

# THE GREEN GROCER

By

*Joni Ravenna*

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...In all the genres of literature humor is probably the most personal. What's funny to one person may not be funny to the next. Comedic writing is hard. Apart from the fact that you have to target the funny bone, delivery can often disappoint because there is the tendency to overkill the joke, situation, scene, line whatever. The 'story' in 'The Green Grocer' is less important than the humor. And funny it is. Ravenna has a wonderful ear for speech and her unexpected word play is at times just plain ingenious. I seldom laugh when I read a fiction submission for FOTD (more often I cry--not because the hero died but because I wish he would). But I laughed at this one. Out loud. Enjoy!*

The Green Grocer  
by Joni Ravenna

With my thirties behind me and the big '4'-'0' looming, I desperately search the internet for a way to stay young looking without going under the knife or needle.

Articles about the amazing anti-aging properties of plant life are everywhere. For instance, I learn that the reserves of Co-Enzyme-Q10, which is “abundant throughout our connective tissue until we turn 30, can be replenished by consuming massive amount of kale, reversing what years of sun has reeked on our skin.” I decide to eat nothing but fruits and vegetables – raw, steamed, poached, or pickled – for the next 40 days. I figure by the time my birthday comes I'll look twelve again.

First Stop: The Grocery Store.

“Can I help you with a vegetable selection?” says a man who is gorgeous, about twenty-eight, with tanned bulging biceps and a tattoo that reads “George” over his left pectoral. This Green Grocer is just what the gerontologist ordered.

“Actually, yes,” I say emphatically. “What’s really tasty?”

“Well, fennel’s in season,” he says. “It’s a vegetable that comes to us via Mykonos. The seeds have a sweet taste and you can boil the stock, which is full of vitamins. They say the Ancient Gweeks ate it to lose weight.”

“The Ancient Greeks?” I ask, making sure I’ve heard him correctly.

“That’s wight! The Ancient Gweeks!” he smiles.

It turns out that George has a slight speech impediment. His full lips part just enough to reveal a glimpse of pearly whites, but not quite enough to pronounce his “r’s” clearly. He is Adonis and Demosthenese all rolled into one. I grab some fennel, and then make a mad dash for my kitchen.

That night, I log on and learn that fennel is indeed a super food. It disarms the free-radicals which cause all that pro-aging inflammation. So what if it tastes like shit.

This is war.

It’s about defying time – that enemy with whom there can never be a truce. I read on and learn that “certain papaya enzymes can dissolve cellulite from your thighs.” I must return to the market and ask George what he thinks of papayas.

I go back the very next day....And the day after and every day after that for three weeks, each time, listening intently as Gorgeous George the Green Grocer describes in almost alarming, if somewhat thick-tongued detail, the anti-carcinogenic benefits of *bwussel spwouts* and the cleansing effects of sea kelp, and how it’s the phyto-chemicals in our *cwuciferous cwunchies* that give them their *vibwant colows*.

Naturally, it’s all innocent. After all, I’m a married woman. Besides, I’m much too old for him (although, everyone has noticed I do look better).

One day, while pinching pineapples together, George hands me a folded piece of paper.

“I wote something I want you to weed,” he says. “You have to fill in the blanks with a fwuit or vegetable.” The words are barely out of his mouth and off he darts to squirt down some rutabagas so they’ll maintain that moist, appealing glow.

“But George,” I call out after him, confused.

He doesn’t stop.

“Ciao,” he calls back.

“Bye,” I wave, then touch my newly soft skin and wonder why I didn’t become a vegetarian years ago.

That night I open the letter and fill in the blanks. It’s very cryptic.

“My dearest, I think we make a perfect *pear*. Lately my heart *beets* only for you. Since we *cantaloupe*, *lettuce* find some way to be together. *Honeydew* you feel the same? Please say yes or you’ll make this *mango* crazy. Meet me tomorrow at noon. If you *carrot* all for me; don’t *turnip* late.”

I’m overcome by the sweetness of it all. My head begins to swim. I feel like a schoolgirl in love – queasy, tingly, almost faint – and I’m pretty sure it’s only partly from having eaten nothing but cauliflower and kale for the last five days.

The next morning I awaken to find my skin is luminous. On the way to the market, I notice a lilt in my gait and a surge in energy I haven’t felt since the Clinton Administration. What’s more, I think I hear a cat call from one of the workers on the street.

“Hello George,” I say.

“So, what’d you think?” he asks. “Did you get it?”

