THE CU(L)T

“I entered the community on my own terms. At that point in my life, I felt crooked. Off. Just sort of limping from one year to the next, really. Working several office jobs and suffering from insomnia due to the stress of the corporate world. I needed an exit strategy from that kind of existence. Then I heard about this community operating out in the woods. There were rumors, of course. About how everyone was naked, running around lashing each other with whips, so as to learn how to transcend pain. People said the entire commune modeled its behavior after apes and starved their babies to teach them lessons in humility and smallness. A lot of wild ideas were floating around from tongue to tongue back then.”

“And yet, Luna, despite the rumors, you still felt called to this community?”

“I did.”

“Did you fear these rumors might be true?”

“I think I was partially excited about the possibility that they might be. I was young back then and extreme behavior of that nature, with a firm spiritual foundation, felt exhilarating to me. I needed strong medicine, you know. Something potent to shake me out of my zombie walk through life and fling me into a more evolved state. I had a lot of skin to shed, and I needed something fierce to help me wriggle out of it.”

“Tell me about your initial impressions when you first arrived at the commune.”

“I don’t know how else to put it, except to say that I felt like I was inside a flame. I was surrounded by a radical warmth that left me feeling tender. Everyone I met was so kind and generous, I almost couldn’t believe it. It scorched me, you know. The purity of their hearts. All that love began to devour my crooked ways, and I felt a new sort of me coming into

creation. I felt a profound clarity, as if I could really see things for what they were, for the first time in my life. And the entire time everyone kept telling me, 'We're so happy to have you, but please know that you can leave whenever you like, and you can take whatever you like, for we are only here a short while – you must not be afraid to do what it is you need.' It was remarkable."

"When they said, 'We are only here for a short while,' were they referring to a sort of suicide pact?"

"No, Ruth. That's a load of bull. They were just talking about life."

"And did you ever get the sense that something might be off or that things weren't as they were presented to be?"

"No. Not at all. We were all riding on a different plane, a different planet. We were functioning as a single organism with many legs and eyes. We breathed together, moved together. If there was any discord amongst us, we wouldn't have been able to survive. It was an egoless existence. Our bodies were shining from all the sun and physical exercise. We were this liberated force ready to extend our glow to everyone on earth. I never thought I'd leave."

"So, it was a sort of heaven for you?"

"Heaven is too rigid and loaded a term. It was something far greater."

"And can you tell me about the leader, Ulli?"

"Ulli lived on a small island about a ten-minute canoe ride from the larger community. He resided in a little shack made of mud and grass. He insisted on a simple life, but the commune had a tradition of making offerings to him. We weren't allowed to see Ulli

directly, so we would sneak in the night and leave a trail of flowers, rocks, fruits, herbs – whatever we had – along the shoreline, right on the edge of his island. The most devout among us used to float in the water, chanting his name for hours on end, eyes closed, lost in a trance."

"So, you never saw Ulli?"

"No, of course we did. I simply mean that we didn't have constant access to his physical form. We were learning to love the spirit, not the body. But once a year in the middle of November, when there was a slight chill in the air, Ulli's great-great-granddaughter would retrieve him from his shack and walk him throughout the entire commune on the mainland. I cried every time I saw him. We all did. It was like we were collectively unraveling, being stripped down to our most essential form under his all-knowing gaze. He holds such power. The kind of energy that emanates from dirt. The essence of the earth. That's what he possesses."

"And may I ask what he looks like?"

"I suppose he's changed a bit since I last saw him, but he's surprisingly small given his great spirit. Sacred beings often contort into small shapes just to blend in and complete their work amongst humans in peace."

"Is it true that Ulli trained members of the commune in the science of astral projection?"

"Astral projection is a modern term for an ancient method of travel that allowed our ancestors to see things that the naked eye alone cannot perceive."

"But is it true that Ulli taught you and others how to travel outside your bodies?"

“One can’t teach you something that’s already encoded in your blood memory. But the short answer to your question is yes.”

“I don’t think many viewers will believe you, Luna.”

“Belief is an illusion, Ruth. Let them think what they want. The truth remains untouched and in pristine condition regardless.”

“Right. Well, during your time at the commune, were you ever made aware of others who were distressed or sick?”

“Distressed or sick?”

“Yes. There are many accounts from other individuals who lived on the commune during the exact same years as you, who reported they suffered greatly.”

“Suffering is optional. If one suffers, it’s because they choose to. And illness can’t take root in a healthy body. This is basic science. Everyone that I was surrounded by in the commune was robust in body and spirit. So, no, I saw no suffering, no illness. Only occasional purging when newcomers joined our community.”

“Isn’t it possible this ‘purging’ you noted wasn’t actual purging?”

“Anything’s possible, Ruth. But in order to heal, one must first eliminate and expose whatever sickness has grown within them. And that’s exactly what needed to take place – a purification.”

“Luna, where exactly does the truth lie when reconciling what you claim to have seen with what’s reported to have actually happened?”

“Accept that the truth is singular but its interpretations are many. Ruth, the issue here today is that there’s this crippling Western addiction to drama. You and all your viewers

devour chaos just to survive another day. You demonize goodness just to validate your own savagery. But you're searching for something that doesn't exist. You see, the sacred never sours. It just is. And it never stops being."

"But the reality is that this commune has proven harmful to many people."

