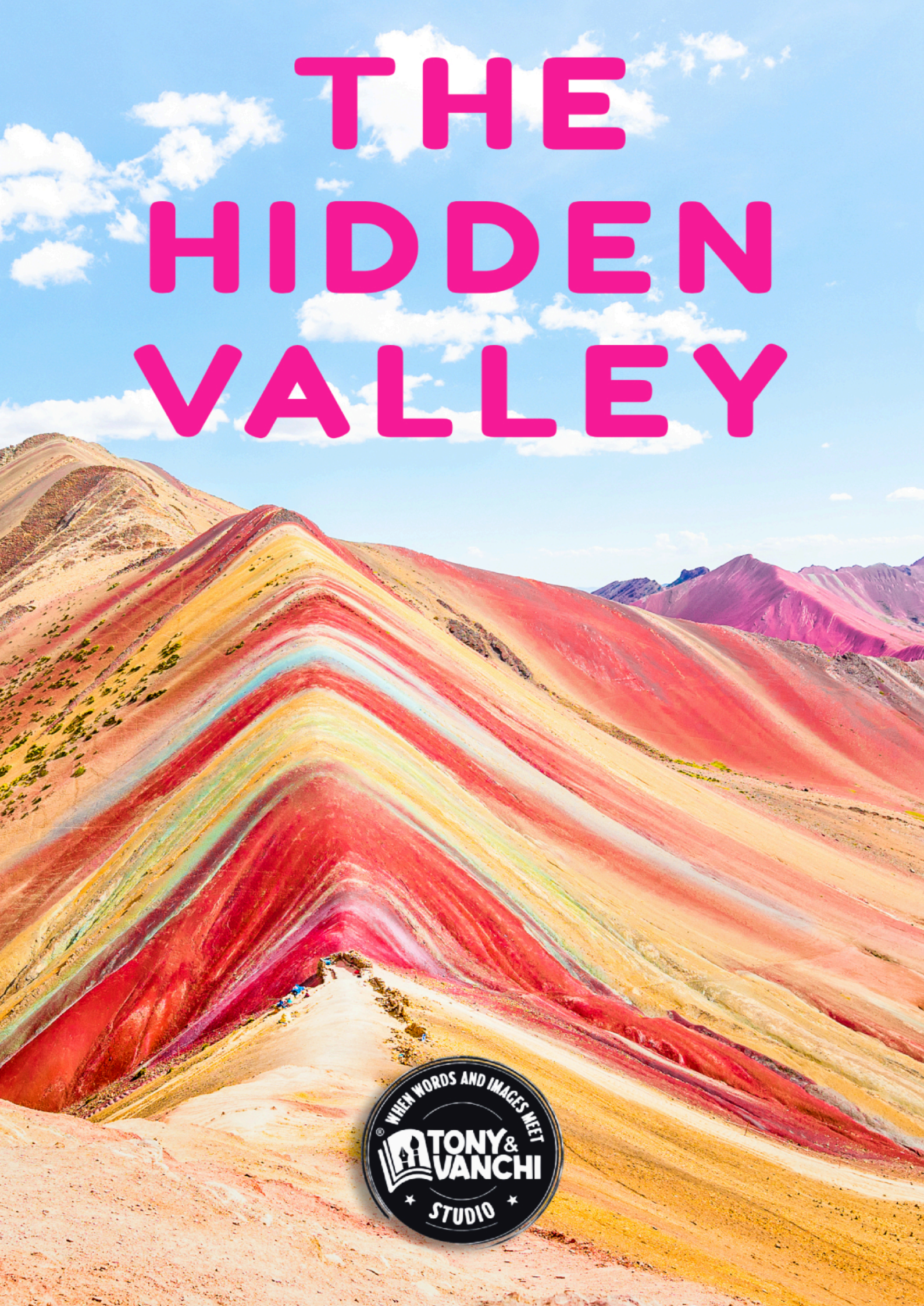
THE HIDDEN VALLEY



The Hidden Valley

IVAN BOLANOS

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CHAPTER 1

“I am happy!” Cindy exclaimed.

