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# LEAVE BY KATHERYN KROTZER LABORDE

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After three days, ten emails, fifty-one text messages, and ninety-seven voicemails, Bonnie emailed Trey to say that she was not dead.

She had not read all the emails -- there wasn't time for that, and figured she knew what they all said, anyway. She was only allotted thirty minutes at the library computer, and the computers ran slow. With only one hand to use, she pecked at the keys. Around her, heavy faces peered into screens or hovered as they waited. Everywhere there was worry. Bonnie was worried herself. She had lost her motel room in Donaldsonville, Louisiana to a family of evacuees who had booked it before she realized she would not be going back home.

No one would be going home.

Everywhere she went hotel lobbies were bursting, gas stations were sucked dry, and restaurants were taking cash only. The roads that connected one hamlet to the next shimmered in the heat. She measured the hours by the fields she passed -- cotton, soy, sugar, weeds. Nothing but fields and the occasional trailer or maybe a small house with muddy trucks in the yard. Slow drifting cows, the occasional dog glued to a porch, tired trees, the rare shock of roadside blossoms -- all this Bonnie clung to as she zipped by in her green Chevy Nova, her left arm in a cast. The armrest was too low but she was able to rest it, in a fashion, on a purse placed on her lap. But every few hours she'd have to stop at a little diner and take a Hydrocodone. There she would stay, sipping water, crumbling crackers into soup, looking at the newspaper, reading about the city, the levees, the water, the bodies. From what she could tell, her part of town was OK, maybe, though there was no way of knowing if her place had been looted. But there was no going back. Not for a while, anyway.

Animals chewed their way out of traps: she understood that feeling -- if only the storm had hit a week later, she'd be in the lighter cast, not this big white monster that dragged at her. Making her way down this highway and that, she cast glances at her rearview mirror now and again, wondering if she would recognize his car if it came up behind hers. She wondered where he was. She knew he had wanted to go to Mississippi, and she knew he was not home. Days before, when Trey had insisted that they were going to take his car, that they were leaving hers behind, that she should pack their bags while he went off to find some gas if there was still any to be found, he had said that they would be staying at a friend's place in the woods not far from Jackson.

When he said all this to her just she just stood there, in the kitchen, her hands washing a bowl, a wooden plank nailed over the window blocking her view of the darkening sky. She heard the door close. There were long, heavy strides down the driveway. There was a car door slamming, a motor revving, tires hitting the street, and then there was nothing more. Silence and sweat, water overflowing the basin. Bonnie walked to the bedroom, packed her bag by handfulls, dashed to the bathroom to grab her toothbrush from the stand, to throw in the Suave shampoo and conditioner, the Nioxema, the Dove moisturizer, drug-store brand anti-perspirant. Her hand shook as she shoved the

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precious orange vial of pills into her purse along with the phone recharger. She threw in her address book, some bracelets, her grandmother's cameo pin. Running back to the house one more time, she made sure the photo albums were on the highest shelf, and unplugged lamps and appliances. She lowered herself carefully to the floor to kick the firebox out from under the bed. She took what was hers. She didn't bother to lock the door behind her.

Knowing the Interstate would be choked, Bonnie made her way to River Road. She drove past the refineries, the small grocery stores, the little houses, the cinderblock bars, arm throbbing, eyes aching. She wasn't exactly too sure where she was going except that it was *not* Mississippi. Every now and then the phone would beep from the bottom of her purse: a new message. Bonnie would assure herself that she was not obliged to reply, that Trey couldn't find her, wouldn't know where to look. She was on her way, arm in her lap, gliding from one road to the next until she spotted a small motel just off the main road. Inside, she learned she was just outside Donaldsonville.

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Bonnie's cell phone beeped from the passenger seat; perhaps he had read the email -- yet another reason to keep driving. She had left the library just as it was closing. The sky was sweetening from blue to purple when she found US 165. She hoped that she would find gas before she reached the next town -- the station in Kinder had run dry. Part of her wanted to cry, to pull over and let sleep ease through her bones. Instead she peered past the smeared birdshit and smashed lovebugs on the window. She turned the radio volume up, faking harmonies to tunes she'd never heard before, crying through songs from a lifetime ago, a life she had stretched between jobs that bored her and a man whose moods switched from bright to frightening with the utterance of one wrong word. She drove on.

She stopped at the intersection, the first one in miles. She turned the radio off. There were no signs to tell her where she was, what lay to the right or left. There were no lights beckoning in either direction, only stretches of farmland and dusk.

Sweat trickled. Her cast felt as though it was glued to her skin, and her arm throbbed. It would be easier to turn to the left, but taking a sharp breath she turned to the right. The dusty Nova crawled along. Five miles later, she saw a little grocery store with gas pumps. A hand-scrawled sign limited customers to twenty gallons. She scooped crumpled bills from the bottom of her purse. Once inside, the man told her she was near Bunkie.

The map was new, sharply creased, and opening it with one arm was npt easy, but Bonnie was able to spread it open on the hood of the warm car. Sipping a Diet Coke, she peered at the jumble of lines and numbers. She was somewhere in the middle of Louisiana, a maze of fields and roads and small stores and smaller houses. Placing the can on the map's corner, she traced a path from Bunkie to Marksville. The man had said that evacuees were staying in the casino hotel for free; it was worth a try, she reasoned, and if the place was filled up she could at least eat.

A breeze billowed her map like a sail, lifted at the tendrils that had escaped from the messy ponytail. A car zipped by, and then another. Bonnie tossed the open map into the car. Sliding back into the driver's seat, she reached under the stiff paper for the phone, and clicked it off before tossing it into the back seat. She placed purse on lap, arm on purse, hand on wheel and, exhaling for the first time in days, drove toward the light.

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**Katheryn Krotzer Laborde** is a writer of prose who teaches at Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans. Her writings -- fiction and non -- have appeared in *Poets&Writers*, *Callaloo*, *Southern Gothic Online*, *Xavier Review*, and is forthcoming in *CrossRoads*, *South Central Review* and the online literary salon *Fresh Yarn*. She is currently at work on a book for McFarland Press about the marked and messaged refrigerators

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found in New Orleans during the early days of Katrina recovery.