



PICKLE FOR THE SUNSHINE

TONY ROBLES

JOEY ROSALES' FATHER took a record from its sleeve. The disc was red, redder than an apple. It turned like a wheel on his father's fingertips. Mr. Rosales took much care handling his record albums, careful not to get fingerprints on them, always handling them by the edges. Joey watched his father pucker his lips, blowing what Joey thought was imaginary dust off the grooves.

"Don't *ever* touch these records," Mr. Rosales said in his thick Filipino accent. To Joey, his father's mouth was a cave where mispronounced words were written on its porous walls; broken English, they called it—a blend of English with occasional Filipino words thrown in—Filipino words Joey didn't understand. Why should you speak Filipino, Mr. Rosales would say. *You're in America*. Joey's father pronounced his *v*'s like *b*'s, his *f*'s like *p*'s.

Joey sat as if on trial. He felt as if he were being scrutinized. *Saan*—the only Filipino word Joey understood—which meant "where." His father was always interrogating him: *Where are you? Where did you come from? Where are you going? Saan this and saan that. Sa-ahn!* To Joey, the old man's tongue was a blade . . . *sa-ahn!* It was like the sky was sliced in half with his

tongue leaving an open seam where coconuts dropped and landed on his head. Most of the time, Joey didn't know how to answer these questions; all he knew was that the old man was always pissed off—especially at him.

Joey's eyes melted into the album, into the grooves, the light from the living room hitting the flat surface of the disc, making it even redder. In its perfect flatness, it appeared as a candy apple stepped on by a circus elephant or run over by one of those Cadillacs he'd seen floating down Fillmore Street—a perfect circle, a planet within reach of his fingers. Joey wanted to be on Fillmore Street, where the sounds of voices, of music floating from cars and open windows, flooded his ears, and the smell of barbecue hit him in the nose. But he couldn't get out of the house—not with the old man there.

“You have been touching my albums,” Mr. Rosales declared accusingly, holding the disc to the light, inspecting it. “*Peengerprints*.”

“I ain't touched no albums,” replied Joey, leaning back, his crown of black hair gleaming, his lips taking on a twist that his father despised.

“Where did you learn to talk like that?” Mr. Rosales said, his face turning red. “Ain't, ain't, ain't! Where do you learn this . . . *saan!* Who taught you how to talk? You talk like those people in the street, those *peemp* out there.”

Mr. Rosales was tempted to slap Joey across the head, but Joey was getting too big to hit. Joey had come to anticipate that hand and knew to lean back whenever the old man got hot. Mr. Rosales looked at the crown of black hair sitting on Joey's head, shining with grease from a can that he dipped his fingers into, massaging it in—*Crown Royal*. Mr. Rosales used Crown Royal, too, on a head of hair no longer crown-like but sparse with the light exposing a spot that kept increasing in size. He held the red platter to the light then set it down on the turntable. The red disc turned like the wheel of a big car. He placed the needle onto the groove.

Mr. Rosales wanted Joey to stay at home. Part of it was because of the Fillmore Basher, a large man who prowled the neighborhood bashing people with a baseball bat. It was all over the newspapers. Mr. Rosales had installed bars on the windows, but Joey found a way to pry them loose and slither away. I don't live in no jail, Joey had thought as he pried the bars loose. He would arise from the open windows greeted by large cats and dogs that the pound hadn't rounded up. He felt a kinship with them as he slipped away to Fillmore Street.

