

Cuban Capers : Alice String

What the hell? My sister dumps her backpack and runs back through the crowd. 'Louise', I yell. But she's gone. The crowd streams towards the airport's sliding doors, which part with a surge of sound and heat. People nudge, push and shove. I round my shoulders and hang onto our bags.

Cuba with Louise! Such a bad idea.

The crowds ebb. The doors close. I watch a mime of taxi drivers frantic for trade.

Panting Louise returns cursing. 'Left my bloody ipad on the plane, didn't I? Come on, sweetie.' She storms through the doors, only pausing when a wall of humanity throngs towards her. She calls out 'Paradiso Hotel, if you please.' And bounce into our adventure on the soft unsprung seat of a 1950's Cadillac.

At the hotel, an ageing bellboy leads us away from the frantic heat and noise, into the cool, faded gloom of a dark, dusty suite. He dumps our bags and throws open the shutters, to reveal a crumbling apartment block. Its balconies overflow with squabbling kids, languid guitar players, screaming mothers and even a couple of passionate lovers.

'Wow,' I breathe in the exoticness of it all.

'Oh, for God's sake close the bloody shutters' Louise growls, 'and you' she says, pointing at the bellboy, 'bring us some white wine.'

One sip of lukewarm wine and jet lag overtakes both of us.

Hours later, I awake hot and sweaty. Unsure of where I am, or what time it is. I fumble for the light switch, but nothing happens. No bloody electricity. I see Louise slumped, on the sofa. 'Louise.' I whisper, but she doesn't move. I stumble to the window and creak the shutters open. Light and heat explode into the room. 'Louise', I say again, but it's not her. It's a naked, ageing bellboy, eyes open wide in shock, lying on our sofa.

'Oh my God, it wasn't the travel experience I thought it would be.'