My Father

Keyoka Kinzy
My father always smelled of work,
Like gasoline and metal and something spicy
That the wind blew into my nose,
And I could smell him after he was long gone,
As I sat in the front seat with my mama.

She asked how it went,
A ten-minute meeting at a middle ground gas station.
I dropped the money in the cup holder between us. Well, he’s fat,
As though he swallowed too big a bite of life,
And it thickened around his legs, swelled in his belly,
Sagged his arms, and filled his head.

She said I should try harder,
So, I carried on for years.
We would meet at parks or 24-hour McDonalds, one time a grocery store.
My mama would watch from a distant car or a far-off table –
Hoping, I think, that I would find myself in him –
As I stared at his fingers or his chin;
Sometimes there was a moustache or a bald head.

I never told her I forgot how he looked every time,
That I had to sift him out of a crowd
Or distinguish him from maybe-killers alone on benches.
He would kiss my forehead with whiskered lips
And say he didn’t have long.

Neither did I.