

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

by theric

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Scene: a fishmarket

at least three booths

backdrop and/or sound of the sea

three primary booths each manned by a husband and wife

dirty children run about

cobblestones

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Songs (each booth has its own song):

Andy & Beth Fishers

Fruit of the Sea
such beautiful fish
Gift of the gods
our beautiful fish
Poseidon, pisces
roughly not carp—
The fruit, the fruit,
Fruit of the Sea

Mann & Sons

We sail all day
We row all night
We sweat our blood
to make things right
Masculine tears
course into the sea
But masculine fears?
On, *none* have we!

Mister Jonathan Bezreal Smith Esquire and Fishmonger of the Seven Seas and Distant Lands

Mother Nature saves for me
her very freshest fish
For love of thou I travel far
and grant your every wish
I am
MasterJonathanBezrealSmithEsquireandFishmonger
And this my lovely wife
Hoorah! hoorah! hoorah! for fish!
and ours from distant lands
and so exotic seas!

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Dramatis Personae

Andy & Beth

Fishers

Andy: *without guile*

Beth: *driven by love*

and their **baby daughter**

Mann & Sons

Mann: *injured dreadfully*

Wife: *tired*

their three grown sons (out to sea)

their **many small sons/daughters** (making a nuisance)

Mister Jonathan

Bezreal Smith

Esquire and Fishmonger

of the Seven Seas

and Distant Lands

Jon: *certain in all things*

Mindy: *full of ambition-free ambition*

customers, as they come and leave, are never seen

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Act I

Morning.

Fresh fish being displayed at Andy & Beth's and Mann & Sons'.

Mann (*to offstage, seaward*): And should you see your brother, tell him we'd better have dolphin for the dinner crowd! (*to Wife*) Lazy sons of bitches. (*Pause*) Meaning no offense of course.

She acknowledges him.

Andy (*to customer*): Why yes, of course we have roughly. We know how you like it. (*Mimes wrapping fish.*) Oh, I don't know about that. Beth?

Beth (*to customer*): Usually of course you are right. But we had that storm last month and— Oh yes, certainly. And thank you.

Andy: Will there be anything else, then? (*Hands over fish.*) All right, then, thank you. A please as always. (*Watches customer leave.*) Lovely woman, that. Kind.

Beth: Indeed.

(*Pause.*)

Mann (*to Andy and Beth*): Slow morning!

Andy: Yes! Looks like a nice catch you've this morning!

Mann: Aye.

Pause.

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Beth begins singing song. Andy quickly joins in.

Silence.

Mann sings his song.

Silence.

Brightened faces.

Mime selling fish, interacting with customers.

Jon appears, miming lugging large load.

Andy finishes up with a customer.

Andy: Nice load, you've there, Jonny!

Jon (*straightening*): Jonathan!

Andy: Right, right. Sorry. Keep forgetting. Surely you didn't all that in the cove. You go out farther last night?

Jon (*straining*): Maybe!

Andy laughs.

Andy: Right-o, Jon—athan! Good luck today.

Jon begins laying out his fish. The others watch with increasingly surprised faces.

Mann: I say, Jonny? Carp? Were you in the shallows?

Jon very deliberately stops to examine his fish.

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Jon: I suppose they do rather look like carp, don't they? I admit I hadn't noticed before. I was more focused on the extraordinary luck of finding an entire school of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass without having to go to China for a change.

He hangs a sign reading "Chinese La Ming Sea Bass."

Jon: Ladies and gentlemen! Boys and girls! Fish lovers of all ages! This night I tracked east and south around the horn in my speediest of fishing boats solely for your epicurean pleasures and delights and bring you today in this sparkling morning sunshine nothing less than the preferred food of emperors and sages, the Chinese La Ming Sea Bass!

By now the others have stopped serving customers. Jon is swamped as he sings his song.

Afterwards, harried, he cries out—

Jon: Mindy! Mindy!

Mindy wanders on stage dressed in something approaching finery.

Mindy: Oo! Chinese La Ming Sea Bass! Food of emperors and sages!
I'll double your asking price!

Jon (desperate): Just get over and help me!

Mindy: Oh yes! Of course.

Meanwhile, Andy and Beth, bemused, watch on.

Mann is furious. His Wife merely watches, passive.

