

I sit in the garden shed.

Old habits.

Wrapped in a blanket, I close my eyes.

Fold into myself against the ache of loneliness

An old familiar feeling,

Recently made fully real.

When did we start drifting?

After our third miscarriage?

I had never wanted another child, two was enough, I insisted.

Which made it my fault, somehow.

In my new life alone, I can choose to do whatever I like.

Sell up and move? Where?

Downsize to a flat and go off on a world cruise?

Take serial holidays like Tom and Jill next door?

Buy a campervan and become a nomad?

Decisions.

Stick or twist.

"Give it time, Dad."

Lady in Red

It's seven weeks and three days since the final goodbyes.

Car doors slammed, half-smiling faces, half-waving hands, glad to get away.

Family and friends doing their duty, calling up.

"And how are you today?"

My son is first to miss a day.

Two days later, my daughter does not call.

Dwindling.

They have done their duty.

Busy lives to be lived.

Lucky them.

Then Phishing calls only.

I keep a count, as a punishment.

No fool like an old fool.

Fifty-two nights and days free of her caustic silence.

Everything donated to charity shops, especially her golf and tennis gear.

Purged. Free of her presence.

Although her cloying perfume lingers. Everywhere.

Two decades of sleeping apart. Warmed by old flames.

The single infidelity revisited. Repeatedly. Shamefully.

Swaying to the music. Our bodies pressing into each other.

The beginning of the end.

Time to reset. Man up. Face reality.

At last I am truly alone.

Longed for. Am I heartless?

On day twenty-three, a Saturday, no calls.

It's start of half-term.

A week goes by. *WhatsApp* messages. Incessant.

Dubai? Water slides. Camel safaris? ***Skiing?*** Dubai?

I boil with indignation. Delete my *WhatsApp* account.

Silence is golden.

I revisit the aftermath.

Like a tongue seeking the ragged edge of a lost filling.

The bench at the seventeenth hole:

"Our friend Janine. Taken suddenly, in her prime, while golfing.

Exactly as she would have wished. Always in our hearts.

And what about me?

My silent scream withheld.

Unbefitting.

Above us, the eagle hangs, on station.

High above the emptiness of their eyrie.

Both chicks fledged and long gone.

Hovering. Waiting for Spring? For renewal?

The swallows, swifts and martins fled south weeks ago,

To sojourn under blue skies and warmer, gentler climes.

Atop my neighbour's pine, clinging against the gusting breeze,

My blackbird hurls his defiant call to approaching Winter.

"I will survive! I will survive!"

His answer, not mine.

My medications lie shunned since the funeral.

Let the prostate cancer win, why not?

In the distance, our home phone rings.

Another sale's pitch? Another scam?

Leave it to the automated answering service.

Computer speaks to computer.

Time to try a ready meal.

Shepherd's Pie. Four minutes.

The light blinks on the phone cradle.

I press "play", ready to "delete".

"Hi, Kenny. Surprise, surprise.

Did you not get my *WhatsApp*?

In a taxi now, at the airport.

Hey, I still fit that dress.

With you soon, big boy."

A South African twang.

Selena from Accounts.

Selena from the Christmas night out?

The house is a tip. . . Bugger it!

My God. Selena.

The Lady in Red.

Lady in Red
