

THE SHADOW ##
OF THE ##
CORDILLERA, ##
Or, The Magnolia Flower. ##
BY VIRGINIA LEILA WENTZ. ##
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BY ERVIN WARDMAN.

"He is going to beg your pardon in English," the padre explained. Then came Inocencio's rich, mellow voice, with a childish treble in it: "Mees, I ask of you par-din. Zee hands I kiss of you."

"Isn't the English tongue funny, padre?" laughed Liana merrily. "May I learn it too? I'll study hard."

No wonder they loved the good padre of their little pueblo. He was a man into whose being something better than mere scholarship had passed—woodcraft and weather wit, the friendship of animals and a delicate sympathy with the life of childhood. The gentleness of his manner contrasted oddly with the bigness of his physique. And he was quite content to spend his days in his humble little corner of the earth. He was too fastidious as well as too lowly to care greatly for the flinging up of caps in the street.

Yes, the Padre Antonio was one of the Elisha kind as against the Elijahs, one of the sort that heal bitter waters with a handful of salt, make poisonous pottage wholesome with a little meal, find quiet, simple ways to deliver poor widows from their creditors and secure homes for orphans. In the pocket of his cassock you could always find a deck of cards, but that was only for the game of solitaire. His sacristan and servant, old Jose, had carved him a sort of card table out of the trunk of a tree, and instead of going off with his pipe or his cigar, his flute or his guitar, as other padres did, he would go to his little table and have his game of solitaire.

Several years before he had said to Berrendo and Cristino: "The little ones are bright. They ought to go to school." And the two old men half to themselves had responded in hopeless tones:

"Si, padre." Neither of them had ever done that.

"There's fine stuff in both of those children, and there's no reason why I shouldn't teach them myself. I will." So spoke the padre alone a few hours later to his cards.

And ever since then he had been true to his word. At first he had begun by writing them to his knee and telling them of those wonderful things called cities, full of people that could read and write, and about steamboats and steam cars. And they held their breath in amazement, while the tendrils of ambition commenced to feel around and aspirations began to stir and hum in their young hearts like waking bees in the warm presence of spring.

CHAPTER III.

By and by Inocencio was 18. He now stood six feet, bootless, and was, moreover, a young fellow of magnificent build. (It was his ancestors who used to dance the war dance and cry "Ouch-ka!" not those who lived in a castle and wrote on crested paper, that he had to thank for this.) His eyes were as dark as the waters of the Rio Grande under the cover of a starless night, and they looked out straight into those of his fellows like the eyes of an animal that does not know enough to fear.

In the pueblo where he lived he was regarded as a marvel for bravery and strength. Once, when there had been one of those rare occurrences in Mexico, a fire, all the town had flocked about to see it, thinking it, for its rarity, better than a festa. Then, in full view of every one, with the flames scorching him and the smoke blinding him, Inocencio had fetched out from the fire an old woman in one arm, a crippled girl in the other, while on his shoulders was a little boy. Oh, it was a marvelous feat, and beyond doubt he was a youth of courage, they said.

Liana, for her part, was fast growing into womanhood and was withal fair to look upon. To Inocencio she was very fair indeed, and his wont was to liken her to the flowers that smiled, rare, white and wonderful, from among the dark leaves of the magnolia tree. La bella magnolia, he called her.

At times she glanced with such favor upon him that he almost thought the beautiful dreams he had dared to dream were about to be realized, and old Cristino would chuckle in his heavy, ponderous way and, slapping him on the back, say that all would yet be well, that Liana's heart was in the right place, after all.

Again clouds would lower and the girl would look at Inocencio indifferently. Her scarlet mouth would draw itself down in a prim, cold manner, and she would call him "the senior" and ask him in stiff, stilted tones if his health were good these days.

Inocencio was as shy of expression as any of his forbears that ever tipped in silence along a dusky trail, and, for the most part, he suffered these capricious moods without a word. But there came an occasion of a memorable outburst of strength and righteous indignation which brought things rather more to a climax.

