

Exile drives us to invent ridiculous narratives, ploys, to convince ourselves that our landscapes, our people, our sky, our country are still within our mind's reach. Homelands, ha, what a foolish delirium. At least once a week, Bernardo and I go to Café Cluny to indulge in our past over wine, Beaujolais for him and Alsace for me. To an outsider it may seem indecipherable, but it's a simple game, born of misfortune, accompanied by a small, stinging satisfaction. Misfortune, alas, is our reality ... I mope; therefore I am. This is how it goes: one of us asks a question about some detail of the almost inconceivable, distant Montevideo: a building, a theatre, a tree, a bird, an actress, a café, a proscribed politician, a retired general, a bakery ... anything at all, though never something private. The other one of us has to describe it, racking their brain to wheedle a fleeting image from ten years ago, or else concede, admitting that it's vanished, or even erased, from their memory. If the latter is the case, they lose a point, provided that the one asking the questions actually knows the answer. And since the rules are scrupulously strict, if the answer is insufficient in the eyes of the loser, the point remains up in the air until an occasion arises where we can compare it against a photo or talk to one of the many academics that crowd (and plague) Paris' Latin Quarter. Bernardo currently leads by two points, making our running score Bernardo 15, Roberto 13. Whenever he gains even the slightest edge over me, he becomes all smug and pedantic. I should clarify that his win today is down to an extremely far-fetched, almost fraudulent, question about some obscure feature of the horse's front leg on the Gaucho statue, and another, just as cruel, regarding the windows on the eleventh story of Salvo Palace which overlook Independence Square. To me, this feels unfair because I ask him normal, plausible and straight-forward questions, like let's say "what is (or was) the name of that café on that corner of Rivera Avenue and Comercio street?" or "how many entrances does (or did) the Colombes stand at the Centenario Stadium have?" or "where is (or was) the final destination of the 173 bus?" Do you get the gist? So, I begin my protest, formally speaking. But at the exact moment where Bernardo replies saying, among smug sniggers, that the issue is that I've always been, and always will be, a sore loser, "a typical Aries", I see Delia ... Delia of all people. She stands there, passively waiting to cross Boul'Mich, or rather, waiting for the spur of a green man. I haven't seen her in eight or nine years, yet I recognise her immediately. She's thinner, but still pretty. Her stance radiates the same comfort it did all those springs ago. Back in '69, before the frenzy of militancy and the repressive madness, before the walls were flooded with slogans and before going underground proved

irreversible, she and I shared lovely evenings and even better siestas. As I see her there, waiting for the green man, I am overcome by an uncharacteristic urge to undress her in my mind. Yet, what we shared historically was not solely physical. Delia is a lovely woman, intelligent and compassionate, with a smile which brightens life itself. She was conscientious beyond the trance of love. If we weren't so young, we might have married, but with what? I was just starting my second year of engineering and was getting by with odd jobs. And she, still living with her parents back in Paysandú, was a bit further behind me, also studying engineering and earning a few pesos selling arts and crafts in Montevideo's Tristán Narvaja market. Even so, we still managed to find time for each other, twice a week to put it modestly, and we were in love. Yet, the hard times came, and our respective political persuasions began to challenge our proximity. Schedules become unforgivingly rigid in political turbulence, and this conspired against us. Sometimes a fortnight would pass with us only seeing each other at some assembly, and even then we gradually drifted apart. More than once, during pinnacle late-night votes, I'd raise my hand and she would not, or she'd raise hers whilst mine remained in my pocket. In an April riddled with political tension, we only saw each other once, for just one night, and, unbeknownst to us then, it was the last time. Just forty-eight hours later, I was forced to disappear, and she was too, three days after that. It wasn't until the August, when I hastily turned up in Buenos Aires, that I discovered that Delia had been imprisoned since the mid-July. She complied, that's to say, she suffered.