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There Were Wolves in Albuquerque's South Side; Circa 1999

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Things had turned out a bit differently with a kid. It was just the beginning of my semi-adult life, and I had already had Israel, my first son, my first masterpiece. I had graduated high school the year before, like a shotgun, hiding an ever-growing belly deep within my shiny purple robe. When normal people my age were going off to college and raves, I was instinctively becoming a mother. Salty tears burned down my face as my friends stood up in honor of their scholarships, and I lamented when I couldn't drink all night at any of the graduation parties with my exhaling class. I was just a kid myself, and the smells of lilac in the still desert air made me yearn for something I did not know. Yet, I never saw my son Israel as a threat. He was more of an undiscovered adventure.

Before I had even graduated, his soon-to-be father, Jeremy, had already moved on to the strawberry blonde I had seen him with early one morning. At that time, he owned a tattoo shop right off San Mateo in Albuquerque's northern side, correctly named 'Independent Ink.' The name was more than just his business though, it was his motto; independent.

My blue 84' Malibu had slowly crept up his block as I was on my way to school that morning. I wanted to profess my love to him with a rose, because I was confused and lost, and I felt alone. He was up, which was surprising because I had envisioned quietly walking into his room and waking him up with my own bodies warmth. Not only was Jeremy up, but he was walking down the adobe lined block with the beautiful young woman and her large husky-like dog. I rolled down my window and called to him. 'HEY!' The look on his face suggested how absolutely mortified he was to see me. I immediately became aware of my inexperienced age, my curly, nappy hair and my ridiculous face. As he walked towards my car, trying to shrug off some dumbfounded shock, I childishly handed him the rose that I picked from my aunt's garden earlier that morning.

"There is always the thorns." I said to him, as if I possessed some sort of wisdom on the subject of love. "Here, this one has a whole bunch."

He reluctantly took it out of my hand, probably hoping that my existence would evaporate. "Crazy..." he said. I watched his shoulders under his long black hair shudder as he walked back to her, and then I somehow made it to my high school to attend class. I can't recall if that was the moment that silently ripped the heart out of my chest and would hold it in some sort of deranged self-loathing torment for years to come, but I do know that luckily, it didn't hit me right away. Her name was Stacey, as I would come to find out, and she was stunning. But I, well, I was free.

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I traveled around all summer that year, little Izzy in my belly, and I in my Malibu. I told no one in my family that I was pregnant, because most certainly the adults in my life would have been disappointed. My father had driven all the way from Virginia to Albuquerque to see his baby graduate, and my grandmother

gifted me with her very own jewelry. There would be no imposing heavy realities upon them now, they would have to wait. Their smiles as I flaunted my graduation success was enough to silence any truth. No, it was now my life to claim, and I had plans. My future was still going to be an open ride, baby or not.

The plan had been to travel, and to let the world unfold before me. I couldn't think of a reason why I wasn't going to do that. I wanted the high desert as my breakfast, and the Oregon shore as a dreamy pillow. The graduation checks were generous, and my father equipped me with a tent and some cheap gear. No baby was going to spoil all the fun. My growing belly and morning nausea weren't a grounding factor at the time and a good friend, Chantae, accompanied me. We had planned to travel for more than a year, only waiting for me to save some cash and graduate.

The day after graduation my morning sickness hit a climactic peak, urging me to consider the situation at hand. My family thought that I was just nursing off a hangover; a graduate who had too much fun the night before. They weren't on to me in the slightest. 'Goodby! Congratulations! Don't get hurt, and we love you!' I packed too much stuff into Chantae's car and we drove away leaving our childhoods behind. The desert roads sliced us away from the bland and domestic. From dishes and babies.

Chantae and I didn't last very long as travel buddies. That alliance had broken apart as soon as we realized that our personalities outside of when we were growing up would no longer work well together. She was as carefree as a willow tree, and I had a growing need to somehow produce some control in my life. She had started to fall for the random hippy boy in Flagstaff. The only problem there was that he had lice. She seemed unconcerned. The parental need for that control was already stewing in my veins, making it hard to combine with her free-spirited nature. There were times that I looked over at her driving, with adoration of

our dream of endless travel, but other times as she would talk about where to go next in her carefree tone I could have hit her with a shoe.

