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The Ghost of the Caress

Martina Jagielski, BCHS 2022

A silence sets in. There no longer exists the impatience the audience harbored throughout the evening. Instead they're curious about the next piece Yo-Yo Ma will decide to breathe life into. His bow hovers over the cello, and his first notes flow from the strings. They quiver fluidly, like the chirping of birds that are calm in their element. It is slow and oddly serene, the music creating a lull of longing masked in sadness.

The strokes of his bow produce vibrations that curl in the air, twisting and turning to make tendrils of sound that brush against my soul. His notes pull on all of the feelings I've been suppressing, tugging them from the crevices they were rotting in.

It takes form in my thoughts, the music creating images to match the emotions lazily swirling around me. Behind my eyelids, I am reminded of the things that haunt me in the light of day.

The everyday reminders of my grief emerge from the notes of his music, their effect intensified. I feel it wash over me, the vulnerability leaving a residue I'm not quite comfortable with. It's sticky, and causes the thoughts to cling to me instead of having a fleeting effect as usual. I try to brush them off, but the next string of notes flow from the stage.

They envelop me, and this time, coax out the acceptance I had previously achieved. I feel the thoughts drawing back in, the tendrils becoming wisps, their strength diminishing. It has been a long time since I experienced these emotions so thoroughly, the melody their catalyst. I feel stripped bare, the caress of the cello's notes still warm on my cheek.

The low reverberations are paired with the quiet bird calls again, and I open my eyes and start to pick up the pieces.

The scene comes bursting back. The light that illuminates the stage floods in painfully bright, drawing attention to Yo-Yo Ma. He plays the final note, and I remember what he said earlier in the evening, how music vibrates through the air and touches each one of us. I still feel the ghost of the caress on my cheek, the feel of the sticky residue and the whisper of the unnerving memories. I am forced to catch my breath, not only out of appreciation, but also because of the state the music leaves me in.

The next sound that comes is applause, and it feels like a violent disruption in the unnatural calmness I finally reached. It is abrasive compared to the melody we experienced moments before, as if the order of the sounds shouldn't come after another. This applause, loud and deserved, consumes everything else. Everything except the feeling I can't shake off, and the tendrils that used to lay dormant under my skin are brushing up against the surface, threatening to extend again.