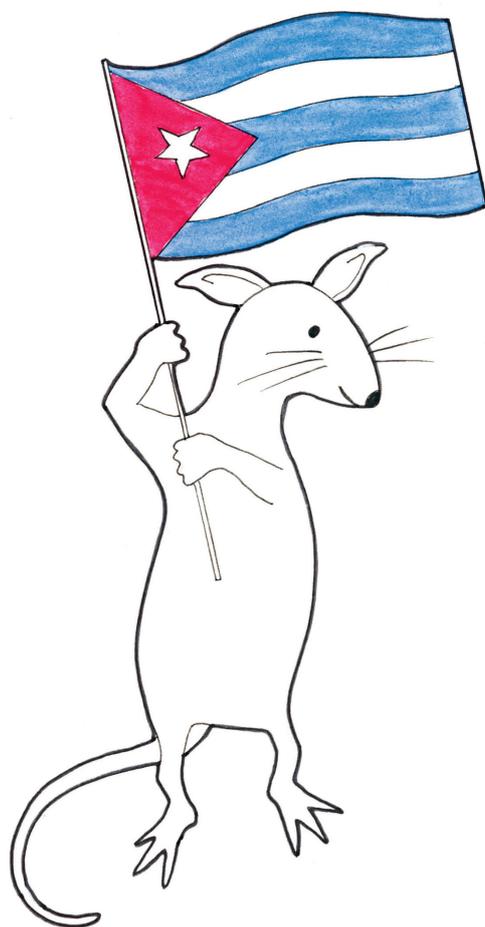


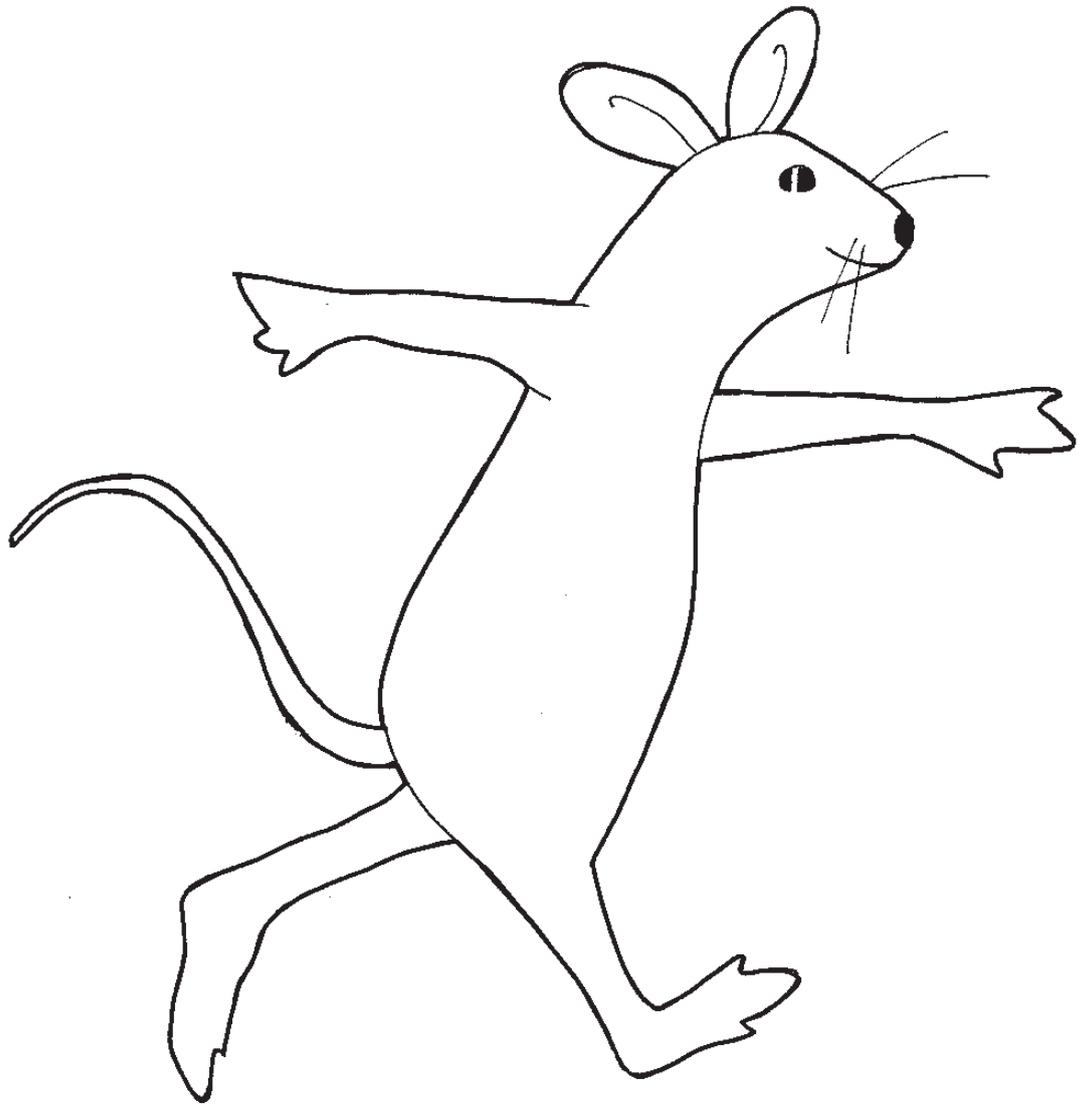
# Where in the world is Raúl?



