

CHAPTER TWO: BY INHUMAN HANDS (THE STOLEN)



CHAPTER TWO

On the far sidewalk, something shiny catches Bobby's eye. Ignoring his friends, the boy bustles across the street to see what it is. From where he was, it looked like it was on the sidewalk but it's really in the storm drain. Bobby positions himself as close to the drain as possible. It's down but not too far.

The grate is loose. Bobby manages to slide it open and get his hand through the opening. He can't quite make out what it is but he's almost got it. Bobby pushes through, enough so his entire arm is through the hole. Something sharp brushes against his fingertips.

"Ow," the boy says, flinching. He bites down to stifle a louder cry. He glances over at the guys who are arguing about a shot, oblivious.

"Son!" A voice says from behind him. "Back away, son!"

Bobby can't turn around to see who's talking. He ignores it. Maybe the guy is talking to someone else. Bobby inhales and wedges his shoulder into the hole. Now he's got as much arm as he possibly can down the storm drain.

"Son," the voice again, louder. There's a hand on Bobby's shoulder, tugging at him. "Son, get away from it!"

Something else clutches Bobby's hand, the one inside the drain. It's cold, wet, furry. Something snarls from underneath the sidewalk.

Bobby tries to jerk his hand back but the thing holding on is strong, too strong. The boy twists his head back to see some guy in a green jacket pulling on his shoulder.

"Hold on, son," the man says, tugging with all his might.

The snarl turns into a growl, or rather a bunch of growls, like a dozen cats attacking each other. Something bites into Bobby's hand. The boy is about to scream when there's a sharp tug. Bobby feels the rush of wind on his face, the scrape of concrete against his cheek, and hears a brief popping sound before he is surrounded by darkness.

The man stands on the corner, his hands empty, staring into the grate. Another one. Gone. Just like what happened to the man's brother so many years ago.

The Stolen

The second most common means by which a child becomes missing is for that child to be stolen. Any child who has been captured directly by a monster is a stolen child. If a monster takes a child after the child has been abducted by a human, the child still considered—for our purposes—to have been abducted as the monster wasn't what separated the kid from his family.

PART ONE: HOW IT HAPPENS

It's not always as simple as a monster grabs a kid and runs off. That does happen, yes, but not all monsters are stronger than children. Kids are not just dolls laying on the floor; they have minds and wills of their own. If a monster's incapable of overpowering a child, it will use other tools and tricks it has to capture a child.

Being Overpowered

This is the obvious one. Monster grabs kid, kid tries to get free, kid can't, monster drags kid away to Closetland. This typically happens at night, while the kid is sleeping (and, perhaps most importantly, the parents and siblings are sleeping too). Big monsters, such as a typical Closet Monster, can grab up two, three kids at a time. Some monsters have

BY INHUMAN HANDS (THE STOLEN)

whip-like tails they wrap around children, others have muscular arms with grips like a vice, and there are monsters whose mouths are like bird cages, slamming shut on some slumbering child in the quiet of night.

Being Ambushed

Monsters who aren't big, bad beasts may gang up to overpower a kid who is going at it alone or has become separated from his friends. They will lay in wait for some unsuspecting child to stumble past them before springing into action, using their combined weight, sheer number, and the confusion of their attacks to take the child down.

Falling for a Lie

Some monsters prefer subtler techniques. Perhaps the monster sees muscle and strength in numbers as crude, maybe even garish. These monsters rely on their charm and (sometimes actually) silver tongues to sweet talk or fast talk a child into following them, maybe the monster appears as a trusted friend, to convince a child to come with them, into a rundown house or a carnival that's shut down for the night. The monster seeks to isolate the child and let the natural course of Closetland's magic capture them rather than aggressively attempting to get the child.

Falling into a Trap

We're talking physical traps here, not emotional or mental (as those would fall under the above header). A monster may use a trap to catch a child. These range from camouflaged holes in the ground that give way to deep pits, to metal cages whose lures draw in children and then the door slams shut, to ropes laying in the dirt that string up children by their feet as they rush across. If a physical device is used to contain or restrain a child (usually until the monster that set the trap can come back to claim its prize), it falls under this.

PART TWO: WHY IT HAPPENS

Whether a monster snatches a child straight from his bed in the middle of the night, dons the face of a friend to convince the child to come into an old house, or snares a child running through the woods in a trap, the child has been stolen. But the reason is another matter.

