

GREEN EYES

For a long time I have wanted to write something with this title. Now that the occasion has arisen, I have written it with capital letters on the first sheet of paper, and then I have let my pen wander at will.

I am sure that I have seen some eyes like those I have described in this story. I don't know if it was something I dreamt, but I have seen them. I will never be able to describe them exactly as they were: luminous and transparent, like the drops of rain that fall from the leaves of the forest, after a summer storm. For that reason, I am counting on the imagination of my readers to help with the interpretation of what might be considered the "rough draft" of a story I am going to write some day.

I

"The deer is wounded...; it is definitely wounded. There, you can see drops of blood between the branches and here, where it tried to jump over this branch, you can see that its legs are weakened... Our young lord is starting out, where others finish... In all my forty years of hunting, I have never seen a better shot... But, by San Saturio, the Patron Saint of Soria!, cut off that deer before it gets through the rest of this thicket; set loose the hounds, blow your horns till you're blue in the face, and sink your spurs into the flanks of your horses. Can't you see that it is about to reach the spring of Los Alamos. And if it gets there before it dies, we've lost it?"

The sound of horns echoed over the slopes of Mount Moncayo, the pack of hounds was let loose, and the voices of the hunters resounded with new fury as the combined troop of men, horses and dogs directed by Iñigo, the Chief Hunter of the Marquis of Almenar, made a determined effort to cut off the flight of the wounded deer.

But all their efforts were in vain. By the time the fastest greyhound reached the thicket panting, his jaws slavered with foam, the deer, which was as fast as an arrow, had already left it and had entered the path which leads to the spring.

"Stop!... Everyone stop!" Iñigo shouted. "It was God's will that it escape."

The mounted procession halted, the horns stopped blowing and, after a shout from the hunters, the eager pack of greyhounds also stopped following the trail.

At that moment the group was joined by Fernando de Argensola, the oldest son of the Count of Almenar, who was leader of this expedition.

"What are you doing?" he exclaimed, turning to the Chief Hunter with an expression of outrage painted on his face and his eyes burning with anger. "You idiot, what have you done? You can see that animal is badly wounded—it is the first one I have been able to shoot—and now you want to let it go and die in the forest. Do you think I've come to hunt deer just so they can provide food for the wolves?"

"Lord," Iñigo whispered under his breath, "it is impossible to go beyond this point."

"Impossible! And why is that?"

"Because this trail," the Chief Hunter continued, "leads to the spring of Los Alamos: the spring of Los Alamos, in whose waters there is an evil spirit. Anyone who dares to enter that place will pay dearly for his boldness. The deer will have already crossed the

boundary. How will you ever be able to stop it, without bringing a terrible disaster down on your head? We hunters are the kings of Mount Moncayo, but kings who pay a price. And any animal who manages to get near that mysterious spring must be considered a lost cause.”

“A lost cause! I would rather lose the lordship of my family; I would rather place my soul in the hands of Satan than let that deer escape, since it is the only one that was shot by my bow, and on my very first hunting expedition... Look there, you can see... It is still visible; its legs are weakening and it’s slowing down, so let me go... just let me go... Let go of my bridle, or I will knock you off your horse... Maybe I can still reach it before it gets to the spring. And if it does, the Devil take its waters, and its evil inhabitants. Let’s go, *Relámpago!*; let’s go, horse! If you can catch it, I will order them to fasten diamonds to your golden halter.”

The horse and its rider bolted off with an explosion of movement. Iñigo followed them with his eyes until they disappeared among the trees; he turned to the others and saw that they were also frozen and speechless.

Finally, the Chief Hunter said to the others:

“Men, you saw it; I was ready to die under the hooves of his stallion to keep him from leaving. I did what I could. No good can come from confronting the devil. A hunter can go this far with his bow; but in order to go any further than this, you would need a priest with a dispenser of holy water.”

II

“You look a bit off-color today; you are gloomy and upset. What is wrong with you? Ever since that fateful day, which I will always consider regrettable, when you went to the spring of Los Alamos after that wounded deer, you look like some evil witch has put you under her spell. You never go into the forest with your hounds, nor does the sound of your horn echo through the trees. Every morning, bearing this burden that seems to weigh you down, you enter the forest with your bow and remain there until the sun sets. Then, by the time night falls, you come back to the castle pale and exhausted, but I have not seen you bring home any game. What are you doing during those long hours when you are away from those who love you?”

