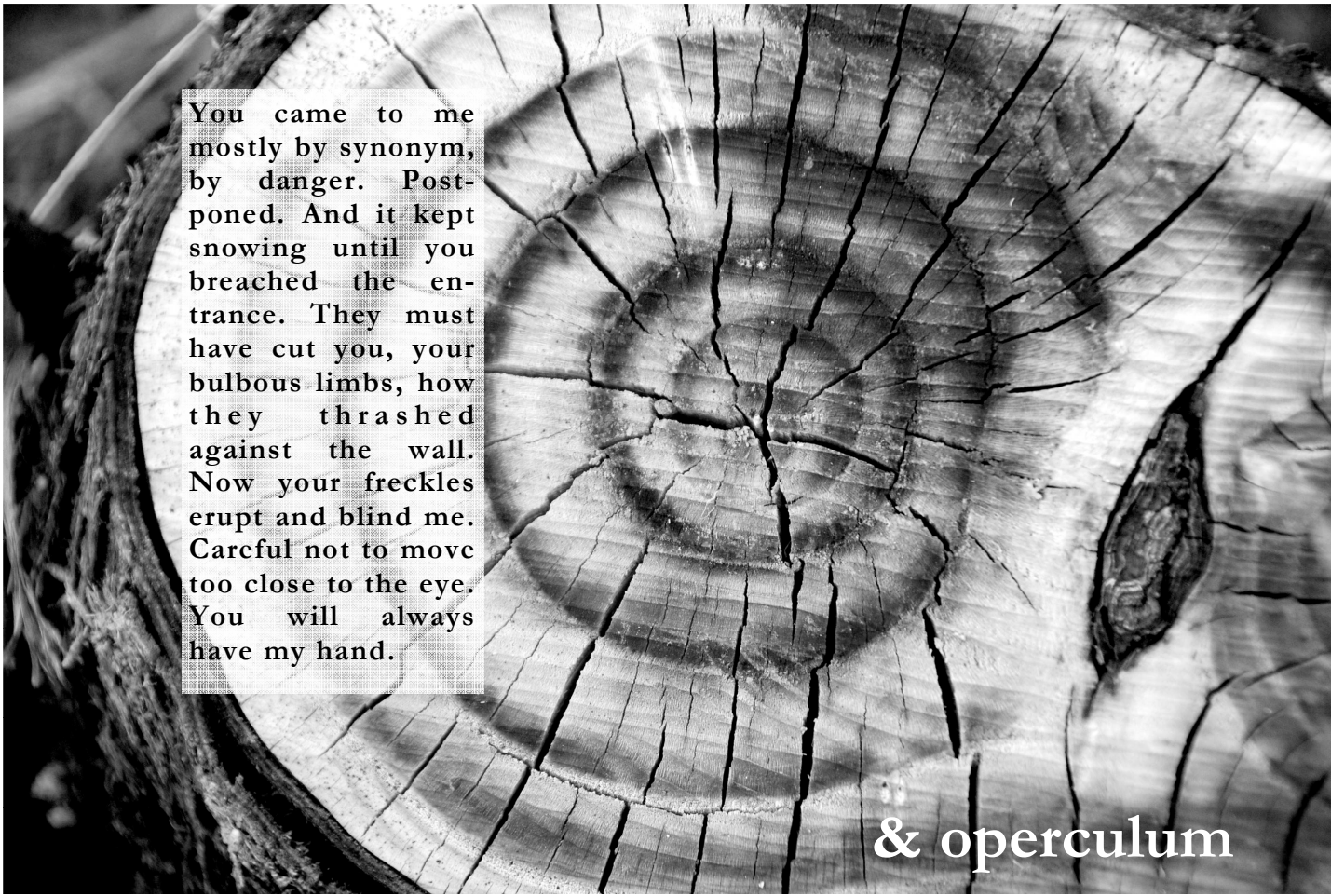
& persona

Murmur. Strands of hair woven in tulle. Her pear tree, nascent and removed. It is a cage, we argue, this swallowing center most illuminated by nests. What song? The woman you heard me saying me saying. What time? Initial clap of the bell. You descend on me, still falling, still hovering. Perched. Who sings? Don't answer so quickly. Standing among my others. Which one of me is being lost? On occasion, I call myself "her" because she is a multiple of three. Capture me moving, you can see the trinity. Beginning to shudder.



