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The Pishtacos

People say that a long time ago, more or less in the beginning of the republic, there were individuals that killed people who went to the countryside, especially those who were fat and had a very good voice. They say that the blood and the fat of these people served in the funding of the bells, and the better voice that the person had, the better the bell sounded. And that is why the bloodthirsty men, called the Pishtacos, were feared by the townspeople.

In regards to this belief, in the town of San Buenaventura there is a way that they can prove that the Pishtacos do exist.

During this period of time there was a closer union, or brotherhood, between the citizens that made up the community and who were like a single family for all of the jobs. For example, when one person would build their home, everyone would help out. There came a day when one of them wanted to build their home and as it was custom, everyone, including men and women, went to help. When the roof was the only thing left to build, which is made of straw, they agreed to go one day to go search for the straw in the highlands. The people left on the day indicated and since it was far away, they took a break half way. They sat down to rest and to eat their cold cuts, which was what they called their lunch that they brought. It consisted of roasted corn, cheese, jerked beef, fried potatoes, brown bean, among other things. When they were calmly eating, they were startled by strangers that pretended a real friendship. They offered some of their fiambre which consisted of pork rinds, pieces of cooked meat, but what they did not know is the pork rinds contained some type of narcotic.

The wives of the men that were going to get straw, who had realized that the strangers were the pishtacos, tried warning the husbands not to eat the meat, but the men did not pay any attention to the signals that the wives were making and continued to eat. When they finished the meal, the strangers left, who surely went to hide, waiting to see the results of their trickery. A few minutes later, almost all of the men fell in a deep sleep, so the women who were awake, desperately took the men to hide them in caves, or cover them with the straw, so the pishtacos could not see them. The women then went back to the town and warn the authorities and the rest of the people who had stayed in town. When they were armed with axes, knives, machetes, and other weapons, they went to the place where they had stayed hidden, but there were 2 men missing. Everyone was distressed over their comrades and kin. They decided to go look for the pishtacos who had committed the crime.

Some two or three kilometers away, they finally arrived at a cave where at first glance they saw the corpses of the men that were missing. They were decapitated and hanging from their feet from hooks on the rocks that formed the cave. In the lower part there was a pot that was catching the blood of the stiff bodies. Full of anger and horror, they started to search for the bandits. One of them found one of the pishtacos a few meters from the cave, who was sleeping peacefully after his act. The townsperson carefully got closer to him and with the axe in his hand, he hit the neck of the pishtaco so hard that the head rolled off to the side. However, the pishtaco’s reaction was so sudden that the body without the head, in one swift motion, managed to get on his feet but could not say like that. The body fell to the ground, finally dead. The other pishtacos heard the noises and fled without being seen. The men picked up the bodies of the relatives and took them back to town to give them graves, leaving the body of the pishtaco in the same place for the ravens to eat it.

The pishtacos fled, unhappy with what had happened. They went to search for the other people. While walking, they came across an isolated hut where they say an elderly woman with her two grandchildren. The pishtacos already went around the hut and were preparing to enter the hut when they heard the elderly woman say words that they had never heard of “ Janampa, janampa, chaita, chaita, uraypi, uraypi!” The bandits thought that the woman was calling for people to help her or that she was a witch who could cast a spell on them. They left and never returned.

In reality, the woman was telling her grandchildren where to scratch her back and oblivious to everything that was happening outside. She was telling them “Up, up, down down, right there!” in quechua so that they knew which spot to scratch. In that way, she helped to save them because if not, they would have been destroyed by the pishtacos.