We had made about fifty pounds of soap in the small desert town of Ramah. The plan was to sell and barter it to hippies at the national Rainbow Gathering that year. We spent a week in Phoenix before the Gathering, and I watched her strip naked and soak herself with a hose at the Baseline Mansion, a small commune right out of Phoenix. She was silly, dizzy and had pixie hair that was accompanied with big almond shaped eyes. As much as I adored her, we knew we would ultimately go our own ways. Some animals naturally break away from their pack to start their own.

I spent a month at the 1998 Rainbow Gathering near Shiloh, Arizona. With a newfound freedom, I scouted a nice hiding place upon a wide meadow that was some ways off from the main event. My nice new tent was posted on a steep hill surrounded by aspens that were all connected at the root system. I was happy to call it home for the next four weeks. The freshness of the air made all of the morning sickness vanish, and I began to feel more alive than ever before. I started to adore my belly, and the child within it. I deeply talked to God as I looked off of surreal high desert plateau's, and I sometimes danced to the constant drumming of jimbe's until the sun would creep over the horizon.

It was just my belly and the random individuals that would accompany me upon the strange events of connection. The world was unfolding before me, in the uniquely crafted groups of artisans and lonely dreaming travelers, just as I had known it would.

Eating quickly became the driving force of each day for me, so having a "kitchen" to be a part of eased the burden. The gathering was made up of many varieties of these kitchens, where groups of traveling individuals would attempt to feed as many people as they could. Some made bread, some made what looked

and tasted like vegan gruel, and some offered the commodity of meat. Some just served fancy teas, and announced '*Its tea time! Time for tea!*' after blowing their Royal Trumpets through the woods. I had arrived into the paradise of my imagination. A community of travelers that met up at least once a year. Some of the people there were very old.

About a week into the gathering, a 'kitchen' invaded the base of my far-out spot. Even though I liked waking up and observing my meadow, where I felt that I was a lone soul caught in an obscure wonderment, I needed to *eat*. I welcomed them.

"What do you call your kitchen?" I asked, with a strong curiosity.

'Milliways' the blond woman said. 'Because we are located at the end of the universe.' Her demeanor gave off a 'we got this shit' kind of vibe, and I was really digging it, especially when she made ice cream and let me be the first to try it. I could wonder about all day, and Milliways would always find something for me to eat when I returned. I would weave through the bikers of A-Camp, the Hari-Krishna's that sought my devotion to a cow and the beautiful brothers that, in my condition, had become unattainable. And at the end of each day's journey, I could settle down in my tent with the realities of my future, and the beauty of the moment I was in. If nothing else, someone from Milliways would lend me their time.

I began to understand the fertility of youth and travel, and embellished myself in the dream-like existence that held certain understandings that one did not have to mentally comprehend. It was felt, and it was continuous. A slow and beating vein that can only flow through a land that possesses freedom. One where anyone could decide to be whomever they wished, as long as their bodies held up. One where I could hide from the iron bars of the approaching domestic life.

My baby and I danced around fires to the beating of drums. We bartered my soap for belongings that were not freely given. I think I must have met some of the most light, whimsical, and brokenly free souls in America that year. A painfully beautiful time to have lived, because those moments stay etched in the mind, and they cease to last forever.

From there, I hung out in Sedona, convincing myself that I could feel the vortexes, still running from the nest. Then, while attempting to make it to a festival in Oregon, I broke down with the two new friends that I had met, right in the heart of Las Vegas. Not being a very good gambler, I submitted the dream of travel to settle in a spot for the baby's sake. I returned to Albuquerque where my own mother's heart was disappointed. "I can't take care of you and a baby" she said. So, I hesitantly opted to join my father in Virginia, where my maiden story would end, and my hidden baby's childhood would begin. The time of running was over.

