

Life in the Lyme Light

Former chef to Prime Ministers and popstars, Anthony is musing over some alternative resolutions while Eleanor is pondering the class system running rife through her wormery

Eleanor:

This year I want to begin a journey on the toadstool-strewn path to sustainability, to live in harmony with nature rather than in conflict with it. I want to feel the organic soil under my fingernails and my bare feet and in between my teeth. I seek the advice of Ashley, an organic farmer at Trill Farm who supplies us with outstanding salad leaves and vegetables. "How did you get yourself certified as organic?" I ask. "Did you have to submit a stool sample?"

"It is the land that is certified as organic, not the farmers," he patiently explains. I have much to learn, it would seem.

I commenced my organic lifestyle with a wormery, that is to say several buckets with sieve-like bottoms stacked one on top of the other; each is filled with worms and rotting kitchen waste. Worms may have a reputation for being a bit simple, but I have discovered that they are in fact very complex and sensitive creatures. They love newspapers, but don't like citrus fruit or anything that sprouts and I find they compost best to Mozart. As they get lethargic in cold weather, and to help boost productivity, I have brought them into the house to see if I can't cheer them up with a couple of episodes of *Downton Abbey*.



As we sit together in front of the television, I wonder if the tiers within the wormery operate like the social tiers explored in *Downton Abbey*. Are the worms in the bottom tier subordinate to those in the top tier? Are they trapped by the system? Sure, the worms can move up and down, but I bet it's rare. In a moment of madness I seize this class dilemma by the horns and swap the bottom tier of the wormery for the top tier and make a mental note to feed them only *The Guardian* from now on – thus no doubt creating anarchy! □

Read more about Anthony and Eleanor's life in Lyme Regis at teaanddiningroom.com

Anthony:

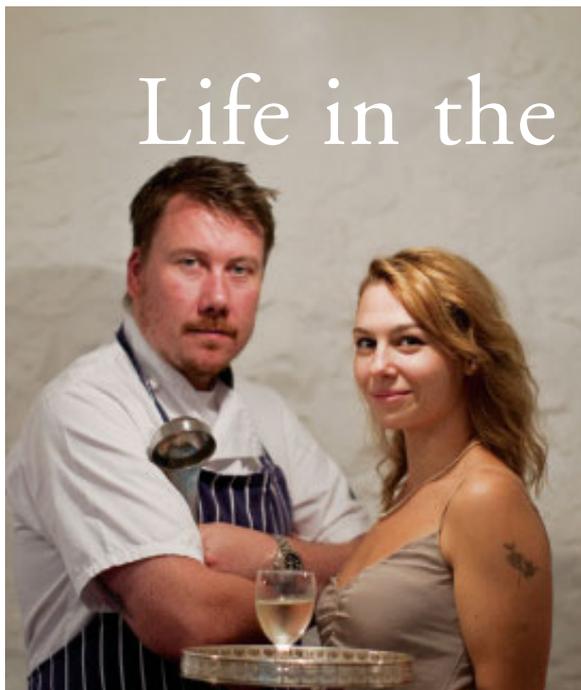
January. The worst weather. The emptiest wallets. And there's nothing good on the telly to distract you from your frostbitten toes rattling round in the bottom of your boots. It's funny how the month with the shortest days seems to take the longest to pass. As if it wasn't bad enough we put a cherry on top of it all by crippling ourselves with over-enthusiastic New Year's resolutions. Whose great idea was that? Well, apparently it was a chap called Janus in 153 BC, a mythical two-faced Roman god who could look into both the past and the future and so became the symbol of resolution. Easy for him, no chocolates to give up, no gyms to visit, no computer games to cut back on. The distillation of this tradition over 2,000 years has left us with 'Do more of this' or 'Do less of that'. Well, living with Eleanor, I get more than my fair share of that all year round so this year I might try some alternative resolutions such as:

- Eat more fried food
- Eat fewer greens
- Do less housework
- Drink more Pery
- Ring my parents less
- Watch more television
- Read fewer books
- Talk more
- Listen less



Always, always put empty milk cartons back in the fridge. On second thoughts, I'll probably be looking for a new home if I stick to this lot. Though I might keep the last one, just for fun...

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Former chef to Prime Ministers and popstars, Anthony seduced his girlfriend Eleanor with his cooking, but on Valentine's Day he is busy cooking romantic dinners for other women

Anthony:

Is that the sweet smell of romance in the air or have I stepped in something whilst on the way to buy a dusty Valentine's Day card and a bunch of wilted carnations from the local garage? I'm joking, of course – I would never make that mistake again!

