

## BLUE ZEBRA

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*Steven Petkus*

I wait until everyone's out of the aisle  
before approaching the celery.  
There's this couple from New York  
taking forever choosing apples;  
when they finally go off  
in search of gourmet coffee  
I stoop over, my face near the stalks,  
so close I can feel the chill  
from their couch of ice chips.  
I want to talk it over.  
Specifically, how it is  
that I am clinically without you  
here in Iowa, having once  
shared lunch upon a rusty petrified log  
outside the Duke Forestry lab  
where we helped examine soils.  
On this matter I seek the celery's  
crisp licorice wisdom.  
I am confused, also, about deli meats:  
what exactly are "giraffe popsicles"  
and how do they compare, as snacks,  
to the hickory-smoked whiting?  
I could use advice as well  
on dealing with other shoppers:  
this tiny limping man who pokes  
and shouts, "Blue zebra!  
Mammal noise! You give to me  
this loaf of bread!" Last week  
the lemons at Hy-Vee supported

non-violence in such situations.  
I turn and head for the checkout.  
In line, I don't look at anyone.  
I insist on bagging everything  
myself. I can hear the tiny  
man explode, "Lingerie eyes!"  
and "Marshmallow hoof!" two  
customers back. At the clerk's  
raised eyebrows—"What do you mean,  
*bags?*"—I shuffle my groceries naked  
into the carriage and hasten to the door.  
The New Yorkers, though, they go on  
thunking melons, deciding what beers.  
They've seen worse. Much worse.