

Stolen Voices

There I was, dancing around my room, screaming the lyrics of Katy Perry's newly released song, "Unconditionally" from the top of my lungs on a crisp Tuesday afternoon. As a 16-year-old, that was one of my favourite things to do when I had time to kill. Sure, I wasn't Mariah Carey or Celine Dion. Oh, but I so wanted to be. My love for singing and theatre were the only things that kept me sane throughout my childhood.

I was the happiest to find out that my boyfriend was also a singer, at the start of our relationship. A great one. He used to direct his college choir and participate in national singing competitions. Singing to each other was one of our love languages, I would say.

Katy Perry's "Unconditionally" resonated with every part of myself that was so head-over-heels in love with him. As a 16-year-old drug-addled with raging hormones mixed with the excitement of being in love for the first time, I wanted this song to be "our song".

Squealing with excitement, I called him while he was on a break from singing practice and asked, "babe, have you listened to Katy Perry's new song?"

To which he replied, "Mm... I'm not sure. Could you sing the melody for me to identify if I've heard it before?"

My heart was pounding. I sang the melody without thinking too much about the pitch or how I sounded. I wanted more than anything for him to just say that he loved the song and that the lyrics resonated with him too.

But instead, he said, "You need voice training. And no, I haven't heard that song"

My heart started pounding even harder, but not in the same way as before. My palms started to sweat, my lips went dry, my cheeks were flushed with embarrassment and tears welled up in my eyes. I was dumbfounded.

I was drowning in every single "you're not good enough" I've heard from various people throughout my 16 years of existence at that moment. For a split second, I couldn't breathe.

It's been 9 years since I last heard "Unconditionally". And it's been 9 years since I last sang. I went from a girl who would sing in the shower every single time, to a girl who has now forgotten what her singing sounds like. It was not only my childish innocence I lost that day, but I also lost my voice.

"You never forget your first love", they say. But they fail to mention that sometimes, it's not because of how significant that relationship was, but because of how hard it breaks you.