
The Secret of her Cuban Eyes

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Would she know about telepathy? Would she have paranormal powers? Does she have X-Ray vision? I asked myself these and other questions after listening to that lady.

She was walking by my side as any other woman looking for supplies to take home. Carefree, she asked me: where did you get that pumpkin?

I was stunned. How would that lady know that I had bought a pumpkin —a good one? Did she follow me?

Not at all. The answer was in the transparency of my nylon bag that allowed her to easily see the strong orange of my pumpkin.

After my initial awe, I realized that the lady had not done anything different to what most of the people do: to watch closely other people's belongings.

It cannot be denied that the lack of supplies in Cuban markets, coupled to our reduced pockets and other shortages, has made us sound the alarms on good but not so expensive products.

Beside these facts, there are others that have nothing to do with the usual search of products, but equally determine Cubans' curiosity.

These facts are related to curiosity, even bad manners or imprudence. Even in the most formal of the activities, curiosity sometimes characterizes us.

A European friend of mine told me that the look is something that identifies Cuban women. They look at you right in your eyes, fearless, as if they were your family. That is not common around the world.

This is perhaps an absolute opinion. But as our eyes are the mirror of our soul, it is true that the Cuban soul is unique. Cubans are forward-looking, sociable, hard-working, and caring.

They talk with joy, confidence, and warmth. The look of the Caribbean citizens—perhaps influenced by the sea, breeze, and hurricanes—is sometimes carefree, tolerant, and chatty. The way we look is also related to our sexuality and sensuality.

A Canadian citizen keeps saying that “Cuban men should all wear sunglasses so they can hide that look with which they stare at women. It is like an X-Ray, and some girls just love it. Cubans look, smile, and finally take your wife away.”

Looking for diversity and other stories, I asked an Argentine woman about this subject. She meditated her words and then said convincingly:

“Cuban men and women have a fearless, quiet, and confident look. And I do not believe it is only because Cubans are brave, they have it in their blood. Their environment is quiet. They are not violent. They are not concerned about a bomb exploding close to them or from the mall at the corner.”

Your Eyes Scream

There might be a study on how domestic literature have approached the glances of Cubans, perhaps on the way plastic arts have done it. If such study is real it is not within our reach. Nevertheless, we have a Cecilia Valdés who "... although the eyes of the mulattress spurted lightning, and not lightnings of love, but of anger, he was totally subdued Leonardo, and he forgot Isabel."

All in all we still have the great José Martí remembering in his poem A Emma that "If in your face shine so sweet eyes / the soul in love goes in them, / don't let sad angers cloud them, / that all the women of my lips, / they are not a look of your eyes... "

Guillén described us as "a long green lizard, with stony eyes and water" while in the Cuban song book of all times famous characters dedicated works to the Cuban eyes. That is the case of the famous bolero song *Aquellos ojos verdes* (Those Green Eyes).

Nile Menéndez added the music and Adolfo Utrera wrote the lyrics, it was considered the first Cuban bolero song to attain international fame, around 1929, when many sighed humming *Those green eyes /with a quiet look /left in my soul /and endless thirst of love... "*

Many years later, no wonder minstrel Silvio Rodríguez sang "I wish your steady look will end" or he remembered that "in these days the sun is not coming out but your face / and in the deafening silence of time your eyes scream".

In the Cuban plastic arts it's impossible not to speak of Victor Manuel's Tropical Gypsy without passing before her dark eyes; the Floras of Portocarrero would tell little if from their portraits there weren't looks of surveying who knows what close or far, while Mendive paints human eyes in tree trunks and knees, like the saying "There's always an eye that sees you."

If your looks kill

When Isaac Delgado sung "... If your looks kill now I'd be in heaven, I'm so afraid" is very likely that he did not refer to what Cubans have named "bad eye". It must be like that although the singer and songwriter implores "don't look into my eyes /that my strength escapes me /your pupils get dilated /and I cannot raise my voice."

What's for sure is that more than one born in Cuba gives importance and even crosses his fingers because of that bad eye which withers the most vivid and sprouted plant. Many tie a red ribbon in their cars, including carts drawn by horses; and it's not like decoration that so many newly born wear hooked in their clothes next to the traditional Saint Lucia's Eyes.

The bad have settled roots so deep in the people that would amaze to find tucked as protection in many purses the traditional garlic clove, the copper stone or a leaf of basil.

It's also common to find on some house front doors or in living rooms with that eye that looks at you, crossing swords with the bad eyes, and sometimes accompanied by a tongue pierced by a nail or dagger which is the warning against gossips.

Scholars like Doctor Dionisio Zaldívar, associate professor at the Psychology Faculty of Havana University explain that thanks to traditions and customs, "life

demonstrates that people from diverse cultural levels can, regardless of them, share certain superstitions". Nevertheless, the professor explains that while you have more than a tool to explain the phenomena around you, that can influence the response you give towards them.

The bad eye appeared anchored in popular culture, sometimes within the section of superstitions that pass from grandparents to grandsons, almost as in a game and without science or rationality in-between.

By the way, the doctor in Philosophical Sciences Miguel Limia David, Professor of Merit, say a few years back to this reporter who asked him about superstitions: "Human behavior can be regulated by very simple factors like the relationship between fear and the sensation of safety, between shame and honor, the notion of dignity and guilt. They are different scales and respond to different degrees of development of the psychic activity. That makes superstitions remain in a residual way in the contemporary social environment.

"However – added the expert -, it's also true that the human being doesn't see shortened its spirituality to rational elements, it's eagle and frog at the same time, as a well-known poet would say, but that doesn't happen for being Cuban but for the condition of human beings. I believe superstition is an element that belongs to our culture like many others, but not of the core of our idiosyncrasy."

Something very different to superstitions and lucky charms is the intention and force of the Cuban look when, without speaking, intends to reproach, threaten or criticize.

A relative tells me that although decades have passed, he can't forget the way in which certain lady looked at him while visiting her house, and he stepped unintentionally, the paw of the dog living there.

There was not damage to the animal, but if the looks kill, as the song warns, my relative would be half-dead and buried by now, as she comments while showing me the hair on her arms standing remembering those piercing eyes.

Of course is not the same seeing than watching, those avenging eyes of the dog's owner were not just seeing, but watching. Dictionaries and encyclopedias tell the slight difference mentioning that seeing is mainly related to a physical capacity; to see you only need to have your eyes open, while watching is more related with a deliberate act. Therefore, we see all that we watch, but we don't watch all that we see.

Anyways, don't forget that "beauty is but skin deep. You have to search with the heart ". If that heart is Cuban, well the look, although not lasting, it will almost always speak for itself and it will even reveal some secret.

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