Joey saw colors everywhere as he walked down Fillmore, the street where he took his first steps. Fillmore seemed to go on for miles, yet his feet only traveled four blocks. On storefront windows, bright lights announced themselves like teeth, faces behind windows gleamed as cooks cooked, salesmen sold, dry cleaners pressed, and the solitary song of a bird hidden in one of the many trees lining Fillmore Street communed with every sound to spit out a symphony. Joey passed windows as clear as water, while others were misty—taking in different versions of his reflection. He kept walking, his feet moving to the muffled sound of music behind doors and partially opened windows. Rich baritone voices hit him in the face as he watched the bodies all around him, some leaning against cars, gesturing—arms and hands splayed as if communing with spirits or perhaps God himself. Joey’s eyes fell on a car. Music came from it. It was the voice of a woman belting out blues from deep within the bowels of Fillmore. The car was light blue, as if the sky had popped open and rained its hue on the metallic shell in an act of selflessness, bestowing its hue in a tithe that would intersect with the flesh sounds on the hallowed ground that was Fillmore Street. The wheels moved as if trying to keep pace with the woman’s moans:

I woke up this morning
 With an awful aching head
 Well, my new man had left me
 Just a new room and an empty bed

“What’s happening, Joey?” a voice called out.

Joey looked. It was Adrian, cat from school—Galileo High. Adrian grew up in the neighborhood. His skin was dark—blacker than black. He wore thick glasses, so thick that his eyes seemed to pop out of his head. He had the nickname Bug Eyes, which he hated.

“What’s happening, Bug Eyes?” said Joey.

“Man, don’t call me that,” said Adrian.

“Everybody be calling you that,” said Joey, putting up his hands, slapping at Bug Eyes as if he were boxing.

Joey feinted to the left and came over the top with an open hand. It was thrown with the intention of missing, but it landed, knocking the other guy’s glasses crooked.

“Man, what you do that for?” cried Bug Eyes.

“Shit, that was just a tap,” replied Joey. “You need to keep your eyes open.”

“Eyes open? They open all the time. I can’t help it if I wear glasses.”

Joey reached over and yanked the glasses off Bug Eyes’ face.

“Look at these smudges,” said Joey, inspecting the glasses like some kind of doctor. Joey spat on the glasses and wiped with his sleeve.

“Give ‘em back,” said Bug Eyes, trying to snatch them from Joey’s hands but missing.

“You too slow,” said Joey, laughing.

Bug Eyes kept grabbing at the glasses. He finally slapped Joey’s hand, knocking the glasses to the ground.

“Man, see what you did?” said Bug Eyes. “Always messin’ ‘round, man. How am I gonna see anything now?”

Joey’s eyes drifted away from Adrian toward another car, a Cadillac—deep blood red, like a cherry squeezed between the fingers. It moved like a ship on land. In the driver’s seat was a man wearing thick glasses. Voices called out as he looked out the window.

“What’s happening, Silk?”

The man looked out, nodding slightly.

“That’s that blind cat,” said Adrian. “He a pimp.”

The man turned his head. A shadow cast over his profile, exposing a sharp nose pointing in the direction of heaven—ground level of Fillmore Street.

“Yeah, I know who it is,” said Joey as the Cadillac passed like a train before slowing to a stop.

Joey watched the car and thought about his father’s words: *Those peemp.*

Joey had seen the car many times. It reminded him of the color of his father’s record album. He’d heard that the guy who owned it was a pimp called Blind Fillmore Silk. How could a blind man drive a car? Joey had never seen the man’s eyes. He wore thick dark glasses. Joey wanted to know what was behind those glasses. Once, when Joey was younger, ten or eleven, his father marched him down Fillmore Street by the scruff of the neck, heading toward a liquor store he’d stolen a dill pickle from. Joey walked, embarrassed, with a thick, half-eaten dill pickle in his hand. With his free hand, his father slapped him across the head. The blow’s momentum turned Joey’s head sharply to the left, where he saw Blind Fillmore Silk looking from across the street. He was with a woman. He

was speaking to her, gesturing with his hands. He pointed a finger in the woman's face. He then shot a look across the street toward Joey. He stared at Joey for several seconds before nodding and turning back to the woman.