And why would I, living, after all, in a place as romantic as Lyme Regis? There are deserted beaches (in February), cosy hotels, romantic restaurants and long walks along the undercliff a-plenty. The last one is not a euphemism.

We've also got the Cobb. And thanks to local author John Fowles' romantic novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the Cobb has become a very romantic thing. It's merely a matter of time before some enterprising young soul enters BBC's *Dragons' Den* and asks for twenty grand to set up a stall on the harbour renting black hooded capes for the ladies and fake moustaches for the gentlemen by the hour; although in the interests of political correctness they may not be able to insist that only the gentlemen wear the moustaches.

Personally, I've always fallen back on skills and materials at hand. I once made Eleanor a five kilo chocolate sculpture coated in edible 24-carat gold leaf, filled with chocolate truffles. Overkill? Well it seemed like a good idea at the time. Romance and frivolity seem to go hand in hand, but what to do when the energy that frivolity needs has declined?

A quick look at the entertainment listings for Lyme show that on Valentine's weekend the town's museum is hosting a talk on how to find, identify and handle fossils. And with 45% of the town's population being retired, that sounds like a very practical sort of romantic day out to me. □

13 February: *Know Your Fossils: Talk by Paddy Howe and Chris Andrew 2.30pm, Lyme Regis Museum, Bridge Street, 01297 443370*

Read more about Anthony and Eleanor's life in Lyme Regis at teaanddiningroom.com

Eleanor:

As is usual when Valentine's Day arrives, I get out my card, PVA glue, macaroni and glitter and begin to express my deepest affection with it. Then for a walk on Lyme Regis beach, where the concentration of romantic, hand-holding couples means that clothes-lining is a very real hazard and all the pet-name calling puts the seagulls off their scavenging.

Later on, in the restaurant, couples stare into each other's eyes for so long they fall into a trance.

"I wuv woo."

"I wuv woo too."

"I would wuv your order now, please."

Embitterment is the inevitable result of watching one's boyfriend cook romantic meals for other women every Valentine's. Once upon a time, when Anthony first began the long and arduous task of wooing me, his instrument of seduction was a pan. Each morning a different gourmet breakfast would appear from it; sweetcorn fritters, Mexican eggs and fresh homemade crumpets. After three months, I had

entirely forgotten how to feed myself and would lie idly on the floor next to the cat,

watching the front door until Anthony came home and fed us both. So,

as you see, romance has become materially fundamental to my survival... and I still haven't broken the habit of rubbing myself against his ankles when I'm hungry.



Life in the Lyme Light



Former chef to Prime
Ministers and popstars,
Anthony is in agony with a
sore tooth and Eleanor is stockpiling
bunting for the royal wedding

Anthony:

Toothache, what a pain in the backside that is – if you'll excuse the mixed metaphor. The week from hell has seen me with bandages tied around my head, hot poultices, cold compresses, gargling with salt and swilling brandy. I've been chewing painkillers like they were Smarties, and West Dorset is now officially a clove-oil-free zone.

Eleanor caught me looking into the bathroom mirror at 3am with a pair of pliers in my clenched fists and a determined look in my eye. I even considered decapitation. It was no good. I would have to go to a dentist. A simple five-minute appointment could have saved me a week of misery. Typical man!

It's a good job it's all cleared up because April is shaping up to be a very busy month indeed. We have April Fools' Day, where we all try to have a laugh at the expense of someone in authority. Then it's the end of the tax year, where authority has a laugh at our expense.

St George's Day gives builders a chance to dust-off their World Cup flags and spend half the day in the pub celebrating a Syrian who was handy with a lance. Finally, of course, there's the royal wedding, after which the charity shops get buried under an avalanche of commemorative tea cups and we all get brand new tea towels.

Here in Lyme we're having a huge picnic to celebrate the royal nuptials, which should please Eleanor. I can only speculate on the amount of bunting that will appear in the weeks building up to it. I imagine a sweatshop somewhere in Charmouth with row upon row of grannies churning out miles of the stuff, working in cramped conditions with only PG Tips and Rich Tea biscuits to keep them going. Eleanor is a hard taskmaster! □

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Eleanor:

Can you imagine the horror of a chef with toothache? In a species already renowned for its temper, ferocity and unpredictability, add to this a 6ft 4in male, weighing in at a good 17 stone, with a vivid ginger beard and a sore tooth. Now you begin to understand that Anthony is, at present, one of the most dangerous animals in the world. Even a grumpy grizzly bear would back slowly away from him.

