

Ways in Which Looks Deceive

by Roxane Gay

We're down by the water. We've laid claim to a temporary homestead. Brett has set up our yuppie lawn chairs replete with footrests and cup holders. Between us is a cooler filled with ice and Bell's Pale Ale. Girls in frayed denim cutoffs and tank tops walk by, laughing with their heads together, their legs long and tan. Brett doesn't pretend he's not looking. I appreciate the honesty. The wide canal is filled with rowboats and sailboats and motorboats, one yellow cigarette boat. The sky is tenuously holding itself between day and night. We're all waiting for darkness so the fireworks can begin but darkness comes very late this time of year. Brett lights a cigarette, opens a bottle of beer, and leans back in his chair, satisfied.

As the fireworks start, Brett pats his legs and I slip over and onto his lap. The air thickens with smoke as the sky fills with bursts of white and purple, red and green. My husband nuzzles my neck with his damp lips. He is drunk. I can smell it on him. He starts whispering to me. His hand slides around my waist and beneath the hem of my skirt. I take hold of his wrist and laugh. Everything is illuminated. If anyone is watching, we look happy.

When it is over, and the sky is black gray, I spill Brett into the car with. As we drive home, he rests his head on my shoulder, tucks his left hand between my thighs. He sings a Sugarland song, slurring, *All I want to do ooo ooo ooo ooo.*

At home, he stumbles into the bedroom and falls onto our bed face first. When I sit next to him, running my fingers through his hair, he

jumps up, pushes me onto my back. I laugh and run my hands down his chest. If anyone is watching, we look happy.

We make love and I give him a show and say filthy things the way he likes. He tells me how much he fucking loves me, passes out. I lay awake, hot and damp, staring at the ceiling, one arm over my head, the other across the flat of my belly. I can still smell the fireworks on our skin. I think about the deceptive properties of appearance.

