



# Something in my Pocket

*SHORT STORY*

**MARINA GERRARD**

# **SOMETHING IN MY POCKET**

Short story

By Marina Gerrard

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This morning I found something unusual in my pocket. A piece of paper. Unusual in more than one sense. Not that a piece of paper in itself is unusual, of course not. I mean, paper is paper. One uses it to write things on, shopping lists, messages, notes to oneself, phone numbers, what have you. Not even unusual to find it in one's pocket, provided that one had put it there themselves. With a purpose attached to it. A logical thing to do. If that were the case. But this was different.

A. I didn't put it there. I know that for a fact because I emptied out both pockets before sending the coat to the dry cleaner's. And no it wasn't there when the coat came back because I always -always- check the pockets.

B. I didn't recognize what was on it. A list of some sorts. I don't make lists. Apart from shopping lists that is, and this was no shopping list. Far from it.

So did I know how it got there? No.

It wasn't like somebody came running up behind me shouting 'Hey mister, you dropped something!', gave it to me and I propped it into my pocket without looking at it. Mind being elsewhere, that kind of thing. No. I would have looked. Certainly. To verify and see if it was actually mine. But no.

And in case you ask, yes, the coat was mine, as was the pocket, but as to what was in it? No.

No, no and no.

It wasn't mine, I didn't put it there. I did not recognize what was on the piece of paper and no I certainly did not write what was on it. Not that way inclined. I mean, the things that were on it! For crying out loud! Why would anyone want to do that! Not a hair on my head and all that malarkey. The very thought makes me sweat under the arms.

If you now think methinks that chap protests too much. He must be lying. Puut. Let me inform you: I don't lie. Don't see the point of it. If you did it, own up. If you didn't, don't bother. The very thought gets me worked up. Lying would get me the strap. Not much fun, I tell you that.

Getting curious as to what is on that piece of paper? I'm sure you are. Well, let me enlighten you. You might want to sit down as you digest this. Now where is it? Ah yes. Here it is. All crumpled up. Sorry about the state it's in. I was ready to throw it into the bin



when something inside me said ‘Don’t! It might be special to somebody. They might be looking for it while you carelessly treat it as rubbish.’ Let me smooth it out.

Here’s what it says.

January. That’s in capital letters. Then what follows is this list of things. In alphabetical order.

A for Abseiling. Don’t know what that is but it sounds like wanting to absent. That I could understand but maybe that’s not what it means. I’d have to look it up. Maybe I should but, well.

Under B it just says B. Now what kind of crap is that, I ask you?! If you make a list, you want it to be clear, don’t you? Mind you, I did make a shopping list once and I put ‘S’ and ‘M’ on it. There I am in the supermarket and for the life of me I couldn’t remember what they stood for. And no it wasn’t what you were thinking. The letters weren’t joined by a &. They were separate, ‘S’ then ‘M’. One underneath the other. It was only when I came home and opened the fridge to put stuff away I knew. M for milk and S for sugar. It was just that they were in the wrong order. Stupid me. I had to go back, didn’t I. Otherwise no C and that stands for No Coffee, in case you wonder.

Now what other oddities are there on this list? I’ll skim down and see if anything jumps out at me. Skip D, E F, pompedeepompedeepomp. Geocaching, hmm. I know that one, haven’t done it but I know what it is. Let’s go for M and S, shall I? For curiosity’s sake. What’s that at M? Something scribbled there. Can’t make it out. Handwriting’s none too good. Don’t they teach that in schools anymore? In my time you were rapped over the knuckles if what you wrote was unreadable. You soon learn to do better. Hated to have my knuckles rapped. Hurt like hell. S for Sand sculpting. Now there’s a thing I wouldn’t mind doing myself.

Maybe this is what they call a bucket list. Know what that is? Sounds to me like things to throw in a bin. In alphabetical order no less. But no, this one was explained to me once by a neighbour. Young girl, who treats me like her uncle. Barry, she said, a bucket list is a list of all the things you want to do before you die, kick the bucket. Know that one, Barry? Of course I do, but I don’t have one, a bucket list. Never thought about making one, you know. What’s the point? You live day by day and finally you come to the end of the road and poof, you’re gone. Kicked the bucket. Or maybe someone did that for you. Kicked your bucket and oops, sorry Barry, didn’t mean to but it was your time to go. That sort of

thing. Incidentally K is not on this list, ha ha. I can quite understand that. Timing would be totally wrong for that one!

