



Stealing Cinderella: How I Became an International Fugitive for Love

Mark Diehl

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Stealing Cinderella is a true story of love triumphing against the odds.

A fairy tale comes to life in *Stealing Cinderella*, the true story of how Mark Diehl's love for a South Korean girl brought them into life-or-death conflict with a culture determined to crush them.

The story begins in 1993 as Diehl arrives in South Korea with twenty dollars in his pocket and a precarious contract to teach English. At the English school he meets the intriguing and lovely Jennifer, the second daughter of a prominent family bound by strict rules, superstitions, and an unyielding script that prescribes the exact roles and responsibilities of each family member. Couple that barrier with South Korea's mistrust, even open hatred, of foreigners, and the scene is ripe for conflagration as the two young people fall in love. The book conveys the soul-killing stress engendered by living in a society in which every move is surveilled, where a Korean woman and an American man holding hands in public could provoke an attack by an angry mob.

The meaning of the book's title is revealed as Jennifer's role in her family becomes clear: to create an image of wealth and respectability for her siblings, and then to slide into the background, uncomplaining. Referring to her elegant, stylish appearance, Jennifer says, "It's all temporary. Like Cinderella." Intense and suspenseful, the book details the abuse that the fiery, independent young woman endured as she struggled to free herself from her family's icy grip, and the dangers the couple faced in their perilous attempt to escape to freedom. Deep descriptions of people and places reflect dark truths, compelling emotional involvement.

The tension builds right from the start. Pointed, natural dialogue moves the story forward, revealing characters' backstories without lengthy narrative passages. Informative and entertaining, the book sets the stage for the conflict between the young outlier couple and Korean society through eye-opening, often disturbing facts about the country's culture, beliefs, and lifestyle, including that it's suffered nine hundred invasions in its history. It becomes clear why the nation is suspicious and fearful of its neighbors and why it takes comfort in holding tightly to its traditions. A prescient warning comes regarding submission to rigid hierarchies as a requirement for acceptance and survival.

Stealing Cinderella is a thrilling, high-stakes memoir—emotionally intense, in which two memorable lovers fight against injustice and toward a satisfying conclusion.

KRISTINE MORRIS (August 6, 2019)

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