



Cuba Diaries: An American Housewife in Havana

Isadora Tattlin

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Isadora Tattlin is the American wife of a European energy consultant posted to Havana in the 1990s. Wisely, the witty Mrs. Tattlin began a diary the day her husband informed her of their new assignment. One of the first entries is her shopping list of things to take, including six gallons of shampoo. For although the Tattlins were provided with a wonderful, big house in Havana, complete with a staff of seven, there wasn't much else money could buy in a country whose shelves are nearly bare. The record of her daily life in Cuba raising her two small children, entertaining her husband's clients (among them Fidel Castro and his ministers and minions), and contending with chronic shortages of, well . . . everything (on the street, tourists are hounded not for money but for soap), is literally stunning.

Adventurous and intuitive, Tattlin squeezed every drop of juice--both tasty and repellent--from her experience. She traveled wherever she could (it's not easy--there are few road signs or appealing places to stay or eat). She befriended artists, attended concerts and plays. She gave dozens of parties, attended dozens more. Cuba Diaries--vividly explicit, empathetic, often hilarious--takes the reader deep inside this island country only ninety miles from the U.S., where the average doctor's salary is eleven dollars a month. The reader comes away appalled by the deprivation and drawn by the romance of a weirdly nostalgic Cuba frozen in the 1950s.

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