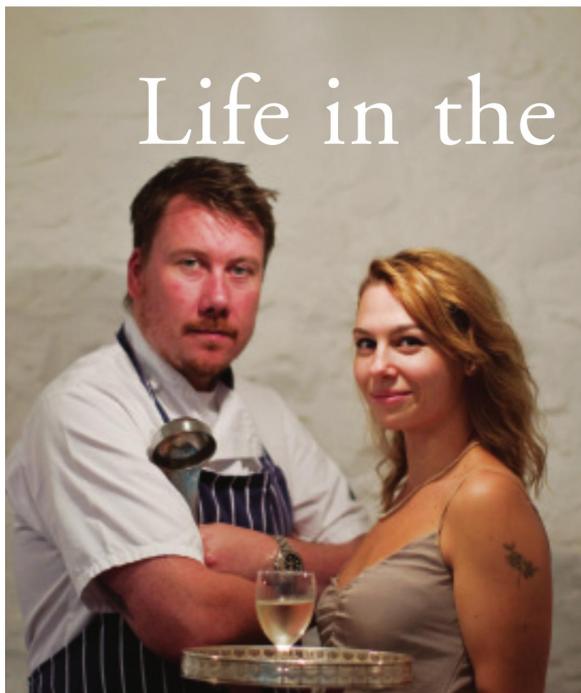
I peer cautiously through the top window in the door from the restaurant to the kitchen and behold his horribly swollen and lop-sided face. Nervously I enter with an order from a hungry customer. Anthony is waiting at the pass, unnervingly still and quiet.

"Cheque on! Two crab sandwiches." Anthony lifts his sorrowful eyes and stretches out his massive hand. To grab me and rip my head off or, I wonder, is he after a reassuring kiss? It's actually the cheque, which he pushes into the tab grabber. Phew! What a relief. Head still on shoulders and honour uncompromised by giant ape.

I resume my work keeping the general public safe... well, at least until his dentist's appointment at 3 o'clock, though I don't envy the brave dentist who will be trying to sooth this particularly savage beast.



Life in the Lyme Light



Former chef to Prime Ministers and popstars, Anthony is proudly showing off his seasonally appropriate tattoo and Eleanor is avoiding the ducking stool

Anthony:

Thank goodness we live in Dorset and not one of those awful far flung foreign places where all manner of strangeness goes on around May Day. If we were Cornish we'd all be out on the streets at midnight trying to avoid the clutches of the sinister 'Obby 'Oss. In Oxford, we'd be jumping from bridges into the river, and if we were in Whitstable, we'd spend the morning following a chap called Jack in the Green, painted green and covered in leaves, around town. We've none of that madness in Dorset, just a maypole or two and a light dusting of Morris men.



I look forward to May for another sort of feast day. The first week in May is the traditional start to the British asparagus season and as it's only around for eight short weeks I'll be eating a bunch or two every day. I enjoy this quintessentially English vegetable so much that some years ago I had a life-size spear of asparagus tattooed on my arm. In my mind it's no stranger than having Spurs tattooed on your arm.

Eleanor:

Tattoos, as everyone knows, are a bit addictive and once you've had one you think, "There are so many other things I like, shouldn't they be given some room on my body?" In Anthony's case, vegetables, fish and cuts of meat are what he likes and I'm keeping a close eye on him or else he'll have a rasher of bacon and a bunch of radishes who knows where.

