

## 4. Shadows and Shame

Cuyaiya: ViraVira Ayrihua coya (twin-ears moon, April 1534)

Cuyaiya stood at the edge of the empty sacrificial platform and looked over the almost sheer drop. It was over a hundred feet down to where the slope became more gentle, but even there it was covered with broken rocks. It was where they had found her mother so long ago.

Her mother, the first abandonment. She had gone far away inside herself long before her body died, blank-eyed on coca, not caring that her daughter needed her.

She looked down at the rocks and went over all the reasons she might choose as her mother had.

Rejection had been the story of Cuyaiya's life. Her father had been ashamed that she looked nothing like the Inca's people. Her community of ViraVira had never accepted the Chachapoya half-breed child with the crooked arm. The llamas were the only bright spot in her childhood.

Adulthood had proved worse. Her first husband rejected her for another. Her second husband used her body mercilessly and tried to kill her soul. Her third husband despised her, betrayed her and arranged the sacrifice of her child.

As if that had not been enough, when she had been out transporting the Inca's ransom the Spanish 'Viracochas' had raped her and left her for dead. And the resulting pregnancy caused the women of the ayllu to condemn her for a sin she did not commit. And when the foreigner Elias had married her so she would not have to pay the penalty for adultery, the other women who wanted him hated her even more.

Through all the lonely years only her aunt Tumbai had made her feel special, mentored her, saw in her a future High Priestess, the last of the line of Yrca. Tumbai and Machacuay the Snake-god of the Chachapoya had comforted her with ambition and hatred and coca. She had left all that when she chose to follow the Lord Speaker.

But she had been wrong when she thought He would restore her son's soul, bring him back to inhabit the new life in her womb. Her heart was pierced with grief as she remembered Churi, her little boy. It was for Churi's sake that she had fled the sacrifice ordered for those who hid the ransom. It was for his rebirth she had thought Apu-Rimac brought her back from death.

But her infant had been a girl. So Churi's soul was still trapped in a animal form; the transfer she had staked everything on had not occurred. What hope was there now?

The three years his human soul had been imprisoned in a llama's body had driven her son crazy. And he would be right to hate her; Fray Juan said innocent children went straight to Apu-Rimac when they died. But Juan did not know that in her grief and selfishness she had not let Churi go, had used spells to snare his soul in animal form.

Just as Machacuay had snared her own soul again with coca, tempted her to break her vow to Apu-Rimac, the Llama of God.

How she wished she had not found that bag in Tumbai's hut, those irresistible leaves! Now Jesus Apu-Rimac had left her too.

She should have gone to Him when her daughter was born; it would have been so easy. Why did she stay? What was there to live for?

The days were too dark to bear, and she hurt. Pain was everywhere: in her head, in her heart, in her stomach. She craved coca to dull the pain. But that brought only temporary surcease. She wanted more than coca; she wanted never to feel again. Cuyaiya looked over the edge.

One leap, a swift fall, and it would be over. How she had blamed her mother! But she did not blame her now.

Maybe in heaven she would forget what she had done to Churi. Maybe she would be released from the weight of her grief. She remembered the precious days after she first felt Apu-Rimac, the Llama of God, glowing within her. He was not here any more, because she had turned back to coca. But there was no coca in heaven, and she would still go to be with Jesus when she died. Fray Juan had told her so. No more sorrow, no more pain.

Pailin might be sad. But the others would be happy the witch's pupil was gone. Nobody would really miss her; she was a curse and a burden to them all. She had been from the day of her birth. The sharp stones beckoned to her with a siren song: you are no better than your mother. Come to us, we are the solution to your trouble.

Cuyaiya felt the rush of air as she sprang outward into space. The decision was a relief.

Elias: ViraVira Ayrihua coya (twin-ears moon, April 1534)

Elias woke to the hunger cries of Eva. Where was Cuyaiya? She must have stepped out to the privy. He scooped up the baby and went to check. She was not there.

Perhaps she had gone to get water. A sense of hurry, of foreboding followed him as he trotted toward the spring, jiggling his daughter to quiet her. From the terrace above, he could see no sign of her mother. The

priests' house was nearby; he stuck his head in without knocking. Fray Juan was awake, talking to the air. "Fray Juan, have you seen Cuyaiya?"

