

TUNUNDRA VALLEY

Our annual staff conference was the first thing to go. Then it was my trip to Hobart. The kids' music performances. Eating out. Going to the shops. The dominoes came crashing down, taking the life that I had made with them. All that time. The long hours meeting with clients. The late nights up editing and revising. For what? Everything that I had worked for, the virus took away.

The schools were closed, and the office moved online. With kids in tow, I withdrew from the city. He headed to our block in the valley. Far enough to feel a world away, close enough to have essentials delivered when we got really desperate. We had space and fresh air. And we fought. Over maths lessons, and monopoly. Over which movie to watch and who ate the last piece of slice. Our fear and uncertainty came out as anger. But with time came calmness. Patience. Trust. We began to enjoy spending time together. Slowly we fell into a new rhythm.

I am still be up early but let them sleep. I put the kettle on the stove, rekindle the fire and let the chickens out of their house. As they stick their heads cautiously out at the door, I breathe the crisp still air. I sit with my tea by the fire and wait for the children to stir. I have stopped pushing them to do the work from school. Instead we read together, study the birds that we see outside and write about things that actually interest them.

And we garden together. Gardening was never my thing, that was Andrew's department. His dream to buy this place in fact, with his talk of orchards and roaming geese. Of chickens and bees. But he's been gone nearly 2 years, and we are here without him. My thumbs were greened through necessity. Our time in the garden connects us with this place, with each other, and with him.

But I sit up most nights with thoughts racing through my head. As the fire burns down, I question myself and the decisions that I've made. Am I doing the right thing? Will the children grow to despise me? The truth is that the kids have long forgotten about words like lockdown and social distancing. They don't ask about school or violin lessons. They just know that they have their mother back. We spend our days together. Our life is simple.

But one day I will have to tell them everything. About how I lost my job because I stopped turning up to online meetings. How I removed them from that school which I hated. And how lockdown ended, almost 12 months ago. The schools are all open, and the cafes too. I will tell them one day. But as I watch them play in the orchard I think that it can wait another day at least.