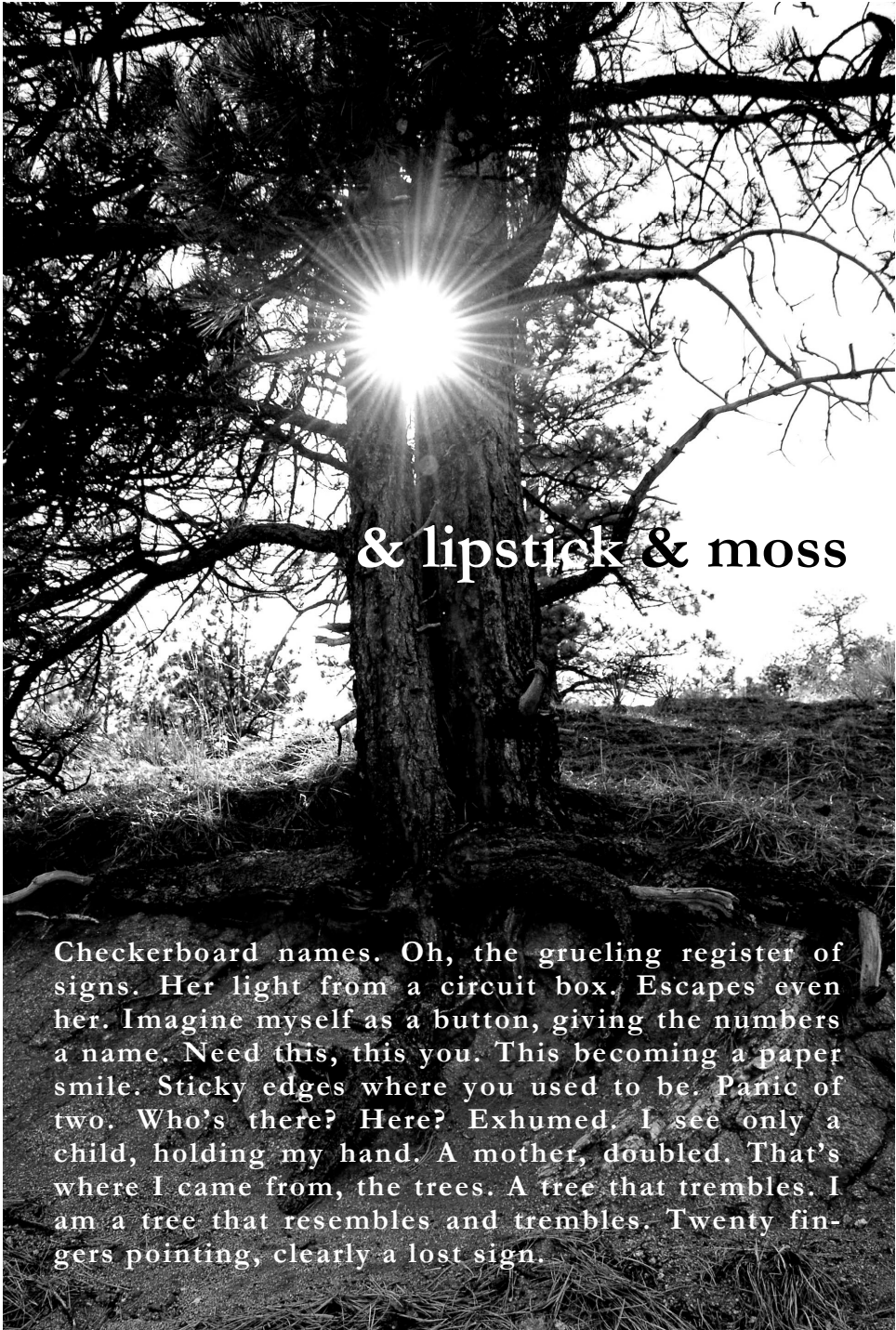
Hands elevate. Angle from below, the silent fall. What was hanging. You whisper around me. In a circle the voices drop. Swear to me, this is your battle, this is your tire swing. I crave the sway of the pendulum, the way it used to bring me to you. A climate that frays and tugs on the end. Sweet daffodil, I have tied you and tied you again.

