



5-1-2018

Rather Than a Bedtime Story

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Recommended Citation

Howard, Joslynn (2018) "Rather Than a Bedtime Story," *Calliope*: Vol. 49 , Article 17.
Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/calliope/vol49/iss1/17>

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Rather Than a Bedtime Story

Joslynn Howard

Count to ten, she whispers.

We start with my toes,
curling and cringing.

I cannot sleep.

This is my bedtime ritual,
tightening every muscle until
they are snug against my
young bones. Inhale,

count to ten, hold, release.

Mother teaches me how to
shake the fear from my
skeleton. I tremble.

Facing skyward, I clench
my heart to prevent it from
breaking free. I cannot sleep.

What if he comes in my dreams?

Count to ten, repeat.

I worry that he will
reap my skin again
without my permission.

I cannot dream of anything
but his hands, stealing flesh.

I contract every fiber, each loose
end, constricting myself inwards.

He can no longer hurt you,
she whispers, count to ten
and go to sleep. But I ache.

Mind and body revolting,

I have not slept in weeks.