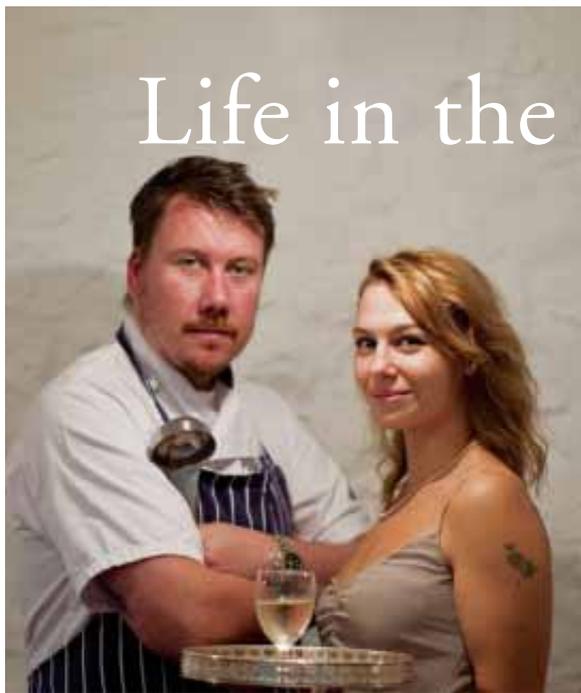


May is the best month to chase or be chased around town by a strangely dressed man, and the only month when such activities are not phoned into the police station. I am a bit of a pagan myself, dancing sky clad around a bonfires or frolicking around fertility symbols with ribbons is my sort of thing. Paganism comes from the Latin *paganus*, meaning 'of the country', which is a nice way of articulating our eccentric rural habits. 'Wicca' relates to those ancient practices specific to the British Isles, and no longer include human sacrifice, but can sometimes involve chanting, which I think is worse.

Not far from Lyme Regis is a small bridge over the River Axe, resourcefully named 'Ducking Stool Bridge'. If Anthony knew of its existence, I imagine this is where I would be spending much of my time! □

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Former chef to Prime Ministers and popstars, Anthony fondly recalls a wake at sheep shearing time and Eleanor is swinging from a chandelier

Anthony:

June in Lyme has a funny feeling about it, a bit like infantry soldiers cleaning their rifles the night before going over the top. Local business owners hurry about in the early mornings, exchanging glances on the high street like evangelicals who know that the end really is nigh. By this time next month we'll all be knee deep in sticky-fingered children, inflatable beach toys and half-eaten ice creams. The car parks will have razor wire stretched across them and the sandy half of our beach will look like a guillemot colony. June wasn't always like this...

Before moving to Lyme, June was all about sheep shearing on the family farm in Western Ireland. I say sheep shearing but in reality there was an awful lot of waiting to be done for the right sort of weather and of course, if the weather was right, there was always a drama that needed attending most urgently. In Ireland, bad weather and dramas are best observed from a bar stool.

I witnessed one such shearing week drama with my father when the landlord of a local pub sadly passed away. On attending the wake in his own bar, being staffed by his long-suffering widow, we were shocked to see his half-open coffin on top of the bar.

"Sorry for your trouble Mary."

"God bless you. Thank you boys. What'll you have?"

"Two Guinness please." She placed the two pints on the coffin.

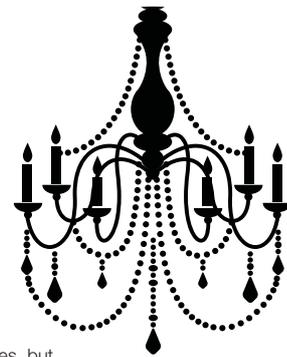
"Now boys, that's the only time you'll have a pint on him."

We had a riot that weekend and not many sheep got sheared!



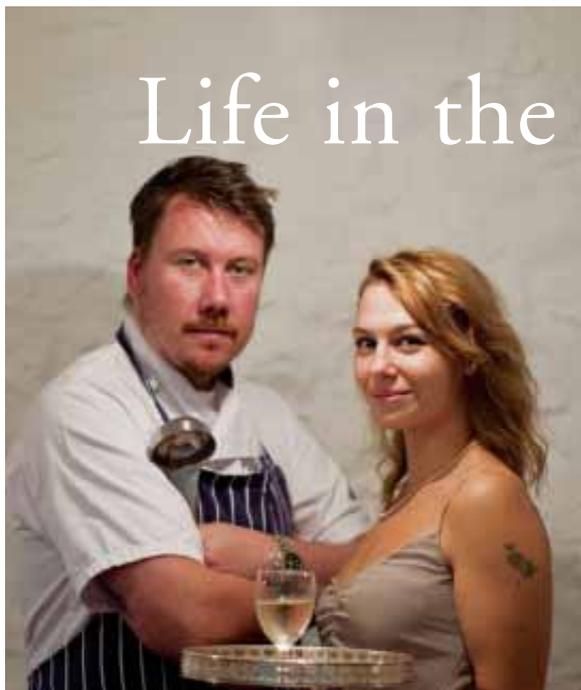
Eleanor:

