

# STEALING CINDERELLA

HOW I BECAME AN  
INTERNATIONAL FUGITIVE FOR LOVE

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PREVIEW 11

**K**orean Lurch had shoved a scrap of paper at me. It was a note: “SEE ME. RICHARD.”

The landlords downstairs had been at it again the night before, though they’d finished early, around one o’clock in the morning. On the taxi ride in at 5:30, Leo and I deduced that the wife must have knocked the husband out cold.

I finished another can of a chemical-tasting Korean energy drink called Bacchus F, which made me feel as if my eyes were being pulled from their sockets with suction cups, and knocked on the flimsy metal frame of Richard’s open door.

It had been several days since I’d been out with Major Byun and endured the subsequent hangover from hell. In the interim, two different classes had confirmed that soju was made from petroleum.

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In the two chairs across from Richard sat David and Karen. Both looked flushed and upset. Richard, as always, looked like he'd just been awakened from behind a Dumpster.

Richard turned to me. "Just wait in the lobby a minute, Mark. You can come in when these two are finished."

"No, stay here, Mark," David said. "You can be a witness."

"Richard," Karen said. "This is serious. We used to think it was funny that Gerri talked about how all three of her husbands died in freak accidents, but now she's accusing me of really weird things, like going through her stuff. When she said it, I asked if anything was missing, and she said, 'No, you're too crafty for that.' It's getting scary. I can't keep living with her."

Richard ran a hand along the side of his face and into his hair. It was too tangled to continue that direction, so he pulled it back down in front of him again and wiped his fingers on his shirt. "Her contract is up in a month," he said.

David turned to me. "Gerri is Karen's roommate," he said. "You may have noticed that Gerri is insane."

I shrugged. "She hasn't crossed my path much."

"Today, she was talking to me at the copy machine," David said. "Her eyes got this glassy look. 'Karen's making me nervous,' she told me, just like that, in this really distant, flat voice. Then she leaned close and whispered, 'I suspect that she's plotting to kill me.' The hair on the back of my neck stood up. Gerri went off to her class, and I went through the offices and hid all the scissors. It was all I could think to do."

"Well, I can't think of anything else to do, either," Richard said. "If she were to leave early, I'd have eight classes to fill for a month. I'm not going to do that just because she's creepy."

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"I'm not asking you to send her home early," Karen said. "I'm just afraid to live with her. Just let me go to a *yogwan* or something until she's gone."

"I don't have the budget for that."

"Karen, I don't think you'll get anything this way," David said. "Why don't you just come stay with us? There's an extra bedroom because Sue and I share the big one."

"There you go," Richard said. "Problem solved. Karen will live with David and Sue. Now, go prepare for your classes. Mark, come in."

David and Karen squeezed past me in the narrow hallway. I entered and sat down.

"So, what's up?" I asked.

"One of your students told me you like to discuss cultural issues in your class," he said.

"Yeah, I do," I said. "It's more engaging, and the ones who tend to be the least motivated in learning English become the most eager participants, trying to show me what's so great here."

"Well, they don't like it, and that's not your job."

"I don't know who it is you spoke with, but they truly don't seem to mind my teaching style. Some have told me they enjoy it because it's more interesting."

"Koreans don't think of what you're doing as education," he said. "Korean education is ordered and structured, like the rest of the society here, always peaceful and efficient. Nobody has to listen to subordinates or students. What's important to Koreans is the knowledge you possess, not your opinion about that knowledge. You make them lose respect for you when you make them explain their society."

"I'm teaching in a way that's not just empty memorization," I said. "They talk in my class because they *want* to talk. The

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students help each other put together vocabulary and grammar to say what they want me to know. And by the way, it's a lot harder to come up with challenging topics of conversation than just reading the book all day."

"They think you're wasting their time," Richard said. "Education in Korea is when you open the book and teach them what's there. You present it, and they accept it. There's no squabbling, no back and forth. It's all methodical and serene. That's what we do here, and it's what makes this country so incredibly productive. Don't come here and try to fuck it all up. Got it?"

"Whatever."

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