Joey saw those glasses. He was ashamed that his dad was parading him down Fillmore Street on display for all to see. But he was more ashamed that the man in the car saw his father holding his neck like a vice while he held a half-eaten dill pickle. Joey heard that Silk slapped his women on the street. Every time he saw Silk thereafter, Silk was alone. What he remembered was when their eyes met and how Silk nodded at him as if to say something. A few months after, Joey had gone back to that liquor store and saw Silk inside. He saw Joey as he was walking out.

"Hey, young blood," said Silk.

"Yeah?" Joey replied.

"What's your name?"

"Joey."

Silk reached into a small brown paper bag and pulled out a dripping dill pickle.

"For you, young blood," said Silk, handing it to Joey.

Joey remembered when he was caught stealing the dill pickle. His father had sent him to the store to get Canned Tomato Hunt, having meant Hunt's canned tomatoes.

Silk headed toward the door.

"Hey," said Joey.

"Yeah, kid?"

"You really blind?" said Joey.

Silk looked at Joey through thick glasses and laughed, showing teeth like bright lights.

"Your breath smells like baby's milk," laughed Silk.

Silk nodded to Joey then walked out of the liquor store. It'd be the last time Joey would see him for a while.

Years went by and Joey would roam Fillmore Street against his father's wishes. He would hang out with Adrian who'd just lost his glasses and was groping around like an old man, declaring that—while he might be as blind as Ray Charles for the moment—he could make out all the ugly faces in the neighborhood with the utmost clarity. One day, Joey walked down Fillmore Street and saw Blind Fillmore Silk coming out of a barbecue

joint, Leonard's—the best joint outside of Texas. Silk walked toward a pool hall called 8 Ball Heaven—the sign out front, a rack of pool balls the colors of candy, with a black one, larger than the others, in the middle. Silk walked inside to a hail of greetings, as if he were a returning soldier. Joey followed him inside.

“Silk!” a voice cried out. “Where you been—*hiding?*”

“Meditating,” replied Silk, slowly moving toward a pool table.

“A pimp mediating?” another voice called out. “On what, that nose on your face?”

“Yes,” said Silk, running a finger over his nose. “This nose is well built, like the Egyptian pyramids.”

“Well, my nose is built pretty good, too,” another voice called out. “And it knows bullshit when it smells it.”

The pool hall erupted in laughter.

Joey saw shadows on shadows, black brothers all over—a heaven where cigarette smoke concealed everything you may have done outside. Smoke rings expanded into crown-like halos. Next to a row of barstools, a young blond man with shoulder-length hair sat playing a harp, strumming and plucking, looking like some angel on furlough from heaven, like the angels plastered on the walls of St. Mary's. Next to him was a small table with a bowl of fruit. Swirling voices curled on floating smoke. Green felt tables blended with a haunting blues voice from the jukebox. Somehow, the voice from the juke and the harp coexisted to where nobody noticed conflict. The ice in the glasses blended with everything. Silk carried one of those sticks that blind folks carry.

“S'appenin, Silk?” a voice rang out.

“Ain't nuthin',” Silk replied, “just keepin' my nose clean.”

“Nine ball?”

“You know it.”

The man talking to Silk was big. Arms like trees; looked like he could lift a car with one arm and a woman with the other; had a face like Jersey Joe Walcott's. People called him Willie.

Silk looked around.

“Over there,” Joey said.

“Who's that?” asked Silk.

“Joey.”

“Joey? Joey who?”

“Kid from the liquor store, you know, with the dill pickle.”

“Oh yeah, I remember. Your old man was smacking you upside your head a while back.”

“Yeah, but he ain’t smacking me around no more.”

“Is that right?”

“Yep.”

Silk smiled. His ring seemed to smile, along with the ice in a glass close by bathed in harp sounds.

Play that harp, motherfucker! A voice belted out from the shadows.

“Where’d that harp player come from?” Silk asked.

“He’s a stray,” a voice called out from behind the bar. It was Gizzard, the owner. “He come in one day wanting to learn the blues. He brought in his harp and started strumming.”