Just as bars can often double up as funeral parlours so restaurants perform many functions beyond just providing food and wine. Within the catering industry a restaurateur may expect to feed, amuse and generally entertain not only friends, relatives and former colleagues, but friends of friends, distant relatives, and the entire staff of a dozen other restaurants. People in this business work super hard and are determined to make up for it in their short hours off with bouts of lavish behaviour, preferably performed at a friend's restaurant. We like to trot up the hill to Mark's place and consume an estuary's worth of oysters with a bottle of Macon... or two... and we likewise receive a steady flow of day-off-ers gasping for Anthony's steak tartar and several bottles of red. At the end of the night those working sit down for a drink and the restaurant gossip carries on into the early hours, then the music is turned up for a bit of a dance until people start banging their heads on the chandeliers and footwear flies off balconies whilst attempting ambitious dance moves. Then everyone realises they have four hours before their next shift begins and shuffle off to bed. The glasses are left on the table, the chandelier finally stops swinging and if anyone finds a pink, high-heeled shoe in the river Lym or washed up on the beach, please get in touch. □



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Former chef to Prime Ministers and popstars, Anthony celebrates a new foodie accolade and Eleanor is having a wardrobe meltdown

Anthony:

We've had a nice big pat on the back at the restaurant this week. *The Good Food Guide* has named The Mill Tea and Dining Room as the South West Restaurant of the Year! All the hard work, cuts and burns, 6am starts and 1am finishes, varicose veins and extreme fatigue seem worthwhile.

We're both very proud but also humbled. *The Good Food Guide* relies on the nominations of the general paying public who have to submit their review either online or by post. In a time where apathy reigns and a third of the population couldn't be bothered to put an X on a ballot paper to decide who'll be running the country, for people to do this because they had a nice supper is truly remarkable. Thank you, whoever you are!

So we've been invited to the national awards ceremony in London to nervously await the result of the UK Restaurant of the Year. The organisers know a thing or two about chefs letting their hair down and have wisely made it a short lunchtime function rather than a late-night thing, otherwise it'd probably end with the Roux brothers wrestling in a fountain over a bottle of Cristal and Raymond Blanc flicking Gordon Ramsey's backside with a wet tea towel after necking Crème de Menthe cocktails.

The last time I won an award, my mother had a portrait taken of me and my award. It was for good handwriting, I was eight. The award was presented each month, so being a small class I suspect it might just have been my turn, but I'm confident that it isn't the case with this one.



Eleanor:

I believe I am quoted in the national press release as promising to "kiss the whole town," and I fully intend to. I'm just waiting for the orderly queue to form outside the restaurant doors. Of course the only really pressing issue on a female mind as vacuous as my own, is what to wear to the awards party. I have absolutely nothing in the wardrobe. Anthony wades into the bedroom through drifts of discarded garments as scarves, tights and the odd brassiere rain down on him like a meteorological phenomenon.

"What is this mess?" I do not dignify him with a response; I merely hurl an unwanted sandal at his head, forcing him to retreat. "You're mental!" he shouts from the landing.

If he only comprehended the extent of the madness, he would have me tranquillised and transported to the second floor of Selfridges with a blank cheque and a note reading 'please dress' gaffer-taped to my head.

But as it is, I must find a suitable outfit in Lyme Regis and the options for haute couture are somewhat limited – a charity shop, a vintage shop and a shop supplying hoodies for what I can only term 'the youths'. After trying on two rails of polyester gowns in the hospice shop, my hair is so static that I can shoot electricity from my fingertips.

A further two hours spent struggling into various vintage dresses leaves me lamenting that modern woman does not have a waist the size of a malnourished wasp. Which leaves only the shop full of teenagers; at least I can use my newly developed super power and zap them! ☐



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Life in the Lyme Light



Former chef to Prime Ministers and popstars, Anthony is contemplating bagging a Macnab, whilst Eleanor has a touch of wedding fever

Anthony:

Weddings? Parties?
Fireworks?
Sometimes I think Darwin missed a huge fork in the evolutionary path and that, in actual fact, men and women are entirely different species! Everyone knows

August is all about the start of the grouse season – the Glorious Twelfth – and lovely late-evening bass fishing sessions after work. It's also the most likely month in which to bag a Macnab, where you stalk a red deer, shoot a brace of grouse and catch a salmon all from the same estate within 24 hours.