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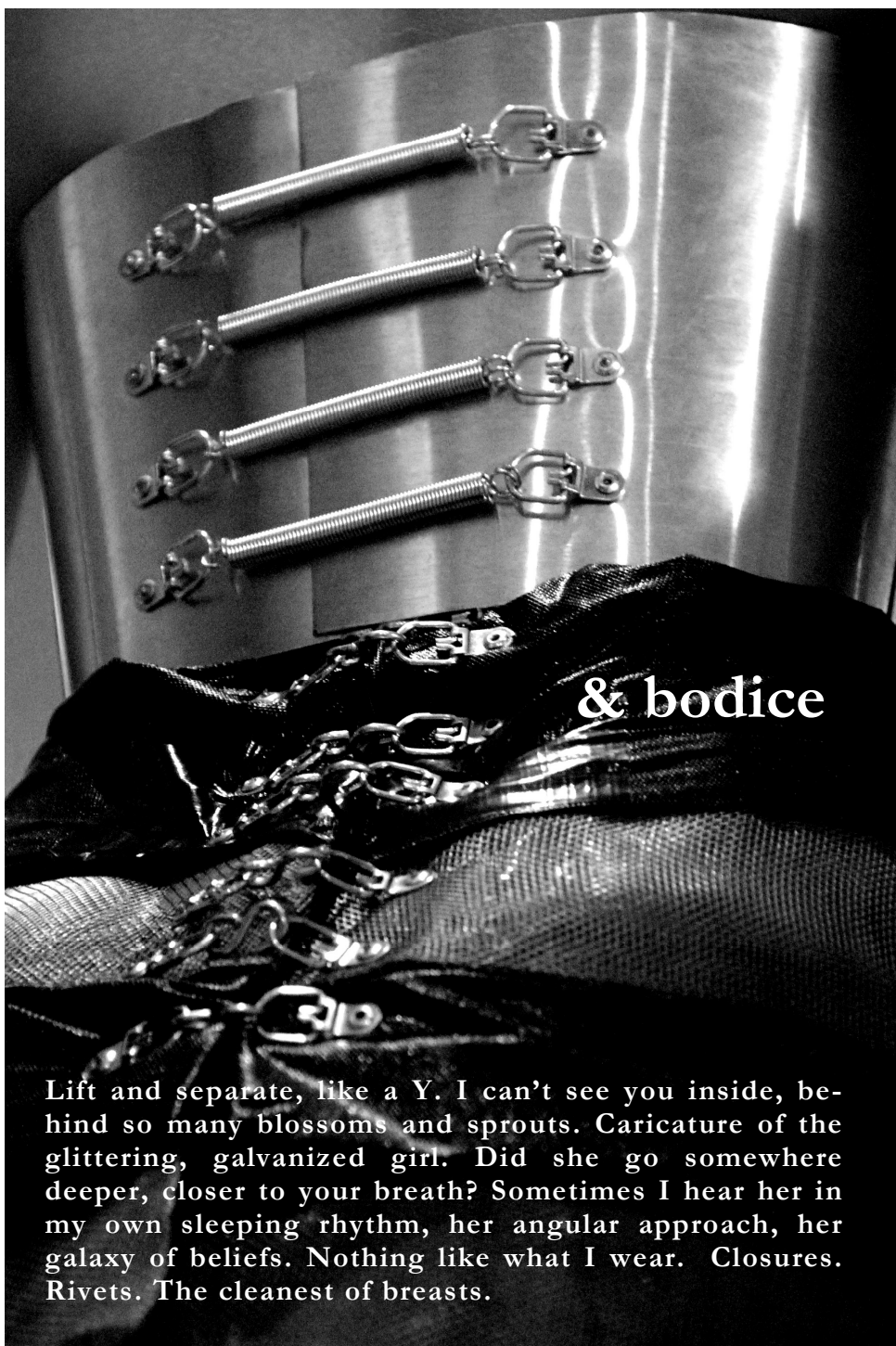
You came to me
mostly by synonym,
by danger. Post-
poned. And it kept
snowing until you
breached the en-
trance. They must
have cut you, your
bulbous limbs, how
they thrashed
against the wall.
Now your freckles
erupt and blind me.
Careful not to move
too close to the eye.
You will always
have my hand.