"I have seen her in the pagan place of sacrifice," Juan said hollowly. "We must pray that Jesus will turn her back. The snake is after her!"

The old priest was talking to his delusional snake again. But this might also be a warning; Fray Juan was often uncannily right. Well, Pedro would be back in a moment. Elias thrust Eva, still crying, into Juan's arms. "Watch her for me, Father!" He turned and sprinted off.

When he reached the sacrificial platform at the highest point in Vira-Vira, no one was there. Skeins of mist drifted lazily across the level spot. "Cuyai!" Elias called, the wind blowing his shout off to the south. From the hills opposite a tiny echo came back to him. He went to the sheer edge and looked down.

The mist concealed the drop, but some distance below him something lighter-colored was caught on one of the small trees that grew horizontally from the stone. It moved and struggled to free itself. "Cuyai!" he called again.

"Go away!" came the muffled voice from below him.

Fury gave him energy. How could she do this to Eva? How would a child only two weeks old survive without her mother's milk? Elias leaped over the edge and swarmed down the cliff, his fingers and toes finding hold in the cracks, until he reached the form hanging in the tree. She was suspended by her dress, which was caught under her arms. One arm was over her head, trapped in the cloth; with the other she was trying to free herself.

Elias saw a small ledge directly below her and dropped down to it, getting a firm footing and grabbing Cuyaiya even as she fought free of the entangling clothing. He pulled her close to him, leaning back against the cliff to support her weight on the ledge.

"Be still, unless you want to pull me off with you!" he snarled.

Cuyai stopped fighting him. "Let me go," she begged. "I want to die. Please, let me go!"

"No!" Elias leaned back against the cliff, drawing deep breaths, forcing the anger down, adjusting his tone. "Eva needs you. I need you."

"Nobody needs me," Cuyaiya said. "Larca can nurse the baby. Any of them would take you." The tears began rolling down her face. "My son is gone. The ayllu killed him, but it was I who sent him far down in the cycle of rebirth. Now Apu-Rimac has left me alone too. Let me die and go to him!"

Elias wrapped his arms around her while she shook with sobs. He had already said Eva needed her and he needed her. What else there was to say? Why was she still babbling about her son? He had been dead for years! The wind increased, and Cuyai began to shake with the cold and the

anticlimax of still being alive when she had chosen death. Elias stretched one hand upwards and yanked at the edge of her dress as it flapped within his reach, hearing it tear and come loose in his hand. He draped it over her. What was he going to do with this woman?

Then an inspiration struck. She thought if she jumped she would be with Jesus! Well, a little Dominican doctrine would fix that. "Cuyai, you won't go to Apu-Rimac if you kill yourself. That is murder, and those who commit murder after they have been forgiven go to hell."

That got her attention. The sobs ceased. "Is hell the place where the spirits of anger live?" she whispered fearfully.

"It is the worst place imaginable," Elias improvised, trying to remember the stories they had told at Holy Cross. "All good things that give comfort or pleasure are stripped away, and you have to look forever at everything you hate. It is a place where Jesus cannot even see you, and you can never see him."

There, that produced results. Cuyaiya pressed against the cliff with him. "Now, we are going to climb back up, and you are to do exactly what I tell you. One slip, and you could cause us both to fall and die. And who would care for Eva then?"

That thought made his blood run cold. He tested each foot- and hand-hold as they inched back up the cliff until at last he hauled her over the top, panting from the exertion.

Cuyaiya lay on the ground next to him, not caring enough to rise. The tears dripped unheeded into the grass. "Why did He leave me here? What good am I?"

"You are here because you have a job to do," Elias' tone was sharp. Then he softened as he thought of better arguments. "Your people need you," he added more gently. "Apu-Rimac has called you to his service."

"Pedro can do that better than I."

"You are of their priestess lineage. You must learn to interpret the Speaker-God so that he can help the Chachapoya also." Elias pulled her up. "We will go to Fray Juan and he can tell you more of what Jesus Apu-Rimac wants of you." Eva would be hungry, too, he thought. He steered this woman who was his wife towards the priest's house, keeping one arm firmly around her waist lest she bolt back to the high place for another jump.

*Pedro: ViraVira Ayrihua coya (twin-ears moon, April 1534)*

Pedro returned with the day's water to hear shouting and a baby's screaming coming from inside the house. In the dimness, he could see that Fray Juan was standing, arguing vigorously in Spanish. He was directing his tirade at a small bundle on the sleeping platform from whence the howling sound came.