While living in London I met a wonderfully eccentric chap one summer afternoon in the Grenadier Pub in Knightsbridge. He was down on his luck, having just sold both his title and the sizeable Scottish estate that came with it in an attempt to clear some of the huge debts he had had such fun building up. After a couple of pints, the subject of Macnabs came up. I had recently been thwarted in completing one by a most unsporting salmon that resolutely refused to play its part. My new drinking companion commiserated with me but confided that he had just completed his own metropolitan version of a Macnab that very morning. He opened the poacher's pocket inside his Barbour jacket to reveal a fillet of venison, two oven-ready partridges and a side of smoked salmon that he had 'liberated' from the food hall of a very well known department store just around the corner! □

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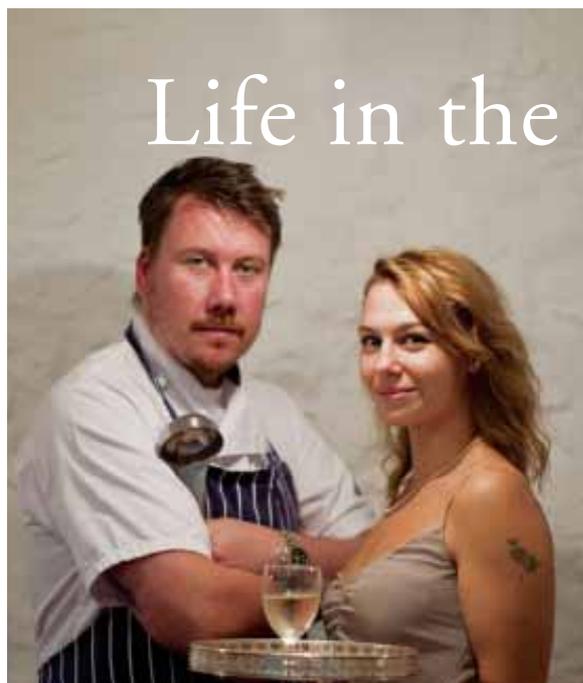


Eleanor:

August is the month when wedding fever reaches its peak. Having grown up reading JRR Tolkien, my idea of the perfect wedding is based on Bilbo's eleventy-first birthday party in Hobbiton. No glamorous venue can beat a good field and no sophisticated orchestra can compete with a skiffle band accompanied by country dancing. The day should conclude with fireworks and the mysterious disappearance of the host, giving you something to talk about over breakfast the following morning. Alas, booking a professional wizard is getting harder these days, so you may have to settle for a Druid and their skill with pyrotechnics can be limited.

Since opening our restaurant we have catered for four happy couples on their wedding day, and though I have not yet managed to sell them the idea of a warlock with a Catherine wheel, the contrast between country brides and their city counterparts is refreshing. After working on many London weddings where the bride would have a fit if the Albert Hall, dancing llamas, Elton John and the owl from *Harry Potter* could not be simultaneously booked for her big day, the rural bride is happy with bunting hung from the trees and a barrel of cider. Some of the best weddings I've been to were the ones where the bride dances on the table and you wake up in a hedge wrapped in a tablecloth!





Life in the Lyme Light



Former chef to Prime Ministers and popstars, Anthony's bizarre passion for his pet signal crayfish Ronnie does not impress Eleanor or Max the cat

Anthony:

I'm not sure why I had a soft spot for Ronnie (my name for the pet cray), seeing as most weeks I buy kilos of them live, plunge them into boiling water, twist off their tails, roast their heads and smash up their shells for fish soup. Hypocrisy is a bit like going for a swim at the seaside, it's no good meekly dipping your toes in just jump right in as deep as possible.

I grew up in a farming family so it's hard to publicly admit having a soft spot for the wee fella but on small farms like ours, the lines between livestock and pets always got a little blurred for us kids. During the long Irish school holidays, my cousins and I would all have an orphan lamb each to lead about like puppies, feeding them hourly with milk from an old Guinness bottle and generally making a fuss of them.

They got walks on the beach, trips to the shop, the odd shampoo and on more than one occasion, sneaked into the house on a rainy afternoon. Of course, all those summers ended with the dreaded words Back To School and like a holiday romance, there were tears at the goodbye but these would be long forgotten on the next trip home where the whole family would sit down to enjoy a huge Sunday roast and catch up with what they had been up to since the summer.

