



UNDOMESTIC GODDESS

Serving up Life, Without the Sugar Coating

RICHES TO RAGS

Would you take a 50% pay cut to do something you love? Kia Abdullah did. Here she explains why

It's hard not to feel special walking down the street in a £300 Armani suit with Hugo Boss on your arm and Osprey draped around your shoulder. I hate to admit it but I feel empowered as I stride towards Fenchurch Street to my high-flying job at a global consultancy firm.

After three years as a freelance writer, it feels good to be in the second tax bracket (with plenty of legroom to boot). I am surprisingly comfortable among the Oxbridge hordes with their PwC internships, Ralph Lauren jumpers and summer vacations aloft daddy's yacht. The two weeks of training in Chicago – offered to every ambitious new consultant – pass in a haze of partying, privilege and self-congratulation. I feel good. I'm finally fulfilling my earning potential and am back within reach of the property ladder.

Ever since I sold half my dream home to my ex a year ago, I have felt as though I've taken a step back – but here I am, taking two steps forward. I feel positive, happy, worthy. My new corporate wardrobe seems to afford me a level of authority my 5'2" frame has rarely commanded. I feel like somebody.

Five weeks after joining the company, I begin my first project – and there ends the honeymoon. There comes the endless Excel analysis, the acronyms that constitute an entire encyclopaedia, the impenetrable consultant-speak and the complete immersion into City life.

I tell myself that it's okay, that it's what I signed up for, that the pay cheque is worth it. But every day that I wake up and put on my shiny high heels and journey to the pristine glass offices, I feel more and more like a droid. The mindless work, the endless hours and the grey suits that

seem to colour everything in my life. I haven't seen my family in the six weeks since I started. I wake up, go to work, come home, shower, eat and sleep – and then I do it again and again and again. I apply for the share purchase scheme and private health insurance and a corporate Amex card. I take my laptop everywhere. I am always online, always available, always connected – and yet I have never felt so disconnected.

My friends tell me to stop being dramatic; that a

little Excel analysis never hurt anyone. It might have been true had this been my first job out of university. If I hadn't spent the last three years doing work I loved, perhaps I wouldn't have felt so empty doing work I hated.

I started my third book to temper the feelings of disillusionment, but City life demanded all my attention and energy – there was no room for passion or personality. And so I came upon the million dollar question: do I want to be poor and happy or rich and miserable?

It's a question many don't have the luxury of choosing an answer to. Those with families and mortgages and responsibilities can't give up their jobs so easily. Perhaps doing something you hate every day for the people you love is a worthy pursuit but it's one I find hard to accept. Despite being a pessimist, I believe in alternatives, in possibilities.

It was a week later, when J called me up and offered me a full-time position at Asian Woman

magazine, that I had to put my money where my mouth was – 50% of my money. I knew I would love the job but could I live with myself for giving up a position thousands of people vie for every year? I had had a taste of the other side – could I really give up my expensive suits and shoes and return to a simpler life? I took a step back and re-assessed my priorities. I didn't need to buy a property; I just wanted one. Conflating the two is a modern malaise that affects us all. How much of what we work for do we really need? If we cut

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out all the superficial desires bred into us by our consumerist culture, most of us could live on far less than what we do. With that in mind, I took the leap and quit my job. Naturally, friends and family were shocked and dismayed.

“I hate my job too,” was a common sentiment. It seemed that people who hated their jobs couldn't understand why I quit, but those who loved their work understood perfectly. You see, nothing compares to doing what you love every day. It sounds trite but now I wake up and I have a sense of purpose. I'm interested and fulfilled by what I do. I may not be able to afford Armani suits or Osprey accessories anymore, but none of that matters because I'm happy.

There is a poster on the London underground that reads ‘If you don't like your life you can change it’. I smile every time I see it because it's true. I did it. Anyone can. After all, as billionaire businessman Larry Ellison once said, I don't know of any place or any time where there aren't great possibilities.