

# STEALING CINDERELLA

HOW I BECAME AN  
INTERNATIONAL FUGITIVE FOR LOVE

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PREVIEW 15

“You missed it,” Karen said as I stumbled in, drunk from going out with my last class of the day. “Your landlords were at it early tonight. She was on him the second he came through the gate, screaming and swinging. He brought his briefcase up in front of him and then shoved it forward like passing a basketball, right into her face. She dropped down to her knees, and he walked around her and went inside. After a while she picked herself up and followed him, but she was really slow.”

“Huh,” I said. “Maybe they’ll both just die. Wouldn’t that be nice?”

“Hey, Mark,” Leo said. “We met Richard’s daughter today.”

“You’re still trying to be friends with that freak?” I said. “You’ll never get back the minutes of your life you waste on him.”

## STEALING CINDERELLA

“You should be grateful,” Leo said. “Otherwise, I might not have been able to talk him out of firing you. It helps to try and get along with people.”

“Right. So, is Richard’s daughter hygienically challenged like he is?” I asked.

“No,” Leo said. “She’s normal.”

“She is *not* normal,” Karen corrected. “She’s . . . relatively ordinary in appearance.”

“Well, except that she looks just like Richard. Like, a younger, cleaner, female Richard,” Leo said. “She looks like a college student. Which she is.”

“Until she snuggles up with Daddy,” Karen said.

“Huh?”

“They are *weird* together,” Karen said.

“Remember I said he’d told me he’d left the States because he didn’t like how the U.S. dealt with ‘family matters?’” Leo asked.

“Yeah,” I said. “He even went on about that with me once in the elevator. I think he was trying to make me see the beauty of Asian society. He said something like, ‘Families here are autonomous and not being harassed by the government, so nobody disputes the father’s authority and there’s peace and harmony.’”

“Ha!” Leo said. “Peace and harmony. Whatever the issue, that’s his answer to it.”

“Yeah,” I said. “Especially when he’s threatening to fire me for offending Korean values or pissing off our oh-so-peaceful-and-harmonious landlady.”

“Richard’s daughter calls him by his first name,” Karen said. “But lots of hippie parents have their kids call them by their first names, so I didn’t think anything of that. Then we

## STEALING CINDERELLA

went to the *kal gook soo* restaurant he likes—have you had *kal gook soo* yet? It's this noodle soup where you mix in your own stuff.”

“It keeps your hands busy, mixing in sauce and peppers and seaweed flakes or whatever,” Leo said. “Before the soup came, Richard was resting his hand on her thigh. Then we were all holding spoons and picking up noodles with chopsticks. When they took the bowls away, he put his hand *back* on her thigh,” Leo said. “And this is a traditional Korean restaurant; everybody sits on the floor.”

“Then we all walked back to Richard's place, so he could get his stuff before we went back to work,” Karen said. “There was extra time, so Richard wanted to make tea with his Korean tea set. They sat together on the couch and cuddled, and then he whispered in her ear and she melted. Just went limp against him.”

“Since Richard's the director, he has an apartment to himself,” Leo said. “Just like this one, the upper floor of a duplex. Two furnished bedrooms, kitchen, bath, living room, just the same. So in the guest room, she'd emptied her suitcase and laid all her stuff out on the bed. She saw me looking at it through the door and said, ‘I should probably put it all away, but I won't be here very long. It's easier like this, and Richard and I don't mess up a second set of sheets.’”

“Wow.”

There was nothing I could add to the conversation, so I went to change out of my suit. When I came back, Leo and Karen were settling onto the couch with dumplings and beer.

“Check it out,” Leo said, nodding at the screen. He had brought a VCR from work, and there were a few movies on

## STEALING CINDERELLA

top of it. “Rented it at the little store down the street: M\*A\*S\*H, subtitled in Korean!”

“We got it for the irony of watching it in Korea,” Karen said. I decided to leave them to their date.

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