

STEALING CINDERELLA

HOW I BECAME AN
INTERNATIONAL FUGITIVE FOR LOVE

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“He say engine is air-cooled,” New Clip said.
“He says,” I corrected.

The fact it was air-cooled was obvious to anyone who knew anything about engines. It was a 125cc dirt bike, and the fin-covered engine was the same type, and roughly the same size, as the old Lawn Boy mower I’d pushed as a kid. The shop guy kick-started it, producing the classic dirt bike sound: *REE-dee-dee-dee-de*.

This three-block stretch of a two-lane city street was crowded with stores selling and fixing motorcycles. I’d brought New Clip along to help. He didn’t know anything about bikes, but his translating was handy, and he got English practice and a free lunch out of the deal. New Clip was a rich college student, though, and he was clearly out of his element among these tough guys with grease under their fingernails. He fidgeted and his eyes darted around a lot.

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“He say bike is one year old.”

“Says,” I said. “He *says* the bike is a year old.”

“He says.”

“But how do I know whether that’s true?” I asked. “Some Korean company must’ve bought the rights to produce this one model, because every dirt bike on this street is exactly like it. I think they make the identical bike here, year after year. It looks like maybe a late 1970s model.”

I knew they bought foreign rights to manufacture international products here because a class had told me about the Mercury Sable, a lower-end American car some company had rights to assemble in Korea. Import restrictions and tariffs made the Sable Korea’s most expensive production car, even though it was essentially brought in as a kit.

New Clip talked to the bike guy in Korean. “He says that is true. Same bike every year, but he says colors different. This last year color. Blue was year before, and yellow before.”

“*Last year’s color,*” I said. “The color of last year. We add an ‘s’ at the end. ‘Mark’s bike.’ This is last year’s color.”

I decided to go with the orange. It looked solid and was only a year old, so the bike would probably be reliable. It would also hold more of its value than a brand-new one, which would be important when it was time to cash it out and leave the country.

I negotiated a price and bought it. The guy didn’t stare, or ask me a lot of stupid questions, or condescend to me. In spite of the fact that I was spending nearly all of the money I’d saved so far, this investment was quite comfortable for a business transaction in Korea.