To Feed

Just as a wolf will kill for food, monsters will too. Generally speaking, Monsters need to eat just like anything else. Some eat fear, some drink tears, some crunch bones, and others like ears. No part of a child goes to waste, by command of the Bogeyman. While monsters are often forced to make do with woodland creatures, stray animals, mashed up butterflies, or each other, each and every one would trade those scraps for a nice, fresh, juicy child.

Not all monsters eat their catches right away. Some store the child in a box or bag, stow them away in a cellar, tie them to a tree, seal them in a glass box, or wrap them in leather and pack them in salt. Monsters almost always prefer live food.

Of course, playing a digested child wouldn't be much fun so let's assume, if your was stolen for the purposes of food, he managed to escape prior to being eaten.

CHAPTER TWO

For Sport

Monsters exist that simply like to scare kids. It's what gets their ichor pumping. Some monsters, such as ghosts, have little use for food, at least human flesh. They'll grab the kid, drag him into Closetland, drop him in the middle of the abandoned school, and laugh their heads off as the tot runs around, desperately searching for a way out. Occasionally, the monsters will rattle chains, drop buckets of bile or slime, or pop up for a quick "boo" that about makes the kid pee himself. After they've had their fun, they'll simply leave the kid wherever he is. They don't care if the child ever makes it home.

Some monsters prefer competitive sports. One will pick his champion out of a litter of freshly-arrived children or maybe field his reigning champion. Another will select his own fighter. The two children will be forced to fight each other—rarely to the death, more to submission. The victor wins his monster-controller bragging rights or a prize but, really, the main draw is the pain the children cause each other.

For Labor

Closetland is a world born from magic and populated by monsters so the idea actual grunt-level work needs to get done may seem ludicrous but someone needs to clean the floors and wash the windows of the land's many buildings. While the bigger monsters could force the smaller ones into doing it (and sometimes do that just because), why not make the kids do it. In the laundry, children scrub grungy clothes and curtains against dirty washboards. They suffer a whip across their backs whenever the drapes don't come out spotless. In the labor camps, children toil day and night for no greater gain than more work.

Monsters keep their feral brethren, such as the mutant pigs and disfigured dogs, in pens. Nobody wants to feed this misshapen beasts so they send the kids out, heavy slop buckets in hand, to dole out rations into the troughs and feedbags.

As a Present

Goblyns in particular think of children as a food, yes, but also presents for their queen Titania. Innocent blood is an important part of the mixture they use to keep their queen eternally young. Some monsters, desperate to get on the Bogeyman's good side, will try to capture a bunch of kids as a gift. They think it will allow them to get favors or preferential treatment from the King of Monsters. It won't (the Bogeyman gives no monster preferential treatment over himself), but still the monsters try.

For Companionship

Some monsters are crazed, feral beasts guided only by instinct. Others are conniving and cunning manipulators. Yet others are lumbering beasts following orders from their belly and the demands of the master. Now, this may be hard to believe, but some monsters are just lonely. Some monsters have the emotional maturity of a small child—some have the physical maturity of one; some are indistinguishable from a real child—and they just want someone to play with. There is a pecking order among the monsters as with any hostile group and some of the smaller, weaker monsters want someone who is a peer, can speak on their level, who respects them (even if that respect is really fear), and won't abandon them because other, bigger monsters come along.

So if these monster can't make friends, they'll steal them.

PART THREE: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The kid was stolen, ripped from our world by villainous creatures, and now faces a lifetime of grueling labor, emotional torment, bizarre tea parties, or being used as cruel sport. The child is now in the world of the monsters, with hundreds of places to hide, countless doors to open, and evil beasts at every turn. So what happens to the child next?

The Child Escapes

Monsters may be great at catching kids but they're not always great at keeping kids. Monsters tend to recycle boxes and cages from the real world, and sometimes the metal is a bit rusty or the wood is rotten and the monster is oblivious as to what that means. A smart child will usually wait until the monster is out of sight to break free though anxious children may kick a door off its rusty hinges right away and try to make a break for it. For the curious, it's usually better to wait, though potential escapees do risk the chance of the monster deciding it better eat its catch now before it has a chance to run away.

Even if the kid is successful, he's only escaped immediate capture. He's still in Closetland (most likely) and away from his family and loved ones (most definitely).