The Chachapoya picked up the infant and her noise ceased, but Juan continued his debate as though nothing had happened. Pedro could see that he was having another of his spells. What was Cuyaiya thinking of, to leave Eva alone with the old man? Where was Elias?

“Master, sit down,” Pedro interrupted Juan. The holy man turned towards him with unseeing eyes. Pedro guided him to the cushioned chair he had built and Juan sank into it obediently, but he remained incoherent. Eva began to cry again, and the distracted man jiggled the baby to soothe her with one arm while bringing the Word-huaca to calm Juan with the other. He prayed that somebody would come soon, Elias or Cuyaiya or even Kichay. Trapped between age and youth, he needed more resources.

His prayers were answered immediately. The respectful voice asking entry at the door belonged to Pailin. “Come,” the Chachapoya welcomed in his limited Quechua.

Pailin entered with a savory-smelling offering of soft-cooked potatoes for breakfast and understood the situation at a glance. She held out practiced arms for the child and Pedro surrendered Eva with relief. The woman said something about the baby being hungry—Pedro was never quite sure if he understood, they all spoke so fast—and scooping a little of the mush from the pot onto her finger, put it in Eva’s mouth. She quieted at once.

“Thank,” Pedro smiled at her. He filled a bowl for Juan and held a spoonful to his lips, careful not to let any dribble on the Lord Speaker’s golden box. The old man ate obediently, for which Pedro was grateful. Food helped end the bad spells.

“Where is Cuyaiya?” Pailin asked.

Pedro shrugged. He had hoped the head weaver might know. He wanted to say that Juan had been alone with the baby when he got back, but try as he might, he could not summon the words. The only Quechua ready at his call was the limited vocabulary learned in his boyhood, before he fled the Inca’s conscription.

Pailin nodded sympathetically. The Incas transplanted to ViraVira had never learned much of the surrounding people’s Chachapoya tongue. The two sat in companionable silence on either side of the stew-pot, each busy feeding their respective charges. The appreciative slurps and smacking noises from Eva and Juan were communication enough.

They did not have long to wait before Elias and Cuyaiya returned. Elias seemed taken aback to find Fray Juan had company. Pedro saw that the couple looked as though they had been rolling on the ground; Cuyaiya’s dress was torn and she had bits of vegetation caught in her hair. He exchanged a knowing glance with Pailin as she handed over Eva. The child’s mother went to a dark corner and turned her back as she sat down to nurse.

Juan started up and began to shout in Spanish once more, almost knocking the potato gruel out of Pedro's hands. He set the bowl down and took the golden box from the seat where it had fallen, handing it to Elias. "Speak for God to Fray Juan, please," Pedro said, knowing that Elias was able to catch his drift; the Spaniard did not speak Chachapoya as well as Quechua, but knew many words. "He has been this way since last night."

Elias nodded and let the huaca fall open. He took it near the light from the door and began to speak in Juan's holy tongue. "Jesús dijo á Simón Pedro—" Elias continued until he finished the passage and waited for Juan to translate, as he usually did whenever the Lord Speaker had something to say. But although the old man stopped debating the air and sank back in his seat, he did not interpret the holy words into Chachapoya.

Pedro was keenly disappointed. "Master, I hear my own new name in this speaking," he pleaded with Fray Juan. "Tell me what the Lord Speaker wants me to do!"

Tears gathered in the rheumy eyes and trickled down the weather-worn creases in Juan's cheeks. "Apacienta mis corderos," he whispered. "Pedro, apacienta mis corderos!"

"Master, I don't understand. Tell me in Chachapoya," Pedro begged.

But Juan lapsed into silence. At last Cuyaiya's voice came from the corner, curiously flat. "He says, feed my little llamas. Be a michec for all my herds."

Pedro looked at her, astonished. "You know the sacred tongue?"

"Elias taught me," she mumbled without animation, still turned to the wall.

But Pedro was too amazed to notice. "It is because you are from the line of Yrca," he said with awe. "The spirit world calls to those of the priestess blood. Elias, divine more of the huaca for me; does the Lord Speaker say anything else to Pedro?"

