



A SWEET AND SOUR LIFE

Successful, smart and beautiful, Chee-Lan is a 35 year-old Chinese woman, living and working in London. The head chef and owner of a super-successful restaurant - the kind people ring weeks in advance to get a table, and with a swanky pad in East London and a none-too demanding but gorgeous boyfriend with all his own teeth and hair, Chee-Lan seemingly has it all. But she hides a secret, something she's been trying to escape from all her life. But when her boyfriend J.D. asks to meet her family, Chee-Lan realises she can't keep running forever. After all, she's not even that fond of running.

So, on a fine and sunny afternoon, J.D. and Chee-Lan hop in the car and drive up the motorway, destination - Chinatown, Manchester. Ten years after Chee-Lan left home. On arrival, Chee-Lan looks up at the great, green facade of a Chinese temple that is the Jade Palace restaurant and family home, and feels her heart plummet. Walking inside, the dread continues as she sees nothing's changed - the patterned carpet filled with stains stretching back years, the rows and rows of tables, the glitterballs and stage, the aroma of garlic and ginger, the warbles of an Elvis song being murdered mingling with the bloodcurdling screams from the kitchen.

She looks at J.D., he's visibly paled. She squeezes his hand - it's not too late to turn back and go home. J.D. smiles - no way. I'm here to meet your family and that's that. Suddenly, a door bursts open. The Chinese Elvis, accompanied by a glamorous woman in 1950's Cheung-Sham complete with beehive hairdo, walk towards them. Chee-Lan smiles - J.D., this is my mum and dad - Wei Ping and Peggy Sui-Leen.

A bit of background here - Wei Ping runs the restaurant with a sideline in impersonations. Peggy Sui-Leen (she added the English bit after seeing the film) does the accounts and ordering. On account of playing mahjong all her life and thus able to count the bamboo poles and green circles at a glance, Peggy's a demon with the numbers - no one ever gets a wrong delivery past her.

Leaving Peggy Sui examining J.D. for moles and Wei Ping demonstrating his latest song, Chee-Lan wanders back towards the kitchen. The screams get louder as she nears. She looks nervous. She reaches the large double doors and pauses, taking a deep breath. Pushing the doors open, she steps inside.

The screams are interspersed with chanting. A machete is about to part a goat's head from its body. A group stands watching, but there's something wrong. They're human in shape, but their faces are twisted, gnarled, blood-red! One burps, revealing a forked tongue. Chee-Lan reacts with horror, she screams - No! The machete drops down, missing the goat. The machete-bearer turns, scowling - it's similar to the others but with a mop of ragged blonde hair (and terrible roots) atop the bumpy forehead. Chee-Lan shakes her head - I thought you'd given up the sacrifices Auntie Lily!

The machete-bearer throws her arms up in the air - "Ai yah, it's you!" (Auntie Lily was prone to melodrama). The weird-looking group crowd round Chee-Lan as she greets them all by name - Uncle Roger, Auntie Jean - Chee-Lan's family - Chinese Chiang Sheh - translated (roughly) as ancient, flesh-eating demons. As they had done since she was a teen, they squeeze her cheek and arm, comment on the fact that she's got fatter (a compliment in China) and reprimand her for not returning sooner. Chee-Lan panics when she hears voices



outside - quickly, J.D. is coming. Suddenly, the group transform, their strange, monster features morphing into human ones. As the door opens, the room is no longer populated by demons, but by ordinary-looking (well, kind of ordinary) Chinese folk, standing with big smiles as they wait to meet the boyfriend.

Chee-Lan and J.D.'s trip has coincided with the re-launch of the restaurant. Things have been pretty tough for the family. Manchester has changed into a thriving, modern city and Chinatown was at the hub of the growth. But with all the gastropubs and themed restaurants, there was little place for an old-school Chinese restaurant with a menu unchanged in years and a novelty act that had lost its novelty. Deep down, Wei Ping and the others hoped that Chee-Lan's return might be more permanent, that she would stay and run things - but they were hoping for a lot!

As the family prepare for the big night, Chee-Lan and J.D. make themselves scarce. Chee-Lan takes J.D. on a tour of Manchester. As they pass the locales of her youth - her school (where Fleur, the mini-Barbie, used to while away the years tormenting the only Chinese girl in the playground), the place she used to make Wei Ping drop her off (so no-one would catch sight of him in costume) the sadness of her past comes rolling back. J.D. is stunned by how lonely she must have been, but Chee-Lan is practical - looking like she did, all dark and foreign in a sea of a pale, blonde faces, not to mention coming from the weirdest family around - it was pretty hard to lead a normal life. Chee-Lan laughs - it's a wonder she turned out as well as she did! J.D. looks at the woman he loves and finally understands why she's been so hesitant about this meeting. He realises she has never been accepted for who she really is. It's a big moment and J.D. becomes aware how important it is for him to let her know he loves her, warts and all. Little does he know how many warts that might mean...

That evening, the restaurant is packed as people swarm in for the big re-opening. Chee-Lan, nervous about what might happen, but feeling fairly calm as things have gone smoothly so far, leaves J.D. talking about the merits of hair-styles through the ages with her mum to see how things are cooking out back.

Her horror quotient starts rising when Chee-Lan learns the main dish of the night is to be Mr. Lee, the family's accountant who'd been stealing from them. Too late to stop them as he's already been sautéed in garlic and soy sauce and served up with noodles, Chee-Lan hurries out to stop J.D. eating it. But she's stopped dead in her tracks when she sees Wei Ping climbing the stage, dressed as his new act - the Chinese Eminem. As he starts to perform, pulling down the mask and kicking the chainsaw into life, Chee-Lan can only stare in growing despair.

Things get worse when Chee-Lan catches sight of Fleur (her childhood tormentor). Now older, cosmetically enhanced (probably) but still blonde and beautiful, she's sitting with her husband, the restaurant's main financier, laughing at Wei Ping. Chee-Lan's past comes flooding over her like a sweet and sour Tsunami and she hurries to find J.D. and escape. But things just keep on free-falling as Chee-Lan discovers J.D. has gone in search of her. Hoping against pitiful hope she can catch him before he gets to the kitchen - the family likes to cook in their natural state - she knows she's too late when a bloodcurdling scream tears through the room. The chattering masses fall silent as a terrified John sprints out of the kitchen, screaming that a bunch of hideous monsters are inside. The whole place erupts as everyone scrambles to leave - mass chaos ensues. As Chee-Lan tries to calm the fleeing folk, she's appalled to see the whole, horrific moment's being caught on camera by the local TV crew - who had been specially invited for the re-launch.



Can Chee-Lan save the night? Can the restaurant survive? Can J.D. ever accept Chee-Lan as a monster? Can Chee-Lan ever accept herself as a monster? Perhaps. But it's going to take a lot of explaining. But as Chee-Lan picks up the pieces, she is forced to confront her past and who she really is. And when she does, she's shocked to discover that time CAN change people, and that who she is might not be so bad after all.

Now she just needs to stop Wei Ping and Peggy Sui-Leen doing an Ike and Tina cover for the next launch.

Writer: Emma Ko

Director: TBC

Producers: Carlo Dusi and Lindy Taylor

Cast: TBC

Budget: US\$5 million