“I see. . . . A more sophisticated blues?” said Silk.

“Damn right,” said Gizzard. “This harp-playin’ motherfucker gonna make me a million dollars someday. I’ll make him bigger than Elvis!”

Joey looked at Silk.

“You really blind?” Joey whispered.

“Get me a cue,” Silk answered.

Joe handed a cue to Silk.

“Is it crooked?” asked Silk.

“I don’t know,” answered Joey.

Silk placed the cue on the table and rolled it. It rolled smooth.

“You as green as a pool table and twice as square. You got to make sure you ain’t playing wit’ no crooked stick, boy,” said Silk.

“Rack ‘em!” said Willie, looming over Joey.

“Me?” said Joey

“Who else am I talking to, kid?” answered Willie.

The faces at the bar looked at Joey, and even the harp player stopped strumming to look.

The pool balls glared at Joey as he racked. Willie held his cue like a sword. Silk laid his arm across the table as if he were diving into its greenness. His splayed fingers spread like an elegant spider. He looped his index finger and thrust the stick through—back and forth. The tip struck the cue ball that crashed into the other balls, scattering them into a frenzy of colors. The colors slid and glided before Joey’s eyes, settling to a halt at different angles. The purple ball snuck to the side pocket and dropped like

a stone in water. Silk surveyed the table, head moving left to right, tilting slightly as if listening to the tinkling of glasses. What's he looking at? Joey thought. Was he blind, or was he bullshittin'—putting on a front? Joey saw spots, as if the pool balls were orbiting planets, floating and rotating under his nose.

"Joey, you payin' attention?" said Silk.

"Yeah, I'm on top of it," Joey replied.

"What do I got?"

"Solids," Joey answered. "You got a six ball near the side pocket."

"Six ball, side pocket," Silk called out in a melodious voice that met the strumming of the harp.

He tapped the cue gently. The ball traveled to the side and tapped the six ball in like a long-distance kiss.

"What I got now?" said Silk.

"Three in the corner," said Joey.

It went in. He nailed every shot. He ran the table. Then he sank the eight ball—and that was all she wrote. Joey couldn't believe it.

"Good Gawd almighty," said Willie. "I've been hustled by a blind motherfucker."

"Good game, my man," said Silk, as Willie reached into his pocket and pulled out a stack of bills.

Silk's clothes shone in the low light of the pool hall. It was like the pool balls had blended and exploded in colors on his skin—orange overcoat, matching shoes, light green shirt. The only other guy who could dress like that, Joey thought, was his father; not as flashy, but his pride and joy was a pair of red shoes he wore when he went downtown.

Silk walked up to Joey, slipped a few bills into his pocket.

"Come on, kid," said, Silk, "let's get out of here."

Joey followed Silk into the Fillmore Street light that felt like sand in his eyes. He squinted, adjusting to the colors and contours of Silk's clothes. They walked toward the Booker T. Washington Hotel.

"Hey Silk . . . what it be?" a voice declared.

Voices, voices all over; guys from the neighborhood, they nodded at Silk and at Joey.

"Here, take this," said Silk, holding out a set of keys.

"What's that?" asked Joey

"It ain't no fishhook."

“What do you want me to do?”

“Open the damn car for me and get behind the wheel.”

“What am I, your chauffeur?” Joey snapped.

“Well, you said I was blind. A blind man can’t drive, right?”

“Can’t play no pool neither.”

“Don’t get smart.”

“Okay, okay . . . but I don’t know how to drive.”

Silk straightened the glasses on his face. He looked toward Joey who wondered what Silk saw.

“I don’t know how to play pool,” said Silk.

“Shit, man,” said Joey. “What you talkin’ about? You ran the whole table.”

“That wuddn’t nuthin’ but an illusion, young blood. It was *you* that ran that table, it was your eyes. I was following your words. I was going with the feeling, the flow, you dig?”

Joey ran his hand across his chin. His forehead felt moist in the warm air.

