Blue Zebra

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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.