

Alone

It's hard to plan your life around the end of the world. It's hard to think about where to apply for university when every summer holiday you have a bag in the back of your parents car with clothes, your birth certificate, and a few precious things you wouldn't want to lose if your house burns down, because the city you live in is built at the base of a mountain with bush so dry people call it a volcano. It's hard to concentrate on your maths homework – four pages from the assigned textbook – when, in the room next door, your grandad and your mum are having an argument about whether or not the climate is changing, when you know from the report you had to write for your environmental sciences class that the data that is being reported on the news playing on tv in your living room, was first predicted in 1896. How are you meant to imagine a future when you're told you are too young to have an opinion by everyone from your uncles at family christmas to the government when you skip class to protest their lack of action.

You have dreams about the future – hopes. But they're not the same as the ones your parents had for themselves. They were ready to inherit the planet. You are hoping there will be something left when they're gone.

You read science fiction where cities are solar powered, and every building is covered in hanging gardens. You spend your free time investigating ways that, if you could afford your own land, you might live small – tiny homes and eco homes and old buses converted into homes.

And all the while your parents friends are complaining about the tenants in the third house that they let moving out because they can't afford the rent being raised.

A garden would be nice. Perhaps when you move out of your parent's home, you'll join a community garden. Everyone will take what they can use, and the rest will go to a food bank.

But first you have algebra equations to balance.

And your younger brother is knocking on your door. You've been watching him go through everything that you did when you learnt about what is happening to the world – the hurt, the hope, the determination to do something. He is nine years old and ready to save the world, if only someone would show him where to start.

You take him to the rallies and help him paint signs. *There is no planet B! Climate Action Now! Save the children...*

You can't keep this up.

Your school brought in someone to talk about climate anxiety. They gave you their top tips. They said *focus on what you can control* but your dad won't cut meat from the family menu even once a week and the marches you attend make you more and more frantic. You should have invited more people. You should be volunteering like that girl in the high-vis vest. You should be speaking but the second you touch the microphone you're sure that your knees would buckle; so you hold your brother's hand and the sign you made and let the whole thing wash over you, listening to other people's words and hoping the world hears you.

Avoid the news. Don't doom scroll, but the algorithm knows you better than you know yourself. Your friend came out last week after the videos on her phone, chosen for her by the hyperintelligent programming over months of consumption, showed her that she was gay.

For you it curates activism videos: people yelling at you to recycle, to live closer to the land, to never buy from this company or support that one. If your attempts at sustainability don't look like theirs then your phone will be flooded with hate.

Take time for yourself. You would love to. But you live in a house with four other people and no back yard. And you still haven't finished the first page of this homework. When did maths get this hard?

The only helpful tip that they gave you – the one that quiets your mind is this: *you are not alone.*

You breath out and think it again.

You are not alone. Look around you.

Your brother is standing in your bedroom door; you are at a protest with thousands of other students and parents and grandparents; you're in a classroom of other grade twelves who came to an information session on climate anxiety, voluntarily.

You close your textbook and greet your brother. Dinner is on the table. They've turned off the news. The fighting has stopped.

Coming, you tell him.

You squeeze his hand, so he knows too. *You are not alone.*