“We both in the same boat,” said Silk.

“Yeah, but this ain’t no boat; it’s a car,” said Joey.

Joey looked at the wide car. It could have been a boat, a ship, he thought. It was a Cadillac, a big showboat sure to draw attention from both the seeing and the blind.

Joey had only driven once in his life: his brother Teddy’s beat-up station wagon. But that was all of two or three blocks, and he nearly hit a fire hydrant. Joey got behind the wheel. The interior was deep red, just like the outside. The steering wheel was red, too. The wheel felt cool in his hands. He looked into the rearview mirror. Silk was leaning, relaxing.

“Let’s get movin’,” said Silk. “Don’t be lollygaggin’.”

“Looks like you’re the one lollygaggin’,” answered Joey.

“Never mind what I’m doing, young blood,” Silk said. “Jus’ keep yo’ eyes on the road.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot,” Joey said, his eyes focused. “You’re the blind one, right?”

“I can still see far enough to knock you on your ass.”

“All right.”

Joey started the car. He hit the gas, then the brakes, jolting Silk’s head back like a cobra.

“Man, what the hell you doin’?” Silk cried out.

“I told you, I can’t drive.”

“Jesus, kid. Put it in reverse. That’s R, then put it back to drive, that’s D . . . as in dummy. Then ease the motherfucker out. Got it?”

Joey put it in reverse. He eased it backward. He worried that he might hit another car, or worse, that his dad or the cops might see him. He pulled onto Webster Street. He stopped.

“What you stoppin’ for?”

“I don’t know where to go.”

“You don’t know where to go? Where the hell you think you at? You tellin’ me you don’t know where you at? We in the *set*—the *Filmo* baby boy. What, you need a map, a tour guide? You disappoint me, son.”

“Aw . . . hell with that, *hold on*,” said Joey.

They began to glide down Webster. It was like those pool balls that Silk tapped in, slow and lingering like a kiss. They started rolling down the wide street.

“Make a right,” snapped Silk.

“Where?”

“On McAllister.”

Joey turned the wheel like the captain on a ship. He hung a right, a wide one, and was on Fillmore.

“Say, Joey!” a voice called out. “What’s up, blood? Who you steal that car from?”

Joey smiled. They were on Fillmore. He felt like Willie Mays driving that Caddie. He’d seen Willie park outside of the pool hall in his flashy clothes flashing a roll of bills. Joey didn’t even like baseball, but he knew what Willie Mays knew—how to take control of a Caddie. The cold steering wheel became warm. Fillmore Street was like two arms opened wide. He knew where he was at. He was coasting. In the rearview, he saw Silk’s face. He looked at his dark glasses. It seemed that the whole world was passing by in its reflection. Joey’s mom had once told him that the whole world passed through the eyes of a fish. He thought that was crazy. Maybe it wasn’t. Silk was in the back seat, one big fish taking it all in.

“Look at that,” Silk said. “Orange like the sun.”

A woman was walking up Fillmore wearing a large orange hat. It was like the sun had decided to sink low and rest on her head. Silk looked out the window like he was the president of the United States, or at least the president of Fillmore. That orange hat fluttered in the wind like a song

trapped in a bird's wing. On Fillmore, Joey felt like he had arrived home from a long voyage. People all along the block glanced at the car, some stopped and looked.

"Keep driving, kid."

The sun was at Joey's eyes like it decided to land on the window and sit.

"Where to?" Joey asked.

"Just keep going straight."

They crossed Eddy Street and headed toward Geary. Joey's eyes looked ahead but flitted in all directions. He saw a crowd near the Booker T. Washington Hotel. A guy was getting out of a blue Cadillac.

"It's Sugar Ray," a voice in the street called out.

Joey looked at the crowd gathering around Sugar Ray.

"Keep your eyes on the road," Silk warned. "Hey Sugar!"

Sugar Ray looked at them.