Now where was I? S I believe.

Let's jump to Z. Zen! I'm glad it didn't say Ziplining! Nephew of mine did that. In Thailand of all places. Never been right since apparently. But Zen. Good choice. Makes sense. If Mr or Miss Whoever has gone and done everything on this list they must need a rest. Nothing better than Zen for that, I've been told. Beats dying if you want to stay alive and enjoy the memories.

All these things to do, the mind boggles. Life's too short to do them all, I tell you.

Maybe making a bucket list isn't such a bad idea, come to think of it. Haven't a clue what I'd put on it. Let's see what springs to mind. A for angle? No, I'm not inclined to go fishing. Been there, done that anyway. B for boring really. Animal then? Don't want to be seen dead walking a dog, or cleaning cat's hairs off the settee. No, what comes to me is Abseiling. Funny that, isn't that exactly what it says on that piece of paper?

Oh well, enough of that. Let's enjoy the scenery. There's an E for you. One can see the pond from here and the ducks in it. Love ducks. Such happy so-and-so's, quacking their little hearts out. Apart from when they are chasing one another. Well, there are more perks for sitting here. When the sun is out there are lots of people about here in the park. That's the time I like best. Sometimes somebody joins me on the bench. After all there's space for more than one. Two weeks ago there was this girl, dark hair, brown eyes, good looking, oh about twenty or so. Not super young. Not a child but still decades younger than me. She could have been my granddaughter, that kind of age. Not that I have any, grandchildren that is. Did have a son. Once. He died. Car crash, if you must know. Wife died soon after, of a broken heart they said. Oh well, happened aeons ago. Aeons, is that a word they still use? Expect not. I don't dwell on it.

This girl, who joined me on the bench, she was friendly. Looked me up and down first, though. Checking me out, I suppose. Old geezer sitting there watching the world go by. Up to god knows what. But she sat down and we started chatting. Had a good old natter. Oh, about this and that. Nothing spectacular. Comfortable, as if we had known each other for years. Maybe she thought I could have been her grandfather if things -life- had panned out differently. Or maybe he died and I looked like him. Who knows but anyway. We had a good old natter. Shook my hand when she got up and left. Said her name was Nadine and

she hoped we'd meet again. Sounds like that song by, what's her name again? Maybe it was Nadine who put this note in my pocket. Didn't she say something about going to do or doing something she'd never done before? Said she was quite excited about it. The fun of it. Now what was that again? Could it be something that's on this list? Let's have a look.

Now where did I put that piece of paper? Oh, right back in my pocket. As if it belongs there. Abseiling eh?! Well, good for her. Must look into that. Better than B for bench sitting, which seems to be what I'm doing most of these days. L for Lazy-itis. Maybe it's time to get off my A for -well, that- you know what I mean.

I keep wondering, though, how on earth this note managed to arrive in my pocket, if it wasn't her that put it there. Count the days and hours when I am bench-sitting here on my own. Things don't fly into my pocket just like that, do they? Since I didn't write it, it must have come from somewhere outside. Now where have I been? Wait, before I dive into that, when did I last have a hand -my hand that is- in my coat pockets for something, anything. After getting it back from the dry cleaner's, that is. Was the coat ever out of my possession? Did I by any chance intend to give it to the charity shop? That one is easy. No, I didn't. Well, I considered doing it but never got around to it. The bench being too comfortable to get up off. And the coat is adjusted to my shape. Bellied out a bit over the years. Too much of the good living.

Incidentally there's no N on the list. For Nadine, I mean. Not even at the top. To indicate ownership of the list, sort of. Whereas for B there is only that, B, a letter. Now isn't that curious? Could it be B for Barry? In that case maybe this list might be more than just a list. Oh give over, Barry.

