

## In Harm's Way: The Ring's Victims

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# **In Harm's Way: The Ring's Victims**

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## Summary

The ones they sold and bought.

## 70o2

*Number 70o2 comes to them young.*

70o2 starts out small and dark-haired and sickly-looking with purple shadows beneath both his eyes. This grows into something stretched and gnarled, and riddled with disease.

He was an athlete once... still is, in a way.

Mr. Doberman brings 70o2 in; he is an orphan; nothing is easier than that. Like the others he comes cheap.

70o2 is replaceable.

His time with them ends when his clients run dry, when one of their own offers him a deal.

He survives in body, and mind has never mattered much to them anyway.

## 40r15

*Number 40r15 comes to them with only one eye.*

40r15 starts out almost pretty, with cropped black hair and skin like alabaster. This becomes something skinny and twisted with bald patches and ugly scars.

She wanted to be a designer once... but she has no hope of ever stitching herself back together.

They receive 40r15 along with a shipment of others very much like her.

40r15 is unpopular.

Her time with them ends swiftly.

She does not make it out alive.

## 20y3

*Number 20y3 comes to them with a battered body.*

20y3 starts out fresh-faced and light-haired, and having just brought children into the world. This becomes something broken and bent, with one leg and many a swollen stomach to speak of.

She was an Air Force pilot once... but she cannot fly away now.

20y3 falls from the sky; they drag her from the wreckage of a ruined plane.

20y3 is a hot commodity.

Her time with them ends quickly, and her time with another begins; they ship her off to a man in Mongolia who desires sons; sons and a new wife to bear them.

To the best of their knowledge she remains alive.

## A40A7

*A40A7 comes as a baby, caught and carried and delivered by Ms. Dragon, who calls her Rose.*

(It's admirable, in a way. Ms. Dragon can call her by a name and raise her like a child and still do what must be done without batting an eye.)

A40A7 is well-kept and well-trained. As a child, she sings and strips and dances. Clients admire her violet eyes and hair like flaxen gold. She learns the proper responses, and more than earns her keep.

She's carefully guarded, and her virginity is finally sold when she's sixteen. She has known it would happen. She knows nothing else. She accepts it all - the warehouses, the merchandise, the customers - as a fact of life.

She proves useful in many ways. She looks after the children who find their way into her warehouse. She encourages the more difficult stock to abide by the rules. She can even be trusted to leave the warehouse (albeit with a tracking chip embedded in her shoe) to scope for new clients.

They have no intention of letting this one go.

## 56c19, 870UI, and 3842F

*56c19 comes to them begging and terrified. 870UI and 3842F come holding tightly to 56c19.*

They are all female; all young, very young. 56c19 is the plainest of the three, brown eyes and brown hair and a thick pair of glasses that she squints without. 870UI is a few years younger with blue eyes and blonde hair; she is striking. 3842F is the smallest, with black hair and dark eyes and a certain innocence to her. That innocence is soon ripped away; it is ripped from all of them. They have no families to speak of; no one that will report them missing.

Once they never had to be anything other than children... now they will never feel childlike again.

By all accounts, 870UI should be the most popular. She should be, but is not; too belligerent. 3842F cannot follow instructions. 56c19 can and does, and makes them more money than the other two combined.

Their time there comes to an end when a new client emerges. A bald man with a strange accent and beak-like nose who takes all three and disappears.

Some time later 56c19, 870UI and 3842F return, looking both healthier and more afraid than when they were brought in the first time. They have slighted a client and are punished severely. In time another buyer emerges, this one a younger man with glasses and brown bowl-hair.

The first buyer has regrets, or so they hear, but it is too late for the girls to be given over to him a second time.

Their current owner comes back days later, saying 870UI has run off; that 3842F has followed after. 56c19 is all that remains of his collection.

All three are still alive, though only 56c19 is worth keeping so.

## KC366

*KC366 comes from a land far away, asking questions in a language no one speaks.*

He comes in with a shipment of others, yelling and demanding in that language they understand. They look at his file and realize quickly he was sheltered. He is naive. He is a virgin. This is something they can use.

They take off his clothes themselves. They stand him in front of a camera, and go to the dark web. The numbers for his first soar quickly. They never return his clothes.

KC366 always manages to remain in the middle for client interest. His time with them ends when one of them makes a mistake and leaves behind a gun.

He's alive, but if they ever get hold of him again, they'll sell his corpse.



## 44KJ61

*The ones that make up 44KJ61 come to them as a single being.*

44KJ61 is not one person, but two. Infant girls, twins, joined together by skin and bone and liver; unique. Beautiful on top of that, with sun-gold skin and sable-brown hair and sea-blue eyes. Expensive.

