

How lockdown helped get over a break

Instead of running away, Katreen Hardt, 53, was forced to deal with her emotions at home

In the midst of the pandemic, on 10 July, my partner Alexander* showed up at my door, tears spilling down his cheeks. Thinking the unspeakable had happened, I put my arms around him and asked what was wrong. 'I have to break up with you,' he sobbed. I was stunned. 'But... Why?' I managed to say.

For two hours, we sat on my bed while he cried uncontrollably that his leaving had nothing to do with me.

I was devastated and, for weeks, I was an emotional wreck, struggling to make sense of how our 18-month relationship had come to such an abrupt end.

My first thought was to run away, but due to the pandemic, I couldn't go on holiday as most European countries required a 14-day quarantine period.

Nor could I fly to the US to visit my family, as I didn't want to take the chance of infecting anyone. So I had no other choice but to stay at home, go on long

walks and have a glass (or three) of wine come nightfall – replaying the break-up, over and over again, in my mind.

Becoming a couple

Alexander and I met at a Christmas ball in December 2018. At the time, I was single, having dated on and off for seven years, while he'd recently left his wife after a 10-year marriage.

I found him handsome with more-pepper-than-salt hair, a short beard, and sparkling, grey-green eyes. A month after dating, we became a couple.

Those first six months, we travelled to Rome and San Francisco, where he met my family, and we did a two-week whirlwind tour of California in a rented black Ford Mustang.

'You really inspire me,' he told me during one of our trips. I always ate healthily and ran 5k every day, so I started cooking him vegan meals, hoping to wean him off his sugar habit, and encouraged him to regularly work out.

We even celebrated our November birthdays together at a spa.

Then, in March 2020, the coronavirus crisis hit. At the same time, Alexander moved back into the house he once shared with his wife. It was run

down and devoid of nice furniture. 'I don't feel comfortable here,' I admitted to him, being honest. I refused to sleep there, let alone have sex inside those four walls. Our relationship continued and I thought we were both happy. But when, in late June, I admitted I loved him, he couldn't reciprocate. I was hurt, but shrugged it off. 'Maybe he just needs more time,' I reasoned.

But two weeks on, Alexander ended things with me. The fact that he cried non-stop only showed me how conflicted he was.

He was unable to give me a significant reason for breaking up with me (there was no other woman, nor had we had a fight), and I was confused when he showered me with compliments, declaring 2019 to have been the best year of his life. 'Maybe we met at the wrong time,' he said.

While lockdown prevented me from distracting myself from my pain with fun nights out, I joined the dating app Bumble, and through a special feature on the app, saw that within a few hours, 50 men had swiped me to

'He declared it had been the best year of his life'

WORDS: KATREEN HARDT. MAIN PHOTO: KAI BUCK. *NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED



Together, we visited my family in the US



On our whirlwind tour of California

me
-up



I'm focussing on my own personal development now



We had fun in Rome as a couple

the right, hoping to make my acquaintance.

Rather than feel flattered, I was just anxious, so I deleted it. I talked to friends and confided in family. I kept a journal and, at one point, I even considered taking anti-depressants – but after one pill, and one bad reaction, I thought better.

Hearts and flowers

Finally, I met with a therapist, who helped me to understand why Alexander and I weren't a good fit. She described me as someone who was all hearts and flowers, full of love and positivity, while he was a dark cloud, inherently sad. She wasn't

implying that one was better than the other, but said he'd probably choose another dark cloud for his next partner.

'He may also have been intimidated by how independent you are and was unsure of his role in the relationship,' she explained. It all made sense to me and helped me accept the break-up.

I also did yoga, meditated, read books by Brené Brown on the power of vulnerability, and took time to self-reflect, as well as work hard to figure out

what it was that had attracted me to Alexander in the first place. Sure, he was good-looking and had a successful career – but, if truth be told, that was about it. He'd once joked to me how difficult it was for him to express his feelings. That had been a huge warning sign I failed to heed.

So what made me willingly enter into a relationship with a man who was emotionally unavailable?

I thought if I could show him what a loving relationship looked like, he'd embrace what I had to offer and change his ways. But he didn't. He couldn't. It wasn't in his nature. By extracting the lessons I'd learnt from our relationship, I was able to discover what qualities are important to me in a partner and what qualities it would be best to steer clear of in the future.

Gaining clarity

And I had lockdown to thank for helping me gain such clarity. Whereas, usually, I'd have fled somewhere after a break-up, lockdown meant I had to face everything head on and, as a result, I got over my ex a lot quicker. When I found out last December that Alexander had changed his online social-media status to 'in a relationship' and then requested to follow me on Facebook less than 24 hours later, I laughed. It only reinforced what I'd already suspected: he'll never take the time to work on himself. So I blocked him.

It's easy to get caught up in the pain of rejection and turn to alcohol, or a new love, in order to cope. But, for me, focussing on my own personal development, and not playing the victim card during one of the toughest years to date,

was what ultimately got me through. My ex-boyfriend and I weren't meant to be – and that's OK. Next time, I'll be smarter.

'I had failed to heed a huge warning sign'