

READING EXERCISE

The Adventures of Lola Badiola

CHAPTER 37: SALVADOR BADIOLA

Lola woke up late on Saturday morning. She had switched off her alarm and disconnected her phone the night before. She had closed the blinds and curtains so that none of the morning light would enter her room. She needed to rest after a stressful week at work.

It was Nala and Mika, her tabby cats, who eventually motivated her to get up. They were hungry and in need of some attention. Lola rolled out of bed, wandered into the kitchen and made everyone breakfast.

It was already noon when she finally switched on her phone.. Her WhatsApp inbox was inundated with messages. She scrolled down to the earliest message from Maddy, her friend and confidante in New York.

"Saw the article. You ok? Call me when you're free."

Lola's heart skipped a beat. She quickly checked the other messages, and they were all regarding the same subject – the profile of her in Cyberworld Magazine.

She ran to her desk and opened her laptop. She googled the online version of the magazine. As the front page appeared on her computer screen, she took a step backwards in shock.

Her own face was staring back at her. Below the image was the following headline:

Lola Badiola: Cybersecurity Saint or Sinner?

Lola frantically clicked on the link to the article and zoomed in to see the content. She started scanning through the paragraphs, unable to really focus on the details.

The piece started by summarizing the state of the cybersecurity sector in Spain. Over the previous ten years, Telecom España had become a monopoly power through a series of hostile acquisitions of smaller service providers. Its ultimate ambition was to become a global player in all telecommunications services, competing with the likes of AT&T, Verizon, and Deutsche Telekom.

The article then described the recent emergence of start-ups like JBlock, companies that were using blockchain technology to offer an alternative solution. They represented a new competitive threat to Telecom España. The cybersecurity sector was, therefore, entering a period of disruption.

At this point, the article introduced Lola Badiola. She was the human story at the centre of these developments. She had started her career at Telecom España, but she had recently moved to JBlock. She was therefore the link between the two competing worlds.

There was a photograph of Lola as a teenager standing next to her father.

The article described Lola's upbringing – her childhood, her education, and her family life. She was the only child of Salvador Badiola - entrepreneur, politician and philanthropist. His rags-to-riches story was well known in Spain, particularly in Cantabria, where he was treated like a folk hero.

According to sources close to the family, the relationship between father and daughter was extremely close. Lola spent her adolescent summers working in her father's factories. She was getting hands-on experience of the business - peeling anchovies, processing olives and storing wine - so that one day, in the distant future, she could take over the food and drinks empire.

But Lola had other ideas.

After graduating from the Lycée Français in Madrid, she was accepted into the prestigious École Polytechnique in Paris to study Engineering, specializing in telecommunications. As much as she loved her father, she wanted to be in charge of her own destiny. That was why she chose to pursue a career as far away from the food and drinks industry as possible.

She graduated in the top 5% of her class and then joined the training program at Telecom España. It was a two-year rotation around the different parts of the company, after which Lola began as a sales assistant in the cybersecurity division. It was exactly the role she wanted – challenging, exciting and, in her mind, heroic.

It wasn't long before she was signing up the company's biggest accounts. She became a star performer, smashing her sales targets and creating new business, not just in Spain, but throughout Europe. She was the first of her graduate intake to get a promotion, and within five years, she was managing a team of seven professionals, six of them were older than her.

Before long, she caught the eye of Mario Ruiz de Velasco, the CEO of the company and, according to internal sources, he started mentoring her on a regular basis. With his help, she took on some high-profile responsibilities within the company, such as the Diversity and Inclusion initiative. She teamed up with the network division to create secure products for their 5G roll out. And she worked with the R&D team to gather real-time data on security breaches. Many people believed that she was destined to reach the very top of the organization.

But then things started to go wrong.

Her father passed away suddenly. He suffered a heart attack on a business trip to Lima. Lola was devastated. She flew to Peru to bring back his body. Then she took some time off to grieve.

When she returned to Telecom España, she wasn't the same person. According to sources within the company, she no longer had the same passion or direction. She had lost the instinct to close deals. There were rumours that she was suffering from panic attacks. Her clients started to experience serious breaches of security. Was this neglect, or something more sinister?

One day, she revealed to a colleague that she planned to quit Telecom España and join a competitor. The colleague then discovered that she was stealing sensitive client information and breaching confidentiality agreements. An internal investigation was launched, the evidence was conclusive, and the company had no other choice but to fire her.

An unnamed source at Telecom España was quoted as saying:

“It’s probably no coincidence that shortly after Lola Badiola was fired,
Telecom España suffered its most serious breach of security.
But the important thing is everything is now back under control”.

It was a clear implication that Lola had been acting as a malicious insider assisting external forces to hack into Telecom España’s systems.

The article then returned to the general theme of the disruption in the cybersecurity market. It concluded that the battle between the monopoly power of Telecom España and the new entrants into the market, such as JBlock, could be long and dirty.

At the very end, it stated that Cyberworld had attempted to speak to Lola Badiola, but she had refused to respond to the allegations. The magazine hoped that she would take the opportunity to contact them at some point to present her side of the story. The Badiola name was synonymous with integrity. It would be a shame if that reputation were ruined.

Lola shut her laptop.

She couldn’t bear the sight of the website for a second longer.

She walked into her small rectangular bathroom and opened the cold tap of the shower. She forced herself underneath the freezing water. Her body went into shock, her lungs gasped for air, her limbs shivered uncontrollably.

She closed her eyes and focused on her breathing. Little by little she regained control of every square centimeter of her body, until she was completely relaxed. And one thought came into her head.

She needed to speak to her mother.

READING COMPREHENSION

1. Why did Lola wake up late?
2. Why did she have so many messages on her WhatsApp?
3. What was the title of the Cyberworld Article? Why did the journalist choose that title?
4. How did the article describe the current state of the cybersecurity market in Spain?
5. Who is Salvador Badiola? What was he like? What kind of relationship did he have with Lola?
6. Where did Lola go to university? Why did she choose a degree in Engineering?
7. Describe the first few years of her career at Telecom España.
8. When did everything apparently start to go wrong?
9. Why was she eventually fired from Telecom España (according to sources at the company)?
10. How much of the article is accurate?
11. What should Lola do about the article? How should she react?
12. What kind of relationship do you think Lola has with her mother?