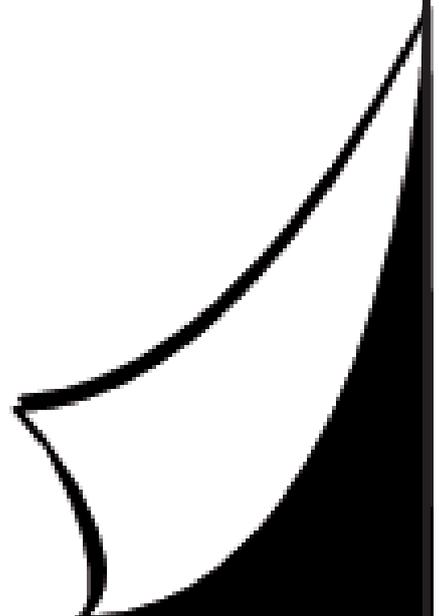
by  
**Gwendoline Boland**

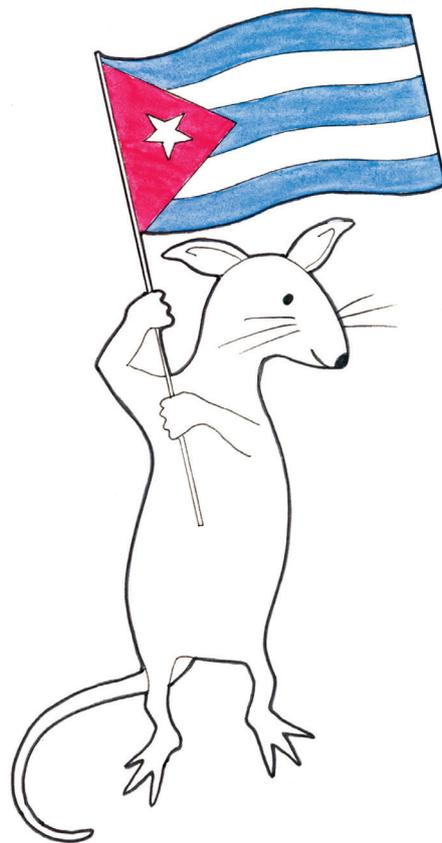
Drawings by  
**Colette Lambe**





"Hola."

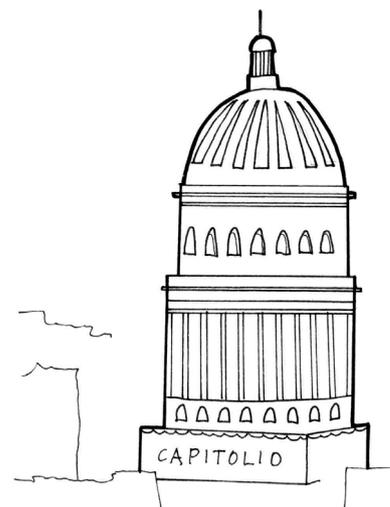




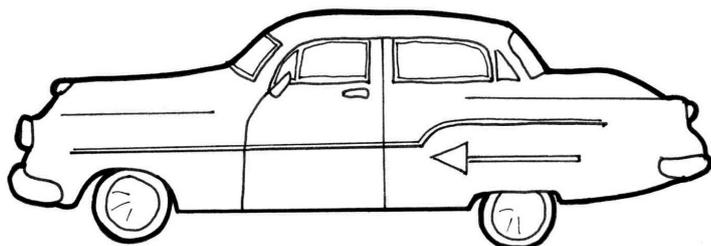
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Raúl wasn't sure where he was. There had been a trans-Atlantic flight with his friends, Robey and Rafa, and ten hours on the plane had muddled him; the boys had talked excitedly about going to Cuba but Raúl wondered if they'd made a mistake. Here they were, now, looking up at a huge, white, icing-sugar dome against the blue sky.

"It's the Capitol Building!" Raúl exclaimed.  
"We've come to Washington DC in the USA."



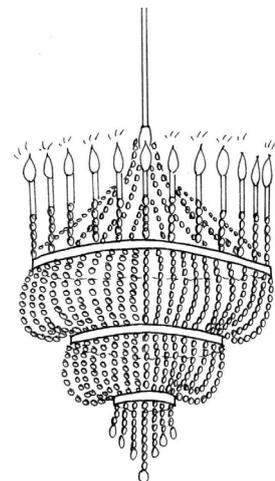
Big cars cruised by - Dodges, Buicks, Pontiacs and Chevrolets - like ones from old-fashioned American movies.



Raúl decided it must be a film-set. The sun was very hot and he was tired. He had already been dragged around what he thought was the costume department of this film-set to see a display of old soldiers' uniforms and a black beret with a star badge.