& operculum



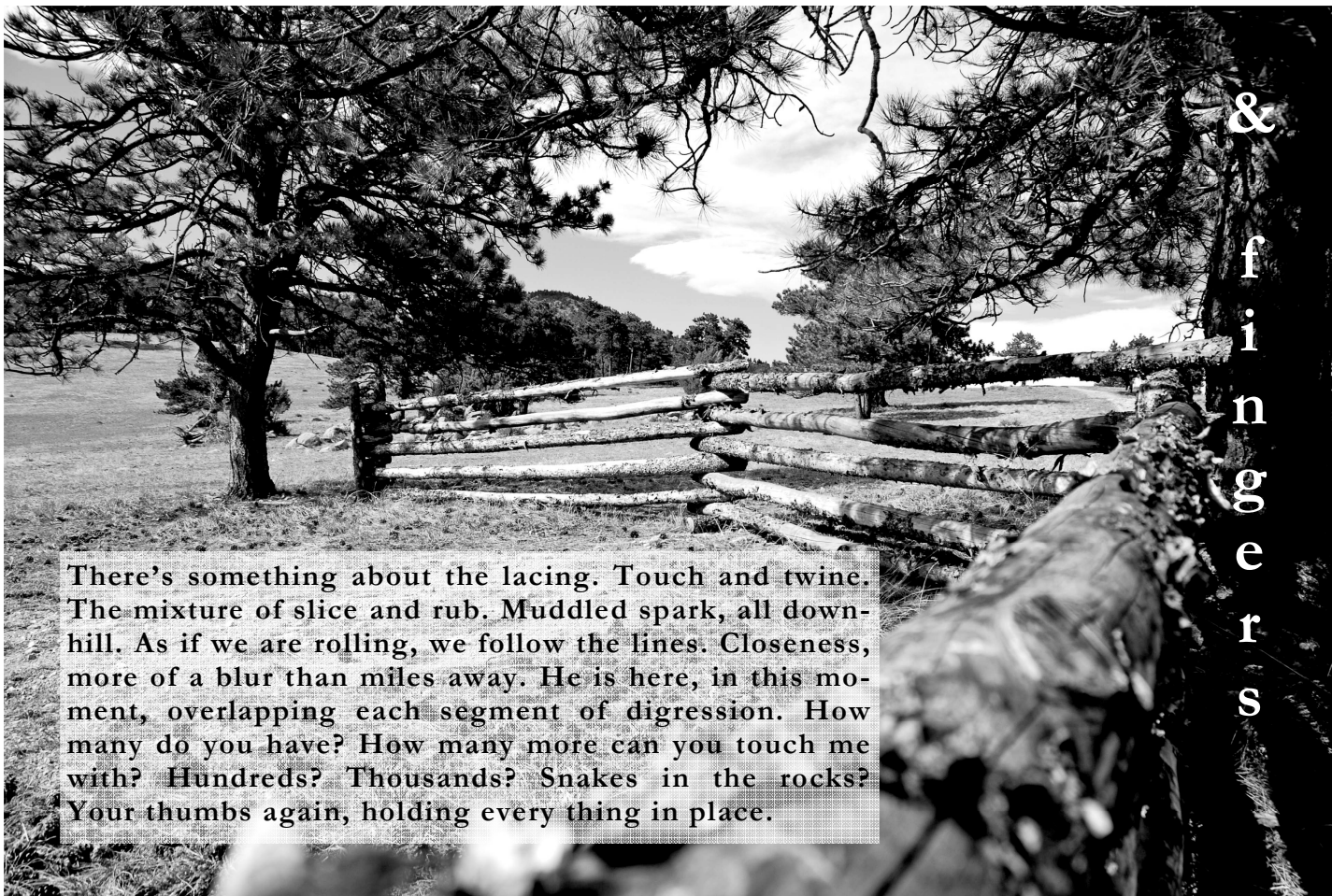
& lipstick & moss

Checkerboard names. Oh, the grueling register of signs. Her light from a circuit box. Escapes even her. Imagine myself as a button, giving the numbers a name. Need this, this you. This becoming a paper smile. Sticky edges where you used to be. Panic of two. Who's there? Here? Exhumed. I see only a child, holding my hand. A mother, doubled. That's where I came from, the trees. A tree that trembles. I am a tree that resembles and trembles. Twenty fingers pointing, clearly a lost sign.



