

# *River*



T H E H E I G H T S



# Chapter 1



The small airport was quiet. It was in western Brazil. Rafael Silva was waiting.

A plane landed. Rafael saw his kids. He ran toward them.

“You guys look great!” he said. “I can’t wait to show you around.”

Franco, the oldest at 16, laughed. “We’re excited, Dad.”

“I missed you,” eleven-year-old Lilia said.

Antonio, 13, gave his dad a fist bump. “The flight rocked!”

They got their bags. Then they got a taxi. It was old. And its engine popped.

“Where *are* we, Dad?” Franco asked. “We’re going to your job. Right? Where is the dam?”

“That’s right,” Rafael said. “That airport is closed. So we’ll take a boat.”

“Cool! A boat! Up the Amazon River!” Lilia sang out.

They crossed a busy street. A soccer ball bounced ahead. The taxi stopped fast. The driver yelled.

They drove out of town. The street was bumpy. There were lots of

green trees.

“Here we are,” Rafael said.

“There’s the dock.”

“Yuck! That river looks dirty,”

Lilia cried.

The brown water was moving fast. It was hard to see the other side.

“I didn’t think the river would be this wide!” said Franco.

“It’s one of the world’s largest rivers. Some places it’s a lot wider,” Rafael said.

Rafael paid the taxi driver. They got their bags.

“There’s only one boat,” Franco said. “So I guess it must be ours.”

“That’s it,” said Rafael. “That’s the *Amazon Queen*.”

“It’s falling apart,” Antonio said.

The old boat needed fixing. Its paint was cracked. There was rust.

“Is it safe?” Antonio asked.

Rafael nodded. “This boat is over 30 years old. Never been in an accident. Or so says Captain Dias.”

Just then a man appeared.

“Silva?” he called out.

“Yes, I’m Rafael Silva.”

The man had red eyes. His hair was messy. His clothes were dirty.

The man frowned.

“I am Captain Renato,” he said.

Rafael looked confused.

“But where is Captain Dias?” he asked.

“Sick. Got fever. No problem. I take you.”

## Chapter 2



The Silvas stood on the *Amazon Queen*. The view was great. The trees looked huge. The trunks leaned out over the river. Colorful birds flew around.

Rafael grew up in Brazil. He moved to the U.S. And he decided to stay. But his Portuguese was still good. He wanted to speak to the captain.

Rafael looked into the control room. Inside, Captain Renato was steering the boat. He had a brown bottle. Rafael watched. The captain took a drink from it. Rafael thought it was alcohol.

He thought Captain Renato was okay. "So far, so good," he said to himself. "But I'll keep my eyes open." He returned to the kids.

"Dad," Lilia asked, "what are those?"

She pointed to some dark shapes.

"They look like logs. But they keep moving," Lilia said.

"They're caimans," Rafael said. "Like alligators."

Lilia gulped. "Are they as dangerous?" she asked in a small voice.

The caimans moved. They headed toward the boat.

One of the caimans opened its mouth. Lilia squeezed closer to her father.

Antonio gasped.

And Franco said, “Wow, look at that! Those teeth are huge!”

“They think we may have food,” Rafael said.

“Food?” asked Franco. “You mean *us*?”

The Melo family joined them. They were heading for home. They lived in a river village. It would take time to get there. The two families were the only passengers.

The river got wider. Then the sun began to set.



Now Captain Renato was turning the boat. They were going toward shore.

“Are we stopping?” Lilia asked.

“It’s not safe on the river at night,” Rafael said. “There are no lights. And lots of animals come out.”

Lilia looked scared. Her father patted her shoulder.

“We’ll be all right. Don’t worry. We’ll sleep on the boat. It will be safe at the dock.”

It didn’t take long. The boat pulled up to a dock. The dock was made from wood.

Dinner was next. Then they went to their bunks. The Silvas were in one cabin. It was small. The jungle was noisy. The night air was calm.

And the Silvas could hear a lot.

There was a loud roar. And then another. There were hisses. And squeaks. And long howls.

The strange noises went on. But the tired Silvas finally went to sleep.