

STEALING CINDERELLA

HOW I BECAME AN
INTERNATIONAL FUGITIVE FOR LOVE

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PREVIEW 14

Alice stood next to her desk, shaking her head. This was her last month, and some students had given her a gift. “Do I want to take this all the way home?” she asked. On the desk was a painted woodcarving depicting two girls in traditional Korean dress jumping on a seesaw, where one had just landed and launched the other into the air.

“Ask yourself how often you play with it now,” I said, smirking.

“Har har. It’s not a toy, it’s a conversation piece. *Neolttwigi*, they call this game. You know why this is a traditional thing, right? Girls played this because they were always locked behind their garden walls. Leaping into the air like that let them see the outside world.”

“Charming. I wish I could see the outside world. Instead, I have to see Richard. Again.”

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“Ah. You know his daughter is coming to visit him soon. Maybe that will distract him.”

“From his vendetta against me?”

“Your word, but yes.”

“I might as well get it over with.” I went out past the reception area and down the narrow hall to Richard’s open door.

Richard was sitting behind his desk. “Ah, there you are,” he said. “Look, sorry I had to call you in like this. It’s not even a big deal, so I’ll make it quick.”

An air raid siren sounded then, like the tornado sirens I’d heard growing up, but deeper and haunting, more suitable to a country that was still at war after 40 years and anticipating chemical weapons attacks. There was no point in talking while it droned, so we both waited.

“Your landlady called yesterday,” he said as the siren wound down. “You left dirty dishes in your sink, and it’s not the first time. I know you and Leo are two young bachelors living alone, but this is Korea, and here people show respect. If you don’t want to wash your dishes, get a maid.”

“Wait,” I said.

It was impossible to see the sink from the windows.

“My landlady came into my apartment?”

“Yeah. It’s what they do, here. You don’t have an apartment. *She* has an apartment, and you live in it.”

“But I assume the company pays rent. That means it isn’t her apartment, during the time I’m there, because the rent makes it temporarily mine. I have a right to privacy in my own apartment.”

“No, you don’t. She owns the place, and she has the power. She is right, and you are wrong. See? Harmony. Peace. We can all get back to work.”

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“But that’s—”

“Look,” Richard said. “You know you ought to wash your dishes, anyway. If I let you stay here, you are going to behave properly.” He leaned a little closer and lowered his voice. “It doesn’t seem like this job is going to work out for you, Mark. You might want to start getting some money together for a plane ticket home.”

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