

Right Now: The Ambivalence of Growing Up

by Grace Gavard

I recognized the pre-show playlist coming to an end, having watched countless videos of this same moment but in other cities across the world. I was feeling thankful for the gentle rush of the AC to keep me cool, despite the warmth of the bustling crowd and the excitement showing on my own cheeks. The stage lights dimmed and the venue turned a dark shade of blue while light bulbs shone on stage, warm white and flickering dramatically. Gracie Abrams sat down at the piano, stage left. The first note rang through the venue, followed by cheers, then hushed whispers. Her song, “Right Now” began, and the crowd eventually fell silent, taking in the slow start with intensity. Standing a couple of rows back from the front barricade, I turned to see fans start to hold up small pieces of paper. Pink, blue, and yellow hearts began to litter the crowd, illuminated by the phone flashlights beaming through them. My own heart warmed as I realized what was going on and remembered the project another fan had worked so hard to bring to life. Reaching into my back pocket to retrieve the paper heart she had given me while waiting in line outside the venue, I held it up against my phone’s flashlight to let the light shine through. My blue heart joined the other ones around me.

“Look at me, I feel homesick, Want my dog in the door . . .”

Looking up and out at the audience, Gracie placed her hand over her heart in appreciation. We sang along softly, the lights glimmering and the stage lights reflecting the colour blue onto our faces. I could feel every note travelling through the ground and passing by my heart before reaching my ears. Listening closely to the lyrics, I took them in for what felt like the first time.

“. . . And the light in the kitchen, from the fridge on the floor”

As Gracie intoned the subtle yet painfully sweet happenings from her childhood home, I felt as though I was listening to her describe my own experiences. I longed for the familiar comfort of my mom’s embrace, even though she was just outside, waiting for me in the car. I thought of my bed that I would settle into after my parents had driven me home. My dog would be waiting for me at the door, tail wagging furiously.

“This is somebody’s hometown. Never been here before”

In front of me, a group of three friends fell into each other for a hug. All taller than me by just a little bit, one rested her head on another’s shoulder as they swayed back and forth to the music. I watched the way their hands lifted periodically to wipe away tears as they took in the moment. I didn’t fully understand the reason for their tears, yet I felt a strong sense of connection to them. I glanced over to my friend standing beside me, tears beginning to well in my own eyes.

“Am I losing my family, Every minute I’m gone?”

As the song reached the end of the second verse, Gracie’s voice shook slightly. No one could fault her, as ours were shaking too. The friends’ hug drew tighter, almost as if there were an invisible ribbon tied around them, drawing them ever closer. The lights began flickering at a faster pace while my heartbeat sped up as well. In that moment, the focus wasn’t really on the singer as much as on the community she had created and the mutual feelings of everyone in the room.

“I’m so high but can’t look down. Left my past life on the ground”

I felt the mood change and morph into something a little more heartening. The echoes from the crowd became louder and more passionate, teary eyes fading into pridefully optimistic smiles.

Overwhelmed by the fervour of the crowd, I tried to create a mental record of this exact moment. I knew this feeling would come back to me at some point. I wasn't sure when, but I knew it would.

“Think I'm more alive somehow. I feel like myself right now”

Lifting her fingers from the keyboard, Gracie rested her head in her hands. The entire venue, taking a moment to come to terms with the end of the concert, stayed quiet for only a moment. Soon enough, the cheers were nearly deafening, leaving a ringing in my ears for days to come. Gracie stood, waving and blowing a few kisses while leaving the audience with this positive endnote, “I love you so much, Toronto. Get home safe.”

At the time of the concert, I was nearing the end of my Grade 10 year. With no concept of what I would be doing after high school, I felt content with my life as it was. My family never more than an hour's drive away, coming back from school to a home-cooked meal, and my childhood friends by my side as we walked from class to class; I was familiar with it all.

Now, as a senior in high school, I continue to look back to this moment, and my connection to the girls in front of me only grows. My blue paper heart is still taped into my journal alongside a written recollection of the day. Maybe theirs are too. I still don't know if the girls were seniors about to leave for university or maybe friends who had met after high school. I can only guess that they were around that age and experiencing similar feelings to the ones I'm feeling now. The loss of familiarity in a life that had slowly been built around ourselves. The excitement for another chapter and new possibilities.

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