

Stephen Robertson

Housepaint

The depths of south London, 1969.
A small Victorian terrace house
stuccoed and flat-fronted.
No electricity—
gas lighting from the thirties;
two taps; one loo
in a lean-to out the back.
On the cornices
a hundred years of whitewash.

We wire from scratch,
plumb, strip everything:
wallpaper from walls,
distemper from ceilings,
paint from woodwork,
lino from floors.
(Under the lino, newspaper
dated 1933
the year Hitler came to power).

Then we get on with our lives:
the repainting can wait.
I go to work.
Judith, artist,
models in clay or plaster,
casts in plaster or cement or resin,
draws in pencil or pen or charcoal,
paints in oils on hardboard.

—

1973. Six-year-old Emily visits.
At home, two days later,
she says to her dad
“Judith is a painter, isn’t she?”
Yes.
“Then why hasn’t she painted
the walls?”

Fair question.