Nearly every house along its length was lighted with vessels of burning oil and with a profusion of many colored lanterns and made gay with draperies, green boughs and pictures of the "Mother of the Mexicans," as a thousand banners proclaimed Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The sidewalks were filled with a moving throng of men and women, their faces all set in the same direction—toward an arch of fire that spanned the street in the distance. The arch was formed of paper lanterns strung on wires across the street, and the brilliancy of the lights illuminated and outlined like some enchanted structure against the sky the grand old Santuario.

The plaza in front of the church also was filled with a mass of humanity while surrounding it on all sides were the vendors of tortillas and strange fruits and vegetables with still stranger—Indian names. The vendors squatted on squares of matting and sold their commodities by the light of flaring torches.

Although not so fashionable a throng as that to be seen in the Plaza de Armas, the crowd about the Santuario was composed of all classes. Cavaliers in picturesque, silver laced riding dress mingled with men whose white calsones, rolled up to their knees, showed lean, brown, sinewy legs. There were grave, stately Mexicans and eager, talkative Americans.

As the Padre Antonio and those who were with him passed from the front of the cathedral across the plaza Inocencio saw something that caused him to clench his hand and made the blood surge to his head till the gay scene spun before his gaze in a swaying mist. He saw the bold, passionate look of a young American who was devouring the beauty of Liana's exquisite face, and he caught the quick upward glance of Liana's eyes, the blush upon her cheek and the pout of her lips before she drew more closely the folds of her rebozo about her.

The next day old Cristino sat under his portico, sewing up a rent in a rawhide chair bottom. Presently down the road came Inocencio on a horse—he had free use of the padre's animal—and, drawing up before the house, he called to Cristino:

"Is Liana within? I would speak with her."

When Inocencio was mounted for a ride, he scarcely sat in the saddle. From the Campeche hat that shaded his face down to the pair of Mexican spurs that tinkled their little steel bells against their huge five spiked rowels on his heels you might have drawn a perpendicular line. It would have taken in shoulders, thighs and all.

Liana came around from the other side of the house, smiling and radiant. It made her proud to see him there so fine and splendid. She went up to him with a look of greeting in her eyes and began stroking the big horse's mane.

"I've just been out by the wood shed feeding the cat and dog."

"Yes," said Inocencio.

Something in his tone made Liana look at him twice.

"I missed you last night," she observed shyly. "Why did you go on with your uncle to San Pedro instead of coming home with the rest of us?"

"It was the easier way," replied Inocencio gravely. But he attempted no explanation.

Liana caught her underlip with her pretty white teeth. "Oh, and you've been home already this morning and are going off again with the padre's horse?" she pursued.

"When evening falls, I shall be back, and then I would speak with you, Liana. That is what I came to say."

He only waited to see that she consented, and then he was off down the road.



She went up to him with a look of greeting in her eyes.

That evening as they walked in silence Liana, who had been awed by her lover's strange mood and by the gloom of the night, looked timidly up in his face.

"Well," she said faintly, "what did you want of me, Inocencio?"

The young fellow, who had been doing battle with himself all of the previous night, turned sharply as though carried away by a sudden and mighty impulse.

"O my Blessed Lady, I can stand this no longer! Will you marry me? Answer me, yes or no."

Liana had never seen the quiet reserve of her hitherto devoted worshiper give place to this abandon of feeling. She shivered a little, partly from remorse, partly from fear, partly from vexation, and walked on silently, looking down at the grass at her feet.

"You are stripping me of my self-respect," Inocencio said hoarsely. "Can you not see what you are doing? Tell me you do not care for me, but do not mock me."

He placed his hand under her chin and turned her face toward the light of the sky. What he saw there caused a low cry to escape him.

"Liana, you have ruined my life," he said solemnly. Then he set his face in the direction of home and walked on a few paces.

The girl's conscience reproached her. She knew she was not blameless. He did not seem to hear her call his name, so she drew near to him and laid her hand pleadingly on his arm as one might who has done wrong and is sorry.