They are bought quickly. Wasted, perhaps. A woman, who does not understand what the business really is, wants daughters of her own. The twins go with her. It is only a matter of time before she finds a doctor to take them apart, leaving nothing but a scar to prove that they were ever one at all. Her choice.

They will never know how lucky they are.

They go free, mostly unscathed.

## Lw55

*Number Lw55 comes to them with eyes full of confusion.*

Lw55 is very young and fresh and beautiful when she is brought to them. Rosy-cheeked with curling red hair and eyes like sapphires, perfectly proportioned and exactly half the height she should be. A pituitary issues, an aged mother - the cause is not important. As she gets older, she grows less and less and stops at possibly a world record for small size. Though she never smiles, though exhaustion has taken the place of anguish and joy, she remains a sight to behold.

To say that she is popular would be a gross understatement.

Her time with them comes to an end much in the same way 20y3's did; a man comes, interested in purchasing a wife for a sizable amount. She goes with him.

They do not know when he sets her free. He intends to keep it that way.

As far as they know, she's alive and still with him.

## 11tH5 and 889p4

*11tH5 comes to them without knowing her own name.*

She is but a child when they get to her. Eyes like ice and hair like fire, and a voice like little bells. She grows up underneath the bodies of strange men. As she ages, she becomes no less beautiful. As it was with KC366, her mouth is full of a language they cannot speak and, just as it was with KC366, they don't bother pretending to care.

The demand for her does not diminish over the years, just as her looks do not.

11tH5's time with them comes to an end when, under the cover of darkness, she disappears into the night, along with another piece of merchandise - 889p4, as they call him.

They chase after the two of them, of course, but are forced to give up when a news station in Paris broadcasts the happy reunion of some grand duchess and her long-lost granddaughter.

The story goes global; two warehouses are shut down; they are the ones running now.

## Rex Candy

*One client buys merchandise so quickly that they haven't the time to record their numbers.*

Rex Candy, he calls himself, though this is not his real name.

He likes them young; he likes them *very* young. Usually female, but there have been a few boys thrown into the mix as well.

His face is plastered across the evening news a little more than a decade later.

One of his collection goes to a beefy-looking man who glares into the camera like he has something to prove; the rest fall into the hands of a hardened officer of the law and her timid husband.

They got the money. The kids were not their problem after that.

## 67AL5 and 74Eg3

*Numbers 67AL5 and 74Eg3 did not know each other before they came here, but are so close that they may as well have.*

67AL5's eyes are as blue as oceans, while 74Eg3's are green like the wood. His hair is red, her's is as pale as cloud drift. They are young, the two of them; 67AL5 does not stay that way; 74Eg3 always will.

It is Mr. Rat who brings them in, souvenirs from his tour of Ireland; the boy weeping and clinging to the girl; the girl spitting curses in Gaelic with a bruised mouth and blood in her teeth; Mr. Rat with a bandaged hand.

Clients adore them both, but for different reasons. 74Eg3 fights and spits; clients say it is a joy to watch her break. 67AL5 complies, plays his part; other sorts of clients (those of the squeamish variety) like that just as much.

One of 74Eg3's renters goes too far. She fights a little too hard; he does the same; and they both pay dearly for it. 74Eg3 with her life, her buyer with his checkbook.

67AL5 does not speak for months to come; that suits them just fine.

His time with them ends years later when Mr. Rat pays a second visit to the Emerald Isle and returns with two more children in tow.

The three of them are gone before the week is out. They never do see 67AL5 again.

They presume he is still alive, though if they ever see him again, he will not be for much longer.

## **S1J68 and 4rt2Y**

*S1J68 comes to them with a million insults on his lips.*

He is a wild kind of handsome, with bulging muscles and windblown brown hair. He glares up at them with mad dark eyes and will not lie still, no matter what they do to him.

It is Mr. Mustang's men that drag S1J68 in, kicking and screaming. He's a drifter; the police will not bother listening to the ones that come looking for him.

He has more clients than any they have seen before, and still he will not lie down.

They truss him up, with a full grown man to hold each one of his limbs in place, and set their men upon him. He bucks and kicks and still remains defiant; unbreakable, it seems.

His behavior is only made worse by the arrival of 4rt2Y, a man who, while not as strong as S1J68, is no easier to pin down. He laughs entirely too much for someone in his current situation; it is a little unnerving.

4rt2Y encourages S1J68's defiance, nurtures his disobedience; until at last it all comes to a head one night and the warehouse door is broken open from the inside. Hundreds of prisoners spill out into the world beyond.

S1J68 is the first to go, 4rt2Y thrown over his shoulder, whooping loudly as they tear through the brush.