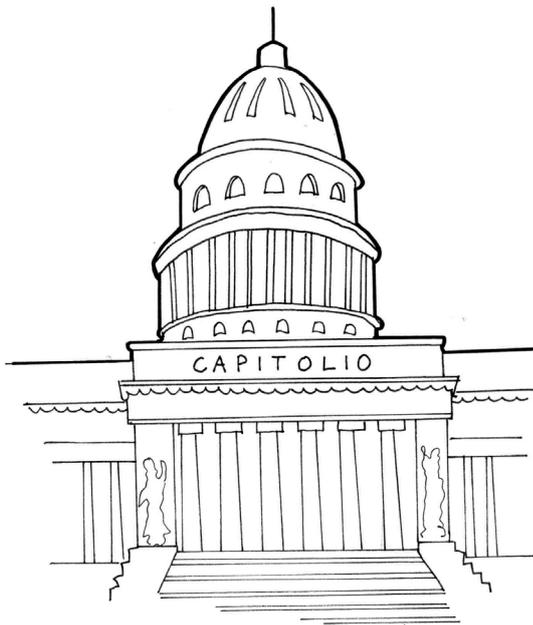
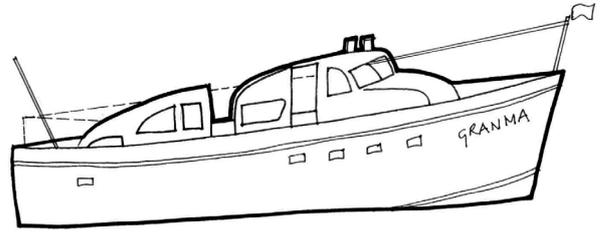
Someone had dislodged a blood-stained shirt from its hanger in the display. Costume assistants rushed to pick it up, tutting, "These are momentos of the Revolution. Do not disrespect them. You are in the Museum of the Revolution, in what was once the President's Palace."

Raúl hadn't been so sure, then, about the film set; what was this Revolution and why were the attendants so fierce? And this palace? - Raúl was astonished by its opulence. Though its windows were broken and its walls chipped and cracked, there were sweeping marble stairways and breathtaking ballrooms under crystal chandeliers. He would have asked Robey and Rafa to explain but he saw them running outside



towards a large boat on display in a glass shelter in the garden. It had its name painted on - 'Granma'.

"Called after someone's Nan, I expect," reasoned Raúl but he was shocked to see an armed soldier step out in front of the twins and wave them away with his rifle. This was too real to be a film set and Raúl had begun to feel worried.



Now, in front of the Capitol Building he was still perplexed but the twins' mother, Carmen, was leading them up its vast steps saying, "This was the seat of government until the Revolution in 1959. Known as the 'Capitolio', it is a replica of the Capitol Building in Washington DC. Over there," she pointed across a wide street to the Gran Teatro, "we will see the great Carlos Acosta dance with the Royal Ballet from England."

"Ballet? I'd rather watch breakdancing," thought Raúl as he scampered after his family into the Capitolio. Even Carmen was going on about this Revolution - perhaps she had a part in the film!

After seeing the grandiose interior of the Capitolio, Carmen called, "This way to the cigar factory. We are going to be shown around. Havana is famous for its cigars."



"Havana?" wondered Raúl. "Havana, Cuba? We must be here! Is there going to be a revolution?"

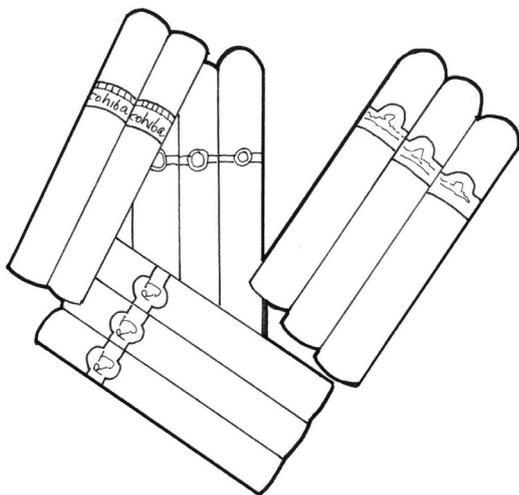
Seeing the cigar factory made Raúl feel again that he was in a film-set. It was a decorative orange building with brown lettering over its shell-shaped façade. It looked perfect for a Western and, next to it, was a row of once-beautiful houses with tall, heavy wooden doors and big windows, their balconies hung with washing. All colour had been bleached from the paintwork and chunks of wall were missing. Men sat in the doorways singing along to a guitar player. One of them shook out a rhythm on maracas.



"I expect they are film extras waiting for their cues," thought Raúl, who was beginning to enjoy this sense of make-believe. "I'd like to have a go on those shakey things, a. d..daa daa dum dad a dum.." he practised, but Robey and Rafa swept him into the cigar factory.

Everything was dark after the bright sun and heat outside and their guide led them up a steep, wooden staircase into a room with long rows of empty desks. "This is where apprentices used to learn the trade," he told them, "but we are not training new people now because the demand for cigars is dropping."

He led the party past this deserted room. The factory walls were painted lime-green with a dark purple border and all the benches and floors were dark old wood. The tobacco leaves were dark gold and the piles of cigars dark brown. They came to a bustling hall where rows of workers rolled cigars in old-fashioned wooden moulds and then clipped and cut them into shape and stacked them in dark piles.