"No, Ruth. The reality is that this commune gives people a chance at big, real living. Not the small living you all do in these concrete buildings. These buildings are sepulchers, nothing but fancy graves built by your own hands, which you then willingly step into day after day, so eager are you to rot. But the big, real living – not everyone's prepared for that. Even if they think they are. Even if they swear they are. You see, what Ulli graciously allows is for the limbs to grow, the spirit to thrash, the heart to roast in bliss. And I honor that. But you're so stuck in the human sludge, you wouldn't understand what I'm talking about even if I gave you every last detail. What I'm talking about is above all this. I'm talking transcendence, edging into the cosmic, an untethered evolution entirely."

"Do you sincerely believe the commune was purely good?"

"Nothing's purely anything, dear. Ulli himself said that. But it's our job to make every attempt to access the good and reject the bad."

"Let's shift gears for a moment. Tell me about your diet in the commune."

"Simple. We ate off the land. It was healthy, vegetarian food cooked without seasoning and with very little fire. Cucumber and tomato salads with lemon juice dressing. Roasted sweet potatoes and yellow lentils over a bed of brown rice. We were being nourished on the atomic and cellular levels. The food we ate vibrated with the energy of the earth."

“Who prepared the food?”

“There were a handful of our loving brothers and sisters who cooked for us daily.”

“And were the undesignated cooks ever allowed in the kitchen?”

“No, we weren’t.”

“I see.”

“What do you see exactly? Clearly, you’re pushing for something more here, Ruth. A dash of paranoia, a hint of betrayal, a heavy-handed dose of barbarism. Our food wasn’t laced with anything. And for dessert we didn’t dance in devil ceremonies. The only difference between Ulli’s world and this one, is the fear that corrupts the entirety of your being. I can smell the stench on you. But you see, I don’t know fear. And fear doesn’t know me.”

“In the interest of time, Luna, as our segment is ending, I think it’s best we move on. Tell me about the housing situation on the commune. How did you live?”

“You know, I have to wonder, Ruth. Have you ever been happy?”

“I’m asking about your former living situation.”

“I understand that. But I want to know if you’ve ever been happy.”

“Of course, I have. Everyone has at some point.”

“That’s not true. Not everyone has been happy. I’m not talking about the pleasure you derive from buying a new car or making a television career off exploiting the personal narratives of others, but the sort of joy that exists simply because you do.”

“I’d like to bring the focus back to –”

“It’s interesting because I was watching you backstage. I watched you for about twenty minutes. And you didn’t smile once. Even when the make-up artist showed you a

picture of her baby, you didn't offer a fake, complimentary half-grin. In fact, your face actually looked kind of dead. Like right now for instance."

"Let's return to the –"

"Script? Yes, we must return to the demands and commands of capitalist America. Because if we don't prance around on stage just as asked of us and right on cue, then what happens, Ruth? Do we lose something significant? Do we become something else? Do we cease to exist?"

"Isn't it true that Ulli is nothing more than a mummified dead man?"

"His body has been carefully embalmed with smoke and oil, if that's what you mean."

"Tell me, how exactly can a corpse act as a leader?"

"He's more alive than most of us. There's a necessary distinction to be made here between the death of the body and the death of the spirit. If the body ceases, but the spirit continues, the spirit then grows celestial in size – its full power is earned. It becomes a mighty guide, a near-god, a wave of energy that works to serve man even from alternate realms. But if the spirit dies while the body goes on living, then we come upon someone like you. *That* is the real danger to humanity."

"How do you give a skeleton power over thousands of people?"

"I don't take insult to the fact that in your ignorance you refer to a great teacher and being as a 'skeleton,' but what should be accounted for here is how astonishingly little you know of life and the living. Because you lack auspicious vision, you walk around with a clouded view, your eyes deceiving you at every turn. You're incapable of seeing the real, of understanding the true essence of all that surrounds you. You're nothing more than a

prisoner, groveling amongst shadows, living in a flimsy and poorly crafted delusion at best. In this realm, Ulli appears nothing but bones. But if you could see his full radiance and ethereal form, if you could see how giant he is and feel the solar material of his spirit, you would know better than to speak so foolishly. If he chose to, he could end this entire world. But you see, power isn't given, Ruth. Either you possess it or you don't."

"Right. Well, perhaps we should wrap up this segment by discussing the last stretch of your time at the commune."

"What I particularly hate about your world, is its fragility. Its loyalty to fear and plastic and the endless accumulation of more and more meaningless things. Anything you create is bound to disintegrate, for you understand little of the eternal. You know absolutely nothing of transcending the flesh and transitioning into a higher state of being. But I do. As mentioned previously, offerings were a large part of our existence in the commune. We were always giving our possessions to one another and Ulli with abandon. Particularly when it came to Ulli, we wanted to find new ways to give more of ourselves. Many took to shaving their heads and offering him their hair, sometimes even their teeth. I wanted to give him everything I had or could ever have. This is what honorable living looks like, Ruth. You see, I was on the cusp of it all. I realized I no longer needed my body. I was ready to jump off the edge in a final act of surrender. So I rowed out to Ulli's island one night and stood on the shore. I took a deep breath and made an incision at the base of my belly with a knife. Then I reached inside and pulled out my uterus. I was ecstatic to give him that force of creation, something with which he could determine the purity of my spirit and intentions. This is love, Ruth. Love devoid of fear and ego. This is what humans in their most evolved state are

capable of. If you chase after only small things, you will continue to stay small. But I am starved for the gargantuan, so I am the large primal snake that will spin the next world into existence."

"What happened after you pulled out your uterus?"

"I was removed from the commune and received into critical care."

"And for good reason it seems. What led you to commit such an extreme act of self-harm?"

"Great love inspires great acts of devotion."

"Since we only have a few seconds remaining, tell me what it was like to leave."

"To leave?"

"When you left the commune and rejoined regular life again."

(Laughter) "You never really leave, dear. Ulli knows that."