While Iñigo spoke, Fernando was lost in thought, mechanically digging splinters out of an ebony chair with his hunting knife.

After a long silence, that was only interrupted by the sound of the blade scraping the polished wood, the young lord turned to his servant and, as if he had not heard a single word the latter had spoken, he said:

“Iñigo, you’ve been here a long time; you know all the haunts of Mount Moncayo; you have crossed its slopes in pursuit of game, and during your many hunts you have reached the summit more than once. Tell me: by chance, have you ever encountered a woman who lives among its rocks?”

“A woman?” exclaimed the Iñigo, looking at him with astonishment.

“Yes,” the young lord replied; “I have had a very strange experience..., very strange... I thought I could keep this a secret indefinitely, but I see that is not possible. It spills out of my heart and is visible in my countenance. So I am going to tell you... And I hope

you will be able to help me resolve the mystery surrounding this creature who, it seems, is real only for me, since no one else has ever seen her, nor can anyone tell me anything about her.”

Without saying a word, and without taking his eyes off Fernando, Iñigo moved the stool where he was sitting so he was facing his lord’s chair. The latter, after gathering his thoughts, continued speaking.

“Since the day when, in spite of your ominous predictions, I went to the spring of Los Alamos and rode into its waters to retrieve the deer your superstition allowed to escape, my soul has been consumed by a desire for solitude.

You have no idea what that place is like. Drops of water flow out of an opening in the rocks, passing through the leaves of the plants that grow around it. As they fall, the drops shine like gold and tinkle like beautiful notes of music; they flow through the grass, rippling with a sound like bees buzzing around a flower; then, the water forms a channel which twists around the rocks in its path till it flows into a small lake. The drops of water fall into the lake making a sound that is indescribable... Moans, words, names, songs... I don’t know what it is that I heard when, alone and filled with sadness, I sat on the edge of the rocks next to the place where water of this mysterious spring is falling, until it fills a area whose quiet surface is hardly ever disturbed by the afternoon breeze.

Everything there seems large. The solitude, with its myriad of tiny, mysterious sounds spreads through that space, intoxicating the spirit with an ineffable melancholy. In the silvery leaves of the poplars, in the hollows between the rocks, in the waves of the water, it seems like the invisible spirits of Nature are speaking to us, and that they recognize a kindred spirit in the immortal soul of man.

When you saw me take my bow at the break of dawn and enter the forest, it was never with the intention of going to hunt for game, no; I always went to sit on the edge of the spring, to look in its waves for... I don’t know what... some madness! On the day when I rode into it with my *Relámpago*, I thought that I saw something strange in the water... something very strange...; a woman’s eyes.

Maybe it was only a ray of sunlight that sparkled on the surface; or maybe it was one of those flowers that float in the water whose petals looks like emeralds...; who knows; but I thought those eyes were fixed on mine; it was then that an absurd, impossible dream was awakened in my heart: to find a person with eyes like those. That is why I returned, day after day, in the hope of finding them.

Finally, one afternoon... I thought it was a dream..., but no, it was real. I have spoken with her many times, like I am speaking with you now... One afternoon, sitting where I usually sit, dressed in clothes that reached the water and floated over its surface, I found an incredibly beautiful woman. Her hair was like gold; her eyelashes shone like threads of light; and between those lashes sparkled the same eyes I had seen... Yes, because the eyes of that woman were those that had become fixed in my mind, eyes with a color that was amazing; eyes that were...”

“Green!” exclaimed Iñigo with terror, rising out of the place where he had been sitting.

Fernando looked at him with surprise, and asked him with a mixture of anxiety and happiness:

“Do you know her, then?”

“Heavens, no!”, the huntsman objected; “God forbid that I should ever know her. But when my parents forbade me to go to that place, they told me many times that the spirit,

the imp, the devil, or the woman, who lived in those waters, had eyes of that color. I beg of you, by what you love most in this world, do not go back to the spring of Los Alamos. Sooner or later its terrible curse will certainly fall on you, and you will perish in its tainted waters.”

“By what I love most...” the young man murmured with a sad smile.

