

Prologue : Like Water (coming 2021)

He's washed the blood from his hands. Proper scrubbed them, all the way up to the elbows like you see doctors doing, but he keeps finding scraps under his nails and in the creases of his palms. It stinks. He's washed and washed and still he can smell it – that cold metallic smell that catches the back of the throat and excites and sickens all at once. He should feel sickened - but he doesn't. Dully, he wonders if this is the way it will always be

He's alone in the dark. The city hums outside his window and far away there is a sound of sirens. He sits waiting for the moment, for something to happen.

Across the hall, he can hear her whispering, even though it is long gone midnight. Her voice jolts. She giggles, a crackling, unnatural sound as she pantomimes out a show of love. His mother.

He wonders for a moment at the word: `mother'. Somewhere he thinks he should feel warmth and softness at the word, but she has never been warm and soft – not to him.

She tells him to call her `Aggie' so that her various beaus will think he's her boarder and not her kid. Sometimes he calls her `mum' just to piss her off and then the men look at her sharply and she laughs her plastic-shredding laugh and pulls them closer. The brittle, snake-sharp eyes spit at him across their shoulders.

Not that he cares. Not any more. He's not the little kid he once was: who climbed into the bottom of her bed in the early hours of the morning just to be near someone; who would break glasses just for a touch, even if it was a slap. But that was long ago and he feels a strange separation from her now, as if she is someone he heard about once. Some sad, fading woman who smiles and simpers and plays at love for some sense of belonging. Of worth.

Mother.

Alone in the dark, he wonders if she ever loved him. Carrying around a large lump of love for nine months certainly hadn't helped her mood – if there was any love in the conception.

Once upon a time, when he was very little and she was mellow on wine, she told him she had loved the man who made him and he had wanted to believe it. But he thought that she probably made it up. Like the name, his name. A name no-one else had. Ironic really, that it was a good name.

Mercutio. He was six when he asked why his name was different and she told him the story, lingering on the death.

"A curse on both your houses," she said, "both your houses..."

And the acid in her eyes stripped away his skin and bore holes in his skull.

But it was a good name. Mercutio, like Mercury, the metal that's not a metal, that can flow like water and change and poison. A good name.

That's one good thing his mother managed. She managed another good thing too: because of her, he met him.