

Handbag

Lucy Ashe

She lays them out, like bread and wine
Consecrated on the plastic table.
As the train rocks her, rolls her lipstick

I watch her, the care, as she places
Each item. Mirror. Powder across the glass;
Dust. Crumbs. Tissues folded, the sharp

Edges ready to catch her cold, words
Stories, tears, the book pages marked with
An old receipt. Purse. Phone. Keys.

Safety netted into the fabric of her bag.
Grey and deep, thin stripes that fray
Feathered by the years she's carried

A bag for all seasons. Worn out,
Packed up. One by one she draws out
Pencil, pen, mints, wisp of silk scarf

Woven, blue green pink red, flash
Of colour like a bird of paradise
Fluttering above the grim ash-edged

Table. A man walks by, glances, a thin
Smile, not smiling, laughing at her offering.
Her sanctuary laid bare. Her hands falter.

One by one, but faster now, quick
Packing at the till, heaviest items
First. Until all that's left is the scarf.

She turns it over in her hands, fabric
Gliding, water sliding over rocks.

She looks up, sees me watching

Stuffs the scarf into the bag. Gone.

Colour fades to grey. She waits, hands

Hovering. Then lucky dip, searching,
searching