A :Ritual

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After folding the pink, rose-printed sheets just the right way, between her chin and

shoulders, I kissed her sweet (slightly sticky) puckered lips. "Before you go to sleep, tell Jesu:zou love him," I whispered, the same way I always had. Careful not to budge her­ cocoon of cotton sheets and comforter, my little girl nodded with a smile which could have said, "Let the games begin!". Desperately wanting sleep, I trudged through her

doorway (left open, of course)? down the hall to tum on the bathroom light, which was a

law of the little princess herself Eventually making it to my bedside, all chores done, I

flopped down heavily and sank in the warm bliss of my too-soft bed and tons of pillows.

For the four children, God has granted mothers immeasurable patience or my daughter and I's bedtime ritual would be much less precious. Granted, I knew chances were I would not lay undisturbed long. Hopes of skipping a night vanished. It sounded identical to the night before; the short squeak as her body leapt off the bed, the pat-pat of her tiny feet slow and quiet at first, then sounds of an Olympic track star barreling to the finish line. Jumping into bed and nearly breaking ribs (mine), my five-year old had escape,., every vicious monster and child-eating animal from her bedroom to mine. "Kiss me:···.

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good-night ginn Mommy, I miss you," she panted, not letting the dim roomdull her

shining blue eyes while she pleaded. */\.* ·

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Learning power control and manipulation could not have been something I taught her,

I decided. My daughter also has an unbelievable talent for perseverance (which does come from me). No way I would challenge her unrelenting force tonight. On my side of the bed, I weaved with care another cocoon, a temporary one this time. Putting her (and myself) to sleep with a gentle rocking motion, perfected years before with her brother, I gazed at her tiny, upturned nose, her plump, doughy cheeks, and full, pouty mouth that babbled low, indistinguishable sounds. Quiet yawns turned to a still peace.

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Returning this beautiful bundle to what should have been her resting place was a whole separate event. Soft were my footsteps as I carried my priceless cargo, feeling the surface under my feet change, from carpet to tile, and back to carpet again. To assure her safety,

I placed Kitty, the one with cut off whiskers and frayed, purple ribbon collar, gently beneath her little round arm, asI reluctantly let go of her warm, soft body. Usually she woke at this point, wanting to start all over again, but sleep had tricked her somehow to gtvmgm.

Volumes of times I had gone to bed hoping she would not disturb me, and then missed

her terribly if she did not. What she didn't realize is I longed for her beside me, just as much as she longed for me beside her. Xanthippe and others like her could never have experienced the blessings of such a ritual, temper has no place in such a parent-child ceremony. Years go by, and mothers remember her babies sleepless nights, longing for them once again. Zoning out everything but her slow, rhythmic breaths, I laid down beside her, to hold her close, just for a minute.

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