## 5Q79 and 2xH4

*Number 5Q79 yells and complains; Number 2xH4 is dead silent.*

The two are siblings - brother and sister - though if they had not been told, they'd never have guessed it. 5Q79 is blue-eyed with straw-colored hair; 2xH4 is dark-eyed and dark-haired with skin like a porcelain doll's. They are both tiny, and though 5Q79 is the elder of the two, he himself looks no older than ten at the most. His sister looks half of that.

The two of them are the ones Mr. Rat brings back from his second trip to Ireland.

They leave days after arriving, spirited away by the man 67AL5 has become. Their clients' hands have yet to touch them.

5Q79 and 2xH4 are never found. It is doubtful that they will ever be.

## 09a20

*09a20 is the splotch on Ms. Hen's otherwise perfect record.*

09a20 is the one she married. The one whose business she used as a front. He is useless to her now, and she plans to kill him... until she lets slip to Mr. Rabbit that *he* feels like *she*. Suddenly the plan is altered.

They decide they will change 09a20. Change her to fit the gender she is... but only halfway. Then she can be sold to those who like those like her, and Ms. Hen can gain back some loss. Their superiors approve.

It is all for naught.

The night before the plan is to be put into motion, 09a20 vanishes. She leaves no trace, only a colorful note. They look for her, but cannot find her; and in the end, it is not worth the search. Ms. Hen apologizes, the group shrug, and Ms. Hen divorces 09a20 and marries Mr. Rabbit instead.

They know she is alive, and they have since learned exactly where she is, but too many would look for her for it to be worth their time.



## **V009, 5tVm1, V10LT, 1gu22, and C609b**

*V009, and 5tVm1, and V10LT, and 1gu22, and C609b, come screaming and crying and shouting and terrified.*

They come from disparate places, each with a face unlike that of the others; with hair and eyes and body types unique to them alone.

V009 is petite and pretty and upper-class. with a nobleman's nose and light brown hair.

5tVm1 is a small boy with brown hair and not much else to him. He is too loud, too angry; he will not last long.

V10LT is a plump little girl with dark red tresses. What is odd about her is her skin: pale and freckled and rife with argyria (or something like it) coloring it an unmistakable baby blue. She talks too much and speaks too quickly.

1gu22 is another brunet; young, but enormous. He asks questions in words they understand, hampered by a heavy German accent.

C609b is blond and small; meek and timid. His eyes are very blue.

None of them will make it out unscathed; none but C609b will make it out alive.

It is Mr. Doberman who brings the lot of them in; a fake sweepstakes operation, very successful.

V009's looks make her popular, as does her haughty attitude, as does her accented voice, as pretty and little as the rest of her; 5tVm1 is too loud, too irritating for most clients to stomach; V10LT's strange looks attract strange buyers, but she makes them money all the same; 1gu22 is in low demand, though not so much as 5tM1. C609b is very popular.

As it was with 74Eg3, it is another rambunctious renter that brings V009's life to an end; her body is burned until nothing can be used to identify it, until there is nothing left to bury. 5tVm1 becomes too much of a nuisance to bother with any longer; a shot to the head, a body chopped into bits. V10LT's death is messy, her gut churning and spilling over with the half-finished child of one client or another. 1gu22 dies by his own hands - or feet as the case may be - leaping from a boat as they transport him, losing himself to the waters below.

C609b remains; he stays with them for a long, long time.

## F981

*F981 is brought in with a truckload of other women.*

She is tall and thin with a voice like a bird, eyes like raindrops and hair the color of leaves in late September. The others are lovely too - they'd need to be to be worth taking at all - but F981 is special.

Miss Butterfly is the one to bring her in; a girl she knows quite well; one who rejected her own son once upon a time.

A client - a man whose short stature is the most notable thing about him - has reached out to them, suggesting that he'd like to make F981 his own; his exclusively.

Negotiations are ongoing; arrangements are being made. They have not sold F981 yet, but it is only a matter of time.

She resides with them for the time being, but for how much longer she will be there, they cannot know or say.

## 12Bb5 and 4K109

*Number 12Bb5 comes to them with the face of a man and the body of a woman.*

12Bb5 is not quite a child, but still far from grown. Dark hair and dark skin and dark brown eyes; the illusion of exoticism. Flat-chested (and with a pair of scars to keep him that way) and deep-voiced; when they first grab him they expect that what they have found is just another boy. But when his clothing is removed, when they see the area beneath 12Bb5's legs - the place where something else is not - they know they have something far more valuable.

They grab him (her?) off the street one night; offer her (him?) a ride back to the house he(?) cannot find his(?) way back to.

