

# Wild



T H E H E I G H T S™



# Chapter 1



“A trip to Africa?” Lilia asked. “Are you kidding, Dad?”

“No, I’m not kidding,” Rafael said. “Africa is one of the last wild places on earth.”

“I remember a lot of our trips too well,” said Antonio.

“So we’ve had some bad trips. But we always handled it, didn’t we?” Rafael asked.

“All of our trips end in disaster,” Lilia replied.

“Well, I think it will be fun,” Ana said. “We haven’t gone on a trip in a long time.”

Franco Silva was in college. But he was home for spring break.

“Well,” Franco said. “I’ve always wanted to see Africa. I’d love to go.”

“I guess I’ll go too,” Antonio sighed.

“Hey,” Lilia added. “I’m not staying home alone. Someone has to keep Dad out of trouble.”

“Great!” Rafael said. “This will be our best trip yet.”

“Hey, Dad. Africa is big. Where *exactly* are we going?” asked Franco.

“Africa’s the world’s second largest continent. There are a lot of

places we could go. But we'll fly to Nairobi, Kenya. We'll spend a few days in Serengeti National Park. Next, we'll fly to the Zambezi River. We'll stay at a lodge. We can explore the river by canoe."

"Sounds like a great plan," Ana said.

Rafael had already made the reservations months before. Everyone checked the days off on the calendar until it was time for the trip.

Ana wanted the trip to be fun. So she gave everyone a box. "Here's a gift for the trip," Ana said. Inside each box was a digital camera.

"We can have a contest," said Ana. "Let's see who can take the best picture."

“What’s the prize for winning?” Antonio asked.

“Don’t worry about that,” Lilia laughed. “You won’t win. I’m going to take the best picture.”

“Well, we’ll see about that,” Antonio stated.

“The prize,” said Ana. “Well, how about the winner decides where we go on our next vacation?”

“You’re on, Mom,” said Franco. He really wanted to go diving again.

It was finally time for the trip. The flight from New York to Nairobi was long. As they were landing, Lilia looked out the window. She saw a big city.

“Look at that!” Lila exclaimed. “I didn’t think Nairobi would be so big.”

The big jet landed. Then it sped along the runway. Soon the flight attendant announced, “Welcome to Nairobi.”

“I can’t believe we’re finally here!” Rafael exclaimed.

“He’s more excited than the kids are,” Ana thought.

## Chapter 2



Everyone grabbed their bags. Then they all went through customs.

A man met the Silvas near the exit. He was tall and blonde.

“I’m Eric Gibbons,” he said.  
“Your guide.”

“Nice to meet you, Eric,” Rafael replied. “We’re excited to begin our adventure through the Serengeti.”

“Welcome to Africa,” Eric said. “Are you ready for an awesome time?”

“Oh yes,” declared Antonio. “We are so ready.”

Eric led them to a large four-wheel drive vehicle.

“This isn’t the best car for the city. But it’s good for the bush,” said Eric.

Eric had an accent. It sounded familiar. But it didn’t sound African.

“You don’t sound like you’re from here,” Lilia said.

“Right you are,” Eric said. “I’m from Australia. I came to Africa four years ago.”

“What made you come here?” asked Ana.

“Well, Australia was too small for me,” Eric laughed. “I want to see all



seven continents. Being a guide in the Serengeti is one stop along the way.”

Antonio and Lilia asked Eric about the animals in the Serengeti.

“You’ll see *lots* of animals,” Eric stated. “The park is loaded with predators and prey. This is the best time to visit.”

The ride to camp took four hours. The Silvas were happy to get there.

Even though they had to sleep in tents, the camp was nice. The tents were set up on wooden platforms. A bed, desk, and chairs were in each tent. The tents were a lot nicer than the ones back home. Oil lamps provided light.

The kitchen was in the middle of the camp. Four African employees

ran the kitchen and cooked all of the meals. The kitchen staff was kept busy with all of the tourists.

After dinner, Franco asked Eric if an animal had ever attacked him.

“We’re always alert and careful,” Eric answered. “Animals are unpredictable. One day one may be scared of me. The next day it may charge at me. But I’ve never been scared for my life. My friend Kevin has though.”

“Who’s Kevin?” Antonio asked.

“He’s a mate back in Australia,” Eric answered.

“What happened to him?” asked Antonio.