The young girl, adorned with lively eyes and shoulder-length straight hair, could barely contain her excitement. She was about to see the vast plains of auquenids she had long wanted to explore. The road, generally kept in excellent condition, looked clear this morning. The horizon, still laden with blues and oranges, promised her and her family a beautiful day.

At twelve, Cindy had shown a deep love for nature, especially animals, large or small, domestic or wild. She liked to travel the roads of Perú accompanied by her parents, and she had not yet had the opportunity to visit that corner of the country’s southern highlands. The idea of exploring those fields and trails, close to the herds of llamas and vicuñas, made her more than happy. She was hopeful that she might even be able to pet them. Cindy would stay in the reserve for a week, learning all about auquenid breeding.

“How much is left?” she asked her father for the umpteenth time after meeting his gaze in the car's rearview mirror.

“We're not even halfway there yet!” he replied with a smile. “First, we must arrive in Cusco. Then, a minibus will take us to the reserve.”

While father and daughter talked, Cindy's mother slept peacefully in the passenger seat.

“Okay, but don't stop letting me know as soon as we're close,” the young girl stressed. “I want to have my camera ready so that nothing interesting escapes me.”

Cindy treasured her new camera like few things, a gift her grandparents gave her for her birthday. As usual, she meticulously verified the correct installation of the batteries.

She carried two other reserve pairs in a practical kangaroo hanging from his waist.

“Do you think we see pumas? Those would scare me a little! And the condors... did you know that they are the largest flying birds in the world? I want to ride updrafts like them!”

“We will surely see a condor. And please keep in mind the foxes and the vizcachas,” her father highlighted.

“When we are in the reserve, they will indeed approach us.”

“Who?” his father was paying particular attention to the road. He was a careful and responsible driver.

“The vicuñas, Dad! I can take photos there. I want to capture their beautiful fur and that sweet look that characterizes them.”

“I know you will! Do you know, daughter? I like your photos.”

“Don’t forget that my grandfather taught me how to take them. I never stop admiring his magnificent collection.”

“Your grandfather has had the opportunity to travel a lot and has always known how to portray his adventures.”

“Dad…”

“Tell me, daughter.”

“I hope the day will come when that is the only way to shoot animals, through a camera shutter.”

Cindy's father couldn't agree more with what he had just heard. He was proud of the beautiful feeling his daughter held in her heart.

“How much do you two talk about?” the mother, who had just awakened from her little nap, joined them. “Traveling by car always makes me sleep. It relaxes me.”

“That's because you know what an excellent driver Dad is,” the girl rested her hands on her parents' shoulders and then exclaimed, “Pampa Vicuñas, here we go!”

CHAPTER 2

After a few more hours on the road, Cindy's father warned his spirited passengers, “We are about to arrive!”

Once the capital of a vast empire spread across the territories of the current countries Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina, Cusco received them that afternoon with a radiant sun. Numerous tourists flocked to the square, and they could hear languages from all over the world. Known as the "navel of the world," the city's attraction drew thousands of travelers, who continued to visit the Inca sanctuary of Machu Picchu, an archaeological wonder situated atop a mountain flanked by the sacred Urubamba River.

“We are here, finally!” Cindy exclaimed.

The vehicle parked a few meters from the hotel's door, where they would stay that night. Minutes after registering, Cindy had already come and gone to confirm the mobility they would use the next day to go to the auquenids reserve.

“Everything is ready, Dad,” she said as soon as she entered the room. His parents were still finishing packing up the luggage.

“I see you can't wait,” her mother smiled at her.

She returned the comment with a broad smile but suddenly gave them an unmistakable signal to remain silent. Both parents looked at each other, somewhat puzzled.

“Dad, Mom, did you hear that?” the young girl finally broke the silence.

“What thing, Cindy?” His father walked to the window of the large, well-lit room.

“I'm not sure, but someone was greeting me.”

Outside, little birds fluttered playfully, perching occasionally on the window frame. Cindy didn't know that she would soon discover a wonderful secret that would mark her for the rest of her life.