& bodice

Lift and separate, like a Y. I can't see you inside, behind so many blossoms and sprouts. Caricature of the glittering, galvanized girl. Did she go somewhere deeper, closer to your breath? Sometimes I hear her in my own sleeping rhythm, her angular approach, her galaxy of beliefs. Nothing like what I wear. Closures. Rivets. The cleanest of breasts.



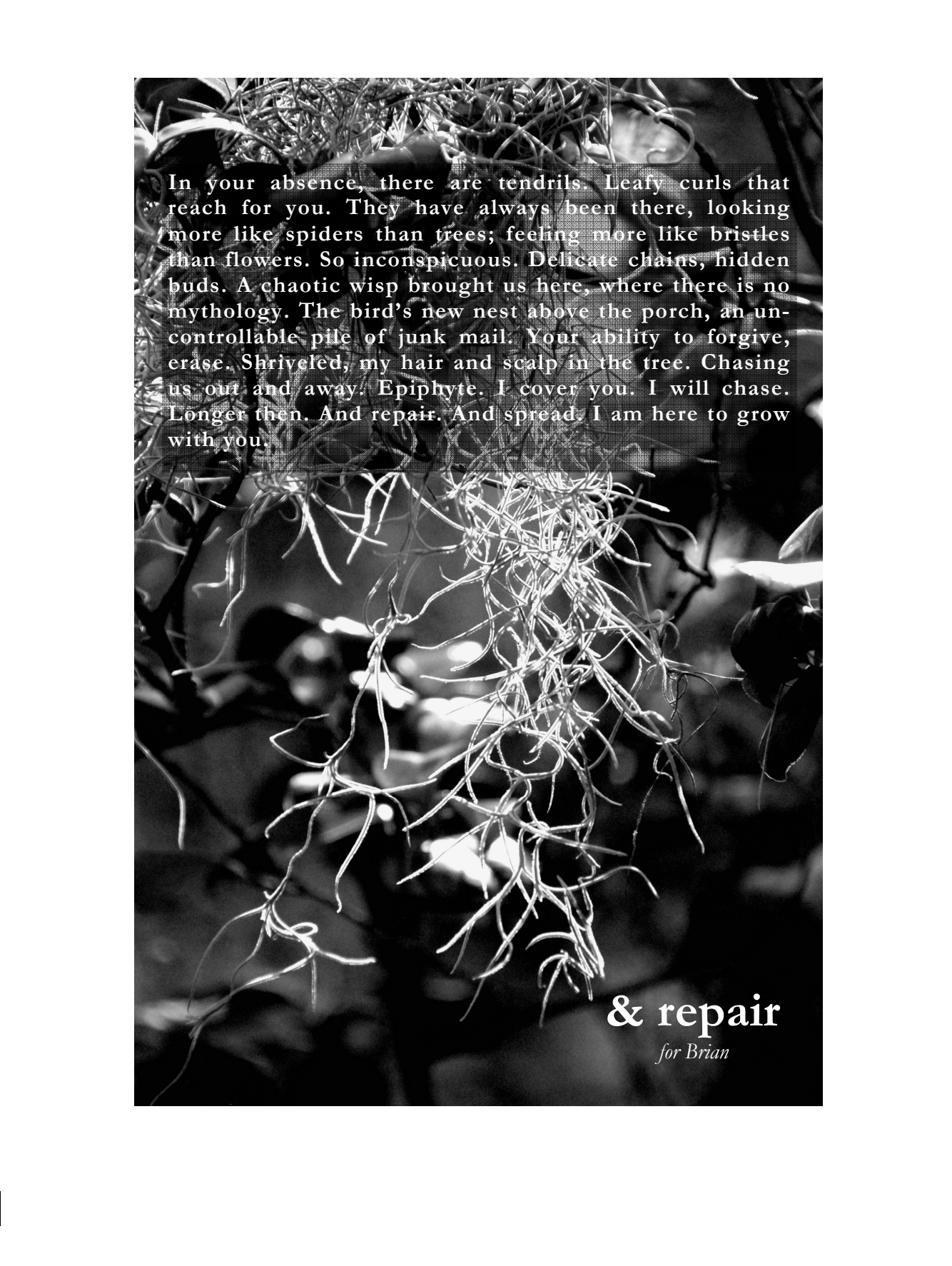
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There's something about the lacing. Touch and twine. The mixture of slice and rub. Muddled spark, all downhill. As if we are rolling, we follow the lines. Closeness, more of a blur than miles away. He is here, in this moment, overlapping each segment of digression. How many do you have? How many more can you touch me with? Hundreds? Thousands? Snakes in the rocks? Your thumbs again, holding every thing in place.