12Bb5 does well for them; *very* well.

It has only been a matter of months since they took this one for themselves, and already their profits have increased tremendously.

The only trouble 12Bb5 has given them concerns his relationship with another piece of their merchandise, the tiny and terrified 4K109. The two talk though they know they are not supposed to, whisper to one another in the darkness.

They shove their bodies together, force each of them to become an instrument of the other's torture. They do this to prevent any more escape attempts, successful or otherwise. They do this to break the bond between the two.

It does not work, and the children only huddle closer together.

12Bb5 and 4K109 are theirs for the time being.

## V1ta7I

*They do not get very far with V1ta7I.*

She is not beautiful, not exactly, but the girl is striking all the same. Very small and very young, with dark skin and golden hair; her eyes are as blue as rivers. All of this makes her a novelty, the kind for which they'd have clients lining up around the block.

They have watched her for days, taken in how she is often alone; always dirty and rough-looking, obvious signs of neglect. They expect for her to be an easy target-

*-they are dead wrong.*

Every week - a few days a week - V1ta7I is brought to the city's old theater by a boy they presume is her older brother. He does not pay much attention to V1ta7I, and oftentimes she wanders ahead; other times she falls behind. Occasionally she slips from the building and wanders about the deserted parking lot.

They watch her on one such day, ready to make a move. They assume she is alone, that no one is keeping an eye on her... this is not quite true.

"That crazy bastard with the raz-" their operative says before he can no longer say anything.

They never do get their hands on V1ta7I. They never see Mr. Pig again either.

## **L10Z, MZ59, MG46, G8hA**

*L10Z has a face that many people recognize. MZ59, MG46 and G8hA do as well, to an admittedly lesser extent.*

L10Z has bright white teeth and golden skin; a light brown afro filled with enough product to poison a whale.

MZ59 wears his hair in a mohawk of ordinary black and artificial white, a color scheme that matches his own - this time naturally - mottled skin.

They can tell straight away that MG46, with his long neck and roving eyes and rail-thin frame, is a junkie; his arms are a mass of puncture wounds, his teeth beginning to rot.

G8hA is round, but not in a way that renders her unattractive; if anything her large bust and even larger backside make her something of an asset. Her skin is dark, her lips thick, her hair shaved completely off.

The four of them played at the top of the charts once... but the sounds they make here are nothing like music.

Miss Lion attends one of their concerts with a pass to the backstage; four cocktails laced with some of Mr. Weasel's special ingredient; four celebrities lying limp on the warehouse floor.

L10Z was the band's face, the one the paparazzi hounded and teenage girls screamed for. Naturally this makes him the one that most clients go for, and the one for which they demand the highest price. The others are not as popular, but they are (were?) still celebrities; and that fact alone allows them to draw in mountains of clients each.

They are too valuable to sell, too valuable to lose; the Ark knows better than to ever let them go.

## 46a17

Each one of their associates has some sort of specialty. With Mr. Doberman it is children, with Mr. Rat it is the hard-to-come-across, and none are superior to Miss Lion when it comes to tracking down celebrities or merchandise that would otherwise be too high-profile.

Miss Butterfly typically brings them girls; young and fresh-faced and conventionally attractive. This comes easily for one whose cover business is a beauty parlor. It is girls that come to her, and so they have come to expect that it is girls Miss Butterfly will bring to them.

*Number 46a17 is irrevocably and unmistakably a boy.*

He is brought in, unconscious and alone, and none of them have the faintest idea why he was brought at all. Perhaps, as it was with F981, their colleague has some sort of grudge against the boy. Unlike with F981, however, Miss Butterfly does not tell them what it is.

They aren't about to complain, not when they turn 46a17 over and get a good look at him. He is young, only a teenager, with features that could suit a woman or a man. His face is freckled and his hair a softly curling bob of strawberry blond, and when he opens his eyes they see that they are blue. He is attractive, and whatever Miss Butterfly's reasoning is for bringing him here, they are glad that she did.

He sells fast, and he sells well.

As it stands he is still with them. He is still young. He is still *beautiful*.

## C0045, LoK7, T3oR

Though each associate has a specialty, not all of them have to do with acquiring merchandise. Ms. Dragon is the best there is at training the very young ones the ring brings in; Mr. Rabbit knows how to seek out and advertise to potential clients; and his new wife, Ms. Hen, she is the expert in not only scouting for potential merchandise, but deciding what to do with them afterwards.

It's no surprise when Mr. Doberman brings her three separate files and a request for advice.

