

READING EXERCISE

The Adventures of Lola Badiola

CHAPTER 27: THE PAELLA

Eugenio Hernández knew how to cook the perfect paella. He was a native of Denia in Valencia where he grew up in a big house by the Mediterranean Sea with his parents and his grandparents. From the moment he could chop a carrot he loved to cook. While his friends were in the street playing football, he was in the kitchen with his abuela boiling eggs, frying onions and baking bread.

His abuela was responsible for cooking all the food in the house and she taught him everything she knew. She showed him the best combination of seafood for a fideuá, she demonstrated the perfect mixture of oil, vinegar and vegetables for a bollit, but most importantly she shared with him the secrets of the perfect paella.

She explained to him that success depended on three key elements – ingredients, timing and witchcraft. She said that it was an intuitive process - more of a feeling than a technique. She advised him that the only way to develop this feeling was to spend hours and hours in the kitchen watching, learning and assisting a master cook. And that is exactly what Eugenio did for the first 18 years of his life.

"How's it going?" asked Lola as she walked into the kitchen with a glass of Rioja in her hand. "We'll see," replied Eugenio bending down and looking at the enormous dish of simmering rice as if it were a science experiment. He was cooking paella with rabbit and artichokes for the eight guests who had been invited to his apartment for Sunday lunch. It was a critical moment in the preparation of the dish, and he would have preferred not to have been interrupted.

"You know, in England they sometimes put chorizo in their paella," said Lola laughing. Eugenio didn't react.

"How was your trip to the World Economic Forum?" she continued.

"Fascinating." he replied without taking his eyes or his focus off the paella dish.

Eugenio was the husband of Lola's best friend Concha. He worked for the World Wild Life Fund and had recently returned from Davos, where he had been assisting David Attenborough with a speech on climate change.

"Great!" said Lola.

She realized that she was not welcome in the kitchen at that specific moment and said: "Well... if you need anything... let me know," then she walked back into the living room.

Concha was in the middle of telling a funny anecdote to the seven guests who had already arrived. It was a story about her recent visit to New York. She said that she had taken a friend out for lunch and

at the end of the meal she had only left some small change as a tip. The waiter had followed her out of the restaurant and refused to let her get into a taxi until she had paid him properly.

"Twenty percent!" shouted Concha. "He wanted twenty percent!"

The apartment intercom buzzed. The eighth and final guest had arrived. Concha was clearly distracted with the other guests. And Eugenio could not be disturbed, so Lola went to answer it.

"Hello!" she said into the mouthpiece.

"Concha?" said a man's voice.

"No, it's Lola."

"Oh! Hi Lola! Can you let me in?"

It took a moment for Lola to recognize the voice.

"Sure." She said and pressed the button that opened the entrance from the street below. She felt butterflies in her stomach and her pulse started to race.

It was the voice of Mr. Red Bull.

She didn't know he was coming to lunch. She thought it was going to be a simple and relaxed Sunday afternoon with friends, a chance to forget all the stress in her life. After the grilling she had received from Interpol her mind was fried. She needed the weekend to unwind, de-stress and recover.

But with the arrival of Mr. Red Bull, the atmosphere of Sunday lunch, at least for Lola, had suddenly become deliciously tense.

She opened the front door of the apartment. She could hear his footsteps running up the stairwell. She wondered if she should stay there and greet him herself, or just disappear amongst the other guests.

As the footsteps grew louder and louder her heart seemed to beat faster and faster, until the door of the apartment burst open and Mr. Red Bull walked in.

He looked at Lola and smiled.

"Hello again!" he said and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Hi." Lola replied.

They stood at the entrance staring at each other for a brief moment. And then he said:

"Wow, that Paella smells incredible!"

Lola was lost for words, like a teenager meeting her crush in the school hallway. She searched deep inside her brain for something intelligent to say. And the only thing she could think of was:

"You know, in England they sometimes put chorizo in their paella."

READING COMPREHENSION

1. Who is Eugenio Hernández?
2. Where did he grow up?
3. What dishes did his abuela teach him to cook?
4. According to Eugenio's abuela, what is the secret to a perfect paella?
5. Why doesn't Eugenio want to be disturbed by Lola at that moment?
6. Who has been invited to Sunday lunch?
7. What story is Concha telling the guests?
8. Why does Lola answer the intercom when it buzzes?
9. How does Lola feel when she realizes it is Mr. Red Bull?
10. What do you think Mr. Red Bull is like?