



Paradise

by Debbie Edwards

I look down and see a trickle of bright, red blood curling through and mixing with the milky blue suds of the SOS pad. Out of habit, I quickly shove the injured finger into my mouth — salty sweet joined with bitter astringent. I make a face. Then spit.

I eye the cut. It's small, but jagged. I reach to pick up the garden hose and then hold the wound underneath the cold, gurgling water.

Cleaning the barbeque grill was never something I particularly enjoyed, anyway. It's just the kind of thing that unemployed college graduates do for their moms after an August cookout.

The moms don't have to ask; the graduates **offer**. Kind of thank-you-for-continuing-to-support-me-even-after-you've-spent-your-entire-life-supporting-me type gesture.

It's all only a matter of time. It's all part of the cycle.

I have studied man. I have peered deep into the essence of humanity. I have gloried in its masterpieces and analyzed its failures.

And I have studied well.

I have internalized not just the knowledge, but the yearning in the spirit of mankind. I have uncovered man's limitless potential. There are no boundaries to complete gratification. There are no walls which bar man from paradise.

One only has to follow the cycle — to scrutinize every action, every instance, and strive for perfection. And await the culmination of his faultlessness.

The bleeding has stopped, for the most part, and I grab my steel-wool ally and go to work on the metal tines. Crusted meat drippings and burnt marshmallow middles drip to the ground. It will be spotless, **spot-less**, soon.

It's the only way. If goodness begets goodness, surely perfection begets perfection. Life in the cycle is a constant search; a search for those things which transcend the concrete world, a search for those slices of reality that are — that must be — inevitably linked to man's utopia.

I rinse off the grill, and it shines in the twilight. I lean it against the concrete step to dry while I turn the water off.

It's kind of tricky — turning the water off — without getting the sneakers muddy. From the step, to two small stones, and then to the cracked, salmon-colored patio brick.

Half-way there.

I stoop to turn the ridged metal wheel right, right, right — until I feel the tension and pressure. With one more twist, the flow of water will cease completely. I turn it hard.

There are bubbles of water on the siding surrounding the faucet. I use my finger to trace the rounded forms of the droplets. The cool water soothes my cut.

Patio brick, stone, stone, and back porch step. The sneakers remain relatively mud-free. Victory.

I sit on the low concrete and lean against the back door. I cross my arms, rest my elbows on my knees, and look up.

The sky is a real light purple; so light that it almost looks white. But if you put something white, white up against it, you could see the purple tinge.

Opalescent.

That's it. The sky is a lazy, opalescent violet.

I stare at it for a long time. It is passive, soft. It is the color of calm, of fulfillment.

The clouds roll, and the night gets darker; but the color doesn't fade.

It is the color of nirvana.

Tonight, that state of absolute blessedness — where desire, passion, hatred, and delusion become extinct — is embodied in the evening sunset. Oblivion to care or pain; rest, harmony, stability, and joy reached by one in whom all craving is extinguished. The attainment of truth and unchanging being: ecstasy, bliss. That is salvation.

My nirvana sky.

It is the quintessence of tranquility.

It is absolute.

It is definite.

It is perfection.

I stare at it intensely, absorbing as much as possible before the darkness takes my violet-sky away. Through the eyes and into the soul. I must keep the feeling there; guard it.

And then I will know what to look for.

A car engine races and jerks my head from the sky. My mother turns the back porch light on and looks down at me through the heavy, weathered screen.

"Have you finished with the grill, dreamer?"

I nod, rise, and hold up my paragon.

She says, "Nice job," and means it.

But in the light of the bare bulb, I see a spot. A tiny piece of meat clinging to the surface, dulling the shine. I swallow hard and hand her the grill.

She smiles and uses her elbow to flick off the outside light.

And as I stand alone in the darkness, my finger begins to throb.