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The iron hand of my dad was set upon directing my life in the way he felt I should go. Though he demonstrated a generosity to me, insisting that his house was mine, his way of marine-like function was at times too much to bear. Properly folded tee-shirts in the drawer, a well-cooked dinner expectation, floors cleaned with bleach. I had just drunk from the world in my own cup, and now I was back under a heavy parental hand. Picking out little outfits with overalls crushed me, yet intrigued me, while the days ticked like a sharp-edged clock.

My son Israel was born on December 16th, as the sun was rising through my hospital window and filling the room with an orange glow. I looked out at my nurse, and told her I wasn't ready. She looked down on me

with compassion and said, 'he is coming anyway!' My aunts had been scattering about the room to make me comfortable as I yelled out at them to rub my back. It happened to be ripping in two. After a crescendo of pain that almost seemed unearthly, I was a nineteen-year-old mother. Just like that, the shotgun fires through the sleeping night and with it brings a new day. I had a precious jewel with little blue eyes in my arms, and yesterdays were moon-shadowed memories.

By the following spring, my baby and I moved back to Albuquerque to live with my mom for an uncertain amount of time, while I was figuring out who I was and what in the world my place in this life would be.

Making sacrifices became a new art to master. Staying in when the city was ripe and loud. Giving time to play cars, instead of locking myself in my room to listen to music and dance. Those were the processes where I realized childhood was a state of mind for those that lacked responsibility. I had been waiting so long, for the world to just drop my fate in my lap like some sort of movie, and then, it was tipped upside-down and fleeting emotions of youth had to be reconfigured, as realizations were found neatly circled in the Diaper Genie. I didn't yet understand that I was the author of the outcomes of this new path.

My high-school buddies seemed just out of reach, even when we were hanging out. They weren't ready to understand parenthood, especially from one of their whimsical peers. "Were going camping this weekend" became the likely excuse, as to which I would always have to decline. But that didn't really matter. The hardest part, in humble fairness, was realizing that becoming a famous traveling flamenco dancer was going to have to wait a while.

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The infamous coffee shop on Harvard St., R.B. Winning, located right off the historical Rout 66, was where it all would come together. The narrow brick sidewalks that aligned the café, with ringed in trees,

gave a glimpse of purpose to so many lost souls, young and old. It was a meeting place of the minds. A place where the oddest individuals could be spotted, and identities could be re-created while buzzing to the good old caffeine. At any time of the early afternoon one could find them, telling their stories to pass the time of a slipping day. There was Bedouin, with the pyramids tattooed on his forehead, the stripper Freitas, who liked to have breakfast there with her 5 kids. The endless faces of the usual acquaintances. Occasionally there was the Spanish missionary, Angelina, that came to recruit individuals into the Aggressive Christianity commune in Ramah, telling us all who Jesus was over a mocha latte. And myself. I was there too. Sometimes when Israel would be with his father and sometimes when he was on my hip like an extension of me. I would cruise from Eubank onto Central, old route 66, and follow it all the way down, usually arriving there before 10 a.m.

Hanging out and discussing the philosophies of the world with other unemployed pseudo hippies of the 90's was where I figured out what was going on. It was my starting point, and I developed my sense of being an adult while engrossed in endless cups of coffee that were shared with that addictive group of slackers. We philosophized, we self-righteously figured out the worlds secret evils and government conspiracies; we were a silent revolution that smoked cigarettes and baked in the intensity of the Albuquerque sun, resigning to leave only when all shade had crept up the buildings and the red brick sidewalk became an unbearable roast. Israel was there, going along with all I did, as if his little angelic self was sympathetic to my state. Amongst the caffeine and commotion, I did sort of figure it out. I got my beginning by connecting with the people that would shape my 20's. Ya, I may have heard about the chem-trails in the sky that the government was experimenting on us with, but I also learned about different people, and in contrast, about myself.