"There's the champ," said Sugar Ray, pointing at the red Cadillac.

"Sugar Ray called you the champ," Joey said to Silk.

"Naw, he was talking about you, kid. Keep driving."

They rode past Post and Sutter and Bush—past the mom and pop stores, past the little market that Joey's sister Grace's husband owned that was next to the Japanese grocery store. He got more comfortable behind the wheel, at the controls. He eased on the gas and didn't jam the brakes. He was a natural. They went past Sacramento toward Union Street. The houses were clean, the windows were closed, their mouths with metal bars. They were in the same city, but it felt like a thousand miles away. People looked at them with glances meant to shoo them away, but they ignored them. The sun sat on the windshield, along for the ride. Silk lay back in his seat, his head titled as if looking onto the sky for possibilities. Joey didn't know if he was asleep or awake. He stayed quiet.

"Hang a left. We're gonna take a trip," said Silk.

"Where we going?"

"Across the bridge."

The Golden Gate Bridge stretched before Joey's eyes. He'd only crossed the bridge a couple of times, in the back seat of Grace's husband's car—along for the ride en route to some errand—a pick-up or delivery. Ships were crossing underneath in both directions. Joey thought about his father who'd been a merchant seaman before working at the shipyard. He'd always come back after a couple of months. If he knew Joey was driving across the Golden Gate Bridge, it would blow his mind. Joey got

on the highway along the Presidio. He felt like the car would rise like a plane above all the other cars and sail above the bridge. He rolled down the window. The wind ran across Silk's head, catching pressed strands of his hair, causing them to rise like flames.

"Roll that window up, blood."

Joey ignored him, hitting the accelerator going to seventy-five.

"Hey, watch it," said Silk, smoothing his hair in the wind. "You don't want to get our asses stopped by the cops. You ain't got no license, and I got's me a criminal record."

"Man, I told you I ain't had no license. You didn't listen to me," Joey replied, looking into the rearview.

"Just be cool on the accelerator, kid. We ain't tryin' to catch no train."

Joey couldn't relax. He held the wheel tightly, steadying as he went, but swerved out of his lane from time to time.

"Be cool."

They headed toward the hills. San Francisco was a postcard shrinking in the rearview. Joey thought of Alcatraz—all them guys in there, listening to the sounds of cars and voices so close. They were going straight like Silk said, past Sausalito, Marin. It felt like they were on the road for a hundred years. Joey calmed down—didn't swerve onto other lanes. He even looked around and caught the scenery. It seemed the farther they drove, the more at home he felt. Silk stopped complaining about the wind. His hair moved in the breeze like wild grass. Joey's mind was tripping on things like that. It was different. Maybe he was different, too. They were driving along a long road that dipped and curved and straightened; it was like something out of a book.

"I like colors," said Silk.

"Yeah?" said Joey, the wind blowing his black hair aflame.

"Yeah . . . all kinds of colors."

"But how can you like colors when you can't see?"

"I can see your ugly brown face in that rearview."

"So, you can see brown?"

"Among other things."

Joey shot Silk a glance. His glasses shielded his eyes.

"You know, I wanted to be an artist," said Silk. "I wanted to paint pictures."

"What happened?"

“Nothing.”

Silk tilted his head. He looked everywhere, like everywhere was taking him in.

“Looka there,” said Silk.

“Where?”

“Them mountains.”

Joey looked at the hills in front and on the sides.

“Yeah, what about ‘em?”

“Look at the color”

“It’s tan.”

“It ain’t tan, young blood. Check out the richness of the hue. It’s yellow ochre.”

“Yellow okra.”

“Not *okra*,” Silk laughed. “We ain’t cookin’ gumbo. This ain’t Louisiana. It’s *ochre*. Ochre is golden yellow or light-yellow brown.”

“You mean, like high yellow?”

“Yeah, somethin’ like that.”

“Look at the sky.”

