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Why I hate living in the countryside by Ioana Miller

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I recall clearly how the nightmare started . Martin, my husband, sat in the car, and announced : « I have a surprise. » He then proceeded to drive three hours from our flat in Notting Hill to Herefordshire. Rolling hills, sheep, picturesque farmhouses : Herefordshire's Golden Valley is a bucolic vision. Martin stopped the car at the top of a drive : « This, » he announced, « is Great Brampton House . » At the end of the drive stood a large Regency residence. The sun gilded its charming, if slightly run-down façade ; « It's beautiful ! » I trilled, enchanted ; « I was hoping you'd say that, » Martin had a twinkle in his eye : « I've just bought it. »

He really had. Martin is – among other things – an antique dealer, a hotelier and a distiller, and he enthused about the great deal he'd struck, the vision he had (we'd renovate the house, turn it into a hotel and build a 7,000sq ft contemporary gallery), and most of all about the prospect of our moving to the countryside to enjoy a quieter, more meaningful and healthier life. I, the city girl, would find happiness in Arcadia.

Two years on, Martin has realised his dream. But I've realised that living in the country is like forcing myself to take a nine year-old to Alton Towers : very nice in theory but in practice – get me out of here !

I am surrounded by sheep, cows and chickens, but for human contact I have to learn Polish to chat to the workmen, drive half an hour to our nearest neighbour, or wait until the vet comes to check the hens. The cinema is seven miles away. When I sought a bit of culture, a neighbour suggested that I go to Hereford cattle market on Wednesdays. The notable exception is of course the Hay Festival, although that comes but once a year.

From www.telegraph.co.uk

Vocabulary :

- to recall : to remember
- a nightmare : a bad dream
- a prospect : an anticipation
- Alton Towers : amusement park
- to surround : to encircle
- to seek, sought, sought : to look for

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Gary and Irene are on an isolated island in Alaska where a cabin is being built.

« It's really small », Irene said.

« Yeah », he said. « Nothing wasteful. Just a cabin. Only what we need. »

« I think we need more. If you want me to live out here, actually live out here, we need space for a bed, a kitchen, a bathroom, and maybe just a little bit of space to walk around. Somewhere to sit»

« Sixteen by twelve is actually pretty big », Gary said. « I think it's fine as it is »

« Where does the bathroom go ? »

« We'll use an outhouse. »

« An outhouse ? »

They stood there in silence for a while.

« What about a fireplace ? », Irene finally asked. « Will there be a fireplace ? »

« That's tough », Gary said. « Maybe one of those freestanding ones. We could add that. »

Irene could see, in one terrible moment, that they would really live out here. The cabin would not go together right. It would not have what they needed. But they would live in it anyway. She could see that with absolute clarity . And though she wanted to tell Gary to live out here on his own, she knew she couldn't do that, because it was the excuse he was looking for. He'd leave her forever, and it was not okay for her to be left again. That would not happen again in her life.

« What about water ? », she asked.

« I'll rig a pump from the lake. »

« Will we have electricity ? »

« It'll be a hand pump », he said. » I'll have to track one down. »

« I meant for lights. »

« We'll use lanterns. »

« And the stove ? »

« Propane. I'll get a two- or three-burner. »

« And the roof ? »

« Not sure about the roof yet. Geez, Irene ! I've only just started. The floor is working out, isn't it ? All the rest will follow. » He put his arm around her for a moment, pulled her in closer, a couple tugs of reassurance.

« Okay », she said. « I think I need to go back. My head really hurts. I need to lie down. »

From David Vann, *Caribou Island*, 2011.

Vocabulary :

- *tough* : difficult

- *on his own* : alone

- *a stove* : a cooker