One of Mann's children looks to be picking pockets from Jon's crowd.

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Mann: Boy/Girl! You! Boy/Girl! What did I tell you!

The child run's off.

Mann: Lousy good-for-nothing . . . (*face softens*). Will catch some fine fish someday.

Andy: Have you ever seen anything like that?

Beth: No. He's really outdone himself this time.

Andy: I'll say. (*To Mann.*) Ever seen anything like this Mann?

Mann: Never!

Andy, Beth and Mann all break into their songs.

Although they sell the occasional fish, it is Jon who is busy.

Mann (*to Andy and Beth*): It's degenerate! That's what it is!
Degenerate!

Andy: I should think he'd be worried on his reputation tomorrow.

Beth: It's never hurt him before.

Andy: No.

Beth: No matter what he's done.

Andy: No.

Mann is consulting with his Wife. She nods, glumly, and walks offstage.

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

She returns immediately and walks to Mann as if a customer.

She is glum and her delivery is flat.

Mann is loud and over-the-top.

Wife: So. Delicious fish.

Mann: Aye, mum! Finest in the land! Caught fresh in the wee hours of this very morning.

Wife: Golly.

Mann: Aye, indeed! The rare Massive Golly Guppy! Haha! So impressed you could recognize it!

Mann pauses to examine Jon's crowd. Nothing seems to have changed.

Wife: So I guess I'll take five pounds.

Mann: Oh, forget it. Get back over here, woman.

She shrugs, slightly, and complies.

Jon: I'm sorry, folks, sorry! Truly this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for you gourmands, and I may well weep myself to sleep tonight that I could not fulfill the dreams of each and every one of you, but sweet fate can be cruel, and it is left to us to suffer

But while this day's miracle catch has passed, when you're a customer of Mister Jonathan Bezreal Smith Esquire and Fishmonger of the Seven Seas and Distant Lands, you may always rest assured that the morrow will bring some new miracle culled from the depths of the sea.

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Dear?

Jon and Mindy joyously sing their booth's song.

Then they wave and shake hands and wish customers adieu, laughing and joking and being old, dear friends.

Meanwhile, business at the other two booths increases.

Marginally.

Mann (to Jon, who is smiling stupidly): That was a dirty trick, Jonny. They'll not be pleased with you next morrow.

Jon: On the contrary, tomorrow they will mourn when they learn I have once again headed off for lands unseesn. And it's Jonathan!

Mann: Aye? And so, *Jonathan*, you plan to actually leave the cove tomorrow, do you?

Jonathan laughs.

Jon: Why, the cove? The cove is no more than a garage to me. If you fellows had my talent, you'd be as wealthy as I.

He and Mindy gaze stupid-happy at each other.

They are about to kiss—a big sloppy horny kiss—when—

Andy: They'll catch on someday, Jonny. Jonathan! They're not stupid, you know.

Jon (*gazing at Mindy*): No (*He shakes his head.*) Nor are we, eh, Andy? Excellent. Come on, Mindy.

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

They start taking down their booth, locking it up for the day.

The others watch silently till they finish and leave, dopey and rubbing against each other.

One of Mann's children tried to pick Jon's pocket but Jon sticks his hand in his pocket at the previous moment.

Andy: The poor fool.

Mann: The bloody rich fool, you mean.

Andy puts his arm around Beth and she lays her head on his shoulder; he rests his head on hers.

Mann: Bloody— *(to child)* You! Boy/Girl! You leave that lady alone! Morning, sir. Care for a sweetfin? Excellent choice.

----- end --- act -----

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Act II

Same.

Afternoon.

Mann and Andy only.

Mann: Do you suppose old “Jonathan” will bother returning for the dinner crowd?

Andy: No. I imagine he sold out this morning and I can’t see him back on the waves before he has to be.

Mann: Aye. The lad should sell his boat and leave the fishing to the men.

Andy: You should offer. I’m sure your sons could manage a third boat.

Mann: Oh, aye, aye. That they could. Excellent seamen, they are. Excellent eyes for the fish as well. Very talented.

Andy: You’re quite fortunate to have them.

Mann: Aye, aye. But you’re the only one catching roughy, Andy. And the folk in this city do love their roughy.

Andy: They sure seem to What’s this?

Enter Mindy with new clothes, veil, parasol. Trying to walk rich.

