

Practising

She is in her bedroom practising piano. On the wall above the piano is the picture that gets put up every year – the manger scene with Mary in a cloak of the most beautiful blue. The blue is still beautiful even though the picture has faded. In her head she is in the telephone box. It is its own claustrophobic universe. Fogged-up glass, vicious little paint flakes, a hollow metal smell mixed with piss and dead cigarettes. The clammy black receiver, mouthpiece peppered with tiny holes. She imagines her voice going into the holes, splitting into bright streamers of sound in the darkness behind them, her message exactly as she wishes it to be for a shining moment, then sucked thin into the curly cord and pulled blindly through the telegraph wires by the world's most powerful magnet that is the listener, into whose ear she tumbles muddy and squashed, the colour of plasticine all mixed together. She hits the cracked B flat above middle C. Then she is back in the box, fingers tangled in the empty cord, the pips in her ear like a lack of stars.

Janet Lees

Rogue wave

There is no clock

on this exposed stone wall

but I feel its silent

movement in me.

The pure white trick

of the hitch

in the chest, like missing

a train you didn't know you'd booked: an abrupt itch for something

someone you had no thought of wanting

until this moment.

I picture home. A postcard, bleached;

the image blurred, its edges curled.

I need to move. I need to get up now,

step away with my hands in the air

from the bird without feathers

pecking at my breastbone,

get back to the cold house

by the sea; the clock of

the tide that scours me.

Janet Lees