Elias read further in the holy language of the foreigners. There was a long pause while Pedro waited expectantly. Pailin also sat politely, until Elias gave a halting translation into Quechua for her benefit. At last Cuyaiya repeated the meaning in Chachapoya:

"Jesus the Lord Speaker asks of Simon Pedro if he really loves him more than anything else. And Pedro says, yes, you already know that I do. So the Lord speaker told him to feed his little llamas."

Elias gave the next passage and translated into Quechua for Pailin again, directing expectant looks towards the bent head in the corner, his tone almost as though he were coaxing her. Cuyaiya looked up at him and gave a correction of his Quechua, and Elias smiled at her encouragingly. Pedro waited anxiously for the Chachapoya version.

“Once more, Jesus asks if Pedro really loves him. And Pedro said again, yes, you already know that I do. So the Lord speaker told Pedro to be the michec for God’s herd.”

Pedro turned this over. If I love the Lord Speaker, I must be his Michec, Pedro thought. He was filled with wonder. The Lord Speaker had words just for him!

Elias: ViraVira Ayrihua coya (twin-ears moon, April 1534)

Cuyai plodded dispiritedly in front of him as they followed the alpacas down to the lower pasture. The work remained to be done just as though the day had begun like any other, but Elias’ thoughts were churning with exasperation. First it was everyone else he had had to prevent from killing her, now the stupid woman wanted to kill herself! Fine, she could kill herself once Eva was weaned and she had taken him to the Inca’s ransom. But until then, he was going to make sure she never left his sight. He turned the job over in his mind.

It would be much less effort if he could make her *want* to live. He would have to risk some of the techniques that had worked for him back in the old country. It was a gamble that Elias would rather not take. The first rule of the con artist – and he had been good at it – is to choose your victims with care. Needy women who were not inclined to be suspicious were the easiest. By the same token, there were types who would see through every flattery and expose you just for the pleasure of it. He had spotted Cuyai for one of these the day he met her.

If it had been merely a matter of finding a woman to support him and teach him the language, he would have picked one of the lonely widows in the ayllu, perhaps Shuru or Gapti. Not Piqui, she was too pretty and had other options. But it had been Cuyai who knew where the gold was: the last person in ViraVira that he would have selected for a mark. Elias sighed cynically. It took one to know one.

But now she was more than a means to gold: she was also Eva’s mother. And a mother was necessary to a child, even beyond weaning. He would need her to care for his precious one; no hired nurse could replace her own parent. He would have to use his best guile to bind her to him. Elias wished he was not so out of practice and that he had a better grasp of this culture and the nuances of language. The details were what led to success.

Well, some things were the same all over the world. Women liked to talk about themselves; they liked to be touched. Cuyai was not the talkative sort, but those fell harder once you got them going. Draw out the secrets she had never told another, that was the key. At least his opportunities were unlimited: no furtive meetings in crowded markets or salons full of dangerous eyes and suspicious ears, but wide open pastures with

just the two of them all day, every day. And he had earned the right many times over; except for him she would be dead.

Which is just what she wanted to be, he thought, reminded of the problem.

When the llamas settled to the serious business of grazing and Yana, the old black boss-llama, had taken up the herdsire's duty of watching the little ones, Elias came over to where Cuyai sat with their baby. She was not spinning; she was not even watching the animals. She merely sat, staring despondently in front of her at nothing, as though even moving her head was more effort than it was worth.

He settled next to her, encircling her with his arm. "Cuyai, Tell me why you are so sad." The bony shoulders lifted and dropped in a shrug. She continued to stare blankly before her.

This was going to be harder than he thought. So far, everything about Cuyaiya had been. He began to knead her neck with his hands, feeling the muscles stiff under his fingers and the alarming thinness of her body. Eventually the tenseness eased and she let him draw her close. "Cuyai, I want to know what grieves you. Your troubles are my troubles."

She spoke at last, her voice flat and dead. "You will not want anything to do with me once you really know me."

Elias considered his response carefully. If this were some bored Castilian merchant's wife, he would have immediately protested undying love. But this was Cuyai; the only crack in her armor was to invoke Jesus Apu-Rimac. What a stroke of luck she had fallen for the old priest's prattle! "My God already knows everything you have ever done, and He accepts you; therefore I do also."

