

Guantanamo

KATIE ROSE GUEST

1. My sister told me, “Buy the shoes a size too small. The leather stretches when you dance, from the sweat.” At the dancewear shop, I slip on a gold T-strap sandal with a low Cuban heel. I stand and feel the stiff leather cut my ankle and instep as my foot arches. But the suede sole grips the linoleum floor, and I think how my mambo will be so sweet, *one-two-three-four*. I pay sixty dollars for the shoes and throw them in the seat next to me in my car. I sing with Celia Cruz on the stereo as I drive away, *Guantanamo . . . guajira Guantanamo*.

2. *One, two, three, four*. The young girl counts the men standing on the big wall far in the distance. Her mother doesn’t like her to come here, but she sneaks away sometimes. Like everyone who lives near this place, she is careful to step around the dull metal things on the ground, feeling with her bare feet when she walks. The men on the wall don’t look like men to her, just tall dark blocks against the sun. She knows they’re men only because one day she sat on the hill on a smooth rock, for hours and hours she thought, until she almost fell asleep. She watched until finally the dark shadows on the wall moved and were replaced by new dark shadows that looked just as not-human, just as still.

3. The soldier knows something is wrong even before he looks through the bars. The cell is too still. After years at this post he has learned that even when a prisoner is sleeping the air in a cell moves with the vibrations of life. He thinks about all of the life caught inside this massive hornet’s nest. Each chamber is hollowed out and filled with captured prey, then patched over to trap the prey inside and hide it from those outside—from the ones who might poach or steal it away. *It’s amazing*, he thinks, as he finally makes out the man’s body hanging in the shadows, eyes rolled back in his head to give a ghastly white glare, *this hasn’t happened sooner*.