

Beijing Big Mac

a short play

by

Alex Broun

email: abroun@bigpond.net.au

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Cast

SUSANNAH

LEN

Setting

A McDonald's in Beijing, China

Time

About 7pm. New Year's Eve.

Beijing Big Mac

McDonald's. Beijing, China. 7pm.

SUSANNAH IS SIPPING TEA FROM A STYROFOAM CUP, READING A BOOK. LEN APPROACHES WITH A BURGER AND COKE ON A TRAY.

LEN: Can I sit here ?

SUSANNAH LOOKS AT HIM.

LEN: I said can I sit here ?

SUSANNAH LOOKS AWAY. LEN SITS.

LEN: Cold isn't it ?

SUSANNAH DOES NOT RESPOND.

LEN: Bloody cold. Freezin' my tits off. I don't think it's got above zero since I arrived. It's the wind they reckon, comin' down from Mongolia.

PAUSE.

SUSANNAH: Siberia.

LEN: Sorry ?

SUSANNAH: The wind comes down from Siberia. Not Mongolia.

LEN: Oops.

LEN UNWRAPS HIS BURGER. HE EXAMINES IT.

LEN: So what do you think of that ?

SUSANNAH DOES NOT RESPOND.

LEN: I said what do you think of that ?

SUSANNAH: I heard you.

LEN: Well what do you think ? Take a good look. A genuine Beijing Big Mac.

SUSANNAH: (NOT LOOKING) Great.

LEN: I didn't think they'd even have the Golden Arches in China. Now what do I find, right in the middle of downtown Beijing central – my very own Maccie Dees. And since it's New Year's Eve I thought: "Hey, a special occasion. Treat yourself." Treat yourself to a Big Mac – Beijing style. See in the new year with a big bite. Well, here goes.

LEN TAKES A BITE. HE CHEWS.

LEN: Hey, that's okay. No – it's better than okay. It's good. Really good. Almost as good as the real thing.

SUSANNAH: It is the real thing.

LEN: Sort of. But not really. Not really real. Like back home. (OFFERING IT TO SUSANNAH) You want some ?

SUSANNAH: I'm a vegetarian.

LEN: Then what are you doing in McDonald's ? (LAUGHS) Me name's Len.

HE HOLDS OUT HIS HAND. SUSANNAH LOOKS AT IT. LEN PULLS IT BACK.

LEN: Oops. (HE WIPES IT) So, when d'ya get in ?

SUSANNAH PUTS DOWN HER BOOK.

SUSANNAH: You see - now that pisses me off.

LEN: What ?

SUSANNAH: The way you immediately assume I just got in. Like the way you come over here and immediately assume I speak English.

LEN: Well you do don't you ?

SUSANNAH: But that doesn't mean you should assume it. You don't know anything about me. How did you know I wasn't a local ?

LEN: Sorry ?

SUSANNAH: You heard me. How did you know I wasn't a local ?

LEN: I don't see too many other people with blonde hair in here.

SUSANNAH: Just because I'm blonde doesn't mean I'm blonde okay ?

LEN: Okay. Okay. Don't get your knickers in a knot.

SUSANNAH: I'll do whatever I like. I could've been naturalised. I could've been living here for years - but you just immediately assume that I'm not from here. I'm alien.

LEN: So you're not an alien ? You're from here.

SUSANNAH: No. But that doesn't change my point. How would you've felt if I didn't speak English huh ? If you just came over here and started blurting –

LEN: I wasn't blurting.

SUSANNAH: And I couldn't understand a word you were saying. How would you've felt then ? Pretty stupid huh ? You would've felt pretty bloody stupid.

LEN: No.

SUSANNAH: What-ever.

SUSANNAH TURNS AWAY AND STARTS READING HER BOOK. **LEN** GOES TO TAKE ANOTHER BITE. HE STOPS.

LEN: See this is no good now. You've put me off my Big Mac. On New Year's eve too. (PAUSE) I said I'm not eating my Big Mac.

SUSANNAH: Do you know how much crap is in one of those ?

LEN: Hey baby, you're eating it too ?

SUSANNAH: I'm not eating. I'm drinking. Tea. Green tea. Without milk.

LEN: That's usually how Green Tea comes.

SUSANNAH: It's all I can afford. I only come in here because I've got a friend who works behind the counter. He slips me an extra tea bag for free.

LEN: A friend ?

SUSANNAH: He lives with the family I'm staying with.

LEN: You're staying with a family ?

SUSANNAH: I help with the chores and give ‘em five bucks a week. I sleep on the floor in the kitchen.

