

# STEALING CINDERELLA

HOW I BECAME AN  
INTERNATIONAL FUGITIVE FOR LOVE

MARK D. DIEHL

PREVIEW 19

I was already smoking in the living room by the time Leo and Karen came back for lunch. An AFKN commercial was teaching me about the benefits of using underarm deodorant.

“I didn’t know you smoked, Mark,” Karen said, taking off her shoes. Karen had started sharing Leo’s room full-time. I’d thought for sure the landlady would pitch a fit about having three people staying in the place instead of two, but though she had frequently seen Karen in the early mornings and late nights when we’d all come in and out, she had said nothing. Leo’s room was now crowded with her clothes and other belongings, which the landlady had no doubt also seen.

“I don’t smoke, usually,” I said. “My 105 is taking me to lunch tomorrow. Some soup they say I’ve got to try.”

“Oh, yeah?” Leo said. “I love when classes take me out. Good group?”

## STEALING CINDERELLA

“Not really. And it looks like I’ll be paying, which is fine. Whatever. But this class is super nationalist and generally uncomfortable. One guy last week said he hopes North Korea develops a nuclear weapon so that Koreans will have power over the United States after they unify. The class always seems to have that *fuck-you* vibe, you know?”

“Ooh,” Karen said. “I hate the *fuck-you* vibe classes. And you’re going to lunch, huh?”

“Yeah. I have a few tricks up my sleeve to help me cope, though. For one, I asked Jennifer to come along.”

“Jennifer, the teacher who works with us?” Karen asked.

“Yeah. She came to lunch with another class of mine once. I was shocked to learn she’s actually from here.”

“She certainly is unusual for a Korean woman,” Karen said. “She’s brilliant and she’s tough. Having her there will definitely make a more interesting lunch for you. She’s probably just the ticket for a *fuck-you* vibe.”

Leo sniffed the air. “What is that you’re smoking?”

I smiled at him. “Smells vaguely tropical, wouldn’t you say? I made it from banana peels.”

“Oh, I knew someone who tried that,” Leo said. “It didn’t work.”

“You’re supposed to get high from it or something?” Karen asked.

“Yeah,” I said. “But the recipe everyone uses is from this book called *The Anarchist Cookbook*, and I figured out that the recipe is wrong. Or, not wrong. Just incomplete.”

“Are you saying you did it?” Leo asked. “It works? You can get high off of it?”

“Yeah. It’s . . . You know, don’t expect miracles. It works, to the extent that smoking a shitload of it gives you the sensation of spray-painting in a poorly ventilated Tilt-A-Whirl.”

## STEALING CINDERELLA

“Sounds lovely,” Leo said, reaching for it.

I gestured broadly at our surroundings, meaning to implicate all of Korea. “Beats sobriety.”

“So this is why you were keeping kimchee jars full of rotten bananas?” he asked, puffing.

“Yep,” I said. “Fermentation. Fruits aren’t known to be psychotropic, but fungi are. I reasoned that there must be a fungus growing inside the banana peels, so I let them turn black before harvesting the peels.”

The apartment filled with thick, sickeningly sweet smoke. “It’s like having our own chemical weapon,” Leo said.

Kindle | Nook