

# The Evacuation Queue

by Elizabeth Kate Switaj

The ticking must have gone on for an hour before Kathy realized it wasn't a clock. When the line finally moved, the rhythm changed. When the queue stopped again, she glanced behind her and noticed a woman in torn jeans and a filthy sweater tapping a heel on the concrete.

Kathy couldn't remember the last time she'd worn dress shoes. Who wears heels in a disaster zone?

She looked down at her own ragged boots. Maybe the woman didn't have any other shoes. The concrete would burn bare feet.

The line moved a few more times before the sun disappeared. The heat remained. In front of Kathy, a mother rocked an infant in her arms. Whenever the line moved, she had to prod her two toddlers awake. Kathy thought they would have been cute with round faces.

The sun had reappeared by the time the family reached the gangway to the ship. Kathy was looking at her feet again when she heard the mother scream. The guards were insisting that she had to leave one of her children behind.

Kathy asked if she could give them her pass. A guard said there wouldn't be another ship for months.

—I might make it. They won't.

Kathy walked away before the mother could thank her. The woman who had been behind her, however, had enough time to shout: If you're going to die anyway, could I have your shoes?

People never change: Kathy was glad to be staying.

