

Beyond Her:

by Paule Sheya Hewlett



A Trip to H-E Double Carrot Sticks

Right now I'm singin' the "I've got the 'all the Internet grocery services have gone bust' blues."

Here's why: I hate the grocery store. I have to whisper this, because people actually recoil in horror. "We LOVE the grocery store!" they cry — which to me is baffling. What's to love about accumulating perishable food items?

It's not that I hate all shopping (dear God no!). Or all chores. (I often don't have anything better to do).

But this chore — the one where you spend hundreds of dollars on foods that you lug into your car and then out of it — is, for me, just plain painful.

My "situation" became apparent early in my career. My husband — a rabid "I-LOVE-the-grocery-store" type — would sometimes go with me. I would watch in wonder as he hummed, chatted with the staff, fondled lemons, read recipes off box labels, performed stunts on the shopping cart.

I, meanwhile, was having another reaction. Getting through the shopping list became my own personal episode of "Survivor." God help the person between me and the check-out counter!

Logically enough, the enthusiast did most of the grocery shopping. But, guess what? He needed a list. And as anyone who's ever drawn up a detailed shopping list can tell you, it's almost

easier to go yourself. After years of phone calls to answer urgent questions such as "Do you want Unscented or Minty Fresh deodorant?" my prayers were answered.

A genius developed Internet grocery shopping. I was the first person on-line and the last one left standing (clicking?).

Of course, shopping online did pose its own challenges. It wasn't easy to locate the exact type of junk food your children craved without seeing the cartoon characters on the box. ("Eee-yoo, Mom! We like *tropical* fruit!"). And at one point I actually owned a one-gallon jug of vegetable oil (today I realize what 124 ounces looks like).

It also cost money. But here was my view: I was paying \$5 for some-

one to go up and down the aisles and search for the right camera battery, soup mix, texture of bread crumbs. And \$5 more to have products delivered to the door — and placed on the counter — by a strong, smiling guy in bermuda shorts. It was a bargain.

But (sigh) those days are gone — something about making a profit. At first I thought I might give grocery stores another go, thinking that things could have gotten better in my absence. That maybe I had been over-reacting. But, *nah*. I still hate the grocery store, for these reasons and more:

Hello from
Frozen Foods



- **Cold shoulders.** Grocery stores operate at the ideal temperature of a meat locker, oblivious to the energy crisis, California and normal body temperature. I gasp at the arctic blast at the door. I pack mittens and ear muffs for a trip down frozen foods.
- **Cart-break.** Shopping carts have always been awkward, but the new models are the size and weight of a Honda. Try maneuvering with that! And, clearly, all carts have one wheel designed to randomly take off in directions other than the one you're pushing.
- **Miles of aisles.** Highlighting the "more is more" trend, grocery stores today are the size of an outlet mall. "Running into for milk" is at least a 30-minute commitment, earning a full credit on most fitness programs.
- **Noises on.** How did grocery stores end up with ceramic tile floors? Other shoppers may be silently reciting their mantras, but all I hear is the "*ca-chink-a, ca-chink-a, ca-chink-a, screech (gimpy wheel),*" of the metal cart as it bangs along. I can't even enjoy the Hollywood Strings playing "Ticket to Ride."
- **Social factor.** We all know that the worse you look, the more people you'll see at the grocery store. Try this: Don't shower for three days, pull some clothes out of the laundry, roll around in the dirt and then make a run for something like fungal cream. I guarantee you'll see every person in your neighborhood.
- **Big brother.** Call me paranoid, but I'm suspicious of the

frequent buyer cards used to track purchases in grocery stores. I have visions of being strapped to a chair under a blinding light: "Can you explain, Mrs. Hewlett, why you found it necessary to buy so many band-aids?"

Other frustrations include those plastic bags — think of the nerve damage caused by loading 40-50 on each arm to get into the house. And why is it that no matter how diligently I assemble a list, I end up with a lifetime supply of pimentos and no light bulbs?

But without any alternative, I guess I'll just have to keep *ca-chink-ai*ng along until someone again makes this process more automatic. How can life in the Space Age be so . . . manual? Does it still have to be this much of a struggle to bring food into the cave?

I wait in hope. Meanwhile, here's my vision of heaven: "Pass the freeze-dried ice cream, darling. And inflate another one of those filet mignons."



"Beyond Her" is a free electronic publication produced by Paule Sheya Hewlett at irregular intervals.

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