There was music everywhere in this hall; lots of the workers were singing and, on a small stage at the top of the hall, a band was getting ready to play, lightly tapping drums and shaking maracas, waiting for the guitarist and singer to join in for the lunchtime entertainment.

Raúl noticed posters and slogans on the wall behind the musicians. On several of the posters was a familiar sight, "That's the beret I saw earlier - the black beret with a star badge and that man wearing it in the picture is ...?" Raúl strained to read, "Che Guevara?"



Just then the band struck up "El Comandante, Che Guevara," they sang. "Hasta Victoria Siempre" the posters proclaimed.

Raúl loved this and he couldn't help joining in, swaying and dancing and singing on the dias around the musicians' feet... "Comandante, Che Guevara..."

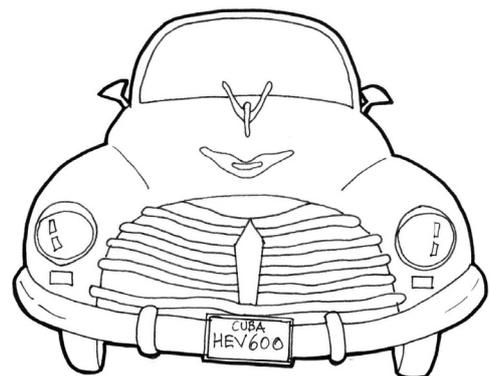
Robey and Rafa had already moved on into the next room where the cigars were being packed into boxes but Raúl was lost in a world of song and Revolution and he danced around pretending to play the maracas and singing "Che Guevara..." No one thought it strange to see a rat enjoying itself; music was music and everyone loved it.

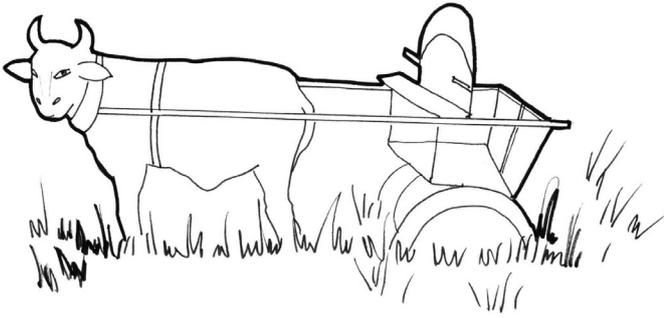
The band had to leave when recreation time was over and they swept Raúl up with their instruments and packed him away in a big, old car. They were in a hurry and one of them called out,

"We have to be in Trinidad tonight to play with the Singing Chef."

"Hooray!" shouted the workers, "the Singing Chef is loved by all of us. Good luck, safe journey."

The old car was hot! hot! Hot! And petrol fumes leaked back into the passenger seats. The journey was long, out of the





city and along the motorway through the centre of Cuba where mile after mile of scrubby grassland sped by behind endless low, stone walls enclosing the old estates that had once been owned by foreign masters. Palm trees stood outlined against distant mountains where vultures hovered. Oxen pulled carts in the fields near the road.

The journey took six hours and they arrived in Trinidad as the sun went down. The cobbled streets of the little town held all the heat of the day and the tiles on the roofs baked. The band, and Raúl, headed for a big house in Plaza Mayor where they were to play and they were welcomed with a dinner and a greeting from the Singing Chef.

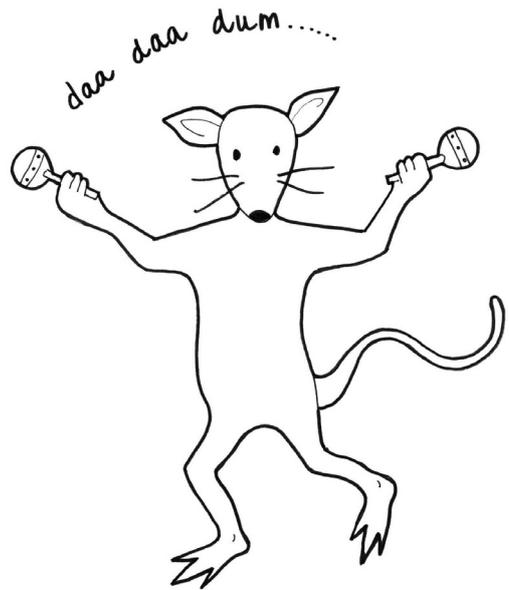
"I will be busy tonight so I can only join you later in the evening when all the meals have been served. I hope you can please the audience till then. Perhaps this little fellow will help you," he said, stooping to shake hands with Raúl.

Raúl wanted nothing more than to be just like the chef! He wanted a white hat like his and check trousers; most of all he wanted to entertain in the way the chef was famous for.

The restaurant was a vast, tiled room in a colonial palace - built by rich, Spanish settlers when Cuba was owned by Spain. Its big windows had no glass; instead screens of decorative iron rods shaded them and let the warm air in. Inside were wooden shutters that could be closed against hurricanes.



As diners started to arrive the band struck up with 'Hasta Siempre, Commandante' and Raúl came alive at once, dancing and shaking in time to the song. He began to circle the tables, maracas shimmering, and he was starting to pick up words of the song and always joined in with 'Commandante, Che Guevara', though he still wasn't sure about this Revolution - whether he was waiting for it or if it had happened already, or even if it meant revolving round and round as he was doing with his maracas. Almost as much as wanting to look like the chef, he wanted now to have a beret like Che's with a star badge in it.



