

gulf freeway TX, march 2005, by Lauren Schroeter

you fall asleep to the quaking earth and the roar of the swamp air through the window machine and you wake again in that dream, vines hanging from the open ceiling, bozo the clown playing on tv. the volume is distant. your bed is lit by a solitary light bulb; the vines keep everything else dark around you.

you walk out onto the wooden deck and see the backlit night sky; siren sounds radiate in your distance; the vines cling tighter as you shimmy out of their grip. they whisper at you to stay

but you don't. you can't.

jump off the deck into the bayou and swim until you reach texas city. on the way, stop at the hooters that used to be hunan chef and before all that was just empty dirt by the water.

swim laps past the lonely strip club on this section of i-45 flashing false promises: "Totally Nude! Only Nude Club in the County!" but where would the girls even come from? you've never seen any cars out there and of the times you went in the club was either empty or the only other person was a lady who had her clothes *on*.

there is nothing else on this stretch of road; nothing between here and it's just one billboard to the next now, leading you home

it is just like you remember it: smoke pouring from the BP refinery, sirens that never quite get to where they're going; the ground still shaking you off-balance. there is nothing for you here, not anymore.