

Bolivian Dreams

I opened the door and there it was face to face with me. "Mama, Papa!" I called excitedly, "the alpaca is here!" Mama came from the kitchen, and Papa came from the water pump around the house. All we could do was stand and look with wide eyes at this beautiful animal and begin to imagine how much easier our lives would become because of it. Papa put his hand on my shoulder and as I looked up into his worn face he said, "This is no longer 'the alpaca', this is 'our alpaca'." A smile spread across my face matching his, and Mama's eyes filled up with tears. It was true, this furry, gray creature of about five feet that stood out in front of *my* house had been given to me by a family who I would never know, but who I would eternally love.

"Dear," Mama said wiping the tears from her eyes, "what do you want to name your alpaca?" *Name*, I thought, *I haven't even begun to think of a name.*

"I don't know," I hesitated.

"That's alright," said Papa, "we have time to think of names. But, we don't have time to just look at our new animal; we need to start learning about how to care for it, and how it can help us."

We all agreed, and I suddenly felt hot. This excitement had helped me forget about the Bolivian sun and the humidity that we had here year round.

"I bet he is thirsty," I said, "I sure am!"

"Yes," smiled Mama, "take the rope and lead him around to the back. Papa will pump some water for all of us."

All of us, I thought of Mama's words. The alpaca was part of our family now. He was like my little brother, and I determined that I would be the best big sister that I could be.

"Ready to go to the village, Elena?" asked Papa after our drinks.

"Yes, but can I take my alpaca with me?" I asked.

"Of course," he smiled, "we have to seek advice of how to take care of him at the Learning Center."

I loved visiting the learning center and hoped to go to school there one day. When we were all but two miles down the sandy path that led to the village, we came to my friend Alicia's dwelling. "Elena!" she called running down to meet me, "guess what animals we got?"

"What?" I asked.

"Honeybees-- two hives of them!" she said almost breathless, "what animal do you have?"

"An alpaca; we are going to the village right now to learn how to take care of him. Isn't he cute?"

"Yes, he is cute. Can we join you the rest of the way?"

"Of course!" I grabbed her hand, and we continued down the path with our parents close behind chatting the rest of the way.

Once at the Learning Center, one of the teachers came out to meet us, "Well hello," he said with a kind smile, a sun hat, sunglasses, and funny looking

sandals. "Let's take your alpaca over to the barn so I can teach you in the shade. Sound good?"

"Oh, yes!" I said. The shade always sounded good.

In the barn, the teacher showed us how, where and when to feed. He then had me help him clean the stall that the alpaca would be in.

"So you see," he said, "it is just like you are taking care of another family member. Not too hard, but not something to neglect either."

Papa and Mama nodded their heads in agreement, but I just smiled. I was thinking about names for my alpaca, and I was pretty sure I knew what I wanted to name him.

Next, we went into the Learning Center. I really didn't want to leave my alpaca outside all alone, but our teacher assured me that he would be fine in the barn for a little bit. It was time to watch a video on a big screen about how the alpaca would help would help our family. The lady in the video explained that the alpaca's wool was very valuable and could be sold for money that we could use for whatever we needed-- including school for me! She then showed us how to shear the wool and preserve it to be sold.

Soon it was time to go back outside. I ran to the barn and gave my alpaca a big hug. I had really missed him!

"Hi," said our teacher, "how was the video?"

"Good," said Papa.

"Great," our teacher continued as he led us out to the road, "sheering season is in the spring. At that time, one of our instructors will come out to guide you through those steps you just watched."

"That sounds wonderful, thank you so much, sir," said Mama.

After my parents shook hands with the instructor, we met up with Alicia's family. On the way back to her house, she told us how her honeybees would help her family's crops grow better through pollination. She also told me that honeybees make honey-- a sweet, gooey liquid!

The rest of the way back to my dwelling, I didn't notice the sand being kicked into my sandals, and I didn't notice the heat of the sun *too* much. I was too busy thinking about how much better my life was becoming just because of one animal. We would be able to afford food, medical bills, clothing, and school for me-- one of my biggest dreams. But another dream had also been fulfilled-- having a little brother. Just the fact that he was here and mine was all that I really cared about.

"So, Elena," Papa said, "have you put anymore thought into naming your alpaca?"

We started walking up the path to our dwelling and I looked at my alpaca's face and smiled, "Yes, Papa. I am going to name him **Little Brother!**"