

Independent author

Jenna Sten

Supermarket

Biographical note:

Jenna works in arts administration in Melbourne, and is an alumni of the *Voiceworks* Editorial Committee. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Writing and Cultural Studies, and sporadically writes reviews, literary fiction, and non-fiction. You can read more of her work at jennasten.wordpress.com.

I've got *Angus and Julia Stone* playing in the background ('I'm wasted, so wasted on you') and *Daria* is on the TV ('You're standing on my neck, la, la, la'). Earlier it was the *I.T. crowd* ('I feel trapped. Like a moth. In a bath') and even earlier than that it was *The L Word* ('everybody's a liar, dear'). Earlier still it was *The Mighty Boosh* and *Juno* and *The Rage in Placid Lake*. Before that it was *Amelie* ('Scowling at them is Joseph...All he likes is popping bubble wrap').

(I'm putting something off.)

Before that I wasn't watching TV. Before that I was reading. I was reading about *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* ("What for?" said Alice'), but I found her too intrusive. So I read *Rosie Little's Cautionary Tales for Girls* ('The wolf has teeth'), and bit my fingernails. Before that I read *Charlotte's Web*, and developed a fondness for sketches of spiders. Before that it was *Essays in Love*, and I discovered a fleeting interest in theory.

Before all this though I was reading *Beloved* ('She was my best thing'), and feeling sick over something I couldn't understand. Before that it was *The Bride Stripped Bare*, and I felt sick over something I *could* understand. Before that it was *The Rachel Papers* ('She's not pretty enough and she wets the bed'). Before that I was reading *PostSecret*, and becoming increasingly terrified. Before that it was *Landscape with Animals*, and I've never felt so sickened and intrigued. Before that I drank two cups of tea and removed lint from a jumper with one of those hand held machines.

(I can't put it off any longer.)

Grocery.

Shopping.

Grocery shopping.

I have to go grocery shopping.

The glass double doors don't look very inviting. I grab a trolley, look down at my list.

My list/my budget/my box/my ... all I can afford for a fortnight:

bananas

apples

mushrooms

apathy

carrots

cucumber

candles

cereal

corn

anxiety

yearning

strawberries, if they have them

The checkouts are whirring and buzzing as people complain about mismatching prices and the checkout operators call for their supervisors. The floor is matted with roots and dirt, and every few meters weeds flourish in a damp spot. All the fixtures are made of wood and everything smells like flowers.

I push my trolley along, wending my way through the hordes of people. It trundles over roots and twigs, locking into bits and pieces every now and then. I look up at the sign hanging from the roof, its thin wooden form swaying in the draft of the air-conditioning. Bananas are ... aisle seven. I turn and narrowly avoid two school-age boys having a trolley war. Splintered bits of wood fly into the air as the front of one of the trolleys is busted and a woman, probably their mother, pelts their backsides with a discarded branch

The bananas are next to the fertility. A teenage couple is dismantling a box and peeking inside it, looking guilty. Further down a staff member is blotting a spill of indignation, and a woman is examining a packet of zeal. I slip between them to get to the bananas and give the lust a stealthy glance. I'm a little tempted, but there are some dodgy-looking men hovering there, evidently trying to find someone to take it with. They look a bit like rapists, but then if they were they'd probably be in aisle six. I move along. Aisle eight is mostly for adolescents, but that's where I get the apples, apathy and anxiety. In aisle nine I pick up some corn on the cob.

I'm trailing behind a man when he drops his list and wheels himself into the next aisle. I glance either side of me. The only person to be seen is distracted and ten meters away (an elderly lady fondling a bag of peaches). My heart skips a beat. I collect lists.

a hot water bottle
sounds of the ocean CD
raw sugar
mittens
love

A bit needy, I think, and pocket it anyway. It will make an off-putting addition to the pile at home. I pick them up, torn and wrinkled from the supermarket floor, then take them home and pin their soft bellies to a corkboard on the wall.

I once took a list from a woman's back pocket, folded neatly along frequently pressed seams. In felt tip pen with clean lines she had written:

scotch
loneliness
rope

But her trolley was filled with other things. Perhaps it was for someone else. Thinking of it that way makes me feel better for saying nothing to her. But what could I have said? *Excuse me, ma'am, but a moment ago I picked your pocket and I think the idea of you committing suicide is just frightful.*

A glass jar of shame falls from the topmost shelf and smashes over large root on the ground. I sigh and shift some of the glass with my shoe. A pebble of shame rolls down the aisle and into the cold section. It nestles itself beneath the mince.

I don't like this place. It tells you what you should buy. The things you shouldn't buy evade you sometimes and change aisles without warning. But if you're desperate for them you can usually track them down. It is, after all, still about making a profit. If you really want to waste your money on things you don't need it'll let you. But it does like to put up a feeble for-your-own-good fight first for some reason. A high pitch beeping erupts from the

floor near the jar and another staff member rushes along to clean up the shards. I step around them.

I wheel the trolley back to the first aisle and pick up the other food items. I don't get the strawberries because they're sitting next to a cracked bottle of envy and have started to rot. I turn down the second aisle and pass the man who dropped his list. He's patting down his pockets, looking for it. I smile. I won't be giving it back. It's too hilarious to be returned, and will contrast nicely with the woefully depressing lists that make up my collection. Like last week's gem:

a book of crossword puzzles

gum

night-vision goggles

I scan the aisle. I can see a tall display of yearning down the end, but a box of resilience edges toward me on its shelf. I shove it back with my elbow as I pass. Nice try. I know what it wants me to get over, but I want to yearn. Realising this, I run hastily towards the yearning. My hands close roughly around a box before the others disappear. They flicker back into place as they register that I've already caught one. The other boxes show no change, but I can feel their frosty stares radiating from the logo on their faces. Time to leave, I think.

I forget about the candles.