One day I took Angelina the missionary up on her invitation to stay at the commune. What did I know, it all sounded good? I longed for a community that was outside of the grid, and these people apparently grew their own food, which in my mind suggested that they were in a superior category. I also longed for people who knew Jesus, the way I had. As real. A supernatural entity that would sometimes come even when you weren't in trouble. I pondered the reality of reaching out and touching faith.

All of my belongings were quickly thrown in a suitcase, and Israel and I went off into the desert once again, in that faithful Malibu. We might as well have been riding into another country. When we arrived, I realized that the commune was a compound with a huge kitchen and lots of rooms upstairs. There was a printing press on the first floor, and everything smelled of incense from where the members had hand-made their own to sell in the city. The compound was on many acres that lined the Navajo reservation, and to me it seemed a quiet oasis from society. Angelina graciously shared her own bedroom with me when I arrived, and I was daunted that the place was real, and not an imaginative conversation over coffee.

As I fell asleep upon a hard bed the night of my arrival, I wondered what I had gotten myself into. The verbiage was unconventional, the dresses were brown, and my restlessness was not yet met. The next morning, I awoke to the members getting up so early, before the sun even arose. They were praying in the room right outside of mine, in tongues and lamentations. I was scared at first, like maybe I was mistaken, and these people were a little crazy. But, then I came to understand that it was more than a quick ideology in the sun. My dreams had easily encoded messages it seemed, and pains that were rooted deep in my subconscious came to the surface for me to face. Deborah Green preached the gospel.

They baked their own bread, grew most of their own food, and lived an uncompromising life of spirituality that was focused on knowing God and following His lead. I was unaware of these ways at first,

but I learned to communicate with God in my own way. I learned to know that He could hear me, and that in fact, I could hear Him too. I learned to look at who I really was, and take showers on Sunday. It is funny how we can live in our skin all of our lives, yet sometimes never understand our what lies in our own reflection. Sometimes that is all we are really looking for anyway.

There was no need to pretend with the clothing of religion. I felt that God had always known me, and I began to piece together the times when things miraculously worked out, times that should have dissolved any normalcy but then a miracle happened instead. Those everyday miracles that we often overlook, as we seek only our own face. Like, when I was eleven and that car with two men pulled up beside me as I was walking home from school in the South Valley. For no reason at all, my mom's bright red car showed up right behind them as they were encouraging me towards theirs. "Get away from that car Rebecca!" She yelled, as she saw the man's hand encouraging me closer. She said she just felt like getting off early that day. Coincidences like these sometimes weave through our lives, and we don't even perceive them. Israel and I spent two months of the summer engrossed in the life of a commune, as I was doing chores and learning how to pray. I think I would have eventually married one of the men there had I ended up staying.

But, by the time fall was creeping into the deserts atmosphere, Israel and I had left the commune. I wrote a letter to my father in Virginia that I had forgotten about. He took the letter to mean that I was involved in an evil cult and must be rescued. My dad was the kind of man that thrived on situations like that, so after a couple of months he came all the way to New Mexico to claim me from 'the cult'. He had a small arsenal in the back of his truck, and there is no doubt in my mind that he would have loved to tell that story had it been real.

I acted shocked when my family showed up, inviting me out to lunch off of the property. I played dumb, and let myself be angry when my father said there was no way I was returning. But, the truth was that I wasn't ready to spend a lifetime with one group of people, and it was evident by some of the members living there, that a life-long commitment to the community was a reasonable option. "Stay where you are at!" they told me when I called them later that day. "We will come and pick you back up." I hung up the phone with a burning sting. I had to go. I longed for other people, coffee shops and hot springs. Maybe I was leaving an amazing environment to seek myself out, but I ached for what lied back in the world. Leaving was an emotional decision, as I felt that I was defying the will of God. There were some long nights where I felt that I would go to hell. The truth I found though, is that God doesn't leave us, and religions are born from men.

