

FIELD NOTES FROM A CULT

Friend A

1992: We hide behind the backyard willow because her father is raging again. He wings a beer bottle into a cinderblock wall—it breaks, pisses down the driveway. He winds his fist in her hair and yanks, a smile behind his cigarette; he whips her with switches and red welts bloom on her thighs. She says her father sneaks into her room at night with wide pupils, bruises on his arms. Says he does things while she pretends to sleep. We hold hands and pinky-promise silence. We pray for it to stop.

2025: Mercury poisons her bloodstream and her skull is cracked; she feels plates shift and grind as she walks to the foodbank. Red Dye #40 liquifies her pancreas and she has leaky gut. Self-diagnosed Epstein Barr. A new staph infection weekly. Lyme. She misses church, the sound of 600 voices raised in song, the sigh of *Amen*. She had a beautiful voice once. Late at night, she posts photos of her nose, bashed in, purple, a parting gift from her Proud Boy ex. She asks the void if she should press charges.

Friend B

1992: We wander the meeting hall while our fathers run soundchecks. He always wears a white button down and carries his bible to church. At the beach, we bump a volleyball back and forth in the cold surf; I almost ask if he is a pretender biding his time like me. The next summer he is baptized at camp, and I mourn his devotion to the Prophet. When he dipped under the surface and rose, water dripped from the tips of his hair. The air was fresh with pine and in the golden hour light, he was radiant.

2025: He rides his chopper around Newport Beach looking for ass, because *any warm hole will do*. Jordan Petersen his new mentor, he bemoans the death of Real Men. Bathed in the light from his laptop, he claims racism doesn't exist, poverty is a choice, and women are too emotional for positions of leadership. Late at night, grievance simmers into hate: *Whores skanks fucking losers all. Glitter tits and tans—they should be force-bred. Women hold all the power and they're too stupid to wield it.* At work, he tests rockets for the military.

Friend C

1992: We roll lumpia and talk about boys at the kitchen table. Inhale cold pansit and whisper where we're going for the Feast—she to Manila, me to Toronto. She says, *we won't graduate before the End Times* like it's a good thing and she clings to the promise of Petra, pink city of Jordan. I want to shake her till the faith falls off in chunks. She takes pages of sermon notes, highlighter blazing Revelation orange and yellow while I daydream about my first kiss, who it could be—and wonder if I'll find him before doomsday.

2025: She posts updates from Puerto Rico. Her new profile pic: manicured feet in white sand captioned #blessed, #FeastofTabernacles2025, #HeIsComing. She shares recipes for matzoh ball soup with pics, steam rising from broth, and monochromatic table settings in ecru, in eggshell. She is packed for the End, and she sees the signs: droughts crack the earth in Somalia; floods wash Bangladeshi cities out to sea. Her prayers remain the same: *Unleash your power soon, Lord. Destroy it all.*