Now I see it says Meet (?) at M. Couldn't read that before, bad handwriting. Meet with a question mark. Curiouser and curiouser, to quote who was it again. Meet who? Old friends perhaps? That mysterious B? But Barry and Nadine are not friends. Yet. Certainly not old ones. Yes, we met on this B for bench and had a natter but that was the very first time. Does that mean we're now friends? She did say that she hoped we'd meet again. M for Meet, Old for Old Geezer and F for Friendly. Oh, shut up Barry, you're rambling. Before long somebody will think you're S for Smitten or G for Gaga. But no that was Geocaching and S said Sand sculpting. Thank heavens it didn't say Swimming. Don't mind swimming but only in warmer climes. Don't really like getting wet. Now for the rest of this list.

C for Canterbury. Never been there. Maybe I should. There's a cathedral there I wouldn't mind visiting. It would get me off my A, or more politely, B, if you get my drift.

D for Downsizing. Have been contemplating that one for years. Never quite got round to doing it. Did some after the wife died, of course. Interest soon petered out, I can tell you that. Not that I'm a hoarder but I find it hard to throw things out.

E says Exercise. Yeah, and the rest! Not Enjoying the Scenery therefore. Shame.

Let's hurry up, I'm getting thirsty. Time for a cuppa. Or maybe a little nip of something else.

Fix Bike. That's easy. Don't have one. Geocaching.

Holiday. Open door really. Whereto I wonder? Spain springs to mind. Somewhere warm in any case. When was the last time I went abroad? Can't remember. Years ago anyway. With the wife when she was still there. But maybe the writer of the list has never been on holiday. Then, of course, it would be something special.

No I, but a J for Jigsaw (landscape). Hah! Been there done that. Once. Lots of sky, flowers, greenery, what have you. Took light years to finish. One look at a jigsaw with a gallery full of paintings and that was it. Gave up after that.

Incidentally there is a K. I overlooked it. Can't make out what it says. Atrocious handwriting. Could be Kangaroo or Karaoke. The latter being the more likely one. You should hear my singing voice, ha ha. One note and you'd be running a mile! Wife used to say, oh never mind the wife. She's gone. And may I say it, good riddance! Not a very charitable thing to say but there you have it. Karaoke for goodness' sake! Hope it says Kangaroo, for your sake that is, not mine. Should have skipped straight to L, if you want my opinion. There it says Lighthouse. Intriguing. Better than Labyrinth. Mind you . . .

Next M. Meet with the mysterious question mark. Meet who? As for me, most of my old friends are gone by now. No more drinks or pool in the pub. Time for acquaintances new, but at my age, well. There's Nadine, of course. Not an old friend as such but an acquaintance new alright, however brief.

No N, or O, but look, it actually says Pub Crawl for P! Maybe I could ask Nadine if she'd like to go for a drink. If I see her again, that is. As if. What would she want with an old geezer like me? I don't mean in that sense, of course, just a friendly chat over a pint. How nice would that be! Someone to talk to instead of oneself. Forget about the Crawling,

though. Can't do that. Never could hold my drink. Barry One-Pinter. That was my nickname. She can do that with her own friends. Nadine that is. Assuming this list is hers and it was she who put it in my pocket without me noticing. But what would be the point of her doing that?

No Q, could have been Quilting, but no. R for Rafting. Rafting! And then when you fall off, you go Swimming, ha ha. But no, S says Sand Sculpting. Much better.

Tombstone Rubbing. Now there's a truly interesting thing. I did some brass rubbing in my younger years. When I was in Ireland on a school trip. We had such fun. Mine was a knight. Had it hanging over my bed for years. The girls mostly did ones of knights and their ladies. Or saints. Not my cup of tea, even then. Don't think stone rubbing's allowed anymore on account of damage done to the stones. As for brass rubbing, I don't know.

U says Ukulele. No way! Let's move on!

No V. W then. That one says Walk the Length. What length? John O'Groats to Land's End? The Causeway, to name but two? Blimey!

No X or Y on this list. Shame about X. Could have been Xylophone. Wouldn't mind learning how to play that. Like the sound of it. Rather than the Ukulele thing! Can't think of anything for Y. Oh wait, Yachting or even Yodelling spring to mind. Yachting I wouldn't mind but Yodelling! Just as well then there's nothing there! And finally Z for Zen.

Even with all those letters missing it's quite some list!