“Well,” Eric said. “He was swimming. He was attacked by a

# TWISTER



T H E H E I G H T S™



# Chapter 1



Rafael Silva sat in his home office. He thought about the e-mail he just got.

Plains, Kansas, needed a watering system. Plains had a lot of farms that needed water. Rafael had been asked to design the system.

It sounded like a hard project. He talked to Ana. They decided that Rafael should do the project.

He called the mayor of Plains. And he took the job. Then he asked about housing. He decided to rent a farmhouse.

Rafael went to talk to Ana. He wanted Antonio to come with him. It was summer break.

“He’d love that,” Ana said. “Isn’t that tornado country? You know how Antonio loves tornadoes!”

“I know,” said Rafael. “I think he’ll love it.”

“Plains is near my older sister’s house. Maybe Lilia could fly with you guys. She can visit Sara,” said Ana.

“That’s a great idea,” Rafael told Ana. “I’ll get plane tickets for Monday. We’ll let the kids know tonight.”

The kids were excited about the trip. Antonio had always wanted to go to tornado country! Lilia couldn't wait to see her aunt. *Tía* Sara always asked her to visit. But Lilia never wanted to fly alone. This was perfect.

Franco had football practice. So he couldn't go to Plains.

"Have a great time," said Franco. "Stay out of danger! You know how Dad's trips turn out!"

Antonio smiled. "I wish you were coming, Franco."

"Not a chance!" Franco said. "Not after everything you've told me about tornadoes!"

"He doesn't know *everything* about tornadoes," Lilia said.

On Monday Ana kissed Lilia on the cheek.

“Have fun!” said Ana. “And don’t worry about tornadoes.”

“I’ll call you,” Rafael said. “When we get to the rental. Promise.”

They got snacks for the plane. Everyone said good-bye. Three of the Silvas were off to Kansas.

## Chapter 2



The flight wasn't too bad. And their rental car was nice. But Plains was a long drive from the airport. Rafael drove. They didn't see many cars.

Antonio looked out the window. He saw nothing but flatland. Prairie land. Mostly dirt. He saw a lot of tractors.

"There's the farmhouse," Rafael said.



He pointed. Antonio and Lilia leaned forward. They looked out the window.

“It’s so little!” Lilia said.

Antonio thought the house looked small too. But it was still far away. They got closer. They saw that it was big. It made the house in the Heights look small. Everyone got out of the car.

“A creek is behind the woods.” He pointed. “My job is to get that water to those fields.”

“That’s called irrigation,” Antonio said.

“You’re right,” his dad agreed.

Lilia looked around. “This place is creepy,” she said. “There’s nothing but fields.”

“Corn is planted in those fields. Soon it will be tall. And everything will be green,” said Rafael. “Well, only if I can make the watering system work.”

“I’ll help you,” Antonio said “I know all about that.”

Antonio and Lilia got their bags. The inside of the house was nice. The kitchen was big. There were a lot of windows. Lilia looked out. She saw fields and trees.

Lilia ran to the biggest bedroom. She put her bag on the bed. Antonio was mad. He wanted the biggest bedroom. But Lilia wasn’t staying long. She was going to visit *Tía* Sara. Good! He’d move into the big room when she was gone!

Antonio's room was small. The walls were gray. There was a picture on the wall. It showed some dogs playing cards. Antonio laughed at the picture. He liked it!

Lilia and Antonio looked around the rest of the house.

"Hey, Dad, something's missing," Antonio said.

"What's that?" asked Rafael.

"A basement!" Antonio said.

Rafael smiled. "Get Lilia. Come outside with me," he said.

There was a tree outside the house. Rafael walked to it. He pointed at two doors in the ground. The doors had rusty handles.

"That's the storm shelter," Rafael said. "We go in there if a tornado

is coming. After we close the doors behind us, we'll be safe."

"How do we know if a tornado is coming?" Lilia asked.

"It almost always rains hard before a tornado," said Rafael. "And sometimes there's hail. If it hails, run to the storm shelter."

"Don't worry, Dad," said Antonio. "We will!"

"What's over there?" Lilia asked. "Is that another storm shelter?"

She pointed to another strange thing on the farm.

"That's an old well," said Rafael. "It's dry now. There hasn't been water in it for years. Let's go into town now. I need to find out about my project."