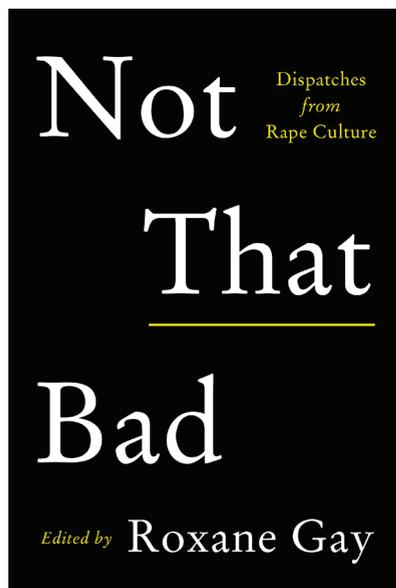


The Hard Truth

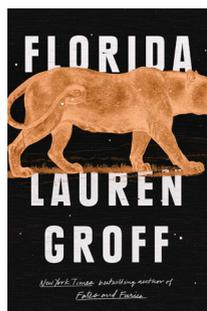
Cultural critic Roxane Gay returns with a chorus of voices from the front lines of rape culture.



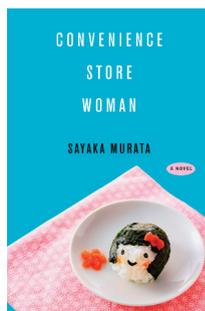
In her writing, Roxane Gay puts to words the messy, contradictory nature of living in a female body. In a new anthology, *Not That Bad: Dispatches From Rape Culture*, the best-selling author curates a selection of both original and previously published essays from writers, magazine editors, and actors (among them Gabrielle Union, Lyz Lenz, Brandon Taylor, and *Teen Vogue*'s Samhita Mukhopadhyay). Together, they interrogate a culture that allows sexual violence. The topics are broad: a teenage boy grappling with masculinity after childhood trauma; a report on the prevalence of rape at the U.S.-Mexico border; a woman who willingly consents to sexual pain. (Writes Brooklyn teacher Nora Salem in her essay: "Perhaps the most horrifying thing about nonconsensual sex is that, in an instant, it erases you.... I'm writing to prove that I exist.") The collection is tough. But it confirms the varied ways the trauma of rape seeps into our lives, helping name, pinpoint, and ultimately confront it. This book is a start.—*Brianna Kovan*

TRUST US

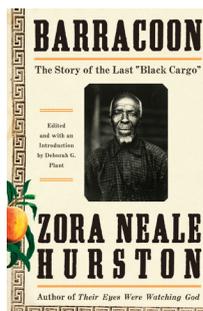
A trio of early-summer reads. For more, visit ELLE.com/BestSummerBooks.



In her second short-story collection, *Florida*, Lauren Groff (of *Fates and Furies* fame) introduces her home state of sink-holes, unruly weather, and heat-induced unrest.



Sayaka Murata's novel *Convenience Store Woman* playfully illustrates the daily routines and ruminations of an eccentric Tokyo salesclerk.



In Zora Neale Hurston's *Barracoon*, the Harlem Renaissance folklorist shares her (until now unpublished) conversations with Atlantic slave trade survivor Oluale Kossola.—*B.K.*



CLOSE TO HOME

Author Fatima Farheen Mirza's magical debut novel, *A Place for Us*, is the inaugural book of Sarah Jessica Parker's imprint with Hogarth. Mirza, 27, has crafted what SJP calls "a quintessentially American family" who confront loss, addiction, and the dissonant cultural expectations of their Muslim Indian-American heritage. (Read the full interview at ELLE.com.)

ELLE: Which parts were hardest to write?
Fatima Farheen Mirza: Any scene where the characters betray one another or cut down their loved ones. I knew how, in some ways, they'd never recover from those moments. I'd call my mom and say, "Mummy, I'm so heartbroken that the character acted in this way." And she's like, "Well, can you change it?" I'm like, "No, it has to happen."
Sarah Jessica Parker: I asked Fatima the

other day, "Do you think [the son] Amar is okay?" I think about him in the same way I think about Theo Decker in *The Goldfinch*. He's stayed with me. It is such a big story, but it's about intimacy and the littlest things.

ELLE: What connected you to this family?

SJP: It's a book for our time, about our country now. I am better for knowing these characters. Amar gets beaten up at school when they tell him that his father looks like a terrorist. I can't imagine internalizing that.

FFM: I share so much with them—a similar culture, faith, and community—but the plot belongs to this family alone. I didn't want to imagine my life in fictional form. I have three younger brothers. One said, "Fatima, it wasn't until I read this that I realized how powerful it is seeing a life like mine reflected in fiction."