& needle

Cleft. Mitosis. Multiple tongues. I speak to you throughout. He put his hand on my vertebrae. Fingers between them like spongy disks. Then squeezed. See, resting spider. You are a succulent breed. I stroke you as you jostle me around. The beasts, alive with their juicy jowls. Foreign self, against my knowing. She is desperate to hold on. Your sweet wisps of hair, brushed away from your face. I. . .it was me who did the suckling. Who are you, then, with a fist around my spine?



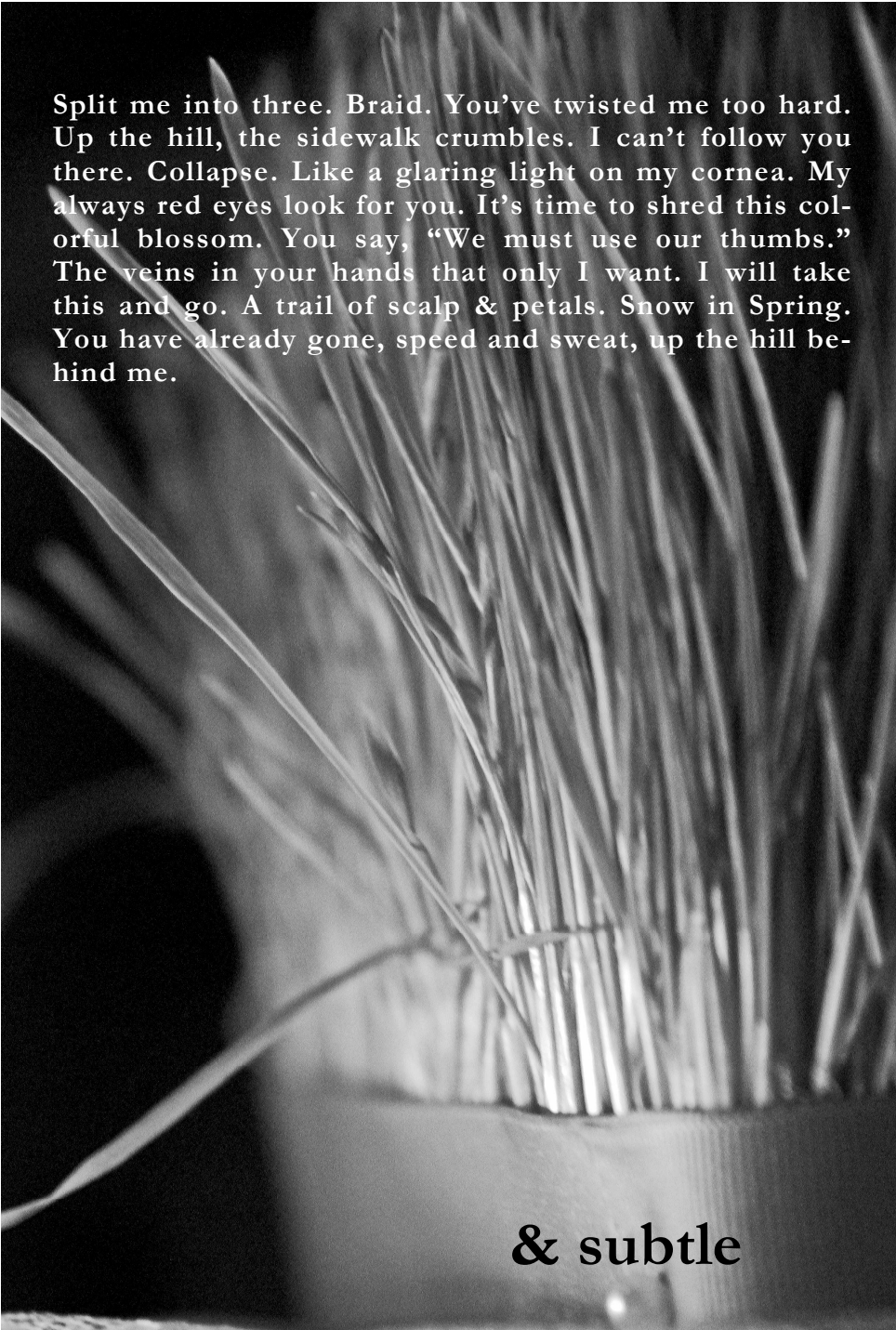
In your absence, there are tendrils. Leafy curls that reach for you. They have always been there, looking more like spiders than trees; feeling more like bristles than flowers. So inconspicuous. Delicate chains, hidden buds. A chaotic wisp brought us here, where there is no mythology. The bird's new nest above the porch, an uncontrollable pile of junk mail. Your ability to forgive, erase. Shriveled, my hair and scalp in the tree. Chasing us out and away. Epiphyte. I cover you. I will chase. Longer then. And repair. And spread. I am here to grow with you.

