

My brother turned 30 the other day and I feel very small and helpless. My brother turned 30 and we had cake and played hide and seek and remembered the songs we invented before we realised we were supposed to make money and we made play-dough figures of dinosaurs and communism and the electric chair. We were all there; my big brothers and my little brother and my little sister and my husband. We were the old gang with our swollen bellies and breasts and glasses and beards. Together, in my parents' big house on our big land with our walk-in larder and our fields of grass and geese and our widescreen TVs showing the cartoons we used to sneakily watch when our parents were out and I could forget the guilt of opulence. I could forget that somewhere someone was being shot or chased or starved or jailed or judged or frightened and frightened. I could be The Family. I could be in that safe world. I could be the nine-year-old who tricks her younger brother into drinking brown paint thinking it was chocolate milk. I could be the nine-year-old pretending to be constipated because she hasn't done her homework and is willing to be nicknamed 'bung' by her brothers if it means not going into school. I could be the nine-year-old on the playground trading a Bulbasaur for a Gyarados shiny, playing pirates on the upturned sofas, diving into the ocean off the coast of Cape Cod, but my brother turned 30 the other day.

My brother turned 30 and the Tories are in power and they're gunning for more as they sell the NHS and raise tuition and lower taxes and let their friends slip through the loops and tell us greed is good and envy is an economic aphrodisiac and I am only worth the money in my pocket and no one gets a free ride and my brother is there and he votes for the conservatives and works at a private school and is politically incorrect and there are pigs that are eating each other and chickens that are shitting on each other's heads and dogs being turned inside out while they're still alive and sometimes I find myself wishing that everyone would die that every human being would be wiped out because they are not worth all this and then I remember that Syrian hamsters kill other Syrian hamsters if they stray on to their territory and they eat their own babies and our cat catches mice just to fuck with them and even plants are fighting for space and for water and food and oxygen and they will spread and fight and drain the land away from their competitors and I begin to lose hope that anything can change, that the world isn't just inherently selfish and desperate for more and that life isn't just about a genetic code and that my brother will never be young again. I will never be a child again. All things will come to an end. My mum will die. And my dad. And my brothers. And me.

And I can get stuck here - in this nihilistic, not even original, funk. Waiting for us all to die. Because how do you get out of it? There is nothing I have said here that doesn't stay true, nothing that can ever be undone, nothing that can be ignored. I guess. I mean, I guess you just find the other things that can be true, as well, on top. Like moments of kindness and beauty and love and joy and laughter and the knowledge that I have changed since I was a child, that there are people who are changing, that there are people who work tirelessly for change and keep going, never stopping, that there are collective celebrations of everything and communities that cherish one another. That even though I have moments of utter hopelessness, where I acknowledge my own selfishness as uncontrollable and irresistible, where I try to imagine the unimaginable suffering experienced by people and animals at our own hands while I sit in comparable luxury, I realise that I just have to keep going, keep trying, pushing that door open with as much strength as the forces that are keeping it closed, even if that means just keeping it in the same place. There are people who've been pushing a lot longer and harder than I have.

My brother turned 30 the other day, so we showed him that we loved him.