

## 2



## WELCOME

*Knowledge and discovery mix with the life that awaits them.  
Many of the biggest and most serious responsibilities are born from this  
important combination.*

The Fox family left in two elegant trucks toward their everyday lives, leaving behind their natural refuge. Nicholas drove his mother's truck while Julian served as the copilot. Their parents' absence gave them enough freedom to amiably recount their latest jokes.

"Jul! I have to admit that with your little pail of water, you got me out of the wonderful dream I was having."

Julian grinned and nodded. "Thanks, Nico, very kind of you. I have to say it was a pretty good one, scaring me out of the room with your little friend Charlotte."

"Thank you, thank you, Jul, isn't she a darling? I asked Victor to try to get one for me."

Julian widened his eyes in surprise at his brother's boldness and repeatedly nodded before saying, "It will be interesting to hear Mom screaming when she sees her as a guest in your room. But, even more interesting will be seeing what she does to you after the new snake 'incident.'"

Nicholas closed his eyes and realized that having such an exotic pet could be used against him. He focused himself and fixed his eyes on the road. But his brother lightened the mood again when he brought up the last crazy stunt he'd pulled before going on holiday at the ranch.

"Hey, Nico, I must also say that you had 'some' originality, having emptied my gas tank to put into your own truck."

"Thanks, Jul. You could say I killed two birds with one stone because, in addition to ruining your day, I was also able to arrive on time to school. Clever, don't you think?"

"Yes, very clever of you, Nico. I hope it doesn't become a habit, because it must be unpleasant to have a bucket of cold water remind you that it is wrong to take what belongs to others. If you need something, it's better to just ask for it nicely."

Julian's irony amused them both but had revealed a truth as big as life itself. They continued talking about an infinite number of things until Nicholas surprised his brother with a question.

"Jul, did you call Ze-Ze-Zennifer?" said Nicholas, imitating the voice of a snake.

Julian closed his eyes, frowned, and gave himself a light slap on the leg in self-reproach.

"No, Nico, I forgot. Poor Jenny."

"Jul, the wise Nicholas advises you to give her flowers, and I believe a little mouse for the snake will make her happy," Nicholas advised him immediately.

"Hey, idiot, don't call her that. But it's not a bad idea. A bouquet of flowers," Julian mused, accepting part of the suggestion.

"And the mouse for dinner?"

"*Idiot!*" was all Nicholas got for an answer.

Andrea, the housekeeper, received them at the entrance of the big mansion with a welcoming smile. The Fox villa represented the fusion of their cultures: the cleanliness and sharpness of the white paint that William had chosen gave it an undisputed elegance,

which was combined with the joy of two beautiful and colorful gardens Sonia had planted in the front and the back of the house. Huge windows adorned with crystal flirted with the light during the day and reflected it at night.

The inside of the villa was spacious, clear, and very bright. The high, impeccable white walls seemed to shine like mirrors with the light that filtered through the windows. Marble and wood floors almost competed in their elegance. On the ground floor, there were large rooms and a modern kitchen. The second floor had been set aside for the bedrooms.

Huge vases from around the world adorned some of the corners, along with thin vases containing beautiful floral arrangements, some of which came from the family's own garden. Luxurious chandeliers, classic furniture, beautiful paintings, exquisite carpets, some antiques, and huge mirrors gave the house the utmost touch of distinction.

Sonia and William sat down to relax in the living room while Nicholas went up to his room to meditate about life and Julian headed to the kitchen, where he got an embarrassing message from Andrea reminding him of his carelessness.

"Jennifer called you an hour ago. She asked me to tell you that she would be expecting your call."

The forgetful man thanked Andrea for the message, then poured himself a glass of water to quench his thirst and to clear his head. He needed the best words to appropriately apologize for his forgetfulness. He went upstairs with the intention of calling Jennifer, walked down the long corridor leading to the bedrooms, and looked at his brother's bedroom door, which was just in front of his own.

Feeling sure about the mischievous future, he whispered, "I'll think of something soon, brother."

Julian entered his own spacious room and sat on a huge and luxurious sofa positioned in front of a TV and other audio-video

equipment that made up his entertainment system. A large window lets in the light and warmth. Another door led to a walk-in closet full of wristwatches, elegant suits, casual clothing, and footwear, and another to a luxurious bathroom. A mahogany bookcase displayed Julian's treasures, containing stories in several languages. A pair of weights, marred by signs of much use, rested on the wooden floor just below the window.

Finally, Julian picked up the phone and held a long conversation that ended with the promise of a visit from his girlfriend to his house that night.

Hours later, when the moon was once again the queen of the firmament, Jennifer came by taxi to the Fox villa. She looked anxious and happy about the desired encounter. She hugged Julian and buried her face in his chest and then, almost despairingly, said, "You finally returned!"

She lifted her face to receive the long-awaited kiss. They separated for a moment to look at each other. She found him more attractive than when he had left. His hair was longer, and his tan was more intense than usual.

Jennifer's feelings for Julian had begun in college when she was introduced to a handsome, rich young man with a playful smile. Her shaken heart decided that he and his wealth would be hers. Her insistence paid off when, one morning, Julian asked her to be his girlfriend, and since then she had been making plans for the future.

She loved to show herself off to the world with him, holding hands with her treasure, and allowing herself to enjoy the admiration they received. She was twenty years old and very beautiful, with clear skin and honey-colored hair that matched her eyes. Delicate features gave a charming touch to her beauty. Although she was tall, next to Julian she looked small.

She stroked his face with the tips of her fingers, and said, "I love you."