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Back to the coffee shop I went. It was there that I would eventually find the three women whom I would start my adult life with. The 'mamas' that embodied what I thought I wanted to be, who I thought I was. Emily and Christina had arrived in Albuquerque together. Emily, with her long blond dreadlocks had originated from Kansas, and Christina, with her short brown ones, from upstate New York. They had met at certain points along their wanderings through America, and had ended up staying in some scabies ridden shack together, in Taos. Both women came to the city looking for something more stable. We were all looking for something.

"If we all talk to our parents, we can come up with the money. I'm sure my dad will wire me at least \$600." Fawn proclaimed. Fawn and I had met at the coffee shop as well. She was bold, full of cigarettes and Jesus. She was a bit dominating with her deeper understanding, and grounding qualities. Her frame was sturdy, thicker, a California girl -- minus the materialistic ego-centrism. She had dark chocolate dreadlocks, dark

chocolate eyes that could gracefully melt, and a boyfriend, P Funk, who rode his scooter wherever he had to go.

Fawn had scouted out a home for us. It was in the heart of the University of New Mexico student ghetto on the corner of Silver and Pine. The solidifying detail that had convinced her that it was meant to be our house, was the front porch door. Three L's were stamped into the metal on the screen door's bottom frame. Fawn said that it stood for the "Ladies Love Lord Light House" (which is 4 L's, I know) and we all agreed that it was probably fate. Fawn and I were going to have a house that was a beacon of light to all the wandering and homeless kids in Albuquerque; a restitution for my leaving the commune, and a new start amongst the hippies that I had longed to be with. Emily and Christina, who needed a place to live, casually agreed. That was our initial mission. Some of Fawn's predictions were right! All of our parents did wire us the money, a miracle from my father in Virginia, whom I believe felt guilty for his stern rescue mission.

The first few days in our new abode were like magic! These women were all pretty, jimbe playing, easy-going friends. They thought it was cool that I had a kid, and they accepted he and I into their lives. Sometimes Christina would wake Israel up and make him breakfast before I even woke up. It was a restless dream to get to connect with those spread-out wanderers that seemed to me at the time, to sparkle like gems in a neon-lit world. And, if things couldn't get any better, I had the largest room, because I had the baby of the house. Izzy and I shared what would have otherwise been used as a private den. It had a fireplace, and sliding glass doors that attached to a lovely fenced in courtyard where Israel would play every morning. It was amazing for us. The only deterrent was that I had to get a real *job*. Drinking coffee all day was not going to support this new lifestyle that I was taking on, unfortunately. And, as if life were throwing me some large

line that I could not miss, I did get a job. That very next week in fact. A waitress at the esteemed *El Pinto* Restaurant.

Life was turning in my favor. I felt fortunate that I had gotten to room with them, for they apparently knew just about every traveler in the southwest. I would discover this on so many sleepless nights of listening to their many, many friends express mild musical talents in our living-room, in our yard at 3 a.m., or chatting in the room aligning with mine about the intricacies of the world and techno music.

We had started with a mission, to help and be beacons of light, but somehow, even with our proclaimed battles of helping the young wanderers of the area, we were beginning to have too much fun with all of our guests. We were all sinners in a hot desert, having held tightly to the coolness and kindness of our faith. Until, we just blended in.

At any given moment, there could be some new body that was sleeping on the floor. Hiking bags packed full, with un-common odors that spread over the brown living-room carpet. This was a common sight, and at first it was invigorating. They would come, by the carloads. They would come from Taos, Tucson, and sometimes Denver. They knew Emily and she had invited them. They had names like To-mas, and Tiger. Sometimes they would be the random couple that was passing through town, making connections and staying with us for a few days. “We’re gonna make a movie mamma’s!” they would say, which was code for, “*We are going to invade your kitchen and make a really big dinner for everybody, hopefully you like it.*” Who would mind that? There was almost always food, and little Israel sitting on the kitchen floor with his cars, making the sound effects as he had learned to go with the flow. We were all flowing along in fact. I hit someone’s van late one afternoon as I was pulling in from work. Put a nice dent in the back of their Westfalia. I walked

into the house, holding my black apron in defeat, and told them the news. 'Hit it again!' said the woman in my living room, who never shaved. 'I don't care.'