But Raúl wasn't thinking in words anymore - only music and rhythm and dancing. The band sang old songs from Spain mixed with choruses from Africa - they told their listeners this was 'Son' music - one voice being answered by the others.



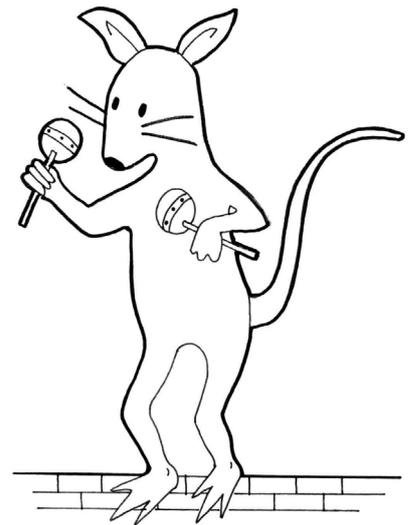
And then the Singing Chef came out of his kitchen. Everyone in the restaurant cheered. He rolled up his sleeves and started to rock to the gentle beat of the drums and then to sing. The audience roared approval as the chef's voice soared above the others, answering their song.

Raúl had forgotten how tired he was and he had almost forgotten that he was separated from Robey and Rafa. Now it was time to stop the music. The diners cheered and cheered but eventually they had to leave as the restaurant closed.

Raúl thought they might get some sleep but there was dancing going on outside the Casa de Musica behind the church in Plaza Mayor

and this was where the band headed. A huge crowd was dancing to salsa music in the night air and Raúl couldn't stop himself joining in. He got trodden on quite a lot so he climbed up on a wall to dance and show off!

Eventually policemen came to close the dancing and it seemed wisest to leave. Raúl and the band found beds in a casa particular where a cockerel crowed all night long and kept Raúl awake.



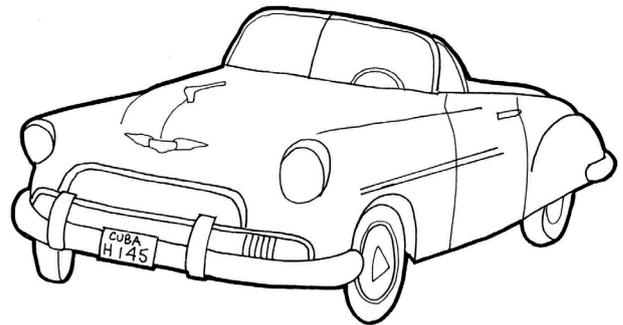
In the morning Raúl was still tired and felt as though he was living in a dream. The band said they were going to see the old slave owner's house in the Plaza Mayor so Raúl scuttled along with them. The house rose up from steps above the square and the entrance was through an arched walkway in its yellow walls. It was built around a courtyard and there was a wonderful carved wooden ceiling on the upper storey where the slave owner and his family had lived. From windows high up on this level the slave owner could look out over the countryside to watch his slaves working on the different plantations - sugar cane one way, coffee and tobacco another - while he sat in his fashionable rooms and enjoyed his wealth.

This sounded good to Raúl and he started to wish he could be a slave owner. But he heard one of the band explaining how the slaves were captured in Africa and torn away from their homes to be sold and then worked till they died. He looked out over the scorching fields from the comfort of the shaded and shuttered rooms and felt very ashamed. He was glad to hear one of the band say that slavery had been abolished in Cuba over a hundred years ago.

"The slaves brought their African worksongs to Cuba and these mixed with the old Spanish songs giving them strong rhythm and wailing choruses," the band member went on, "this has made the Cuban Son music that we play and sing today. It's the music you have been joining in with, Raúl, on your maracas!"

Raúl, still tired and dreamy, could almost hear music from the past rising up now from the fields around the slave owner's house.

But the band called him because they were moving on and Raúl ran to catch up with them heading for the car. "Next stop, Bay of Pigs," they said. "We go there for a rest before going back to Havana."

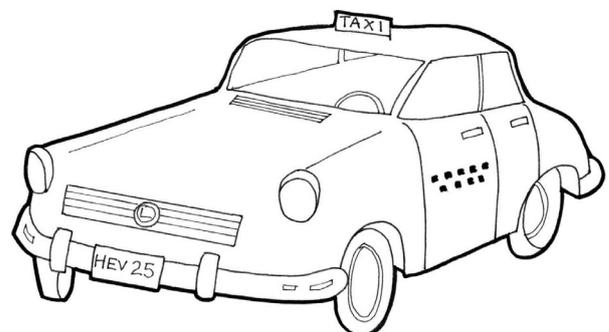


The car refused to start! They tried everything and people milled around trying to be helpful. It was impossible to get parts for these old cars so all sorts of bits and pieces were offered - a coat hanger and an old tin can nearly got it started but, eventually, the band had to leave the car with their friend and head for the bus station. A kind man loaded their instruments onto a trolley decorated with lines of dangling plastic spoons and forks that danced as he sped off ahead of them, a little Cuban flag fluttering above his load.