It seems a new find from South America, a lovely young woman with an hourglass figure, had attracted a few others. Two men, one with long black hair, one with bobbed blond. They were *together*, it seems, and the men's attempts to buy her out had gone spectacularly wrong. Well, wrong for the men, anyway. Now was the question of what to do with them.

The answer, to Ms. Hen, was obvious; as usual. They had to be split apart. Things could get messy otherwise.

C0045 could remain in the U.S., though moving her to another warehouse would not be ill advised.

LoK7 could be sent to Russia. With the government being as anti-gay as it was, the demand for men there was rising.

As for T30r, ship him off to South Korea. White blond men were hard to find there, and a prize when they were.

Her instructions are followed to a T.

It is not her fault when T30r goes missing; that was due to a miscalculation on someone else's part when he was sold into the U.S.

He is presumably still alive, though where, they do not know. As for LoK7 and C0045, they remain with them, right where Ms. Hen suggested, for a long time.

## **Dch35, M4r1, 2l00S, and 6er10**

*Dch35 comes to them with a diamond necklace, and hands that have never been calloused.*

She is a gift in a way: a young woman, pale-haired and blue-eyed, with the most wonderful of French accents.

Like 11tH5, Dch35 is the granddaughter of someone bigger than most people will ever be; unlike 11tH5 they know that fact this time around. The man that brings Dch35 wishes to receive the girl's inheritance. What he needs is a way to get rid of her, a way that will leave no corpse behind-

-and so he comes to them.

Dch35 does well enough for them and causes no real trouble; at least not until M4r1, 2l00S and 6Er10 come into the picture. They are the children of her body, but not quite hers, and she must know that they mean to take them away.

She runs; they do not know to who or where or how far. All they know is that she is gone.

If she knows what's good for her, she had better stay that way.



# Mr. Weasel

*Mr. Weasel is not one of them, nor are his associates.*

They are a group outside even the outermost circles of leadership inside the ring. They are not clients. Normally, not even worth associating with. But they have a valuable commodity: the thing that helps acquire merchandise, as well as keep it in line. Powders and pills and potions, things to bring sleep or waking or the kind of sleep that lasts forever. So they are tolerated, at least when they do business.

They've all met Mr. Weasel's associates a few times. One always mixes up his words, another fancies himself a smooth-talker and annoys the female members. One is never quite as on top of it as the others, yet another seems to be surrounded by a perpetual cloud of smoke. The last of them has eyes that swirl with something darker than madness.

Mr. Weasel is a necessary business partner, but his colleagues are more of an annoyance than an asset. It is unfortunate when the man they know as Mr. Weasel gets himself shot, and one of his associates takes up his name.

Especially now that he's decided to ask *questions*.

Questions that the likes of him do not need the answers to.

They take little heed of the difference in time zones when they call Ms. Hen to ask about the new Mr. Weasel. She, though exhausted, has excellent advice. As usual.

The big one's strong and healthy, not too bad-looking, and he does what he's told. The one with the razor has stunted growth and an unbroken voice, so he will resemble a child forever. None of them are beautiful, but none are terrible-looking. All of them can take pain. Certain clients enjoy a challenge.

Even if they don't sell with the usual merchandise, in their line of work there's no shortage of rivals willing to pay for some time alone with them and a blunt instrument. And all but the grey-haired one have fully-functioning organs.

They remain free for now, but they do have numbers, just in case.

## Ed3in4

*Ed3in4 is rather unusual for the reason they keep her.*

She is fairly young and pretty when they first catch her, with light brown hair and brown eyes, along with a green flower necklace. Her family is no one special and she is unlikely to be missed. That is why they first get her.

What catches their attention - what makes her stay with them - is that she falls pregnant within a month, though her client demand is rather average.

And then, the first time she is with a client after childbirth, she falls pregnant again.

And again.

And *again*.

Whatever condition she has that makes her so fertile, they have struck gold with her. Quite literally, as the children she produces are all high quality. Eventually, she starts making far more money from the fruits of her loins than from any client interest. This suits them just fine. Even after client interest has dried up, they keep her around; a reward for the guards who do well.

Her time with them ends a year after her periods do. When it is clear she will bear no more children. Without her fertility, and with no more clients, she is not useful to them anymore. Her termination is done in the standard procedure for Russian Warehouse number 5. A shotgun bullet to the head, followed by a feast for the sharks and fishes.

Ed3in4 is as dead as you can get, but they don't notice the two pieces of merchandise who gain something in their eyes when she dies.

## Batch 101-15

Miss Dalmatian has highly specific tastes of her own, a preference reflected in her choice of name. When she brings in new merchandise, her colleagues often spot prominent freckles, beauty marks, birthmarks, and - if she's been especially lucky - vitiligo. They're not the only ones she brings in, of course, but they remain her favourites. She kissed Miss Lion when she brought in MZ59.