Is there a theme to all this, I wonder. If so, I can't detect it. Places to go, things to do, I suppose. It does sound a bit like the list of someone desperate -dare I say gasping- for adventure in his or her life. Bit like me really if I'm honest. Which I can be. Honest this is, to myself in any case for who else is there to hear me. All I'm doing these days is sitting here on this bench watching the world go by. I don't think the world sees me sitting here. Except for Nadine, of course, *she* saw me.

I could have written a list like this, I suppose. If I had thought of it. Funny that. Now what would I have put on it? Certainly not Abseiling, I can tell you that! But say Sand Sculpting? Would I have thought of that? Possibly. Incidentally there was this article in the newspaper about it. A sculpting festival somewhere not too far away from here. Members



of the public invited to come and try it out for themselves. Sometime this week or the next. It did tickle my fancy, I must admit. What a coincidence.

Right. Get up off your Backside, Barry, and go look for that article! I'm game! How exciting! Sand sculpting here I come!

Now that was worth trying out, I tell you! Took off on Tuesday to Sandyhome (yes, I know, convenient name). With a bucket and spade. Felt like a little kid going to the beach. Loads of people there. All sorts. We were taken around the place first. Lots of artists busy sculpting. Some magnificent pieces already finished. The viewing of them alone was worth the bother. Then off to the sandpit. There were about twenty of us, mostly adults but some kids as well. Had a whale of a time. Made a big cat. Named it Toddy. I was quite pleased with myself. Shame I couldn't take it home. Oh well. Can tick that one off.

Now where's that list? Ah, right here, in my pocket of course. Where else? Brought a pen for the purpose. Okay, Sand sculpting, tick. Been there, done that. Who would have thought?

Now what was that other thing on the list that I fancied? Oh I remember. Geocaching.

I looked that one up in the library to see how one would go about doing it. Turned out to be quite an undertaking! Blimey! Don't think I'm quite up to that one yet! Need that smartphone thingy, which I don't have. Yet. Let's not rule it out just for that. Pen, paper, good shoes, that sort of stuff I have. I did get quite excited reading about it, I admit. I will probably go and do it, once I've mastered that phone business. One of those modern things I didn't go in for. Go with the times, Barry. I can hear my wife say it. She was a bit more up to date, ha ha. All I have to do is find somebody to help me get -what's it called- 'online'. Yes, that. Have to put Geocaching on the backburner for now. Shame.

What else can I go for? Abseiling? Incidentally looked that one up as well, while I was at it. Not on your nelly. As if! At my age?!! Cross that one off for starters. Next one's Canterbury. That I can do. I'll keep Downsizing for when I'm in the mood. Then I'll combine it with Z. I'll probably need it by then. When I've been to C, I'll dawdle over to that new community centre. Haven't been there yet. They apparently offer activities for the over-sixties. Maybe they include E. I'll call that Making an Effort, ha ha. For now C. Canterbury here I come.

Oh wow! That was an experience of a lifetime! There was so much to see and do that I booked a hotel for another two days. Those lovely medieval buildings! The cathedral, of course. The gardens! All that walking took it out of me. Could have done with some Z there and then! Instead I went on a riverboat tour. Very relaxing. The weather was glorious. Had a whale of a time with the guide. Young chap. Anyway, I'll forget about E for now. That won't be on the cards for a good week. I need to recuperate! I'll have a coffee and lounge about for a bit, take a nap, that sort of thing.

Back on the bench. As for the list? I've ticked off C. And E for good measure. That stuff at the community centre? Good for old fogeys. I've decided to go for half an hour's walk every day. That's enough Exercise for me. F already had a tick and G is on the backburner, as is D. Holiday can wait too. How about going for another J? Hmm, I can get one second hand at the recycle place. Might be a good idea for a rainy day. I'll put that on my To Do list. Next is L for Lighthouse. Another outing. Where would be the nearest, I wonder.

I seem to be getting quite into this list. Once I've gone through this one, I'm of a mind to make one of my own. Who would have thought that?! It certainly gets me out and about.

As for Lighthouse, maybe the lady at the library knows where there is one near here. There must be hundreds scattered all along the coast of Britain. I'd invite Nadine but I haven't seen her for weeks. Shame. Maybe it was just a one-off. Just like this list in my pocket. Never happened before, never again after.