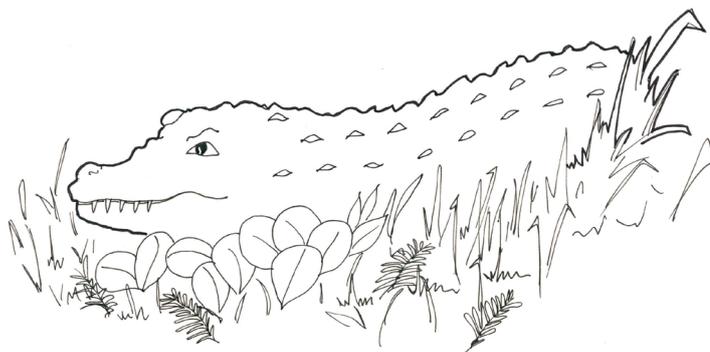
A bus took them back to the motorway and its air-conditioning froze them while they watched people sweating in the heat outside. They passed open lorries packed with workers going to the farms and hitchhikers drooping in the heat.

They got off the bus at the junction with the narrow road to the Bay of Pigs and the heat hit them as they waited at the sweltering roadside for a taxi to take them south.



In the taxi they drove past monuments to the fallen. "Who fell?" asked Raúl and the band looked knowingly at one another as they said, "You'll find out tomorrow."

This sounded worrying to Raúl but the sight of crocodiles slipping into the swamps as the taxi passed them distracted him immediately and he hoped he wouldn't have to meet them close up! Raúl began to realise how alone he was in this strange country and he wondered if Robey and Rafa were missing him. He knew they were still in Havana and he knew he would be heading back there soon with his band.

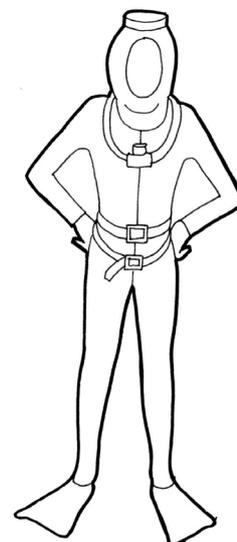


Meanwhile, the beach at Playa Larga at the head of the Bay of Pigs became heaven to Raúl who lay listening to the sea and the breeze, and gently matching their rhythm on his maracas.



While he was lying under a palm tree, sipping an iced drink and adjusting his shady hat made out of palm leaves Raúl was surprised to notice, through his shades, a strange, rubber-clad figure with a glass face rise up out of the sea. It started to wade towards Raúl's beach. And then another figure emerged, then another. Soon there were dozens of them all wading in slow motion towards Raúl.

"It's the Invasion of the Body Snatchers," he shrieked and scampered for cover, noticing as he went that the beach had emptied. Where were all his mates when he needed them? Where was the band?



From his hiding place Raúl saw dinghies being paddled onto the beach and soldiers getting out and following the Body Snatchers. Bigger boats behind these got damaged on the coral reef around the bay and many soldiers had to swim ashore.



Suddenly there was shooting from the sky and planes zoomed over the boats firing on them. Soldiers seemed to be drowning and some struggled ashore.

Raúl couldn't believe his eyes! Now there were parachutists floating down over the beach. He covered his eyes. He didn't want to be in this film! It was a war movie!

"Bang! Neeeuw! Thud!" There was shooting and bombing coming from inland now. Cuba was fighting back!

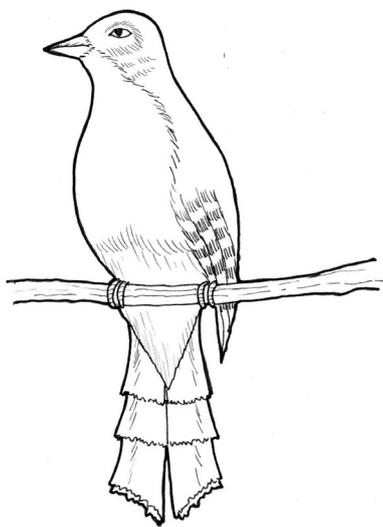
"Raúl! Raúl!" Voices were calling him. He looked up out of his dugout. It was the band and all his other friends at Playa Larga. They were laughing and behind them were the Body Snatchers taking off their masks and laughing as well.

"We said you'd find out who fell, didn't we? Well it was the brave men of Cuba's militia who fought off the invaders until the Cuban soldiers came to secure Victory!"

"What we didn't tell you, though, was that today was to be a re-enactment of the 1961 invasion of the Bay of Pigs when exiled Cubans tried to end the success of the Revolution under Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. It's all been done just as it happened, to mark the anniversary."

"T...t...then why are there Body Snatchers?" stuttered Raúl who was really frightened.

"They're frogmen!" he was told, "who were sent in first to clear the beach. They cleared you away, didn't they?" laughed Raúl's friends. "Come on, let's all go into the hotel and explain this."