I always thought it was the occasion and the company that made this meal more special than others until years later when I worked in an Italian restaurant that served abbacchio or milk-fed lamb. Then the penny dropped, hard, and on questioning, my father could only give a creased-eyed chuckle and I had to join in. It was delicious! □

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Eleanor:

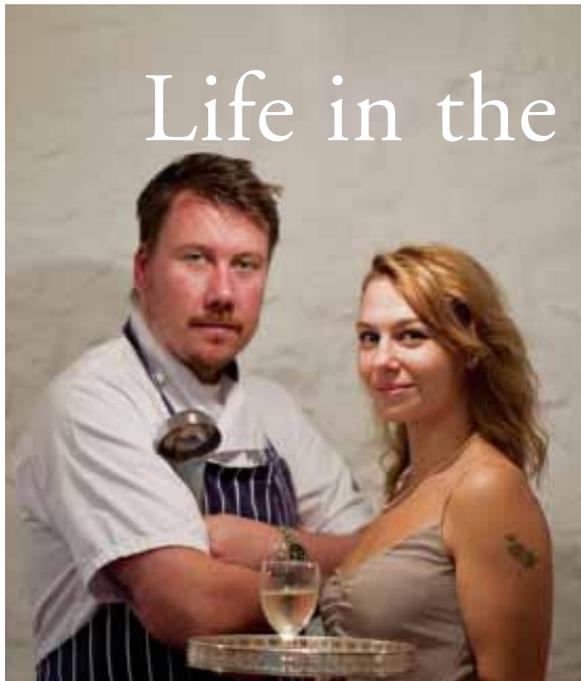
We have a hyperactive trout under the restaurant balcony. The river Lym is teeming with escapees from a trout farm upstream and one has certainly shown some evolutionary savvy in exploiting Anthony. He has been feeding it juicy worms from our compost heap. Anthony loves fish to the point of harassment, if fish were girls he'd be waiting outside their houses hidden in bushes, hacking their mobile phones and buying them cupcakes with hooks hidden in them.

Anthony once brought home what can only be described as Satan in a shell; a red-clawed signal crayfish rescued from underneath the boot of a river bailiff; once caught, it is illegal to return these feisty American imposters to the river.

I created a makeshift tank for our pet crustacean from a large plastic container and a small water pump with a convincing reproduction of the river bed. Clearly dissatisfied with my efforts, it escaped in the night and we awoke in the morning to find our cat Max, hair standing on end, staring wild eyed at the kitchen bin, behind which the creature, horribly reminiscent of a monster from a sci-fi film, was brandishing its claws!

Anthony lavished attention on the little terror, feeding it the choicest titbits from the kitchen scraps, unfortunately it eventually choked to death trying to stuff a huge chunk of venison into its' mouth, the equivalent of Alien choking on Sigourney Weaver!





Life in the Lyme Light

Former chef to Prime Ministers and popstars, Anthony is embracing the Dorset weather and Eleanor is caught up in a marriage proposal between courses

Eleanor:

Anthony says the words "Have you seen the weather?" on an almost daily basis.

"Of course I've seen the weather!" I snap.

What is it with men? I have always maintained that a man will never ask a question he doesn't already know the answer to. This explains why they're prepared to blow huge amounts of cash on diamond rings well before they get an answer from their intended.

We had our first proposal in the restaurant on Saturday night. The gentleman informed me in advance that he would be doing so, but trying to give them the little extra privacy the restaurant can afford was turning out to be tricky, especially when the locals can sniff out a drama a mile off,

"Why can't we sit at the big one over there?"
"Because I'm saving it for someone especially."
"Aren't we special enough?"
"Oh alright, he's going to ask her to marry him, good enough reason?"
"Oooo! Can we have that table next to them?"
"Only if you promise not to stare and grin at her."

Another couple from down the road arrived who knew the first table and despite my efforts, word spread like wildfire. When the couple in question arrived all eyes were furtively turned to them. Despite the overexcited locals I successfully convinced the lady that nothing out of the ordinary was about to occur through a lengthy explanation on the merits of pig's trotters.

Such was the gentleman's confidence in her reply, that he popped the question before their main courses had arrived. Had he been in any doubt I would have thought he might have left it until dessert to avoid her sobbing into her sole and warm potted shrimps.

"She said yes!" As if he was surprised. □

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Anthony:

Well, autumn is well and truly with us. That Indian summer didn't hang around for long; it went home and left us with our usual weather. There is almost no weather that I don't enjoy, as long as it doesn't hang around for too long. Rain shower – good, rainy day – bad; snow flurry – exciting, snow storm – chaos.

The weather was one of the first things I noticed when I moved down to Dorset. There was so much more of it than in London. It was as if it had somehow collected here. It was the first thing my father asked about when I called from my new home. It was certainly talked about much more with strangers. It seemed to me that its effects were felt more keenly down here but that could be because so much of my London life was largely subterranean – each day moving between my basement flat and a basement kitchen via the tube. It's a wonder I didn't grow a thick brown pelt and massive hands!

