



as retold by Daryl Brower

Long ago, during the time of Inca, there lived two young people whose lives became intertwined. The first was a maiden, long of limb, fair of face, and a delight to behold. Now in those days and in that part of the world, girls of great beauty and noble breeding were given the sacred honor of serving in the temple of the Virigins of the Sun. Consecrated to the greatest of the Inca gods, they spent their days learning to spin and weave more beautifully than any in the land, creating rich and sumptuous robes and hangings for the priests and nobles. The girls in the Sun's service took an oath to be loyal only to him. Should they share any word, touch, or other connection with a mortal man, they were put to death, buried alive along with their unfortunate paramours.

Now most of the girls in the Sun's service were well satisfied with their lot, for it was a great honor and they were happy to spend their days surrounded by luxurious fibers and the cheerful companionship found among women making beautiful things with their hands. The maiden of our story, however, was not so content for she had found the love of a handsome son of the Realm and she wished nothing more than to spend her days and nights with him.



So one night, when the moon was dark and all was quiet, she stole out of the temple with her love and fled with him to the countryside. Greatly angered at her betrayal, her father, the king, ordered that the young maiden and her lover be found, offering a great reward for their capture. And so the two were hunted down by the people of the city and returned to face the king, who, furious that they should show such disrespect to the great god of the Inca, ordered them killed.

The young maiden's mother was distraught by the news (what mother wouldn't be?) and begged and pleaded with her husband to spare their lives. The king, perhaps recalling the rashness of his own youth and the many charms of young love, took pity on his daughter and spared her and her lover's lives.

And so the two lovers escaped death, but were banished from the realm (there had to be some appeasement to the god, you see). They lived a grim existence in the harsh countryside beyond the walls of the city. The rocky soil bruised their feet, the cold nights chilled their bones and they found little to eat among the scrub of the mountains. Seeing her daughter in such hardship, the maiden's mother once again intervened. Using her great powers of persuasion, she turned to Viracocha, the compassionate creator god, and asked him for help. Now this put Viracocha in a difficult spot. He well understood the foolish things young people do for love, but he also took seriously the great offense the maiden had given in breaking her vows to the Sun and the great

wrong the young man had done in aiding her in doing so. So he found a clever way to ease their burden, without absolving them of their guilt.



How you ask? I shall tell you. He turned the pair into llamas: strong, sturdy creatures sure of foot, with thick fleece to keep them cool in the hot days and warm in the cold nights. But since they had once been human, the llamas had a peculiar look and manner that was not like that of the other animals. They lived a happy life together, but every so often they would wander close to the village where they had once lived, just to see what had been left behind.

When the king heard of these strange creatures he demanded they be brought to him at once. And when they were, he recognized his daughter, the maiden, and her lover, the son of the Realm. Angry with his wife, but unwilling to be forever parted from his beautiful daughter, he decreed that for their indiscretion the pair should be put to work serving the city. And that is how the llamas, which to this day have an oddly human manner, came to bear the burdens of the Inca people, provide them with good, sturdy fiber, and live among them always.

Editor's note: The folktale of the llama's creation had been passed down for many generations, this version is based on the legend that appears in *Andean Folk Knits* by Marcia Lewandowski (

Lark Books/Sterling Publishing, 2005)