

Cold Cuts

by Emmanuel Z. Price

You're just like your dad, she said with squinting eyes, Like father like son. I thought for a moment and then made an expression that conveyed I wasn't sure. No, not in how you look or behave. In fact, it's not any one quality that is similar. She tilted her head slightly. It's just your *essences*, she said. It's like they're the same shade.

I told her, I don't know what you mean. We were silent, and some time elapsed. I began thinking about something that had happened earlier with another friend.

She said, It's not something I can explain.

What? I said.

About your father. How you're the same. I could *try* to explain and you could *try* and understand; but it'd be like when your looking in the fridge for cold cuts and you can't find them anywhere so you forget about them and do something else. But then some time passes—hours—or even *days*—and you find them right on the middle shelf. Perfectly sliced deli meat staring you directly in the face.

Cold cuts, I said, not really understanding her analogy.

Just trust me, she said. One day your gonna be at the grocery store with your wife and kids looking for ingredients for tonight's dinner and it'll hit you, right there on aisle eleven—'Ahhh, I get it now,' you'll say, 'It's not any outward feature we have in common. It's our *Natures*'—and then one of the small, unanswered questions waiting in the back of your head will finally get to dissolve.

She smiled—*hehe*—and I mirrored her grin, feeling slightly awed and confused. I thought, *How can she be so sure about herself. I've never said something like that to someone. And especially not with such a knowing smile.*

People like her have always amazed me. Those few who can decode the strange logic of the universe and make bold and mysterious statements about *essences* and cold cuts, all while

smiling knowingly. I'm still thinking about it, all these years later. *Was she just kidding around or did she really see something behind the surface?* I'm not sure. But now every time I'm in the grocery store, wandering listlessly through the aisles, I think of her. And of my father. My palms start sweating and my heart starts to *thump* very fast, louder than usual, and I can't help but feel how unknown my life has been, as I brace myself for an epiphany that might never appear.

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