

that you don't need particularly sensitive fingers to weigh up the full 29 carats of my love.



HASTA ROMPER EL ULTIMO VÍNCULO until the last tie is broken

We left, stopping next in Necochea where an old university friend of Alberto's had his practise. We covered the distance easily in a morning, arriving just in time for a steak lunch, receiving a genial welcome from the friend and a not so genial welcome from his wife who spotted the danger in our resolutely bohemian ways.

"You have only one year left before you qualify as a doctor and yet you're going away? You have no idea when you'll be back? But why?"

We couldn't give precise answers to her desperate questions and this horrified her. She was courteous with us but her hostility was clear, despite the fact that she knew (at least I think she knew) ultimate victory was hers — her husband was beyond our "redemption."

In Mar del Plata we had visited a doctor friend of Alberto's who had joined the [Peronist] party, with all its consequent privileges. This doctor in Necochea remained faithful to his own — the Radicals — yet we, however, were as remote from one as from the other. Support for the Radicals was never a tenable political position for me and was also losing its significance for Alberto, who had been quite close at one time with some of the leaders he respected.

When we climbed back on to the bike again, after thanking the

couple for our three days of the good life, we continued on to Bahía Blanca, feeling a little more alone but a good deal more free. Friends were also expecting us there, my friends this time, and they too offered us warm and friendly hospitality. Several days passed us by in this southern port, as we fixed the bike and wandered aimlessly around the city. These were the last days in which we did not have to think about money. Afterwards, a rigid diet of meat, polenta and bread would have to be followed strictly to stretch our meager finances. The taste of bread was now tinged with warning: "I won't be so easy to come by soon, old man," and we swallowed it with all the more enthusiasm. We wanted, like camels, to build our reserves for the journey that lay ahead.

The night before our departure I came down with a cough and quite a high temperature, and consequently we were a day late leaving Bahía Blanca. Finally, at three in the afternoon, we left under a blazing sun that had become even hotter by the time we reached the sand dunes around Médanos. The bike, with its badly distributed weight, kept bounding out of control, the wheels constantly spinning over. Alberto fought a painful battle with the sand and insists he won. The only certainty is that we found ourselves resting comfortably in the sand six times before we finally made it out on to the flat. We did, nevertheless, get out, and this is my *compañero's* main argument for claiming victory over Médanos.

From here I took over the controls, accelerating to make up for precious lost time. A fine sand covered part of a bend and — boom: the worst crash of the whole trip. Alberto emerged unscathed but my foot was trapped and scorched by the cylinder, leaving a disagreeable memento which lasted a long time because the wound wouldn't heal.

A heavy downpour forced us to seek shelter at a ranch, but to reach it we had to get 300 meters up a muddy track and we went flying twice more. Their welcome was magnificent but the sum total of our first experience on unsealed roads was alarming: nine