"I can't say just now. Life is so strange and confused, Inocencio. But if—if you'll wait!"

She began to cry softly, her head against his arm. He had never seen her in tears since she was a child, and he was helpless for words. He stroked her hair instead.

By and by he said, "I love you so much, little one, that I must have you; I must."

"How much do you love me?" She was smiling now through her wet lashes.

"As the fallow deer loves the forest, as the traveler the pomegranate and orange tree; as the still night the song of yonder cenzontle—so I love you."

And all the way home Liana was as sweet as the last dip of cane juice from the boiling batteries along the river bottoms of the Aneca valley. From that day on she stood rather more in awe of her big lover.

San Pedro is the little summer town of the elite of Guadalajara. Outside of the fashionable quarter lived Juan Oajaca, Inocencio's uncle. He was a sculptor by trade and modeled those wonderful and delicate little figures in clay which may be seen from the City of Mexico to El Paso and San Antonio.

Often as children his nephew and Liana had gone in to see him work and watched him by the hour. On a bit of clay no larger than he could well hold in his hand the modeler would fall to work, and lo, there started to life the torso in his most spirited, graceful attitude, springing before the bull; or the aguador, with his water jars; the leñador, with his fagots; the cargador, with his great pack upon his shoulder—every type of the varied trades and occupations of the country. Marvelous was the plastic art which Juan displayed.

It was in his humble atelier one day that Liana met a dear old friend of the padre. She was an American lady who, with her son, who was a civil engineer, at that time working on the line of road which they were endeavoring to lay between Guadalajara and the Pacific coast. The padre had brought her to Juan Oajaca for a sitting. Juan was known to model likenesses admirably and could actually produce a miniature bust with commendable verisimilitude in features and in expression.

Kindly, distinguished looking Mrs. Morris was pleasing the sculptor very much by examining and expressing her appreciation of his work, when suddenly she threw her head a little to one side and listened.

"What a sweet, pure voice!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said the padre; "that is Liana, my capricious protegee. And she is as beautiful as her voice is sweet—a slender crescent of human moonlight. But you shall see." Then he called her.

In order to get to Juan's house you passed through a gateway in an adobe wall and entered a large, unpaved inclosure. Here orange trees grew, and climbing roses rioted over the house and rough wall with an exquisite picturesqueness. Liana was out plucking some of the flowers which Juan's senora was going to send to old Cristino, the day being his fete day.

She answered the padre's call, her arms full of the roses she had been gathering—perfect buds of pure gold—with airs and graces quite her own. Mrs. Morris was immediately captivated, as the padre had known she would be; and when Liana left the room she turned to him, saying:

"Something must be done for that girl. Her voice, at least, must be cultivated."

The school of music in Guadalajara was a new interpretation of life to the padre's protegee. As one caught abed by the first sunrise at sea, her spirit leaped into fresh garments and looked out upon a wider heaven and earth than ever it had seen before.

"It ees so ver' amable, so ravissant!" she exclaimed to Mrs. Morris in comment on the school.

But in proportion to the ravishment of the new vistas, the old narrower, simpler mode of life gradually began to chafe and fret. Nearly all her life the love of the padre, of her grandfather and Inocencio had sufficed to fill up and satisfy Liana's heart. Now it was no longer so. A vision floated before her. It was no bourgeois vision of happiness; not some casa grande, with stately, arched entrance and spacious court within, like that to which she went so often with the dear American senora; it was not clothes such as the fine ladies seated in family coaches in the Plaza de Armas wore. Of such stuff was not the dream that floated before the girl. It was something vague and indefinite, and the rich warmth of an unremembered nature, longing for outlet surged up continually in her heart, like a restless tide against the sea wall.

One afternoon, being especially restless, she went into the little village church, and there upon the clay floor before Our Lady's shrine she offered a strange prayer. She prayed that something might happen—something. Anything, indeed, to give things a turn.

