

# Why I'm ripping up my life... and starting over

Katie Glass was engaged, trying for a baby and on the cusp of a TV career. Then came Covid, and the cracks in her life began to appear

By Katie Glass 1 November 2020 2021 • 7:00am



CREDIT: Montana Lowery.

Before the pandemic started, I was living a different life. My fiancé (two years engaged, five of dating), our sweet Labradoodle (Stringerbelle) and I were happily squashed into a London flat, lazily planning our wedding and keenly trying to get me pregnant. Our lives buzzed around the city. My fiancé went off to work in his start-up's office, while I ran around doing interviews. In the evenings we'd meet in Soho for drinks or long boozy dinners (which he liked) or trips to the theatre (which I did). Then we'd go home and snuggle up in bed with Stringerbelle (who, yes, we had named after our favourite character in our favourite TV show, *The Wire*).

I'd lie next to my fiancé googling Vivienne Westwood wedding dresses and fantasising about walking down the aisle, accompanied by our dog as a ring bearer and my three gay best friends as my bridesmaids, to the sound of Fleetwood Mac's *You Make Loving Fun*. Then, I imagined, we would drive off on honeymoon in our Type 2 VW campervan. Having tried to get pregnant for a year, I'd started seeing a fertility doctor and was taking medication to kick-start ovulation.

Meanwhile, my work was getting more exciting, expanding beyond print journalism into broadcasting: having made my first documentary for Radio 4, producers were interested in optioning my articles for telly.

Then the world changed, and all my plans smashed. Perhaps if I'd been more honest back then, I would have seen that my 'perfect' life was really like a kintsugi bowl: I had painted over the cracks in gold. When Covid came, suddenly all its flaws shone.

My relationship was the first thing to go. As lockdown started, I'd smugly read articles predicting a huge rise in divorces and breakups. 'That could never happen to us!' I thought. How wrong I was.

At first, lockdown seemed like a gift. Before, we worked long hours and I was travelled constantly. Now we could be together... So I was surprised when he suggested we would spend lockdown at his parents' home. I worried about leaving London and people who needed me. Still, he and Stringerbelle were my family, so I went.

For a while it worked. We ate long lunches, walked our dog in the fields by the house, sat down for dinner with his family, then snuck off to drink wine under the stars behind his parents' garage. We dreamt up plans together from his teenage bed: we should have a shotgun wedding! (We tried but we were too late.) We should sell my Dalston flat and buy something near his family! The next day, I called the estate agent... I made bread, cooked meals and drove around local shops buying groceries.

At first it was fun playing at being a housewife. But like all games, it got lonely playing alone. I began to worry I was carving out a role for myself I didn't really want. Meanwhile, as radio and TV production ground to a halt, my work projects started to get canned. I panicked I was losing myself to housework. Was this how the next 20 years of my life was going to look?

Amid so much uncertainty (and not to mention a pandemic), without my friends I became lonely, then anxious. In a family home that wasn't my own, I started to feel isolated. The laughter my fiancé and I used to share seemed to be long lost, replaced instead by a feeling that everything I did had begun to annoy him: how I fidgeted at night, how I dressed, how I parked the van. Some days, I did not want to get out of bed. In the end we had a row and I made a decision to leave. I drove the VW back to my London flat. I spent a week sleeping on the sofa, stopped brushing my hair, and ordered Uber Eats while watching old episodes of The Office.

When the phone rang I thought it might be my fiancé. Instead, it was the estate agent. Someone had made an offer on my flat. 'I can't accept it. My life is falling apart,' I told him. He sounded embarrassed. I had no shame left.

At the height of summer lockdown, I lay on the wooden floor of the sitting room drinking red wine and eating orange Calippos, watching my iPhone light up and ignoring it. Sometimes I flicked through Instagram pictures friends had posted of their chubby babies and bearded husbands. At 39, I was single again.

I didn't call my mother – we have been estranged for years and I was frightened she'd tell me this is all my fault. I didn't call my female friends because I felt too embarrassed to tell them the truth. Instead, I rang my bridesmaids (my family made of glitter and steel) and told them the wedding was off. They took the news like I was telling them something they already knew. 'I never liked him anyway,' one said. It would have helped if he had mentioned it.

I stopped taking my fertility pills, and found myself remembering the day I went to the doctor and sat all alone in his office sobbing. Perhaps now I was no more alone than when I was in that relationship? I decided to keep the fertility pills, just in case. For a fortnight, I allowed myself to

wallow. I considered calling my fiancé and begging him to have me back, but I no longer believed in us.

Lockdown dragged in the city. The bars and karaoke booths I'd usually escape to were all shut; the galleries and theatres desolate. Although I had my bridesmaids on speedial, I couldn't avoid being stuck alone in the flat. So I'd spend long afternoons reading. I attended online gigs and Zoom theatre with friends, and we organised opera nights – watching Madame Butterfly via the Houseparty app.

I reverted to how I lived when I was single: writing all night, and dancing around to music I love: Dolly Parton by day, Leonard Cohen after dark.

I sat down at my desk and banged out 40,000 words of a book. It turned out there were lots of extra hours in the day now I was no longer caught up in domesticity. I'd fall asleep taking up the bed in a star shape, fidgeting as much as I liked. I started to enjoy being by myself.

Sometimes I'd chat on the phone with friends. The ones in the country sounded happiest – sitting in their gardens and swimming in the sea. I remembered how once I'd had a dream about living in the country and writing a book.

Now, on the news, Covid numbers are rising. I feel like my little world is imploding and I remember something my (late) dad once said to me when I was going through a teenage break-up and told him I wanted to kill myself. 'You may as well run down the road naked, then.' His point was that when you have nothing to lose, you should do the things you are afraid of.

I call the estate agent back. 'I'll take the offer,' I tell him.

It is time to try a new life. Maybe it'll be in a farmhouse in Wales, where I'll get my own flock of alpacas or micropigs. Maybe I'll be a novelist who makes jam. Or I'll move to a lighthouse and stage immersive-theatre productions and meet a hot farmer. If this is the end of the world, I may as well try something...

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