Their often laxical attitude to the trivial things of life, like hitting their car with mine, is what ultimately made them tolerable. There was a silent understanding that they wouldn't ever conform to the dredges of domestication. They would not waste their life living and being imprisoned in 'the system' that had taken the majority of society captive. They were a utopia of youth that moved from city to city, from state to state. Some were clean and some were vague, making it hard to sense their intentions. One time, two of them, during their peace walk from California to Texas, only spoke Japanese. Some didn't want to leave, and some I wished would stay a little longer.

Odie became my boyfriend. He was originally from Vermont, but was fleeing some sort of occurrence. Odie Smith wasn't even his real name, but he had a beautiful smile, with silky hair and a slight mustache. He had fallen hard and fast into the insatiable abyss of a lonely youth, but he played the guitar fairly well. Tad, his riding buddy, came with him, because Christina was in love with Tad. Christina and I both felt like we had somehow won an obscured lottery. Odie would clean the house when I was at work. He would say nice things to me when I got home, like how much he had missed me. He took the time to craft me a hand-made Valentine's Day card, by cutting our kitchen sponge into a heart shape to make the festive effects. He would closely help Emily watch little Israel, as being my nanny had become her full-time employment, and once he even folded my underwear and neatly placed them on my dresser so I would see them when I got home. In a short amount of time, Odie had become my wife, and I had become the only one in the house with a real job.

One night, after working a double, I walked into my den to find about 5 new people sitting on my bed, alongside Odie, Fawn, Emily and little Israel. They were all enjoying the warmth of a well-lit fire, and someone was strumming a guitar. My presence as I entered my room had changed the atmosphere, as if somebody's mom had just got home, and everybody had to leave now. All eyes gazed up at me. "I need to sleep guys." I said with a precise tone. "I'm sorry. Do you mind?" I hated to bum their trip, but I was realizing that maybe this life was not exactly where it was at. Even little Israel looked annoyed as everyone left our room, like I had just killed all the fun, which I probably had. As I placed my golden-locked son in his crib, I realized that I wanted order. I wanted fun too, but only when everything was in order. I wanted clean floors, and potted plants with herbs. I didn't want grown men on food stamps taking over my kitchen, as they knit their identity within the seams of patchwork pants. The farther I drifted with the drifters, the more I longed for peace.

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There was the young man, Dan, that Fawn had scooped up from the coffee shop one afternoon. He seemed fresh, lost, and capable of so much more than he was doing. He needed to stay with us for a while, but he had no money, he had no food, he had no idea...nothing. We let him. He was a boy, barley a man, and he had such a passive nature that we almost couldn't help ourselves. We may not have been so gentle with him.

"Cabana Dan, I need a glass of water!" Fawn called out from her reclining chair. "Hahahahaha." "Cabana Dan, could you clean the dishes please?" I would ask from the front porch. Now, all of these demands that we placed upon our new friend were basically in jest, but Dan would do them anyway. He would get us drinks, with ice, and bring them out on makeshift trays. And he always wore a red polo shirt, possibly the

only one he owned...we just couldn't help it. It was all too provoking. I don't remember ever seeing him comfortable in his skin. Sheepishly he brought us all drinks as we held our joke for a bit too long.

