



BLOOD MONEY, or QUID'S SECOND DAY AT WORK

Shinyandnew, just ex-mint, unmarked, without history. In a paper roll along with nine of my brethren, all shinyandnewandinocent.

Split and separated, walking the walk into the leathery depth of someone's wallet.

Spending a night under a pillow in exchange for a milk tooth, placed there by fragrant if unfairylike hands. Sleeping the sleep. Picked up in the morning by night-warm small fingers. Traded (morally implausibly) for sweets at local corner shop, now bearing traces of sticky pancake breakfast.

Resting the rest in unthreatening darkness of cash register until ripped from it by hurried hands patterned with blood like ancient lace, red seeping from knife as though emanating from it. Dropped accidentally, rolling under counter, twisting in on myself, settling the settle. Door banging, bells meant to tinkle, jangling.

Silence, apart from a death-breath rattling somewhere, then silence, complete. Waiting the wait.

Door bells tinkling, footsteps.

"Anyone here? Jaz?"

A sudden scream, fast footsteps fleeing. Bells jangling.

Commotion, lots of it, haloed by liquid flashes of blue like searchlights. Many urgent voices overlaying, intertwining, branches of sound.

Picked out by errant torch, shining the shine. Picked up - gingerly - with long-handled tweezer. Lifted and studied through lake-blue eyes.

"Sarge? Come and look at this. Looks like we might have a perfect fingerprint."

Placed in plastic bag and sealed, wearing someone's identity in a layer of blood like a prize. Incriminating the crim.

No longer shinyandnew, no longer innocent. Walking the walk, swaggering the swagger, the beginning of my career.