Father Figure: Found Poetry Perspectives

I. Miscegenation

A separation occurred.

He returned to Africa
to fulfill his promise—
a book called Origins,
Prometheus and the fire.

Race—the essence
of the morality tale,
my father’s life.
At a local bar, a white man
“shouldn’t have to drink
next to a nigger.”

My father stood up,
smiled,
the white man tried to purchase
my father’s forgiveness.

Why didn’t my father return?
Miscegenation—the folly of bigotry,
the universal rights of man,
the (broken) promise of the American dream.

II. The Departure

He gingerly placed the needle
on the groove:
A tinny guitar lick, sharp horns, the thump
of drums, and voices,
local, joyful, urging us on.

“Come,” my father said, “you will learn from the master.”

Slender body swaying, lush sound
rising, arms casting an invisible
net, head back, eyes closed,
then he peeked at me,
solemn face spread into a silly grin.
My first tentative steps follow my father.

He lets out a shout,
bright and high,
a shout that cries
for laughter, that leaves
much behind.

And I hear him still.

III. The Return

I dreamed I was traveling
by bus, with friends whose names
I’ve forgotten, men and women
with different journeys to make.
We rolled across deep fields of grass,
hills that bucked against orange sky.
The bus came to a halt, I got off, sat on the curb.

I stood before a cell, opened the padlock.
My father stood before me, thin, hairless,
black eyes luminous against an ashen face.
“Look at you,” he said. “so tall, so thin, gray hairs even.”
I saw that it was true.
I began to weep.

“I always wanted to tell you how much I love you.”

An implacable sadness
spread across his face.
I whispered that we might leave
together.
He shook his head.
I awoke still weeping—
          his jailor,
his judge,
          his son.