Joey looked ahead. The sky framed everything. It was like the ocean was turned upside down.

“What color you see?” asked Silk.

“Blue.”

“Not just blue . . . *cerulean* blue.”

“Man, what are you talking about. Blue is blue, right?”

“And I got the blues, all the blues you want. We from Fillmore, right? Well, I’m showing you a different kind of blues right now. Cerulean blue is less saturated than navy blue, you dig? Cerulean blue is blue mixed with gray.”

“Okay.”

Joey drove into the cerulean blue sky. He was soaked in cerulean blue, was swimming in it. They drove straight. The sun began lowering its head, and the shadows began to come out of hiding.

“We gonna head back soon?” Joey asked.

“Yeah. Pull over will ya?”

Joey pulled over. Silk got out.

“Follow me.”

Silk took a hold of Joey’s arm. They trudged down a slope. The earth was soft. At the bottom was a creek. Trees with thick leaves dripping yellow

and red were all over. The sound of water greeted them. Silk removed his shoes and socks, placing them carefully near a tree. The meticulousness he showed toward his clothes was thrown to the wind. He rolled up his pants to his knees. It looked funny yet natural. Silk moved toward the water. He sat next to the stream and dropped his feet into the onrush of coolness.

“What you waitin’ for?” asked Silk. “Take your shoes off, relax.”

Joey tossed his shoes near some rocks. He dunked his feet into the water. It felt nice.

“I used to come out here when I was a kid. We used to catch crawfish,” said Silk.

“You and your friends?”

“Me and my little brother.”

“Where is he now?”

Silk kicked his feet under the water a bit. Sweat formed around his eyebrows. He looked at the water like he wanted to dive in, to become one with it, to move with it to another place.

“My little brother, he was cool. He wasn’t scared of things, used to climb trees, jump into creeks. I used to tell him, hey man, be cool.”

“Where does he live?”

“He died—bad accident up north. We was swimming together in a place like this. He got in too deep. He lost control. It was the last time we. . .”

They stayed quiet for a while. Joey thought about Silk’s brother. Shit, he was driving. He didn’t have a license. He started thinking about the possibility of an accident.

“Check that out.”

Silk pulled his pants up and waded. He stuck his hands in the muddy water.

“Check that out.”

“What’s that?”

“Man, ain’t you ever seen a crawfish before?”

That crawfish was big like a tiny lobster.

Joey reached in and searched. He came up with nothing but mud. He finally felt something in his hand, it felt like a wet bug scurrying across his skin. Joey pulled his hand from the water exposing a red crawfish, its claw attached to his finger like a vice. Joey wiggled the crawfish free from his finger. Silk kicked some water toward him, laughing.

“See them hills up there?” said Silk.

Joey looked.

“It’s a color called Van Dyke Brown,” Silk said, taking it in as if the color were the last bit of air in the world.

“Van Dyke Brown? Sounds like a singer or movie star. It sounds cool, like a color that don’t take no shit.”

“It is. It’s the color of you. I told you, I can see colors.”

The hills were beautiful. They both lay on their backs looking into the sky.

“How come you didn’t become an artist?” Joey asked.

Silk removed his glasses. Joey beheld Silk’s eyes—one teal, the other light brown. Silk didn’t answer him. They both lay on their backs, not wanting to move.

“What color is the sky?” Silk asked.

“I know, cerulean blue,” Joey answered.

They laughed and put their shoes back on. They let the crawfish go free. They got back into the car and drove home.

Joey walked home from Fillmore Street. He climbed through the window of his house. The sky was darkening. He heard sounds from the living room. It was the record player. From the staircase, his eyes fell on his father who had fallen asleep in his chair. Joey stood for a long time looking at his father. *Hey pop*, he said silently.

Saan, he thought to himself. *Sa-ahn!* Where had he been? Where was he? Where was he going? Joey went upstairs to his bedroom and looked out the window into the night.

Cerulean blue faded to black.