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## My Father

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**2020 Vassar Miller Poetry Award  
Honorable Mention**

**My Father  
by 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.