

READING EXERCISE

The Adventures of Lola Badiola

CHAPTER 62 – CONFUSION

Concha knew when people were telling her the truth, when they were exaggerating and when they were outright lying. In her work as an executive headhunter, she had seen thousands of CVs and interviewed hundreds of executives.

“Well, who is he?” she asked for a second time.

Eugenio had to tread very carefully if he wanted to maintain the cover story that the little Asian man in their apartment was a location scout. But before he could reply, the buzzer sounded from the hallway. Concha stood up from the table and hurried to videophone to see who it was.

“It’s Lola.” She shouted from the doorway. “She forgot her iPhone.”

“It’s here on the kitchen table!” Eugenio shouted back to his wife. “Tell her to come up. I wanna say hello to her.” He was thankful for the distraction her presence would create.

He turned to the Korean and whispered: “Hey! I told you just to say yes or no.”

Park wasn’t listening. He was too fascinated by the individual items in the fridge. There were sauces from Mexico, drinks bottled in China and fresh produce from all over Spain. No central planning committee could co-ordinate production and distribution as complex as this. No Supreme leader could deliver anything as impressive to his people. The only possible explanation for this well-ordered abundance could be Capitalism, the idea that consumers directed the system through their buying patterns in the open market. Park had read so much about the theory but never been convinced. He didn’t believe that it was possible for an economy to function without anyone controlling it. But here it was in black and white and vivid green. A fridge full of food delivered by the magic of the market. Like an atheist who has just witnessed the tears rolling down the cheeks of the statue of the Virgin of Guadeloupe in New Mexico, Park Jae Bong was a convert.

The sound of Concha and her friend entering the kitchen brought him back down to earth. He got up from his knees and watched from behind the kitchen door as Eugenio greeted the woman.

Park instantly recognized her face. She was the woman he had seen on the cover of CyberStory magazine, the woman who had been wrongly connected to the hacking of SMZ and Telecom España. She worked for JBlock, the company who had invited him to breach their systems with an ingenious game that they kept hidden inside their website.

The woman was far more beautiful in the flesh than she was in the photos of the magazine. She was tall and strong with luxurious long black hair and dark penetrating eyes. Having read the article about her life story three times, Park already felt a cosmic connection to her.

“Lola Badiola.” He said out loud.

The three friends stopped what they were doing and looked at the little oriental man who was peering at them over the kitchen door. Concha turned to Lola.

"Oh! You two know each other. That's nice."

Lola looked confused. "We do?"

Eugenio looked even more confused. "You do?"

Park closed the fridge door to reveal himself. He had the body of an underfed teenager, and the skin of a heroin addict, but his eyes were bright and intelligent.

"My name is Park Jae Bong." He said quietly.

"I thought it was Moon," said Concha

"I thought it was Kim," said Eugenio

"My name is Park Jae Bong." He repeated with more confidence, and then he turned to Lola and added "but you may know me as Pluto."

Lola, Eugenio and Concha stood in silence trying to process the information. Each one of them had their own questions to answer. Concha was wondering what her husband was doing with this strange man. Eugenio was wondering why he had assisted Park rather than Kim to escape from North Korea. And Lola was wondering how it was possible that Pluto, the hacker that everyone at JBlock feared and respected, was standing in her best friend's kitchen. Lola was the first to speak:

"How do you know my name?"

"CyberStory magazine."

"What are you doing here?"

"I've just defected from North Korea."

Once again, all three friends stood in silence asking themselves different questions. Lola started to put the pieces of the puzzle together.

"Were you working for the Cybercrime division of the North Korean government?"

"Yes"

"Were you responsible for cyberattacks on Western companies?"

"Yes."

"Are you the hacker behind the attacks on SMZ and Telecom España?"

Park nodded his head.

Lola was stunned. She had a hundred and one more questions to ask. How had he breached the defenses of these companies? How had he reached level 9 of their game? What was he doing with Eugenio? But the seed of a plan had been planted inside her head. And her heart was now pounding with possibilities.

"Is Telecom España still vulnerable?"

"Everyone is *always* vulnerable."

Lola looked at her watch. It was 2.15pm in the afternoon. JJ's meeting with the CEO of Telecom España had already started. It was possible she had enough time to accomplish her plan. But she needed to convince the North Korean defector to come with her. She walked forwards and gently took hold of his stick thin arms.

"I can help you Pluto. I can help you find a life of fulfillment here in the West. I can help you with anything you need. Do you understand me?"

Park looked up at the woman who was holding him so gently and yet so securely. He had become accustomed to the smell of Westerners during his journey, and, as he breathed in her floral essence, he knew that she was someone he could trust. She was exactly the kind of person that he needed in the alien world in which he had landed.

He nodded his head.

"But I need you to help me first. And I need you to help me now. Will you do that?"

Once again, the little North Korean nodded his head.

Lola smiled reassuringly, then she pulled the little man towards her and embraced his bony body.

READING COMPREHENSION

1. Describe how Concha feels/thinks/acts throughout this chapter.
2. Describe how Eugenio feels/thinks/acts throughout this chapter.
3. Describe how Lola feels/thinks/acts throughout this chapter.
4. Describe how Park feels/thinks/acts throughout this chapter.
5. Why is Park so amazed by the contents of the fridge?
6. What does Lola promise Park?
7. Why does Park trust Lola?
8. What do you think Lola is planning?
9. How do you think Park can help Lola?
10. What do you think will happen between Concha and Eugenio?