

Four Rolls of Toilet Paper

By Christina Bartson

When you feel trembling on your skin and quivering liquid swimming through your veins, you lift your palms upward to expose the supple flesh and the blood hot in your shaking fingertips .When you feel the soft area behind your knees turn weak where the act of walking toward your salvation is beyond physical, but more willed. And you feel the deep drum in your fragile chest violently thrusting; fighting against the cage it is locked in when you reach for your small battery powered lifeline. When you must sit down and drink the orange juice in your pretty glass that seems so heavy that you have to hold it with two hands. Here is when you can know that you're living.

I remember how we crept out of the house that night, as stealthy as black cats. Cole had rolls of toilet paper stuffed in his t-shirt. He called the bulky lumps they made “Uni-boobs”. I remember I was wearing my favorite red cotton skirt and had pulled a hoodie over my bathing suit top because the air had grown chilly. I remember how we went barefoot carrying our flip flops in our hands, with bits of seashells still clinging to our toes from earlier, to pad across the floor and out of the cottage. The ocean exhaled deeply as we ambled to the sand chuckling and tripping over each other’s feet clumsily. The moon was fat and stared at us, watching contently from his place in the night sky, ready for tonight’s entertainment.

“Do you think anyone will see us?” I asked, looking over at Cole. His hands were holding his “uni-boob” in place. I laughed at his appearance, a little too loud, and he clapped a hand over my mouth muffling the sound. His hand smelled like salt.

“Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.” He hushed. A roll fell from his shirt and onto the sand. He picked it up and shoved it back under. I smiled. “No,” He whispered, “No one is up this late. It’s 4 am. Plus the lifeguard stand is on the far side of the beach. I doubt anyone will be taking a stroll through the tide pools.”

“Yeah,” I replied digging my toes into the sand with every step; liking the way it slid through my toes and molded under the soles of my feet. I love the feeling of walking through sand. There is something so gratifying about the lure of the matter and how it

rushes in around your ankles when you sink down into the sand and how it skims back over the edges of your feet when you pull your foot out. It's almost like the sand needs you. I know I needed it. The only place I never feel the stress from everything that troubles me is the ocean. All I want is the sand, the salty breeze, and the reaching, reaching water. Nothing else.

Childhood living is easy, that is what most adults say. For me, this past year hadn't been easy. A week before my fourteenth birthday my mom took me to the doctor because I had been behaving strange. For the past months I had been angry constantly and would become upset so often. Not repeatedly do I ever cry for hours holding my head tight between my knees and rock myself sobbing into furious fits, and because I was it worried my parents. My clothes seemed to grow larger. All my jeans hung loosely from my hips and legs, where they once fit properly on my healthy stature. My skin, instead of moist and rosy, became dry and dull. I was constantly thirsty; and drank more than five water bottles a day. I was also hungry and ate heaps of food, but I wasn't gaining any weight, I had lost fifteen pounds. Together I wasn't myself, I was a stranger.

I was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. My mother and I were told by my doctor to go home, pack a suitcase, and drive right to the emergency room. I had the feeling as if part of me had left and was running very quickly toward something unfamiliar, and the other half was just hovering, unwilling to follow, just wanting stubbornly to not get implicated.

At the hospital I was sat in a large bed covered in starchy white sheets; I had never been the person in the bed before and I started to cry. I watched entranced, fascinated at how I didn't seem to care as nurses stuck IVs into my thin arms, and lured blood from my veins into large vials. People in long white coats buttoned up or brightly colored scrubs told me my glucose levels were over seven hundred, and they needed to get me back to a healthy number so I would have to stay at the hospital a while longer. It was confusing sitting there. They explained everything so simply to me, the science I could grasp, but what I didn't understand was how I could have this disease. I felt perfectly fine, I couldn't be sick.

