



Yikes! Will I end up right back where I started?

In her quest to find a new future, Katie takes a step back in time

DAYS AFTER THE VW camper van dies, a friendly mechanic offers me a Honda CR-V for £500. 'I'll take it!' I say. Then google what it is. It's not quite the Porsche I hoped to get out of my midlife crisis but it does have a fridge in the dashboard. 'For beers,' the mechanic suggests.

I get back on the road. Six viewings a day. I see every house in Somerset I can afford. None fits. I am a single square peg looking at round family homes.

Now everyone is escaping the city. At viewings, I find families queuing outside in cars packed with bored dogs and sulky kids. I start machine-gunning offers out of sheer desperation. To my relief they all get rejected.

At night, I dream of the place in the countryside where I was happiest. As a small child, I grew up in rural Wales, among crashing rivers and ragged mountains – somewhere far wilder than Somerset's fashionable valleys, which have started to look almost suburban to me. I decide to hunt further afield – into Gloucestershire, the New Forest, Wales.

Then one night on Rightmove, I see it. A granite mill-house, perched on a craggy river. Melin Y Graig – Rock Mill. The house I grew up in.

This house is dark magic for me.

After my mum and stepdad first met, we lived there like a joyful cross between *The Good Life* and *The Waltons* (although I didn't know those references then). It was after we left that they split up and then my relationship with my mother ruptured so profoundly that now we barely speak. I know I have to go and see it.

I tell my friend Tanya I'm going to see my old family home. 'You can't

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go alone,' she insists, coming all the way from her home near Penzance to accompany me. We drive to Wales in shifts – taking turns at the wheel, eating Haribo and sharing gossip.

As we pull up, my cheeks flush red. The house is smaller than I remember it. Now I can see over the gate. It no longer looks like the castle it did when I was six. The lakes I remember have become ponds.

But the rest is the same as my dreams: the garden where I built mud pies and fed goats, the river-

bank where the ducks lived, the kitchen where my mum boiled vats of beetroot to dye wool, the living room where my stepdad and I built fires, the drive where we climbed into my mum's Mini and headed off to explore the mountains.

I sit at the window overlooking the river and close my eyes. The sound of water crashing over rocks hasn't changed in 30 years. I feel tears prick. I worry I've come back looking for a family. Then again, I was bored playing sad families with my ex. What I loved most about this home was all the fun we had in it. But I don't want to go back to an old life, I want to keep moving forward and make something new.

Right then, I know what I want: a home as solid as stone, somewhere as wild as I feel, with space to make exciting things happen in it. A house I can stuff with friends and Tinder dates, where I can hold parties and writing retreats and fill the garden with hens and pigs... Tanya interrupts my thoughts. 'If you want to live in the middle of nowhere,' she says, 'why don't you do it down the road from me?'

We drive back to Cornwall and that week, on my first viewing there, I see it – the house where I am going to start my new life. It is perfect.