

The Look

Sam Gill¹

Water sheets from her naked skin as she walks out of the river. Twisting her torso towards me sunlight falls on her breast. Tilting her head slightly she raises her hand to pull her long black hair from her face. Our eyes meet.

I put in on the Pequari some miles up, looking forward more to the silence of the calms floating through virgin rain forest than to the challenge of the rapids, though they are what I've come for. Where do you find virginity in the postmodern world? Indeed, where even a rain forest? Running a series of class fives tearing along half submerged, weaving through the unknown missing rocks and sucking whirlpools by inches. The adrenalin spurts, the muscles burn, the brain and body clutch like intimate partners in this river dance. Celebrating survival more than my kayaking skills I whoop as I enter smooth water as the Pequari suddenly widens into a broad left turn.

The river sweeps me along a deep channel. Quiet settles my mind as my muscles relax. I savor the return to innocence: snakebirds toucans howler monkeys sloths orchids treesleavesorchidsbirdsendlessdensetreesandleaves. The forest comes to the river's very edge. Rounding the curve the thrust of the river abandons a shallow calm bathing pool next to the left bank. She is here. Taller than I expect for the indigenous peoples of these Costa Rican forests. Athletic body yet round and feminine. Her small belly pooches a bit. Her wet black hair hangs nearly to her waist. A red hibiscus behind her ear. Her skin. A creamy marvel. Velvet texture and a color to die for. My hands ache with imagined touches, caresses. I take her into me. Though she exists only in this moment she saturates my every breath. The full measure of this moment is etched on my being always ready like a photographic plate to examine for forgotten details—the bend of her fingers, the scent of the river, the tilt of her head, the sun on her shoulder, the sounds of the birds, the curve of her cheek.

Our eyes meet. A human marvel. Lingering, an eternity in an instant, they cannot let go embracing conversing exploring knowing. In the meeting of the eyes there is a knowing. I'll be the rest of my life understanding.

Jean Paul Sartre said that it is in seeing others looking at us, the meeting of eyes, that we come to know ourselves as objects as well as subjects. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty the seeing and the seen are of one flesh, united as are one hand with another sharing the flesh of one body. This ontology of flesh, he holds, is the ultimate reality. All this French wisdom and more in one sensuous moment on the Pequari.

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