I don't remember how long Dan stayed with us, but I do remember seeing him at the coffee shop a few months later. He was so out of touch with reality that he could not even speak. Dan looked as though he had lost 20 pounds. He looked me in the eye, for his ability to talk was now centered in them. I could see that somehow trauma had happened, rendering him speechless in a semi-schizophrenic trance. His eyes were empty, deep wells, and his body was ragged. I offered him the bowl of fast-food chili that I had just gotten from a few blocks away, and he ate it up in less than a minute. He was starving, absent, and must have traded in his cabana shirt for the tight meshed male-dancer wear that now wrapped around his frame. A transformation dripping with self-loss. We had not been any sort of sanctuary for Dan. Who were we really, I pondered like a piercing sword? We had made people dinner, and shared in conversation and musical talent, having so much fun; but who were we? Certainly, not the beacons of light that Dan had needed us to be. I was beginning to see myself a little clearer again, wiping the fog off of my own mirror. After several failed attempts to talk to my muted friend, I left the coffee shop. I never saw Dan again.

A few months after that, all of the girls went their separate ways and moved out of the house, leaving me in charge of a lease, and the number of transient souls that would sometimes cling onto us. Emily left with Tad, and Christina left for New York to regroup herself. Fawn went to Hawaii. Israel and I had a couple new roommates, and we were doing ok.

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Sam and John made a habit of weaving in and out of Albuquerque on a regular basis. Though they would not always stay at our house, we would always see them, and they were an element that continued in our

realities. Sam was 28 then, and I considered her a bit old to still be tooling around in some gutter-punk traveler's scene. They had two kids, Kiesha and Song, and they all lived together with their two dogs in the tight but orderly space of their van.

Sam was more direct than I was comfortable with. Though the angles of her face had a softness to them sometimes, the intensity of her dark eyes were enough to rattle me out of my flow, making me too aware of her presence. John, who was a real cutie with his dirty blond mop and skater punk get-up, usually let Sam control things. In fact, when they were around, we all usually let Sam control things. They asked if they could crash with us for a while, to which I had no power to say no. Sam and John decided to actually *stay* with me and the new roommates for a couple of weeks. She must have sensed my vulnerability, and pounced on the opportunity. Or, maybe she felt it would be appropriate for her family now that some of the chaos had left with the original room-mates.

Sam and her family would huddle in the living-room over a pot of popcorn dressed in nutritional yeast, and shoot sharp glances at anyone who might have thought they had enough to share. At night, when we would all be hanging out on the old brown couch in the kitchen, Sam would dominate conversations. She would talk about the world banking system, President Bush and his agenda for the New World Order, Che Rivera, and how there were a lot of stupid dumb-fucks wearing shirts with his face plastered on them, who had no idea who Che really was! She was vegan, self-righteously so, and if we ate non-vegan around her or her family, she told us her kids were uncomfortable with that. She would challenge us on our beliefs and the ideological identities that we put on, un-apologetically, and she would sing her babies to sleep with old Grateful Dead songs every night.

Though I was slightly afraid of, and yielding to Sam, I deeply admired her. She was the real deal. She was not looking for an identity, because she could not have been anybody else. She was bold and unafraid of the opinions of others, unafraid of her own destiny. I didn't even take offense when I had told her my dreams of being an herbalist, and she replied, "I've never gotten that vibe from you Rebecca. I just don't see it."

On one of the last days of their stay with us, I was on my hands and knees scrubbing the kitchen and hallway floors. I was now completely overwhelmed by the invasion of people in my life, and I tried to seek some order by cleaning. I couldn't control the new roommate's guests, or the old guests that felt it their right to couch surf if they needed. I was marking my territory, making the house that had welcomed so many others, truly mine and my sons. Watching Israel toddle in a clean and empty living room felt so right, and so temporary. I had reasonably failed at being Jesus, and was now unsure of the thrill that came with being submersed around hippies. Sam leaned over to me, as if she felt relief from my cleaning away the chaos too, and said, "*You know, your house just doesn't feel right unless it's clean Rebecca. It doesn't feel like home.*"

Sam was right. She could see me, and who I really was in this grand chapter of my youth, even when my own mirror was cloudy as I looked for something that wasn't really defined. I was left alone to raise a child, left for some beauty that would haunt my esteem for years to come. I had grabbed onto ideals and hot flickers of what happiness might have looked like. Sam could see the biggest part of me that held any relevance in the quickly evaporating dance we call time. I was a mother.