“Yes,” his elder insisted, “by your parents, by your family, by the soul of the one whom Heaven has destined to be your wife, by that of a servant who witnessed your birth.”

“Do you know what I love most in the world? Do you know for what I would sacrifice the love of my father, the kisses of the one who gave me life, and all the affection that the women of this world could offer me? For one gaze, for just one gaze from those eyes... How could I possibly not keep on searching for them?”

Fernando said this with such intensity that a tear trembled in Iñigo’s eye, and then it trickled down his cheek, as he said with a tone of foreboding:

“May God’s will be done!”

III

“Who are you? Where are you from? Where do you live? I have come here looking for you almost every day, and I never see a horse, or any other means of travel that could bring you here. Please tear away the veil of mystery that surrounds you like the darkest night. I love you and, noble or commoner, I will be yours, yours forever.”

The sun had passed behind the peak of the mountain, and the shadows were spreading down its slopes. The wind was whistling through the poplars, and the fog was gradually rising over the water and covering the rocks on its edge.

On one of these rocks that seemed about to plunge into the depths of the water whose trembling surface reflected his image, was the heir of Almenar, who was resting on his knees at the feet of his mysterious beloved, as he tried in vain to learn the secret of her strange existence.

She was beautiful, beautiful and pale, like an alabaster statue. One of the tresses of her hair had fallen over her shoulder and was hidden in the folds of her veil like a ray of sunlight that is lost in a cloud, and within the circle of her blond eyelashes her green eyes shone like two emeralds set in gold.

When the young man stopped talking, her lips parted as though she were going to say something, but then they only gave a sigh, a sigh that was weak and halting, like a ripple that was pushed by the breeze until it was lost among the rushes.

“Why don’t you answer me?” Fernando pleaded, on seeing his hopes dashed. “Do you want me to believe all that they have said about you? But no, never that... Speak to me; I want to know if you love me; I want to know if I can love you, if you are a woman...”

“Or perhaps a demon... And if I were?”

The youth hesitated for a moment, while a cold sweat spread over his body; his eyes opened farther as he fixed them on her even more intently, fascinated by her phosphoric glow. Almost driven mad, he exclaimed with an outburst of love:

“If you were... I would still love you... I would love you then, as I love you now, as it is my destiny to love you, even beyond this life, if there is something beyond it.”

“Fernando,” the beautiful woman said with a voice that seemed like music, “I love you even more than you love me; I who am a true spirit, have descended to a mortal. I am not a woman like those who exist on the Earth; I am a woman who is worthy of you, you who are superior to other men. I live here in the depths of these waters, and I am incorporeal, fleeting and transparent, like they are: I speak with their voice and I move in their ripples. I will not punish the one who dares to disturb the waters where I dwell; instead, I will reward him with my love, as a mortal who is immune to ordinary superstitions, as a lover who is capable of appreciating my rare and mysterious affection.”

While she spoke, Fernando was lost in the contemplation of her ineffable beauty and, as though he were drawn by a mysterious power, he moved closer and closer to the edge of the water. The green-eyed woman continued speaking:

“Look; can you see the clear bottom of this tiny lake? Can you see all the plants with long green leaves that are rocking on the bottom?... They will give us a bed of emeralds and coral..., and I... I will give you a nameless joy, the joy of which you have dreamed during your moments of rapture, a happiness no other woman could give you... Come, the fog is floating over us like a blanket of linen... The waves are beckoning with their incomprehensible voice, and now the wind is rustling the poplars with its hymn of love. So come... come...”

Night was beginning to spread its shadow over the water, and the face of the moon was shining on the surface; the fog was eddying in the breeze, and the green leaves glowing in the darkness seemed like will-o'-the-wisps flickering over the surface of tainted waters... “Come, come...” These words were humming in Fernando’s ears like an incantation. “Come...,” and the woman who called him from the border of the abyss seemed to offer him a kiss... a kiss...

Fernando took one step forward, and then another...; he felt slender arms wrap around his neck, and then he felt a cold sensation like a snowy kiss on his burning lips... still, he hesitated... but finally, he slipped and fell into the water with a fateful splash.

The water splattered like sparks of light; then, it closed over his body, and silvery rings spread out until they finally disappeared.