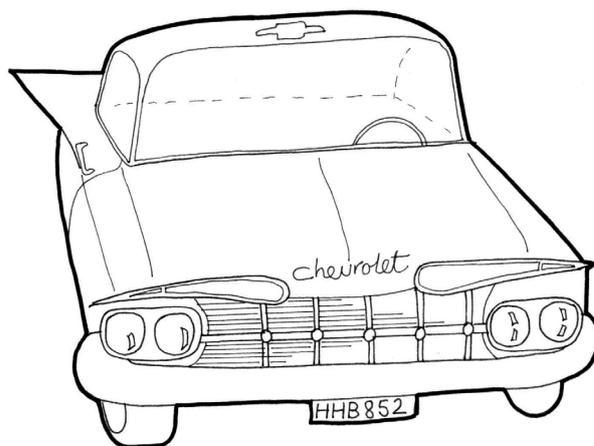
On the wall in the hotel lobby was a mural showing a red, white and blue bird called the Toco toucan. "That is the national bird of Cuba," Raúl was told. "It symbolises the country and the Cuban flag is based on its colours."

Next to the bird was written, "To arms, brave people, forward. To live in chains is to live in disgraceful submission."

"That is part of the Cuban National Anthem. Cuba was held in chains by many outside powers and that song was written when it rose up against Spanish occupation in the nineteenth century. During the twentieth century the USA had a lot of power and several dictators relied on American support to stay in power. That's why there's a replica of the famous Capitol Building in Havana - a dictator had it built to show loyalty to USA."

"Has the Revolution just happened?" asked Raúl, who was still shocked by the invasion.

"The real Revolution," continued another musician of the band, "took place fifty years ago and on January 1 1959 Che Guevara and Fidel Castro expelled all the Americans so that Cuba could be independent. Lots of rich Americans left quickly without their possessions and that is why there are so many beautiful old cars here."



"Did Che Guevara become the leader?" asked Raúl.

"No. Che worked hard for Cuba but eventually moved away to help other poor countries and he was killed in Bolivia. The leader was Fidel Castro and he has only just handed power over to his brother, Raúl, as he is now very old and ill.

"Raúl?" thought Raúl. "I think Cuba is in good hands now!"

He was trying to take in all this information while wondering if he himself was Raúl, ruler of Cuba. He didn't think he was but everything was becoming stranger and stranger as he became even more tired and confused. Was this all a film? Was any of it real?

Once back in Havana the band headed for the Hotel Nacional de Cuba.

"Hurray!" thought Raúl, "that's where Robey and Rafa are staying."

The big reception hall was filled with strains of the song 'Guantanamera' being played by a band on the terrace overlooking the sea. For the first time Raúl didn't want to join in because he had noticed a letter box with a chute dropping down to bring mail from guests in the rooms above. What had caught his eye was a postcard addressed to himself at his home in Madrid - it was from Robey and Rafa!



"They're here," he said. "I'll sit on top of this letterbox until they walk by - they'll have to if they are upstairs now."

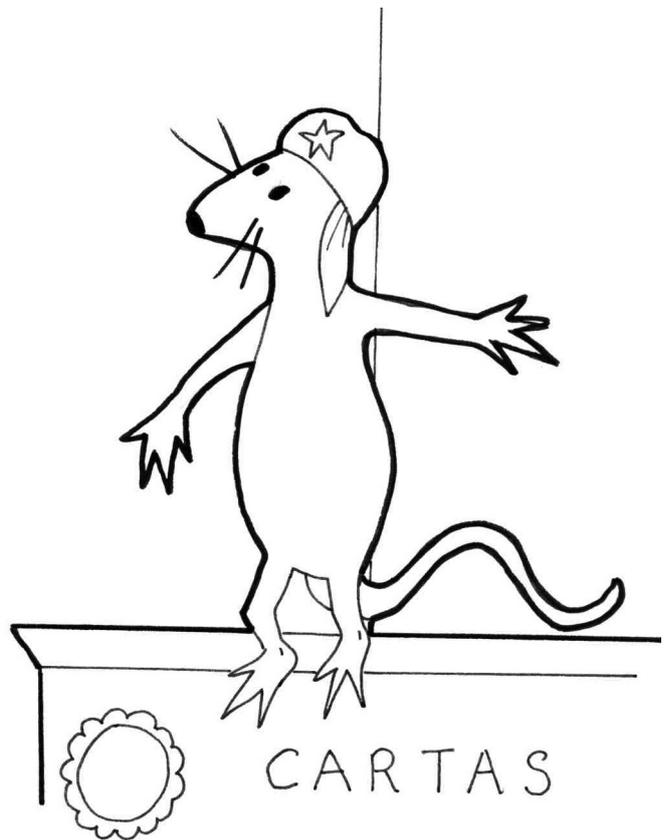
"Oh!" said his friends in the band. "We are sorry to lose you, Raúl. But we know that you have finished your work here and, like Che, you need to move on."

"Hasta Victoria Siempre!" they chorused. "Here is a beret to remember us by."

Raúl swelled with pride as he donned the black beret with its silver star at the front and jumped up onto the letterbox to wait for Robey and Rafa.

Carmen was saying, "Now we can go to the ballet called Tocatoro which tells the story of life in Cuba." She was talking to Robey and Rafa who walked reluctantly behind her as she swept out of the old-fashioned lift.

"I've heard that story already," screeched Raúl as he leapt joyfully onto Rafa's shoulder.

