

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.