I understand now. I am a fourteen year old diabetic who pokes herself ten times a day to check glucose levels and give herself shots. I am more myself now, just my

pancreas doesn't work. But remembering the days in the hospital bed still makes my eyes swell and throat turn cold. It is difficult to tell new people I meet about my diabetes, but to tell Cole it was easy, he is just that kind of person. He undertakes every aspect of a person and appreciates them.

I was thinking about all this as I vigilantly stepped on the thick filmy rocks that surrounded the tide pools, creating the barrier that separated the one beach from the next. But my thoughts frolicked around, not really focusing, because I was giving most of my attention to the sharp boulders underneath me, and the mysterious creepy-crawly creatures lurking in the dark seaweed packed water that splashed at my ankles. I chose my path randomly, skipping around from one place to the next (mostly because I could barely see anything), clutching my flip flops and waving my arms around to keep balance. Cole was almost to the other side, still pinning his "uni-boob" in its proper position.

"Wait up!" I stage whispered. He turned to stop for me as I hopped to where he was standing. We stood on the same rock for a brief moment. My long wild hair blew gently in the wind, curling up in odd places to tickle my freckled face. I stretched up tall trying to level our gaze, both of our eyes almost even, mine green and his brown with twinkles fluttering around, but he was still a bit taller than me. I opened my mouth and started to talk.

"I've never done anything like this. I mean sneaking out that is. I don't know what I was thinking. It's not like me to do something without thinking, really weighing out my choices and the consequences, what my parents would say, what could happen to me, could I get hurt, what would I be doing..." I searched my mind openly, trying to remember why I was standing here, right now. My eyes tore away from Cole's, noticing he could easily read what I was thinking; I always show what I'm thinking, it's a loose brick in the great wall I tend to build. I turned my head away, brushing my shoulder, to focus my eyes on the black ocean and hide the gap in me which Cole was peering through.

"But I guess in this case thinking slipped my thoughts. I'd probably be in bed sleeping if I wasn't here right now ..." I trailed off.

“Yeah, sleeping and having no fun,” Cole said. He continued jokingly, “You’re such... aaaaa... a goody two shoes.” He finished looking over at me. I bit my lip.

“Yeah I guess I am.”

“But you’re here though and you’re going to have fun. I promise.” He replied.

He grinned at me then turned around and proceeded to continue jumping from rock to rock with me following close behind. We reached the sand and in a moment arrived at the white wooden throne.

“Ahhhh,” Cole cooed, “My pretty chair, why we were looking for you. Now that we’ve have found you, tell us, are you ready for some fun?” He removed the four rolls of toilet paper from under his t shirt and tossed two to me. “Let’s do this.” He said, grinning. I laughed, and then made myself look serious by pressing my lips together in a smug smile.

“Let’s.” I said in a low, slithering voice. We threw the rolls back and forth over the lifeguard stand watching them soar through the air with their tails rippling. Giggling all the while and whipping tears with the backs of our hands from our sparking, dancing eyes. And finally when every last quilted butt-wiping square white sheet was gone we stood back to admire our work. The lifeguard stand stood tall in all its newly undermined glory looking very much like a little kids party all decorated with streamers.

“Well done, my friend, its lovely. And I have to say your toilet paper tossing skills are quite impressive.” Said Cole.

“Thank you.” I replied curtsying. Although I thought I was pretty bad at throwing the flimsy rolls.

“Well, should we celebrate our adventure’s pleasing outcome?” He asked, raising one eyebrow. I asked how we would celebrate and he said he’d show me. Then he grabbed my wrist and took off charging towards the ocean. Dragging me all the way while crashing over the water, falling inelegantly to his knees, and scrambling to get back up. He started kicking up the water and spinning in circles looking up at the stars with his arms outreached. But instead of doing his Indian dance slash salute to the stars, I let myself fall backwards into the water, my arms out to the sides, but not there to catch myself. I let the sea water seep into my clothes not caring that I was completely soaked. But just living, living beautifully.