Well, that was an eye-opener! The library woman, Evie, was a veritable mine of information. We had a good chat. Turned out she's a real fanatic. Even gave me a book to read. *The British Lighthouse Trail: a Regional Guide* by Sara Kerr. Fascinating read. Evie said she'd visited quite a few lighthouses herself. Even stayed in one overnight! Been to the Southwold one several times as there is also a very nice beach, according to her. I must say that one sounded quite appealing. Not least because of its connection with Adnams. Yes, them of beer fame. Going to Southwold would nicely combine with P. I'll definitely dive into that one.

Been there, done that. Tick! The beer was very good and I enjoyed the view of the Lighthouse. Might do it again some time. When there are less tourists about. Doable in a day but I might book myself in a hotel then.

Next thing I'm going for is Tombstone rubbing. Oh yes. Skip Rafting. That one is not for me. As for the rubbing business, I suppose I could ask the vicar. He might know. Don't want to go too far away. I'd like to get home after doing it without being crippled in the process. I remember it was quite wearing on the back and knees. Age is beginning to tell on me these days.

What do you know! There's a brass rubbing centre practically on my doorstep! In London no less! Trafalgar Square of all places. Can't wait to go there!

Oh my, oh my, that was such fun! Tons of replica brasses from churches and cathedrals all over the UK. No need to go any further afield! Help and materials all available right there. Lunch too. I did a dragon. And St George for good measure. They go together, don't they? I must admit I was a tiny bit the worse for wear after that but the fun, the fun. I'll do it again, that's for sure!

Wish Nadine was here. I could tell her all about my exploits. I do wonder sometimes where she's gone. Oh well. One of those things. Ships that pass and all that.

Right, the list. Not much left to go through now. No U or V. So W is next. Walk the Length. Again what length? If only I could ask Nadine. Assuming that the list is hers, which it might not be. Bugger. Pardon my French. Maybe it means the length someone would go to. But no, it says Walk, doesn't it. *The Length*. Not just any length. This one is a real mystery. Have to sleep on that one. Maybe I can ask Evie if it raises any thoughts with her. Being the helpful person she is. Am off to the library tomorrow anyway. Yes, I'll do that. Now back to E, as in Enjoying the sunshine. The type of Exercise I'm very good at. No length to go, ha ha.

Well, W draw a blank with Evie too. No surprise really. We batted it around for a bit but to no avail. So we gave up. Failing all else I have to go for Downsizing. I would prefer

to do Geocaching but that takes far more preparing than D. Come to think of it, there's plenty of stuff that I can get rid of. I'll start tomorrow. No Barry, now. You know you're procrastinating. Savour that one on your tongue. What a word for something so simple as putting things off!

Pfff, is all I can say. Once you start, one thing leads to the next. And the next. I'm getting slimmer by the minute. D is very good E. I can say that from E for Experience now. But I've cleared a good lot of space. In the cupboards and the rooms. Keeping the furniture, so it doesn't look bare. I'm all done in. I'm giving it a rest for now. I've been at it for a while. Time to go to the park. The sun is out.

I couldn't believe my eyes but who was sitting there already, as if she'd never been away? Nadine! Only . . . she didn't look too good. In fact she looked ill. Crumpled. Her skin a little bluish, her breathing laboured and noisy. I could hear it from afar.

She struggled up from the bench before I could stop her.

'There's something I want you to do,' she said with a lopsided kind of smile.

'What would that be?' I said.

'Walk with me.'

We started walking. The girl was none too stable on her legs. I had to support her quite a bit. Her breathing became more and more laboured. I was getting quite worried.

'Are you sure we should be doing this?' I said. 'You're obviously not well.'

'Yes, I have to,' she said.

'Why? Where are we going?' I wanted to know.

She just shook her head and put her arm through mine.

'Don't ask. Just walk with me for now.'

It was obviously too much for her but she plodded on, obviously determined to put one foot in front of the other. Luckily the trek did not last very long. When we rounded a corner Nadine stopped and pointed at the building in front of us.

'That's where I'm going.'

‘What’s this place?’ I asked.

