

It takes longer than I'd like to admit for me to realize that this is a digitally altered image (fig. 1). The first thing I notice is the street sign for Cookman Avenue, one of the main thoroughfares of Asbury Park, New Jersey. (I don't know the source for this image, and Asbury's topography has changed significantly in the past two decades.) Then I notice the smoke and the crushed bumpers and think, *Weird car crash*. This is the first obviously manipulated image I've taken from the folders to write about. In color, it has the flat dullness of early digital images, a pervasive gray.

The crumpled shell of the upper car juts into the air as though it's being bucked off the fresh, unbroken car beneath. These two shells look like they're fornicating. They look like two flies mating (a frequently photographed subject, iconic in my head as the cover of Jason Nocito's *I Heart Transylvania*). When flies mate, they look like two humans in doggy style, the top holding the waist of the bottom, with extraordinarily buggy red eyes.

This sends me looking for photographs like this in the books on my shelves. Talia Chetrit's *Showcaller* features, a few pages in, one lone fly and its shadow, among back hair and an errant freckle. The wings look particularly delicate, the fly's body fuzzy too. (I am realizing now that I don't remember any of the words for insect body parts.) I'd forgotten what a strange book *Showcaller* is, oscillating between horny and unsettling, flickering between Chetrit's photographs as a teenager and newer self-portraits nude in the studio, a brief interlude of long shots of strangers on the streets of Manhattan. The spread I was looking for has two bucolic photographs, taken on the same day and from the same vantage point: in the first, two naked white people hold one another, her arms wrapped around his shoulders and one leg hiked up, hands on ass, while the cable release drapes into view from the left side of the frame. Chetrit's bob moves in the wind beautifully, a being of its own, her cheek illuminated by the sun, which sluices between their bodies in a pocket of light. There's a small bruise near her elbow. On the opposite page, they've made it onto the ground, among the dandelions or buttercups or whatever small yellow flowers these are, and the clouds are bright above them, the clouds have shifted a bit,

the wind has moved them along, and her legs are up, her tailbone scoops up, he is between her legs. The cable release has shifted too, is now slicing across the bottom left corner of the frame in a way that locks their bodies between the cable, the grass, and a small brick retaining wall. It has to be early spring; green is just starting to brush across the trees in the distance, but their branches are still bare.

In Paul Knight's *jump into bed with me*, a book full of sweet touch, the pages unfold to reveal spreads of four pages; it chronicles some time in a relationship in muted, even colors. The image I was looking for sits in an array of four: a man lying in the grass at night, lit by the flash as he stares up at the black sky; two men in a grassy field, a tangle of arms and limbs, all the same bright white, their clothes discarded next to them and evergreens in the distance; two glasses of coffee, speckled with condensation, in morning shade; a man sitting shirtless in a dark room, lit by a strong patch of white, contemplating his apple or apple-like fruit. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it's the sex outside I'm most interested in: the one leg in the air, soft back of the head diving beneath it, a hand on the shoulder to brace oneself, the head of a penis peeking from the shadows between them. Nature is wide and boundless behind them. They are so naked and so visible.



Justine Kurland's *Girl Pictures* features mostly photographs of the titular girls, made between 1997 and 2002. The pictures are made with a large format camera and feel immense in their depth, in the width of the scenes they depict: girls on the side of the highway, in marshes and forests and lakes

and deserts; girls on the run, let loose from the car on the side of the road. "Making Happy," 1998, is a beige picture, a rusted out carcass of a car perched somewhere near an overpass and the equally-rusted train tracks, overhead wires criss-crossing above. The windows are completely gone, the roof caving in, hood crumpled up and the trunk popped, showing the round edge of the spare tire. Inside the hollow car, a bare ass and two feet splayed in the air; outside the car, a brown dog lumbers with its tongue out. The grass is dying but still holds something of its former green; across the

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tracks, a Budweiser billboard looms. *Girl Pictures* is full of girl mystique, a girlhood I did not have, even if the landscapes are familiar. In another rusted car picture, "Shipwrecked," from 2000, three girls are curled up inside the car, which sits on the edge of a creek, ships visible in the distance. One girl climbs onto the trunk of the car; one offers something to another; the fourth stares up at the ceiling. A hand-crocheted red blanket spills onto the ground. Throughout the book, the girls touch one another with a care and a looseness I still can't fathom, their limbs entwined with such ease. They hold one another, play fight one another, lean into one another, hold a boy down by the shoulders and spit in his mouth ("Boy Torture: Two-Headed Monster," 1999). The headlights of other cars serve as warnings.



Kohei Yoshiyuki's photographs of nighttime sex in public parks were taken with infrared film and flash. Originally published as *Document the Park* in 1980, the book features couples framed by bushes, branches and twigs, and sometimes onlookers. (Unlike the other books referenced here, I don't own this book but wish I did.) There are so many shoes in these pictures; most of them are taken from the foot of the metaphorical bed. Clothes become ghostly white, the rumpled sheen of dress shirts enhanced. In one picture, a couple is clothed and wrapped around one another, an umbrella open and discarded to their left, as an onlooker gingerly presses his hand to the small of the woman's back. The other man's fingers brush his, like Adam's finger finally reaching God's, and the woman's satin skirt slips aside to reveal the elastic at the top of her stockings. The beginning of another onlooker's bald spot shines through his dark hair.

I didn't want to write about this month's folder, *Automobiles – Accidents*. I chose a picture that made me think of other pictures, pictures of bodies touching one another. The frames of the cars look like they are fucking one another, which is what car crashes often look like even when there's no early-aughts Photoshop involved. Bodies fall together and yield to one another.