*Her latest is Batch 101-15.*

Fifteen children from London; quadruplets, two sets of twins, and five single births, all born within ten years from the same parents. Every one of them is covered in freckles to a varying degree, from a sparse few dots to almost full coverage, and some have port-wine stains on cheeks or necks or looking like a permanent black eye.

The tabloids follow the story for a while, but their family is poor and ordinary in everything except their number, and the parents are not under any suspicion so interest is limited. No one says it, but both parents are biracial - black and white - and the tabloids drop the story within months while missing blonde children are still front-page news a decade later.

The kids are a novelty in their looks and their number, and average earners among the clients less interested in quirks. They're kept in the same building, chained well away from each other. If they behave, they get to see each other briefly. If they don't behave they still have that chance; if a client wants more than one.

They'll last, or they'll sell. Either way, their owners win.

## D3m1gd

*D3m1gd is a strange case, even to those who have grown used to the business.*

It is his parents that deliver him into their “care”. He is young - only an infant - when they first get their hands on him. His skin is dark and his hair brown, and as he grows he becomes a mountain of muscle, though not enough of one to get himself out.

He doesn’t know he should want to.

He is eager to please, having grown up without the world to interfere, without petty morals to make him squeamish.

D3m1gd does well for them, and never quite realizes the sort of hell he stands in the center of.

They do not intend to ever let him go. Not without a very good reason.

And then his sea of clients runs dry and they find that D3m1gd doesn’t matter anymore.

# G11nR

*G11nR is difficult.*

She is young, fifteen or so, and pretty along with that. Her features are delicate and her hair is a fetching shade of red. Her eyes are green as emeralds and filled with fire.

Clients like that.

Miss Hen and Mr. Rabbit pull her from the street of some podunk town in rural England; partly for profit, partly for vengeance. She fights them then, kicking and screaming and making a scene. G11nR never stops fighting, never stops resisting, never gives up on getting away.

Clients like that too.

She does well for them, this girl. Strong and tough enough to put up a good fight; small enough to lose. Stubborn enough to get right back up again.

Her time with them ends when she causes a bit too much trouble and loses them two other pieces of merchandise in the process: one not worth quite so much as she is, the other worth much more.

A buyer emerges, a rich man in America who asks for a bride with a fire in her belly; they ship G11nR out to him before the day is through.

She is his problem now.

# R0kR0d5

*R0kR0d5 is easy.*

He is young when he comes to them, no more than a child, freshly pubescent and wide-eyed with an unbreakable sort of innocence. His hair is red, his eyes brown and his features are shaping up to be handsome.

They buy him off another group like their own, one that specializes in children alone. R0kR0d5 has spent most of his life with them, in the line of work they have planned out for him. He knows nothing else-

-and so he will not fight them.

They are careful with this one. They keep him fed and watered and healthy. He is worth far too much to allow for anything less.

R0kR0d5 is valuable.

They intend to keep him-

-this does not quite work out.

A breakout occurs and perfect, compliant R0kR0d5 is lost to them. It is a great tragedy.

## 5t7N1y

*They do not keep number 5t7N1y for very long.*

He is only a teenager, a high school dropout and homeless on top of that, with a family that seems to have washed their hands of him.

This is ideal.

His hair and eyes are brown, and though his face is not especially attractive, his body is serviceable enough.

They find him across the backseat of his car, fast asleep one night. He is tough and streetwise and burly, but still only a child. He hasn't eaten properly in months and this makes his movements weak and sluggish; his kicks and punches poorly aimed.

They ship him off to a warehouse in Colombia where he stays for about a year or so before picking up a particularly nasty infection; that leads to a sharp decrease in client. Once it becomes apparent that he is of no further use to them, they decide that 5t7N1y must be removed.

They mean to do it by the water - for privacy, and to give themselves a convenient means of disposal - but the execution does not go as planned. The faulty merchandise is bound at the wrists and ankles with duct tape and thrown - screaming - into the trunk of a car. He should not be able to escape-

-and yet...

The drive is not overly long, but somehow - in what must be under an hour - 5t7N1y disappears, leaving nothing behind but a yanked-out release cable and the tacky remains of bonds that they can only assume have been *gnawed* clean off.

They never find 5t7N1y-

*-they are lucky he has not found them.*

## Ff1l and fRRbL

*Ff1l is simple.*

They find her outside Paris in a stalled red Cadillac she's several years too young to be driving, cursing the broken engine in even more broken English, coiffed and made-up and preceded by an almost visible cloud of scent and hairspray. Not twelve years old yet and a runaway, already planning to go back to her warm home and apologise for her tantrum. She never gets that chance.