When she speaks, her voice is disguised.

Mindy: So who’s the best fish today?

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Mann and Andy look at each other.

Andy: Depends. What are you looking for?

Mindy: Oh, having missed my once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Chinese La Thingy Sea Bass, what can it matter? Still, I'm partial to other sea bass as well.

Mann: My son Fred just dropped off several newly caught specimens.

Mindy: Mm, well. That sounds mildly adequate. How much?

Mann: Per fish or per pound?

Mindy: Oh, let's not hobnobble, fishmonger! Name a price!

Mann (*shrugs*): Twelve per.

Mindy: Oh, *outrage!* Outrage! You would part a widow from her last few cents?

Mindy staggers about for a moment, finally ending up by Andy.

Mindy: And you, young man?

Andy: My best fish is this roughy, but I can't part with it for less than twenty-five per.

Mindy: Oh, murderer!

She staggers about a bit more, then returns to Andy.

With a weird failure at seductiveness, she runs one finger down his chin.

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Mindy: Surely we two could make some . . . arrangement?

Andy: What?

Mindy (*turning up the “seduction”*): Some . . . arrangement?

Andy: An arrangement?

Mindy: Yessss.

Andy: Mm. I can't imagine Beth would approve, Mindy.

Mindy: Beth would never have to knnnnnow.

Andy: And what about Jonny?

Mindy: Neither would Jonny—I mean, Jonathan—I mean, who?
Whatever are you talking about, young men? Is this some
clever new fisher talk?

Andy (*sighs*): Go buy the bass from Mann, Mindy.

Mindy: I don't know *what* you're talking about, but I'm sure I've
never been more insulted in my life!

She stomps over to Mann.

Mindy: I'll take one all right, but not a penny over ten per!

Mann: Then you can forget it.

Mindy humphs and stomps but pays and Mann wraps her fish.

She stomps off.

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Enter Beth.

Beth (*walking to Andy*): What was that all about?

Andy: I think she just wanted to get out of paying full price.

Beth: After their morning? What, did they save no Chinese bass for themselves?

Andy: I guess not.

They kiss lightly and Beth starts checking the inventory.

Beth: Not much left.

Andy: No, but it will be all right.

Beth: I know dear. I know.

Mann's younger children run across the stage, off, across the other way, off. As many times as seems appropriate until—

Mann: What's all this? Where's you children's mother?

They make no committal answer.

Meanwhile, Beth and Andy coo to their baby daughter.

- - - - - end - - - act - - - - -

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Act III

Twilight.

Mann is shutting up his booth (with difficulty due to his injuries) as his wife serves the last few customers.

Andy and Beth's shop is already shut up.

Beth is there alone, waiting.

Mann's wife politely helps the final customer.

Mann: Finally! Help me, woman! You know plain well this is not something I can do myself!

His wife nods and turns to his aid.

They work together.

Enter Andy, brightly, carrying the baby.

Andy: Darling!

Beth, Hello, Andy. *(They kiss.)* Sleep well?

Andy: Like a dream. *(He tosses the baby playfully into the air.)* Didn't we, princess? That's right we did! *(He laughs.)*

Beth *(smiling)*: Good. I'm glad.

He hands the baby to her.

Andy: With luck, we'll have an extra productive night tonight.

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

Beth: We could certainly use it.

Andy: Well, even without larger hauls, if the quality of the catch remains high, we'll be fine.

Beth: I know. Just—(*she places a hand on her belly*). I know.

He kisses her cheek gently.

Andy: It will be all right. It always is.

Beth: I know.

She smiled at him and they embrace. He kisses the baby.

Andy: Well, I'm off then. I love you.

Beth: Love you too.

He heads in the direction of the sea.

Beth watches him go.

The baby makes a sound.

Mann and his wife finish taking down their booth for the night.

Mann: They're good boys, woman. They're good boys.

She nods.

He sings their song, turning into a melancholy near-lament. He puts his arm and weight on his wife and they exit.

Beth: I love you.

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

- *finis* -

The Legacy of Chinese La Ming Sea Bass

© eric w jepson 2007

publication rights reserved
performance rights free for the taking

*note: anyone half clever will notice this was written
without any attempt to research actual fishmongery;
anyone wishing to alter the text to bring it into closer
conformity with reality is certainly welcome to do so.*