

## READING EXERCISE

### The Adventures of Lola Badiola

#### CHAPTER 41: LOLA'S MOTHER

Lola agreed to meet her mother at the Retiro Park in the centre of Madrid. It was a cold winter's morning, but the sun was out, and the air was still and dry.

Perla Manchón arrived wearing a long, dark cashmere coat, a Burberry scarf and a trilby hat. She was a tall, thin woman with white hair accentuated by platinum highlights. She walked quickly and purposefully; she was the kind of woman who expected you to move out of her way.

The moment she saw Lola, her face lit up into a radiant smile, her smooth skin stretched tight across her prominent cheekbones, her perfect white teeth dazzled, and her arms stretched out to embrace her beloved daughter.

"It's been too long!" she said, as the two women hugged.

"We spent the whole of Christmas together, Mum."

"Exactly! Way too long! How have you been?"

"Good."

Perla instantly perceived that Lola was upset. She had seen the Cyberworld article the day it was published. She knew that the accusations would have hurt her daughter.

She didn't say anything at that moment. She knew, from her own personal experience, that these unauthorized profiles were full of rumour and gossip, and best ignored. She simply wrapped her arm around Lola and guided her towards the central promenade of the park.

"Let's go to the lake!" she said enthusiastically.

It was a weekday, so there were only a few people scattered around grounds. To Lola, it felt almost empty, a contrast to the happy, noisy weekends she had spent there with her cousins as a child.

"Cristina has left me," said her mother.

"Oh?"

"One of her brothers passed away."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"She flew back to Peru yesterday."

"How long will she be gone?"

"Five weeks! I don't know how I'm going to survive!"

Lola couldn't help but laugh. Her mother lived in a five hundred square meter penthouse apartment at the bottom of Calle Velazquez with panoramic views of the Retiro Park. She had a part-time driver and two housekeepers, one of them was an old Peruvian lady called Cristina. Lola was in no doubt that her mother would not only survive the next five weeks, but continue to enjoy a life of comfort and luxury.

"Do you need any help around the house, Lola?"

"I'm fine, Mum. I can manage on my own."

"Cristina is planning to bring a sister back from Peru, if you need..."

"Mum! I said I was fine."

The two women continued to walk through the Retiro park. They eventually arrived at the man-made lake, its peaceful waters shimmering in the morning sun, the massive statues of the Alfonso XII monument standing proudly at the water's edge.

"What did you think about Borja?"

"Borja? Who's Borja?"

"Come on, Lola, the handsome young man you met at the Christmas party."

Lola thought back to the Grupo Badiola Christmas event. It was an annual celebration of wine, olives and anchovies organized by the company for its suppliers and distributors. She had made a brief appearance at the party and vaguely remembered chatting to a mildly drunk man who smelled of raw garlic.

"Oh. That Borja."

"Well?", continued her mother, "What did you think of him? He handsome, charming and smart. Apparently, he's just been promoted to managing director of the biggest frozen fish wholesaler in the North of Spain. I heard it through the grapevine that he has taken a real interest in you."

Lola rolled her eyes.

"I could speak to his mother and set up a meeting between the two of you."

"No! Don't do that, I'm not interested."

"Why not?"

"He's got bad breath."

Perla Manchón stopped walking and turned abruptly to look at her daughter. Her expression changed from joy to irritation.

"Your perfectionism worries me."

Lola shrugged.

"One day you're going to get a taste of your own medicine."

Lola contemplated telling her mother about Mr. Red Bull, the man she had met a few weeks ago on a blind date, the man who made her smile, laugh and forget about the stress in her professional life. He was returning from his travels that weekend and the two of them had arranged to meet for dinner on Saturday night.

Lola's mother would be thrilled to hear that she was starting a serious relationship. Having grandchildren was Perla's number one priority, as important as her role as Chairman of the Board of Directors of Grupo Badiola.

But Lola decided to stay quiet about the new boyfriend. She knew from bitter experience that if she revealed any part of her private life to her mother it would complicate the situation. Perla would interfere and, with the best intentions, try to take control.

"How's the company?" Lola asked, changing the subject.

"Fine. Your cousins keep pushing the expansion in South America. I sometimes need to shift their mindset, hold them back."

"Yeah, you need to keep an eye on them."

Grupo Badiola was currently run by Lola's three cousins. They had recently made some poor investment decisions in Eastern Europe. Now they were looking to issue public debt to finance their growth in Argentina and Brazil. As Chairman of the Board, Lola's mother had convinced the Directors to block the move.

The succession of the family company had been a source of tension between Lola and her parents ever since she had decided to pursue her own career path. Her mother still hoped and prayed that one day Lola would return to Grupo Badiola. She knew there was no-one better to run the company in Salvador's style than his own daughter.

"What about you Lola? How's the new job? Shall we talk about the elephant in the room?"

The two women stood in silence for a moment.

Then Lola took hold of her mother's arm and guided her to the nearest park bench. She motioned for the two of them to sit down. She looked directly into her mother's eyes and said:

"I need you to tell me everything you know about Mario Ruiz de Velasco."

## READING COMPREHENSION

1. What does Perla Manchón look like?
2. What is Perla like?
3. What is Perla's lifestyle like?
4. What does Perla think about the Cyberworld article?
5. What is Perla's job?
6. What are Perla's priorities in life?
7. Who is the Grupo Badiola Christmas Party for?
8. What happened to Lola at the party?
9. Who currently manages Grupo Badiola? Are they doing a good job?
10. What does Perla hope and pray will happen at the company? Why?
11. What is the "elephant in the room"?
12. What do you think Perla knows about Mario Ruiz de Velasco?