"It does no good! Fray Juan says that Apu-Rimac always knew and loved me, but if that is true, why did He let my body be so used? And why does he not speak to my heart now? I ask him what to do with my thoughts, these horrible feelings that keep coming back, but I hear no answers!"

Elias' blood turned to ice. She must be talking about her attackers, that night she was raped in Condor Huasi. He had been so drunk that he had no recollection of the event whatever, so he was groping in the dark in trying to deal with it. What if she recognized him? "I can speak for Apu-Rimac on that," Elias said. "God would have you forgive the ones who have done you wrong. Forgive and forget."

Especially forget, he thought, hoping he had not sounded too glib. How was it that she had not identified him? Had it been dark? Maybe she had been drunk too. Or perhaps all foreigners looked alike to her. Whatever the reason, those memories were better buried.

"Forgive! How can I forgive, when the thoughts will not leave?!"

For that, Elias had an answer; he was the expert on forgetting. "Just put them out of your mind when they come. Refuse to think about it. Pre-

tend you were never there. It was only a short time; you have the rest of your life.”

“A short time?!” She drew back and looked at him incredulously. Bitterness dripped from her words. “A short time! But you are a man; of course you could not understand. What do you know of being the object of a man’s lust day after day, even though he revolted you, your welfare less important to him than that of his dog!”

Relief surged through Elias; she was not talking about the act that produced Eva. Of course, he knew she had been married before. She had a son who had been chosen for the ayllu’s five-year solstice sacrifice. Well, apparently she had hated her husband. Good; that would make his job easier. “It must have been hard for you,” he murmured sympathetically and drew her closer.

Cuyaiya wrapped her arms around herself in remembered suffering. “How could a man understand the agony, the tearing of the tenderest places of your flesh? Or the days after, in such pain you are barely able to walk?”

A door in the back of Elias mind blew open. What could he know of it, indeed? He struggled to shut it, take his own advice. His abuser was dead. Dead! Painfully dead. Entirely against his will his body began to shake uncontrollably. There was a roaring in his ears, but the woman’s anguished words pierced through it clearly. “What would you know of having your body used, day after day, against your will, because he is stronger than you and has the authority to do so? And there is nobody to turn to, because you are important to nobody and nobody cares!”

Elias forced the horrible helplessness out of his mind and replaced it with a vision of Abbe Matias screaming amidst the flames. “Get even,” he ground out through clenched teeth. “Make him pay!”

Cuyaiya drew back from him, surprised at the unaccustomed violence of his emotion. He rose abruptly and ran to get an alpaca cria that had strayed too far, fighting for control. What had possessed him to give such advice? Forgiveness, that was the key. Keep pushing forgiveness. A wry saying of the novitiates popped into his head. “Justice for others, mercy for me.” Well, those stupid enough to believe in a god should follow his dictates, and Cuyai had accepted Jesus, the God who forgave.

When he was back in command of his feelings, he returned to where she sat. Eva woke and cooed, and Elias picked up the tiny bundle and cradled her to his heart. The past was past; this was his future. She needed her mother happy, and he needed the gold to rear her properly. Focus on the goal. He carried the child to Cuyai who opened her dress so she could nurse. The father watched, entranced, as the soft downy cheek suckled, marveling at the perfect fingers as her tiny hand kneaded the breast.

“I did make him pay,” Cuyaiya said at last, her voice full of sadness. “It did not make the pain go away.”

“No, it doesn’t.” Unprepared, Elias was surprised into honesty. “That was my anger speaking against the one who hurt you,” he lied quickly. “But it is the way of man, not God. With Apu-Rimac’s help, we can forgive those who do wrong against us just as he did.”

“Yes. Jesus Apu-Rimac carried all my hate and guilt away. And for a short time I felt him with me, taking the pain. But he only stayed until the baby was born. I broke my vow, and now He has left me alone.”

What vow was she talking about? It couldn’t be her marriage to him, she had been unconscious. He wished he knew the culture better. “I am still here. Eva is still here. We need you.”

“For a little while. And what then?”

“We will cross that bridge when we come to it.” He took her face in his hands and gave his most earnest look, one that had melted many Spanish women. “Promise me you will not try to take your life again, Cuyai.”

“I do not want to go where the spirits of fire and anger are,” she whispered, looking at the nursing child in her arms. “But sometimes it becomes so dark, I think I am already there.”