& repair
for Brian



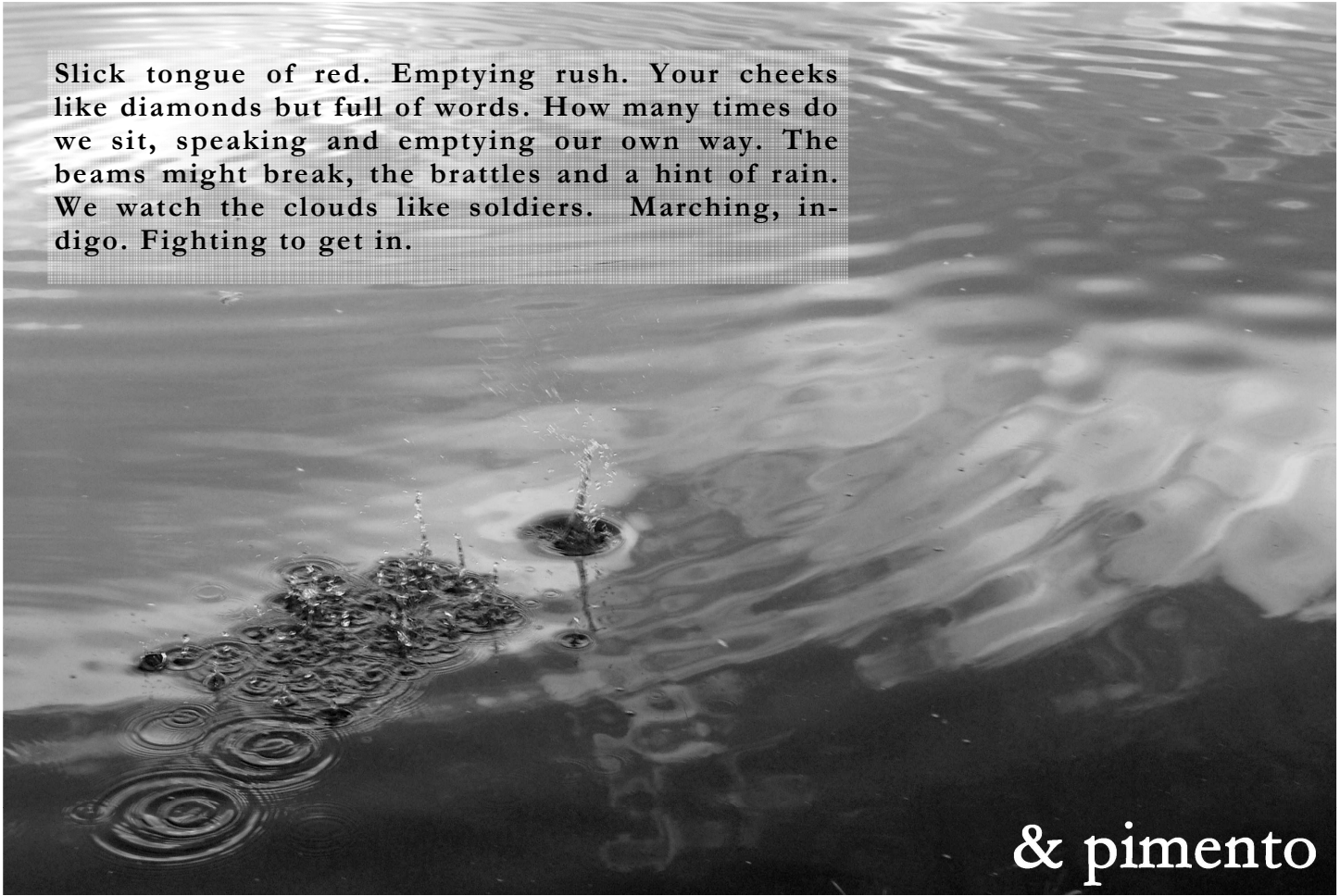
& inception

At the beginning, he came from a bottle, contained within oblong walls. The incision was small but effective. We imagined sugar, rustic canes of sweet grass between our teeth. Gnash, a rush of syrup. He was branded and symmetrical, a strange hint of blue that bordered on gray. You were expecting? Green. Circling herons. As expected, I became a puddle and evaporated. Another photograph refused me. Paper. Unexpected warm fluids.



Split me into three. Braid. You've twisted me too hard.
Up the hill, the sidewalk crumbles. I can't follow you
there. Collapse. Like a glaring light on my cornea. My
always red eyes look for you. It's time to shred this col-
orful blossom. You say, "We must use our thumbs."
The veins in your hands that only I want. I will take
this and go. A trail of scalp & petals. Snow in Spring.
You have already gone, speed and sweat, up the hill be-
hind me.

& subtle

A black and white photograph of water. In the lower-left quadrant, there is a splash of water, creating several concentric ripples that spread outwards. The water surface is covered in fine, shimmering ripples, suggesting a gentle breeze or light rain. The lighting is soft, creating a moody and contemplative atmosphere. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent rectangular box in the upper-left portion of the image.

Slick tongue of red. Emptying rush. Your cheeks
like diamonds but full of words. How many times do
we sit, speaking and emptying our own way. The
beams might break, the brattles and a hint of rain.
We watch the clouds like soldiers. Marching, in-
digo. Fighting to get in.

& pimento



& lens

For Felicia

Your coming here, pure accident. Dodging. The barometer was wrong; it promised grey and wet. Heavy skies. Instead, it is black and on me. Some sun in my ear. I feel it in the back of my eyes: the confusion to focus. How close? How much to get closer? How many slowly rolled before you said, "Come here. You're getting too wet." Maybe you'll always see a window. I can't stop myself from looking, and looking again. And maybe again.

Artists' Statements

Mackenzie Carignan