She's been told not to trust strange men, of course. She *does* trust Miss Dalmatian.

A few sips of wine and she goes to her first client as willingly as one so young can. He's attractive and she's flattered... until she realises how far he's going, and by then it's too late. They don't bother with the pretense for later ones, and a new smell clings to her now.

For weeks she screams and cries, for months she turns dead-eyed and quiet. After that, she seems to return to normal. She learns quickly what they want, and she does it, and she at least puts up a good show of enjoying herself. They've seen this before. If she pretends she's happy, it hurts less.

The delusion runs deep. They tie her next to fRRbL, a boy they snatched from the streets in New York. Once they catch her, between clients, forcing herself on him; she is giggling and chatting as if doing nothing more than hugging him. He pleads for help. The guards bring out their camera phones. She sobs broken-heartedly when he cowers from her later. He never speaks again.

Ff1l is lucrative, if not overly so, and lasts a full two years in their care.

She goes from client to client with shaking hands and her head held high.



## F4gN

*F4gN's productivity peaked and burned out quickly.*

He was reasonable to start with, but he aged and became ugly fast. When he was about due to star in their other kind of movies - a much more final role - Mr. Doberman came to him with a bargain he shouldn't have been able to refuse. He didn't, precisely, but he had the gall to negotiate. Mr. Doberman was amused, fortunately for him, and said, "Alright, we'll try it your way."

F4gN and his assembled co-workers will, he said, bring in more from the streets than they could from the warehouse. Consistently, and more often. They have to do the same work a lot of the time, but it's not the only thing they do; and at least they're free, for a given value of the word.

## B311e and B3A5t

*B311e knows how to play along; B3A5t fights them every step of the way.*

The former is a woman of maybe nineteen years, brought in by Miss Butterfly, knowing exactly why it is she is there. Her skin is fair, her eyes and hair a luxurious chestnut brown.

The latter comes to them as a child of only eleven years, had been there for ten by the time B311e arrived. His eyes are blue, his hair a golden brown, and for a short while he is handsome-

-then a client, a witch of a woman, becomes displeased with him.

Nothing short of cosmetic surgery would be enough to make him beautiful again, and B3A5t is not worth the effort.

B311e is transported frequently, for there is a great demand for her wherever she goes. B3A5t has spent the last decade in the same place. It is unfortunate that they meet one another.

B311e quickly becomes acquainted with others in the warehouse - the French-accented L00m13R, the round-faced c1Ck, the soon-to-be-disposed of Mr5P0t5, and tiny Ch9p - and they grow to appreciate her in turn. She is not frightened of the guards or her clients, or of B3A5t's mutilated face. She is afraid *for* the others there. It is B311e who keeps Mr5P0t5 alive, using her body as a bargaining chip as long as she can manage.

She is valuable for not only her looks, but also her cooperation. She plays with them, lets them play with her. Like Ff11, she conducts herself in a way that is almost pleasant; it's all fake of course, but no one seems to care.

B3A5t turns a profit with those who enjoy the grotesque, and those that care more for the act of violence than who they inflict it upon. He is unpopular, but not without his uses and so he is kept around... at least for now.

Then, B311e and B3A5t begin to hold each other, begin to whisper into each other's ears secrets that no one else will ever know. They make one another belligerent, and he begins to fight his chains when she is taken away; she does the same for him.

They know now that B3A5t is a bad influence on their once so compliant B311e.

They know now that he must go.

## **pR1nc35, Ltt1, 1rM4ngRd, 1vn1A, & m41D**

*pR1nc35 is a credit to their organization.*

What she resembles most is a little princess, being young and pretty with ringlets of pale brown hair and large blue eyes.

Miss Fish delivers her to them, saying that the girl's father has recently died and there is no one to miss her.

pR1nc35 is a favorite of many clients, and better yet has managed to soothe her fellow merchandise in a way drugs could never accomplish. Her family is English, but the girl herself hails from India and she regales her fellows with tales about a land most of them have never seen.

pR1nc35 is the one they bring out to calm the tearful and screaming Ltt1, to coax and encourage the timid 1rM4ngRd, and to talk down the haughty 1vn1A; but her closest companion is m41D, a skinny girl with dark hair and skin, and eyes that have nothing behind them. Nothing at all.

The pair cling to each other as often as they can.

In the end they are bought together-

-but then, so too are Ltt1, 1rM4ngRd and 1vn1A.