Stupid me. There was a sign right in front of my eyes that said it all. Hospice.

I looked at her, flabbergasted.

‘Why are we here?! Who are we here for?’ I wanted to know.

Stupid, stupid me. Too slow on the uptake. Always have been.

‘Me. I’m Walking the Length. My final length.’

I just looked at her. I couldn’t speak for the lump in my throat.

Nadine smiled and patted my arm.

‘I know,’ she said. ‘It was shock for me too. I’m used to the idea now. Let me catch my breath for a minute before we go in.’

I just stood and stared. At her, at the sign, trying to make the two connect in my brain. I couldn’t. Eventually I took the list out of my pocket.

‘So this list *is* yours,’ I said. ‘You *are* the one that put it in my pocket.’

Nadine nodded. Then she pulled on my arm.

‘Come on,’ she said. ‘Let’s go. They’re waiting for me.’

And so we Walked the Length. Her and me.

That was a week ago. I’ve been to see her every day. Seen her grow paler and weaker. We talked. Or rather I did. She barely had breath enough for breathing, let alone talking. So I told her about my exploits. And what her list had meant for me. How it got me out and about. How I was sure she’d have loved to do all those things with me. She nodded at that, wistfully.

‘What’s your name, by the way? I never asked.’

‘Barry.’

Her eyes lit up.

‘B for Barry,’ she whispered. ‘How wonderful. You did look like a B.’

I was too flabbergasted to ask how and why.

‘There’s only one thing I didn’t put on this list’, she then said, obviously making an effort.

‘What would that be?’

‘The name of the one and only, the one I’d Meet before I die. I couldn’t.’

‘Why?’

‘I didn’t know his name.’

Ah, the mysterious question mark.

‘What kind of person would that be?’ I wondered, slow, so slow on the uptake.

Nadine went all dreamy.

‘Someone adventurous. Impulsive. Someone who would pick up someone’s bucket list and do the things I would have liked to do. If I had the time to do so.’

She looked at me.

‘Someone just like you. I guess I found him. Aren’t I a lucky girl?’

‘What?!’

‘I’m dying, Barry. In case you hadn’t realised. Leukaemia. One of those things.’

No, I hadn’t. Not really. In spite of the hospice. In spite of the nurses, the care, the obvious failing of her strength, the hollow eyes. I’d pushed the reality of it away, being so pleased to see her again. On a bench, in a bed. It was all one to me.

‘Where would you like to go on H for Holiday, Barry?’ she then wanted to know.

‘Spain.’

‘Spain,’ she said, her voice fading. ‘I would have loved that. Sadly my time is up.’

She stopped to take a breath.

‘Do it, Barry,’ she whispered. ‘Go to Spain. Do it for me.’

She smiled at me and reached out a hand. I took it between mine. It was so cold.

‘Promise?’

Her eyes glazed over and her breathing stopped.

I put the list in her hand and closed her fingers over it.



‘Promise,’ I said, when I could get the word out past the lump in my throat.

That’s when I knew the time for Z had come.

###

Thank you for reading my short story. If you enjoyed it, won’t you please take a moment to let me know? You can do so by contacting me through my website [www.marinagerrardfiction.com](http://www.marinagerrardfiction.com). You’ll find more information about my Dark&Scary and Light&Airy e books and my short stories there too.

Thanks!

Marina Gerrard

Something in my Pocket is a work of fiction. Names and characters are the product of the author’s imagination. Any resemblance to incidents that may have occurred or actual people, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. Any echoes of popular songs, adverts or catchphrases of TV programmes, if any, are purely meant as clues to memories stored in the author’s memory bank. The references to lighthouses, Canterbury and tombstone rubbing are factual.

### **About the author**

Marina Gerrard graduated to writing novels after finishing a creative writing course and producing a few prize winning short stories. She is the author of Journeys into the Heartland, a mini series of three psychological thrillers that delve deeply into the world of relived traumatic experiences. After finishing this trilogy she decided it was time for something less intense. She then embarked on writing a series of light-hearted novels that can be best classed as ‘dreamscapes’, followed by a novel on the theme of memories and where and how they can be stored. In between she took to writing short stories. Her books and short stories are available in e book format, the short stories also in PDF.

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