I approach poetry by asking questions and challenging the language to find an answer, which rarely happens. It's the asking that makes the poem. In this collection, I am trying to reconcile the many faces/personas I project as a woman: mother, wife, poet, professional, critic, teacher, sister, friend. The poems offer, at best, shadows of answers, and often result in more questions. The poems are also evidence that the desire to define a singular self is a lost battle. You can reach me at Mackenzie@pontarelli.com and please visit my blog at www.mackenziecarignan.com.

Thanks to Cab/Net magazine, where several of these poems appear.
Thanks also to Felicia for making this project a reality, for the wonderful lunches, and for having such an open spirit.

Felicia Ohnamacht

After many years of my camera gathering dust, I rediscovered the reason why I shoot photography: the pleasure of finding an unusual detail and seeing it pop off paper. In taking pride in the analyzation of an object's detail, I in turn find the complex personas that it holds, which is also how I feel about every human. The more we learn and the closer we look at each individual, the more intriguing and detailed are the facades that are presented. I feel that sometimes all it takes is a change of angle, focus or light on any situation to see a more true perspective. & Persona was the perfect way for me to express these details by being inspired by the complexities of the poetry and to document the absorbing mix of human versus object.

If you are interested in seeing my portfolio, please visit the following website:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/stillh20/>.



This project, “& persona,” is borne out of a friendship and artistic desire to see how two differing art forms and aesthetic dispositions could combine in a singular work. Many poems are inspired by photos and many photos are inspired by poems, and we aimed to pair the pictures in a way that aided the thematic progress of both the photographs and the poetic collection. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed creating it.

This chapbook is printed in a limited, first edition of 200 for the dusi/e–chap kollektiv project in August, 2007 in Boulder, Colorado. Text is Garamond.

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