LEN: The kitchen ? Must be hard on the bum.

SUSANNAH: Yeah, well it’s cheaper than the Hostel.

LEN: That’s where I’m stayin’. (LOOKING AT BURGER) You sure you don’t want any ? I could pick out the meat and you could eat like the tomato and lettuce. Seems a shame to waste it.

SUSANNAH: What you paid for that would keep my family in rice for a week ?

LEN: Well shit – I didn’t know that. Only been here a week.

SUSANNAH: You don’t know much at all do you ?

LEN: Well if you don’t like it so much then why don’t you just go elsewhere. Leave this hell hole of corporate carnality and go and find a nice little genuine Beijing bistro.

SUSANNAH: I would – but it’s too friggin’ cold and I think I’m comin’ down with the flu.

PAUSE.

LEN: Hey, you want to know a secret. A big secret.

SUSANNAH: No.

LEN: Come on.

PAUSE. **SUSANNAH** TURNS TO HIM.

LEN: I don’t like it.

SUSANNAH: Like what ?

LEN: (WHISPERS) Rice. I don’t like rice. Guess I’m stuffed out here.

LEN LAUGHS. **SUSANNAH** TURNS AWAY. PAUSE. **LEN** REACHES INTO HIS POCKET AND TAKES OUT A WALLET. HE OPENS IT AND PULLS OUT A NOTE. HE OFFERS IT TO **SUSANNAH**.

LEN: Take it.

SUSANNAH: What ?

LEN: Go on. Take it.

SUSANNAH: I don't want your money.

LEN: Sounds like you need it.

SUSANNAH: I don't need anything from you.

LEN: It's a Christmas Present.

SUSANNAH: That was last week and they don't really celebrate Christmas in China, duh ?

LEN: Well you need a Christmas present then. A late one. (PAUSE. PUTTING NOTE ON TABLE) I'll just leave it here then. So you can think about it for awhile.

SUSANNAH: (STANDING) I said I don't want your money !

LEN: What exactly is your problem ?

SUSANNAH: You are my problem.

LEN: I come over – see a familiar face – just trying to be friendly – and how do you treat me ? Like a dog. Like a fuckin' dog.

SUSANNAH: You're probably use to it.

LEN: I mean we're countrymen. Country-women. Whatever. We come from the same home. Shit – we might've even gone to the same school. I'm all alone here – trying to get used to the place. And you just treat me like shit.

SUSANNAH: Maybe I don't want to run into someone from my country.

LEN: Why the fuck not ?

SUSANNAH: Maybe I came over here to get away from people like you.

LEN: People like ...

SUSANNAH: Travellers. Backpackers. Ozzies. They come to a city, take some happy snaps, tick off the sights in their Lonely Planet, shit in some exotic boghole then get back on the bus and on to the next spot on

SUSANNAH: (CONT) their pathetic little world tour so they can snap and tick and crap all over again.

LEN: And you're different ?

SUSANNAH: I live here. I've made a commitment to live here. For six months - at least. To really experience what another culture is like. To live like the rest of the world does. To stop being so ignorant and stuffin' my face full of Beijing Big Mac.

PAUSE.

LEN: I'm booked in for two years.

SUSANNAH: Two ...

LEN: I'm on a volunteer programme - teaching English. Took me five years to save enough money to come out here. My school is just down the road.

SUSANNAH: You said you were stayin' in the hostel.

LEN: Only till the woman I'm taking over from moves out of my house next week.

SUSANNAH: House ?

LEN: Yeah - house. I think it used to be a mission. Real cosy like. There's a spare room too. Maybe you could've used that. Still I guess that ain't gonna work out now, seeing how you think I'm such pathetic snapping, ticking, crapping Ozzie.

LEN STANDS. HE WRAPS UP THE BIG MAC AND PICKS UP THE COKE.

LEN: You reckon it's alright if I give this to that little kid out on the street ? The guy at the school said you shouldn't give them money but food's okay isn't it ?

SUSANNAH NODS.

LEN: See you round.

LEN STARTS TO EXIT. HE STOPS.

LEN: You know they're throwing a party for me tonight at the school. A sort of "Welcome Len - New Year's Eve" party all rolled into one. How's that ?

LEN: (CONT) They don't even know me and they're throwing me a New Year's party even though their New Year's like months off. Pretty cool huh ?

LEN EXITS. PAUSE.

SUSANNAH: My name's Susannah.

SUSANNAH LOOKS AT THE NOTE ON THE TABLE.

LIGHTS FADE.