Sleep-sill Canvas

By Shadab Zeest Hashmi

The window slams and swings open, nearly unhinging itself. So old, it opens to the city of Ur, the Yellow river of Li-sao, the great granary of Indus, a Badhaus, a sunken garden. Yet, I am certain it is motorized: all the sepia-hued builders of the Pyramids, all the ravaging armies of Tamburlane and Xerxes, could not clamor the way it does. It is powered by a desperate engine. It will tremor but won’t come loose.

I have been running away from a painting. The canvas, six by six, stretches and stretches.

Wishing a stronger body,
I had painted you mahogany; rich, impenetrable.

With each brush-stroke, the wood seemed more ready

A perfect world: A working form in silhouette, conical outlines of butterfly-bush, rosemary and dahlias in a garden. Not such as that of the dream; the over-grown Eden, with its hissing, and slithering, its green so deep. I paled and begged for air. But a garden where terrible mistakes like fear and doubt, avarice and arrogance, the wish to possess, to live forever, are erased with one quick spray. I painted a newly grown garden; sharp, mystic, responsive, where the gazer must bring to it constantly portions of sunshine, rain, manure.

I have been running away from myself; into magma, into ice, into gesso. The window, six feet by six feet, stretched, damp, smelling of linseed, is a composition in eel slime.

I must feed you thick coats of paint, obsess you, robust you with large doses of lightning.

I have paint enough for a life-time.