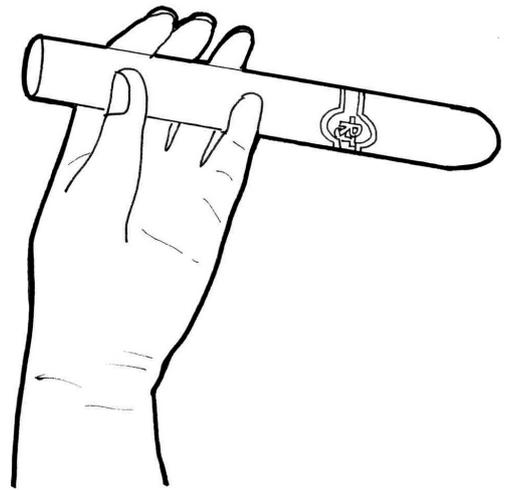


Robey and Rafa were so glad to be reunited with Raúl that they followed Carmen to the ballet without further protest. On their way to the Gran Teatro they passed a carnival parade of street dancers and figures on stilts swaying along to the music, and there was breakdancing to rumba music which Raúl joined in with. On the steps of the Capitolio a crowd, an overspill from the packed theatre, prepared to watch the ballet on large screens which had been set up supported on old trucks.



Carlos Acosta himself came out onto the steps to welcome everyone and, just when it seemed the crowd couldn't cheer any louder, a great surge of voices rose to greet the frail figure of Fidel Castro as he emerged from the Capitolio to welcome the famous ballet dancer home from England. The ballet 'Tocatoro' was Carlos Acosta's own account, in dance, of his Cuban childhood.

Fidel held a big cigar and Raúl hoped this would start a fashion for holding cigars instead of smoking them and increase sales so that more people could have jobs in the cigar factory.

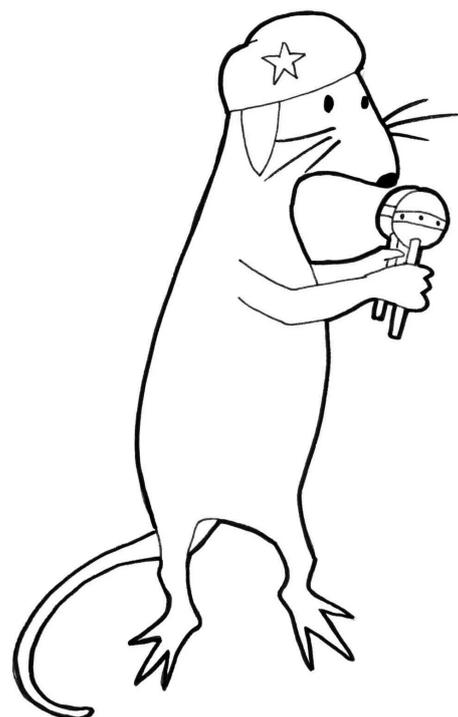


Raúl thought he must have fallen asleep soon after this because he had no more memories of Cuba until he woke up on the plane sitting between Robey and Rafa. He thought, at first, that he had just watched a very exciting film but then it came back to him that these things might really have happened.

"There was a great soundtrack, anyway, so it could have been a film," was his last thought as he went back to sleep, "and I played maracas!"

The plane sped towards Madrid .... and home!

In his rucksack Raúl had check trousers, a chef's hat and a beret like Che's. He wasn't allowed a cigar. But someone had given him his own maracas!



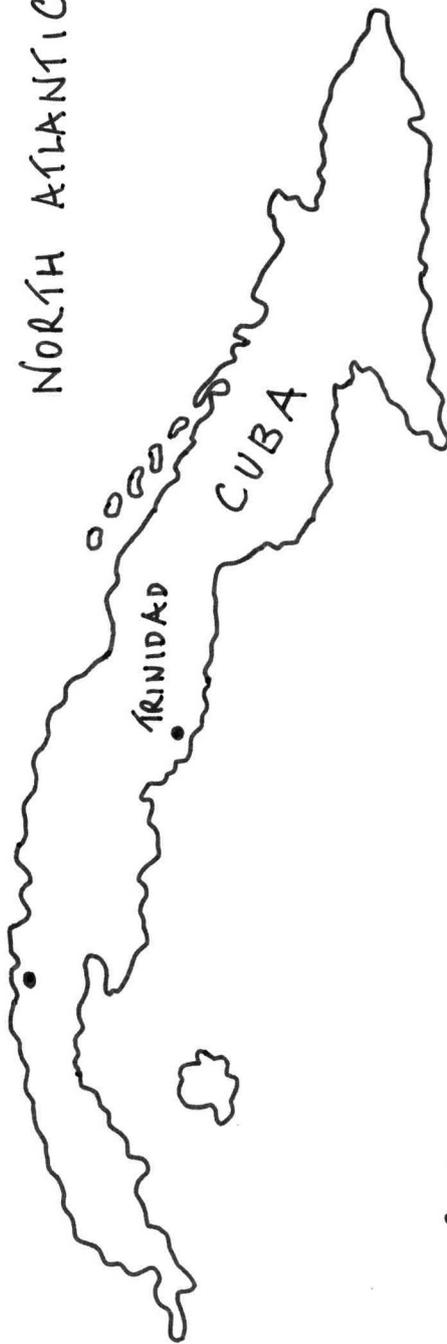
FLORIDA



GULF OF MEXICO

HAVANA

NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN



CARIBBEAN SEA



JAMAICA



HAITI

