

## Lockdown Week 12: Toppled

By Polly Howell

I'd never seen a fitted carpet before.  
First thing I noticed when you opened the door  
and we kicked off school shoes to enter –  
carpet that went from wall to wall,  
corner to corner, tiptoeing through  
the rich pile under my stockinged feet.

At home we'd slide on the hall runner –  
a game, too cold for shoes off,  
a square of carpet in the small sitting room.

That was when I first knew I was different –  
the minority group in my own school class.  
You all wore your navy hats proudly  
with its dolphin emblem, yellow and green,

getting the bus home to the well-spoken north  
while I journeyed south, hat stuffed in bag  
towards the rolling r's and the dropped h's,  
fearful of taunts from the tough estates –  
a fish out of water in both camps.

Bristol's grammar school for bright kids –  
no idea how I ended up there .....  
Its founder, a philanthropist we thought,  
a good man, is what we were taught,

who loved bronze chrysanthus so much  
we threw them, en masse once a year  
high upon his prime-placed statue,  
while he looked benignly down.

And now he's been trapped and toppled,  
dragged to the river and dumped,  
Edward Colston, upside down  
for not believing that Black Lives Matter.

What else went over the side with him  
as I stand shoulder to shoulder for justice? –  
the remnants of a disempowered white girl  
born on the wrong side of town.