

STEALING CINDERELLA

HOW I BECAME AN
INTERNATIONAL FUGITIVE FOR LOVE

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PREVIEW 8

Korea had a lot of taxis, so I was usually able to find adequate transportation in spite of the ones who refused to pick me up. Near our apartment was *Mu Goong Hwa Juyuso*, which translated as “Rose of Sharon Gas Station,” and was known by all taxi drivers. I could get back there in a taxi by saying the name and adding *kapsida* (“let’s go”). Work was near the Grand Hotel, which they all knew, and most downtown attractions were near a famous movie theater called *Han Il Geukchang*. Taxis were my biggest weekly expense, but when possible Leo and I rode together to save money.

One day he and I returned to work with plenty of time to prepare for our afternoon classes. My office was closer to the front door than Leo’s was, and he stopped there with me to finish the conversation we’d been having on the ride in.

“I agree, it’s pretty weird,” I said.

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“What is?” Alice asked.

“That place in the basement next door,” Leo said. The sign that’s all in Korean and except for the words *room salon* in English. Why are they only open at night? It’s always closed when we get here in the afternoon, and open when we’re leaving. Who needs a haircut at nine at night?”

“Ha. Haircut,” Alice said. “*Room salon* is what they call a prostitute bar. Businessmen go there after work. Pretty girls hold their hands, drink with them, and laugh at their jokes. Then if they want, they can pay an extra fee to take the girls home. Or, much more likely, to that *yogwan* you stayed at.”

“Really?” Leo asked. “So, all these parents are taking their kids to the academy downstairs, and we’re next door to a whorehouse?”

“There are probably a hundred of them in Taegu,” Alice said. “Maybe several hundred. They’re easy to spot because they always have the English words *room salon* on the signs. Ask your classes. They’ll tell you.”

“Wow,” Leo said. He continued on to his office, which he shared with Gerri and Sue.

New Clip appeared in the doorway. “Hey, Mark,” he said. “I talked to English professor at my school, like you wanted.”

“You did?” I said. “Thanks, New Clip! That’s really nice of you to do that for us.”

New Clip had been hired as the academy’s errand boy. One day he’d heard Leo and me discussing how we wished there was a program here to teach foreigners the Korean language the way SNM Academy did for English. He’d volunteered to contact the English department at his university and try to set something up. The assumption was that an English professor

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would be better able to communicate with us than someone who regularly taught Korean.

“Tuesdays at one-thirty,” New Clip said. He had a piece of paper saying as much, with a room number. “I will help you get there first time.”

“*The* first time,” I said. “You’ll help us get there *the* first time.”

“*The* first time,” New Clip said. “I will help you get there *the* first time.”

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