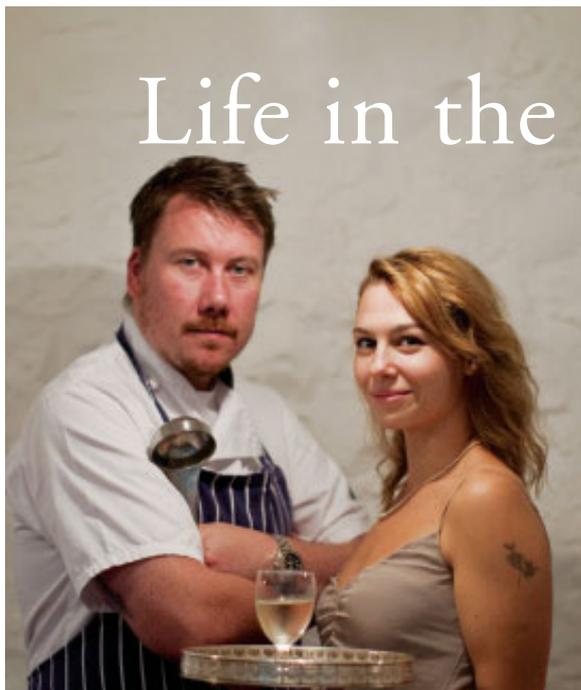
Of course everyone puts up with this diabolic existence because London has SO much to offer - the vibrant multiculturalism, the booming arts scene, the thronging restaurants and bars. It all sounds a bit too busy for my liking.

The idea that it's worth putting up with the crowds, the litter, the crime, the massive cost and stress because there's so many interesting things to do is the lie that all Londoners keep telling each other - if they didn't, they'd all run for the hills and never return. That's what I did.

They can keep their human mole life and I'll keep our weather in Dorset thanks!



Life in the Lyme Light



Former chef to Prime Ministers and popstars, Anthony wants to express his cultural heritage in the pubs of Lyme Regis, while Eleanor plans for their first picnic of the year

Anthony:

I enjoy a picnic as much as the next person, but while Eleanor is busying herself with bottling the lashings of ginger beer needed and dusting off the bone china picnic set, there's every chance that I will be drinking real beer, and lots of it.

Now this isn't some heartfelt admission of a drink problem, but merely a fact of the month of March. While most people will have their annual drinking peak sometime around December, you only have to look my surname (McNamara) to know where I'll be on 17 March.

On St Patrick's Day I'm not just getting drunk and talking a load of rubbish down the pub, I'm expressing my cultural heritage. That's my story and I'm sticking to it. The only real dilemma is which of Lyme's eight pubs to start off in. Do I start in the Nags Head at the top of the hill and weave my way down towards home, or do I start at the pubs down by the Cobb, work my way up the hill and gain the opportunity of repeated visits on the way back down again?

Mindless drinking? Not with this much strategising. A beam in the roof of the Guinness factory bears the legend: 'Everyone's Irish on March 17th', and for the sake of the craic, I hope that includes Lyme. □

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Eleanor:

Spring is springing and its time for the first picnic of the year. Officially this should be taken on the first day of sunshine when the temperature is barely above 'chilly'.



A picnic is a straightforward concept: a simple equation of food, textiles and an outdoor setting. When my siblings and I were young, my father would drag a few empty sacks out of the back of the van on the verge of the M1 and we would sit down to oatcakes and a cold sausage each. Those were the days when you could screw an old sofa to the floor in the back of your Transit and drive your four children on it from London to Scotland. Those days have gone, and today's picnic basket is a metaphor for the loss of those simple solutions to out-of-doors mealtimes.

That first promising morning arrives in Lyme Regis, and Anthony must plan the menu while I gather the accoutrements of our culinary expedition. Once everything is assembled I regret not having a pack of camels.

"I think we could maybe manage without the hurricane lamps," I admit.

"Max should probably stay home too," says Anthony thoughtfully. The cat stays, but I insist on taking the bunting and the brazier.

We hike for an hour to a stretch of rugged remote cliff top overlooking the curve of Lyme Bay. The many quaintly patterned blankets and cushions are arranged, the brazier lit, the table set up with the tea service, linen napkins and silverware, finger sandwiches and sherry trifle. The champagne glasses are polished and bunting strung across the scrubby bushes.

Just as everything is ready, the skies blacken and torrents of biblical proportions descend from the heavens. The brazier goes out with a sad fizz and the wet bunting is ripped from the bushes by a vicious wind.

"We should have brought the hurricane lamps."