

Welcome Mat

by Helen Dring

For you, airplane wings said
'life has not been kind here'.
Kind, like what was missing was
tea or as if we didn't clean our windows properly.
There was that time when, stood in the kitchen
Rupert saw the fire. Flames lapping at the gate of the
alleyway, skirting the cornerstone of brick — and how you
said they didn't really mean it.

And there was the silence that set in to his
bones by half term — head shaking and
the whispers of 'I can't tell you'. You thought
that he did not belong to anyone, that the
world should raise each other's children, - but
not when he walked home in the snow
without shoes and told you that
he had lost them.

And how no-one listened. How teachers said there
was no racism in their schools, that they would notice.
How shops never said no, but suddenly seemed to run
out of toilet roll and bleach, and eggs were in
such short supply until midnight. And Rupert's
hands got used to stripping paint, his hands
cleaning wood until he finally cracked
and pushed his palm through the door.

And the funeral, bleak with only you and Pastor
John and the translator. Snow glittering around the
open mouth of a grave, looming to swallow him.
A goodbye, torn from your chest, before you walked
home to more white paint and slogans: go home. Home,

which was a world away and no more inviting than here.
Another flight, bought with scrimped pennies and open ended -
'after all', you said, 'we all belong somewhere'.

