

This poem was inspired by a brief reference in John Cleese's memoirs "So, Anyway..." to an unpublished and unfinished poem. Michael J. Braus expanded and completed the poem, and no fish were harmed in its production. — July 18, 2018

I.

I really rather care for fish.
In fact they are my favorite dish.
I love the skate; I value dabs.
I prize all carp; I lust for crabs.
I like to take small bits of dace
And lay them gently on my face.
Oh yes there no doubt of this
That I am very fond of fish.
My midday's snack's a stickleback.
My evening meal's a conger eel.
I lunch on tench, I dine on cod,
And break my fast on a gastropod.
I've tasted pearleye with spleen of crappie
And pupfish gills with seeds of poppy.
I would pay a pretty penny
For a bowl of bluetail blenny.
I've supped on leeches from many beaches.
I've darter for starters though grouper's super.
I often scarf an arctic char
With frozen icefish caviar.
I guzzle guppies and gobble mullet;
Dispatch John dory down my gullet.
I do love biting chunks of whiting
And fill my gut with halibut.
You must begin to catch my drift
That I'm a licensed ichthyophagist.

II.

If I were given just one wish,
I'd make the world knee-deep in fish.
I'd jam a sailfish in an orca's blowhole
To sail high seas in search of shoals.
I need not travel very far
For quillback, snapper, or a gar.
I've chased the koi since I was a boy
But head to Bermuda for the barracuda.
I've used a needlefish to sew a patch
And heard roars of lionfish when their eggs hatch.
I've lassooed barbels of a hagfish's sister
The orange-striped triggerfish just can't resist her.
I've ruled with kingfish and cooked with panfish
I've read books on anchovy by the light of lampfish.
I've baited chubs with strings of grubs
And chummed the waters to bring sharks to slaughter.
I've traversed the Americas, both North and South,
To slay armies of soldierfish with a swordfish snout.
With a giant spine of humungous goby,

I harpooned a pupfish as large as Moby... Dick.
At this point you must agree
I have a fishy instinct in my pedigree.

III.

I met my wife on a coral reef.
Our snorkels kept our courtship brief.
Among the flagtail, blowfish, and flounder,
I dodged flotsam and jetsam until I found her.
I used a herring to ring a gong,
And sang her softly the sardine's song.
I gave her jewelry of lungfish scales
And a swim bladder pursed with bones of whales.
We rode a whale shark and I packed gifts
Of pygmy sunfish and krill with whiff.
To keep her with me I told her, "Darlin',
I love you more than I love the marlin."
A hundred hills of salted smelt
Could not describe the love I felt.
I slipped a sea cucumber onto her finger;
I'd caught her heart hook, line, and sinker.

IV.

Months of fun turned into years.
Our tastes changed greatly, my worst of fears.
We're tidal pools of love and hate.
Like winter alewife, interests migrate.
I'll recall but try not to weep, if able,
She threw grilled panga across the table.
"The sight of eel now makes me squeal!
And thoughts of puffer now make me suffer!
When I taste trout, I spit it out!
And yellow jack makes me gag and yack!
Though I still like shad; it's not so bad.
But talk of bream now makes me scream.
Let's skip the surf; begone the hake!
Double the turf; bring on the steak!"
I gasped and sputtered, but she quickly muttered,
"You really are a complete bore
With your stingray, clownfish, and albacore.
And I found a clue in our bedroom;
Perhaps it's nothing but questions loom.
On a fish hook near the bed it hung:
A pornographic photo of a muskellunge.
You invite all touching and sensual incursion
From slender mola and northern sturgeon.
You'll caress tilapia from dusk 'til dawn
But I want your affection, not cichlid spawn!
I've seen you coax your lips to pucker
To smooch for hours an Atlantic sucker.
You once arranged a kissing booth
To snog a Pacific daggertooth.
Your mind is dirtier than a beached mudskipper;

You take stacks of sand dollars to watch tetra strippers.
Then slutty sculpin and zesty zander.
You've lain with salmon, you fish philanderer!"
She barred her teeth like a piranha feeding,
Her chest a-heaving like a nautilus fleeing.
"Stow your sawfish and pack your pike
Take your blobfish fetish and take a hike!"

V.
Her words were the tentacles of an angry octopus:
They squeezed my heart through my esophagus.
The truth did hurt, I guarantee ya,
Like a barbed candiru in my urethra.
But strongly did my patience winnow,
To a tiny sliver, just half a minnow.
I sprang to my feet and flopped around.
I would not take this sitting down.
I stuck a brill in each nostril
And Dover soles in both ear holes.
Strapped to each foot a smallmouth bass
And crammed a catfish up my...
Let's just say there wasn't a single orifice
That remained uninhabited by a fish.
"Launch your squid ink, all you can spray!
I'm not soft jellyfish or a helpless lamprey!
I won't discount your lengthy list,
Indeed my mistress is a spiny dogfish.
But tuna and flathead keep me so warm
With their dorsal-ventral fusiform.
Is it the very worst of sins
To want to be held by pectoral fins?"
My darlin' opened her arms, "I love you,
But I'm not a fish, you have to choose."
I relaxed my sphincters and released all fish.
They fell to the floorboards: *squish, squish, squish*.
Despite the dace stuck to my face,
My fish-love waned in her embrace.