## V0teX, LBB1, CR1l, & SH11n

*V0teX yells; LBB1 plots; CR1l sobs; and SH11n looks at them with frightened eyes that don't quite understand.*

Aside from all being the same age, they don't look much alike. V0teX is a small fair-haired girl with grass-green eyes and milky white skin. LBB1 is dark-skinned, dark-eyed, and wears her black hair in tightly bound braids. CR1l is a large boy with freckled cheeks, red hair, and eyes almost obscured behind the glasses he cannot see without. SH11n is small and skinny with spiky black hair and light brown skin.

They know one another from before and are brought in together, crying and clinging and - in the case of V0teX - shouting threats and spitting curses. It is Mr. Rat who brings them, "for personal reasons," he says; and if the children have been seen in the company of a well-known prodigy... well, they certainly aren't going to complain.

V0teX and LBB1 are pretty little things; both too small to put up a good fight, and angry enough to try anyway. Some clients enjoy this. SH11n isn't bad-looking either, and is much more receptive to their commands. He does well for them, though not quite so well as his female counterparts. Lastly there is CR1l, who is toward their lower end of popularity. There are not many who want him, but he cooperates with the ones that do, and his presence seems to calm SH11n.

The four of them remain... for now.

## **P7NK, Jhn1, m1N4, m1k3, p11G & Rs31tA**

*P7NK, Jhn1 and m1N4 are young. m1k3 is attractive. p11G is healthy and Rs31tA is fertile.*

They are an assorted bunch without much in common. P7NK is dark-eyed and dark-skinned with her brown hair bleached into streaks and done up in spikes. Jhn1 is large and bulky with black hair and a thick British accent. m1N4 is even larger, even bulkier than Jhn1, with dark skin and soulful eyes. m1k3 is small and fair-skinned, with hair like platinum and eyes like ebony. p11G is round and loud, with a German accent even heavier than that of Jhn1. Rs31tA is approaching forty, and looks in all ways average. She has had many, many children.

They are amateur musicians, brought together and to them through a farce of a competition. They fancied themselves superstars... but one round of drugged drinks has turned them into so much less than that.

They have had the six of them for a few weeks now. None of them do particularly well or poorly, but then, none of them have been here for very long either.

They are worth keeping around a little while longer.

## J35513

*J35513 is... entertaining.*

She's pretty, with a red braid and pale skin. Feisty, too, which is good in moderation. It's fun to listen to her curse. Fun to watch her fight. Fun to break her.

The problem is, Mr. Rooster takes a liking to her. He wants to keep her pretty. No, more than that, he wants her *pristine*. So, when she's flailing and kicking and spitting, they can't land a punch.

They find a way around this. They section off a little area just for her. Soundproof, and cold, and dark as death. When J35513 acts up, she gets locked in her box.

It's amazing what isolation can do to a person.

It only takes a few weeks for the fighting to stop. They practically have to *drag* J35513 away from her clients. That eagerness makes her even more popular, and her worth increases.

Even so, they still take her to the box sometimes. It's fun to hear her sob and beg for mercy and suddenly fall silent as the door closes.

J35513 is nothing if not entertaining.

## nUdl192k

*nUdl192k slipped from their grasp.*

She's Japan-born, small and slight, with purple-black hair which they keep cut short. That way, she can play a girl or a boy as desired. Wherever she came from before, she comes in with the skills of a musical prodigy, an electronica Mozart. They do not care. She has no family. She slips through the cracks.

She's better off than some, with them. She's made to play the geisha, making light conversation and showing off her skills. The girlfriend experience with a girl too young. She's kept in something resembling better conditions, to keep her unblemished. Drugged, to keep her compliant. Even with heavy eyes and sluggish fingers, she retains a percentage of her musical skills; and she plays better than some ever could.

At age ten, she's to be shipped off to a buyer in England, in a crate with only her guitar and a bottle of water. There's an error in the shipping which, fortunately for him, the organisation does not connect to Dr. Seapig. She lands on the doorstep of a dilapidated old studio, and the three young men who live in it are shocked. She can't provide useful information to the police, speaking no English and remembering nothing exact, and some catastrophic loopholes in the foster system let them keep her. They're too high-profile to bother trying to get her back.

For now.

## 715513

*715513 is the child of Ms. Hen's body-*

-but she has no intention of keeping her. She never did.

They are not sure of who exactly the father is. (Mr. Rabbit? 09a20?) It doesn't seem to matter much.

She isn't much of a pretty thing. All thin and bony with hard-line lips and eyes that stare. Still, she's far from the worst case they've had to salvage.

715513 does well enough as merchandise. Perhaps will do better once she begins to develop those desired curves that have been so sought after in the other girls.

She does best with clients who don't know who Ms. Hen is.

715513 has never seen the sky, and if they have anything to say about it, she never will.



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