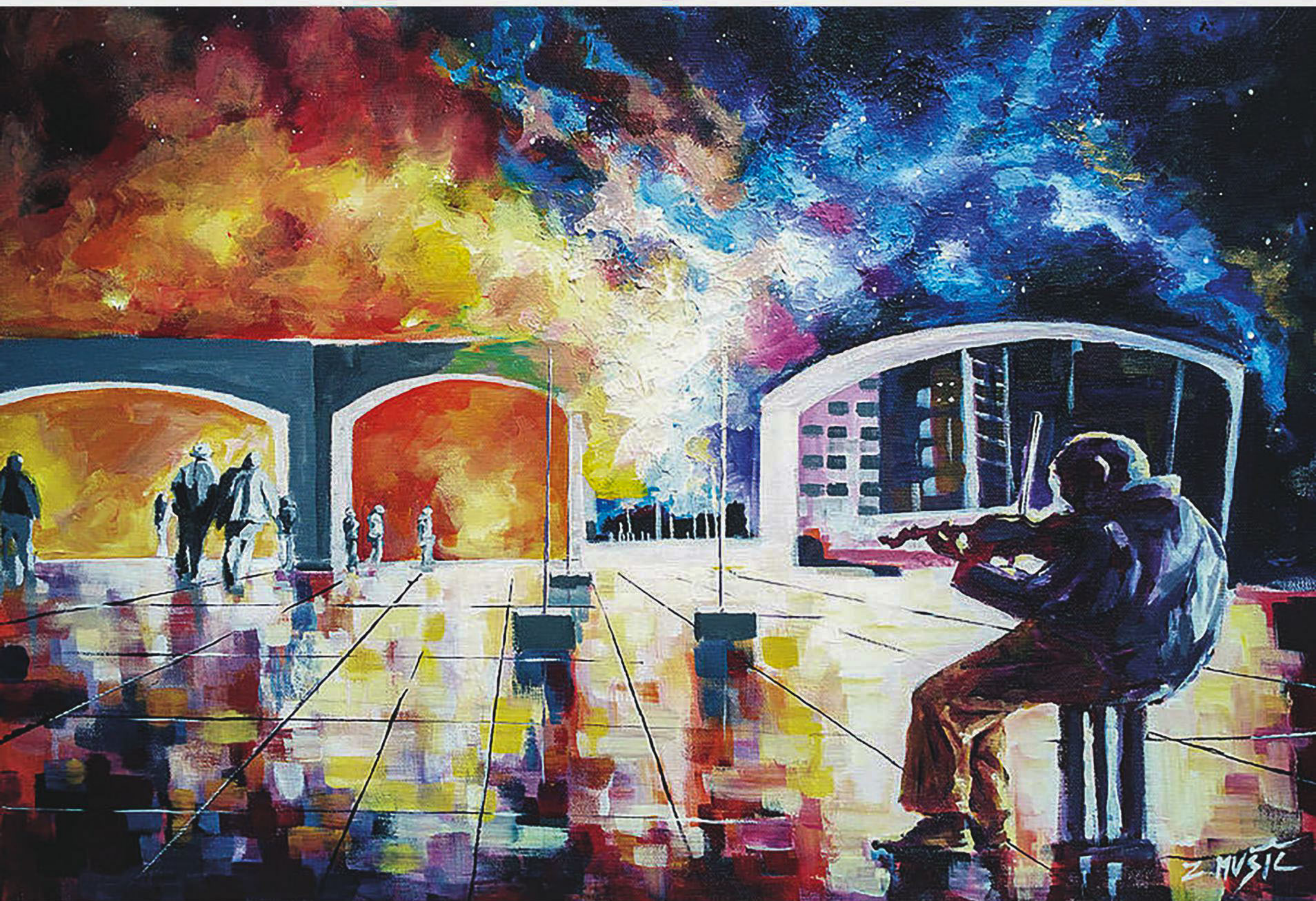




FICTION

A Serenade of Love

FAYEZA HASANAT



I
In a soggy London street he stood, shaking his dreadlocks like wind-struck branches of a willow and moving his weathered bow on the shiny strings of his broken violin. His clothes were torn, his feet, covered in mud, and his whole presence was soaked in the rhapsody of every note of Paganini's Caprice 24 that he was playing. People dropped a shilling or two and quickly moved away before his stinking body odor invaded their pristine essence.

She was a brown woman with earnest eyes and wavy hair. She wore sorrow on her lips and smelled like tuberose. The moving crowd kept moving but she stood motionless, following the rise and fall of every note with her whole being. When he finished playing, she walked into his putrid space and asked, "Will you take me home?"

"Where is home?" He asked.

"Home is where it never is, and yet it's there."

He looked at her and thought for a moment. Then he nodded his head. "No," he said, as he walked away. "You will absorb my soul."

"Please, don't leave me, please! 'Day is desire and night is sleep. There are no shadows anywhere.'" She started sobbing. Her eyes got clouded and he submerged into her overflowing tears. And then he was gone.

She woke up to a sobbing voice—her own—desperately trying to stop her Paganini dream from vanishing away.

II
The night was quiet and the tree was lonely. The creek yonder was filled with fluid emptiness. The dark sky curved downward and rested behind the silhouetted town. Light lived there—within the framework of each house. Light and sound and laughter and

Life. Then all went quiet. Quietly sleeping. Sleeping, like dead. The insomniac, being unable to dream, sat under the tree and wanted to hear what it had to say. But the tree, being lonely, was rustling with unstoppable words, and thus, inaudible. The insomniac therefore started to talk, hoping to be heard.

"I have an obsession, and I am unable to control it," said the insomniac.

"Staying awake is a good kind of obsession, for it makes you want to go numb."

"Staying awake makes me feel alive, but the obsession comes afterward—as knowledge. And I know what I don't have and I pine and my obsession grows."

"What is it that you are obsessed about?" asked the silence of the sky.

"Sleep; because only in sleep I can dream, and only in dream music plays in parallel octaves."

"Then you should absorb your obses-