

Valentines

Her pen poised over the card. Did people send these any more? What about Snapchat or Tick Tock whatever that was? She doubted he was on those.

She just wanted a connection. In lockdown she felt adrift, lost amid a sea of people in trapped in tiny houses, thrown this way and that on a never-ending tsunami. When the children left, they had been so busy, him commuting to the city, her with her all-consuming job. Having such a big house didn't help. She thought of the early years struggle to pay the mortgage, for what? Lots of space now to keep apart in.

She wrote a short message in the card and left it on the desk, for she had a Zoom meeting to attend. It felt so cold with no coffee chat after. She made herself a hot drink and sat a while watching television.

She rinsed the cup under the tap and met her husband Alex in the hallway on her way to bed. They passed each other as silent as strangers. He had his tablet in his hand. He must be reading. Limiting his alcohol intake too, she thought. Maybe, she wouldn't know.

Settled in bed, her mind drifted back to the teenage years: the boy in school she had sent the Valentines card to in January, not knowing she was a month out. Her friend's outrage at the idea that someone sent her boyfriend an amorous card, and the names she had in her vocabulary for such a slut. She cringed in her bed every night for months in case she found out, and a blush crept up her neck every time he got on the school bus, but he never knew it was from her.

She was just drifting off to sleep when she thought of the card again. Alex worked late at the desk sometimes! She was slipping on a robe when the bedroom door opened slowly. Her husband stood there, a glass of wine in each hand. He had that lopsided smile she hadn't seen in a while on his handsome face.

"Fancy joining me?" he said. "It is Valentine's, after all."

She felt the old forgotten feeling of excitement deep within her. His eyes held a question and to answer she pulled back the quilt on what had been his side of the bed.

She was barefoot in the kitchen the next morning making coffee when he came in and brushed a kiss on the back of her neck as familiar as breathing.

He sat and waved the card in the air.

"For me?"

Her heart missed a beat, and then she smiled.

It was just as well she had not changed her habit of sending anonymous Valentine cards.

Deirdre Harvey is part of Ballinamore writers group in County Leitrim. She

enjoys writing and finds it takes her to new places every day.