

Reading Homework 2 – *Como agua para chocolate* by Laura Esquivel

This text is the second half of the first chapter of the book that we study in Spanish at A-Level.

At the end of the last extract that you read from ‘Como agua para chocolate’, you learned that a young man called Pedro wanted to ask if he could marry Tita (the main character in the book). Tita had told her mother, Mamá Elena, that Pedro wanted to come round to their ranch to ask for her hand in marriage. Mamá Elena was angry about this as there is a tradition in their family which states that the youngest daughter is not allowed to marry and should look after her mother instead.

Will Pedro still come to the ranch?! If he does, will Mamá Elena let him marry Tita?! Read on to find out what happens next...

Read the text and answer the questions set by your teacher on Google Classroom.

You will find some vocabulary help at the bottom of the text to help you if you need it.

Tita knew that discussion was not one of the forms of communication **permitted** in Mama Elena’s household, but even so, for the first time in her life, she intended to protest her mother’s ruling. “But in my opinion . . .”

“You don’t have an opinion, and that’s all I want to hear about it. For generations, not a single person in my family has ever questioned this tradition, and no daughter of mine is going to be the one to start.”

Tita lowered her head, and the realisation of her fate struck her as forcibly as her tears struck the table. From then on they knew, she and the table, that they could never have even the slightest voice in the unknown forces that fated Tita to bow before her mother’s **absurd** decision, and the table to continue to receive the bitter tears that she had first shed on the day of her birth.

Still Tita did not **submit**. Doubts and anxieties sprang to her mind. For one thing, she wanted to know who started this family tradition. It would be nice if she could let that genius know about one little flaw in this perfect plan for taking care of women in their old age. If Tita couldn’t marry and have children, who would take care of her when she got old? Was there a solution in a case like that? Or are daughters who stay home and take care of their mothers not expected to survive too long after the parent’s death? And what about women who marry and can’t have children, who will take care of them? And besides, she’d like to know what kind of studies had established that the youngest daughter and not the eldest is best suited to care for their mother. Had the opinion of the daughter affected by the plan ever been taken into account? If she couldn’t marry, was she at least allowed to experience love? Or not even that?

The very next day Pedro Muzquiz appeared at the house, his **esteemed** father at

his side, to ask for Tita's hand in marriage. His arrival caused a huge uproar, as his visit was completely unexpected. Several days earlier Tita had sent Pedro a message via Nacha's brother asking him to **abandon his suit**. The brother swore he had delivered the message to Pedro, and yet, there they were, in the house. Mama Elena received them in the living room; she was extremely polite and explained why it was impossible for Tita to marry.

"But if you really want Pedro to get married, allow me to suggest my daughter Rosaura, who's just two years older than Tita. She is one hundred percent available, and ready for marriage. . . ."

At that Chenchu almost dropped right onto Mama Elena the tray containing coffee and cookies, which she had carried into the living room to offer don Pascual and his son. Excusing herself, she rushed back to the kitchen, where Tita, Rosaura, and Gertrudis were waiting for her to fill them in on every detail about what was going on in the living room. She burst headlong into the room, and they all immediately stopped what they were doing, so as not to miss a word she said.

"Isn't that something? Your ma talks about being ready for marriage like she was dishing up a plate of enchiladas! And the worse thing is, they're completely different! You can't just switch tacos and enchiladas like that!"

Chenchu kept up this kind of running commentary as she told the others—in her own way, of course—about the scene she had just witnessed. Tita knew Chenchu sometimes exaggerated and distorted things, so she held her aching heart in check. She would not accept what she had just heard. **Feigning** calm, she continued cutting the rolls for her sisters and Nacha to fill.

It is best to use homemade rolls. Hard rolls can easily be obtained from a bakery, but they should be small; the larger ones are unsuited for this recipe. After filling the rolls, bake for ten minutes and serve hot. For best results, leave the rolls out overnight, wrapped in a cloth, so that the grease from the sausage soaks into the bread.

When Tita was finishing wrapping the next day's rolls, Mama Elena came into the kitchen and informed them that she had agreed to Pedro's marriage—to Rosaura.

Hearing Chenchu's story confirmed, Tita felt her body fill with a wintry chill: in one sharp, quick blast she was so cold and dry her cheeks burned and turned red, red as the apples beside her. That overpowering chill lasted a long time, and she could find no **respite**, not even when Nacha told her what she had overheard as she escorted Don Pascual Muzquiz and his son to the ranch's gate. Nacha followed them, walking as quietly as she could in order to hear the conversation between father and son. Don Pascual and Pedro were walking slowly, speaking in low, controlled, angry voices.

"Why did you do that, Pedro? It will look ridiculous, your agreeing to marry Rosaura. What happened to the eternal love you swore to Tita? Aren't you going to keep that vow?"

“Of course I’ll keep it. When you’re told there’s no way you can marry the woman you love and your only hope of being near her is to marry her sister, wouldn’t you do the same?”

Nacha didn’t manage to hear the answer; Pulque, the ranch dog, went running by, barking at a rabbit he mistook for a cat.

“So you intend to marry without love?”

“No, Papa, I am going to marry with a great love for Tita that will never die.”

Their voices grew less and less audible, drowned out by the crackling of dried leaves beneath their feet. How strange that Nacha, who was quite hard of hearing by that time, should have claimed to have heard this conversation. Still, Tita thanked Nacha for telling her—but that did not alter the icy feelings she began to have for Pedro. It is said that the deaf can’t hear but can understand. Perhaps Nacha only heard what everyone else was afraid to say. Tita could not get to sleep that night; she could not find the words for what she was feeling. How unfortunate that black holes in space had not yet been discovered, for then she might have understood the black hole in the centre of her chest, infinite coldness flowing through it.

Vocabulary Help

permitted = allowed

absurd = strange / silly

submit = give in / surrender

esteemed = respected and admired

abandon his suit = give up on his idea of asking for Tita’s hand in marriage

feign = fake

respite = relief