After supper that evening she brought the water from the spring as usual. It was Cristino's custom to place the great tinaja close by the open chimney, where through the chill night the water would grow cool in the draft. But tonight he did not come to help her. He just sat there by the window, his gray head in his hands. Liana called to him. Still he did not lift his head. Nor would he evermore lift it again. He was dead.

Something had happened—yes, something, indeed. Liana, dumb in the sight of her prayer's answer, sank to her knees under a burden of guilt she never had known before.

CHAPTER IV.

"So mother's going to bring home some hybrid, black little creature to be turned out educated and an ornament to society! What in heaven's name will she do next?"

De Witte Morris threw down the letter he had been reading and lounged in his chair. De Witte always lounged. The habit sprang from a large minded desire to counteract stiffness and primness in others. You would misjudge him if you deemed it due to laziness. He was the younger son of a prosperous Wall street broker, and since leaving college three years before he had been able to find no calling nicely suited to his particular line of ability. Therefore he had settled down, it appeared, to a life of gifted irresponsibility.

It was a February evening in New York, and in cheerful contrast to the raw cold of the outside air was the warmth of the Morris' heavily curtained library on Fifty-seventh street. Mr. Morris, Sr., who had just come in, stood on the rug in front of the open fire, straightening himself with appreciative satisfaction as the sense of comfort penetrated him.

"Certainly Eliza has taken a great deal upon her," he admitted in response to his son's remark. "The girl's education in English alone will be no slight task." He ran his fingers through his gray beard once or twice. "As to her training in domestic and social felicities—ah, well, Eliza always would have her way!"

He sighed a little, but somehow as he picked up the evening paper and settled in his armchair he didn't look particularly unhappy about that "way."

"For my part," said De Witte, with a yawn. "I don't know why the deuce mother didn't let the girl stay in that fair Land of Manana she writes so glowingly about. Or," he added wickedly, "she might have handed her over to Robert." Robert was the civil engineer and the elder son.

When at last, however, the young man of elegant lassitude was confronted by Liana Miguel's presence he found himself ready to change his mind concerning the hybrid, black little creature and to admit that perhaps after all his mother had introduced a lively and interesting element into the monotony of their home circle. The night of their arrival, indeed, he signified the measure of his welcome by remaining in the house and foregoing the French ball. Actually!

Liana presently began to fit in admirably with Venetian water colors, teak-wood tables and French bound books. On the whole, there may have been



"Eliza always would have her way!"

some foundation for old Cristino's brag of relationship with the conquistadores; certainly here and there among her ancestors must have flashed the sword and waved the plumes of a Spanish cavalier! By virtue of her remarkably fine intuitions she learned early that to do as others do is the golden rule of society. Thereby she managed to save herself amazingly from glaring blunders. Occasions which were quite new to her she observed with outward passivity. Her gravity was ascribed to her lack of fluent English. It was in reality the speechlessness that goes along with a flood of new impressions at a critical moment of growth.

To be quite honest, she sometimes allowed herself to be surprised. Such things, for example, as the kaleidoscopic shop windows, polite social lies and some of the very decollete gowns she saw did at first call forth astonishment. But every day she learned.

She seldom spoke of the old Mexican life. She did not seem to wish to speak of it. In the beginning there were the fortnightly letters to Inocencio and the padre. "Dear padre," she wrote, "because that you gave me into the hands of the sweet American senora can I ever say enough ayes for you?" And to Inocencio she wrote: "The senor De Witte does nothing with his hands, and they are white, like a padre's. I like a man who is strong and has brown hands, like yours, Inocencio. But tell this not."

By and by the letters became more infrequent. The friends who loved her so did not quite understand and felt hurt. Time moves so slowly and peacefully in that faroff Mexican land that one does not realize the breakneck speed it has in a vast metropolitan center.

It was Liana's third spring in New York. She was now nearly 19 and was considered sufficiently skilled in the amenities of civilization to be introduced to society early the following winter.

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[TO BE CONTINUED.]