I gently take his hand and tell him that he is very sweet, but then I explain that I am married to a lawyer “Who’d likely become very litigious is he learns I’ve been loitering around the lettuce with you.”

I laugh nervously, hoping he appreciates that I have a fresh produce repertoire of my own. But George just stares at me, blankly, confused.

“How can I put this?” I say to him. “You are like a large, firm cucumber, just waiting to get tossed together with some plump, juicy tomato. Why would you want to get mixed up with wilted endive?” I ask.

“What?” he says. He appears totally and utterly perplexed. I remind myself that George is young. The class on metaphors is probably not until next semester.

I stare into his big blue eyes, and admire his wrinkle-free skin. I want to scream, *It’s no use! You’re right! Why fight it? I suppose is we’re discreet...*

But just then, George cranes his neck and grunts to somebody behind me. I look around to see an exquisite, long legged, blonde-haired beauty approach us. She looks maybe 25.

“Hey, Shawna, this is the lady I was telling you about,” George calls out.

“Hello,” she says.

“Hello” I say, and extend my palm toward her, wondering if maybe I’m going to meet his sister. I watch as her long, tanned fingers and polished nails clasp my hand, which has three blue veins exploding between tiny brown age spots. I quickly retrieve the disloyal appendage.

“This is my fiancée, Shawna,” George tells me.

I feel my face drop.

“So, were you able to fill in all the blanks?” Shawna asks me excitedly.

I don’t answer. I’m still confused. Did he say fiancée?

“You know, on the word game we’re going to play at my shower?” she adds.

“It’s supposed to be George’s love letter to me when he proposed,” Shawna continues.

“You have to fill in the blanks with the right fruit or vegetable. Whoever fills in the most, wins. But I was afraid it might be too hard. George told me he knew this lady who was really into live foods. We figured if you didn’t get it, nobody would! So, did you get it?”

“Oh, I got it all right,” I say. Like a cannon ball in the stomach causing all that anti-oxidant infused blood in my phytochemically saturated body to go straight to my face, I got it.

“Congratulations!” I scream with a manic, feigned enthusiasm that could have scared a young child. “You two make a great looking couple.”

“Thank you!” she beams. “You hardly know George, but you were willing to help him out! His own mom wouldn’t do it.”

“Yeah, you’re pwetty cool for your age,” George adds, and I wonder if I’m going to have a heart-attack right then and there.

“Ah, well. Who says the old gray mare just ain’t what she used to be?” I quip. “Would you look at that!” I say glancing at my wrist. “Almost nap time! Better get going.”

The three of us exchange smiles, and I make my way over to the broccolini, fiddle with it for a bit, as though I were actually considering buying it, then I quickly disappear down the frozen food aisle.

Directly next to the string beans are 27 different flavors of Haagen Dazs ice cream. I pile the rocky-road up so high that it's hard to get the cart through the checkout stand. But that's okay; because when ingested in sufficient amounts, ice cream contains two amazing properties: It comforts the ego while nourishing the soul.

And if there's any left over, it will provide the perfect accompaniment to my birthday cake. My names's Katie, and I'm going to be 40.

The End

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *Let's see... turning '40' is what inspired this. I wanted to look at the ways we concoct things in our minds, lie to ourselves, in order to help gain motivation for some - more or less -difficult endeavor.*

*I love Ken Follett, Dan Brown, Thomas Mann, Donna Tartt, and whoever wrote "A Gentleman in Moscow" ! ... As for playwrighting and screenwriting influences, I love John Patrick Shanley and Lynn Manuel Miranda to name two. And to all the lonely writers out there... COLLABORATE!!! I just finished two collaborative projects and each was a total joy!!!*

**AUTHOR BIO: '22 WINNER** - Plaza Classic Screenplay Competition for *"The Secret Notes of Professor Thomas"* [Filmmakers Brunch: Screenplay Table Read - Plaza Classic Film Festival | El Paso, Texas | July 28 - August 7, 2022](#)

**'20 1st RUNNER UP** - Pipeline Book Adaptation Competition for *"You Let Some GIRL Beat You?"* (Behler Publications)

**'16 New Works of Merit Honoree** - for *"Beethoven and Misfortune Cookies"* (Smith & Kraus, *Best Men's Monologues '22*)

**'14 FINALIST** - Strawberry Festival (NYC) for *"Sex, Love and The Premature Evacuation"*

**'02 FINALIST** - Playwright Circle Nat'l. Playwriting Competition / Nominated Best New Play by OC WEEKLY for *"For Pete's Sake"* (under the name Joni Ravenna Susman aka JR Sussman) Brooklyn Publishers

