

Word Count: 3442

Trauma Warnings: Self Harm, Abuse

7 Minutes til Heaven

Mutilation was god's greatest gift to his creations. The act of carving made masters of us all. In this, and only in this, were humans able to last longer, extend their expiration date, and immortalize themselves. At least, that's what Ace thought, except for one minor detail. She wasn't so sure about that god part. Ace tugged at her sleeves, pulling them over her hands to cover up her craftsmanship. Up and down her arms lay scars she wasn't the most proud of, but she thought it was good work. Inside her pockets was her tool, the blade she had screwed off of a 99¢ pencil sharpener. As she stood on the doorstep after hitting the doorbell, she could only dread and longed to return home to her room, continuing to work on her immortality. Her hand was shoved into her pocket, fiddling with the blade. Next to her stood her only friend, Teagan. Standing at an impressive 6'7", Teagan smiled down at their one of many friends, but undoubtedly their closest. Teagan was the one who had invited Ace to this party and was the first person Teagan had told Ace about this whole "rebirth Christian thing" that they were trying. A couple of weeks ago Teagan had come to Ace in tears babbling about how she "knew you were into church when you were little" and how much they "wanted to turn over a new leaf." They had done the same when they realized they thought that all they needed in this world, the thing that would fix them and erase all their desperation and turmoil, was to become vegan. They had done the same before they transitioned, too.

But now, all that seemed so far away, especially since she could hear the inner mechanisms of the door working to release the lock, and she saw the door begin to open. When it did, the booming of music escaped, and Ace could barely understand her thoughts. It was loud

and boisterous, like an organ's melody, except this music screamed with electric notes and artificial instruments. Coming out of the cacophony was a familiar face to both of them and supported by a body that was way too familiar to the two for a good reason. It was Jaxx Hill, top of the cheerleading team at the local high school. Her body stood at attention with her sculpted shoulders and defined torso. She stood holding a bottle of something, but Ace couldn't take her eyes off her outfit. Cut up to the middle of the thigh were her jeans, which barely classified as shorts at this point, and all that accompanied them was a mini hot pink bikini top. Ace was more attentive to the little imprints on the center of each bikini that implied she was pierced in that area. Jaxx had left little to the imagination, and Ace took it and ran with it. Jaxx's smile quickly wore off when she grunted and saw Teagan and Ace at the doorstep. Ace grunted back, but Teagan stood with their hands behind their back, waiting. Ace turned her head and called out something unintelligible to Teagan but produced Jaxx's intentions as she left, wandering back inside the chaotic function with the music ever more feeling like an organ.

Replacing Jaxx was another popular figure at the local high school, Riley Hill; he sported many titles, but just to name a few: Captain of the debate team, Captain of the chess team, Captain of the pickleball team, honor student, and essential for tonight's activities, Captain of the Christian club. Each of these did not impress Ace. Teagan bowed to Riley when he stepped in the doorway, saying, "Namaste." Ace wasn't sure what to say, so she didn't. She smirked, widened her eyes, and stood distant, preferring to watch everything. Teagan and Riley talked as best friends in the past. In the short time Riley had been there, he and Tegan found many topics to laugh over. Ace blushed and looked away. Riley soon invited them in, explaining to Teagan that service would start in about 20 minutes. Ace thought that in 20 minutes, she'd be plunged into the dilemma of interacting with people around her.

She plunged into her dilemma as she traversed the gigantic house. Venturing into the chasm, Ace was met with many a bewildering sight. The walls were blood red, having been bathed in the light of a projector, save for the light in the kitchen, which overpowered the forces. The entire house pulsated with energy, and inside, it was filled with people Ace had known in high school. And now, no longer forced to stay in little uniform boxes, they separated into two groups. In the kitchen, sitting around the dining room table in Sunday dress, sat the group Teagan and Jaxx were here for. The bible-thumping Anglicans who hadn't forgotten their imaginary friend into their adulthood. Each member at the table was specially trained in the art of judging, mocking, and belittling. She knew all too well because, in middle school, she was among them with their judging, mocking, and belittling. She wore long dresses, kept her legs closed, and never gave in to sin, and she turned her nose up to the other group of people sprung out all over Jaxx's couches now. They were the delinquents, and Ace still held her nose up when referring to them as she feared she'd become them. They didn't know order or rules and considered themselves more enlightened than those who did. These lots were only skilled in cursing, smacking, and fucking. She knew all too well of their habits because, at one point, she considered herself a part of them. But that was a different life. Was she reformed now? She was thrust from her thinking before discussing what group she fell into.

A familiar sound pierced her ears. Goosebumps formed on her arms, her eyebrows shot up, and she froze. She then heard his voice. Crack! She shuddered. It was all too familiar. She felt like crying. And then she felt the cold force of a hand grab her shoulder.

"Hey, did you know that Paramount+ added all of the Twilight Area to it? That's why I put it on."

When Ace turned around, relief washed her clean. She saw an average-looking guy wearing a tight face and holding a drink. She remained calm, knowing that the source of her fear was just from the TV.

“Yeah, The Twilight Zone is an American media franchise based on the anthology television series created by Rod Serling in which characters find themselves dealing with often distu-” Ace became bored with his words; she had vivid memories of staying up late watching the show as it played on her old house’s bedroom TV. She’d always force pillows to her ears to prevent herself from hearing the eerie music that was the title. Ace stared at the guy as he continued talking; she couldn’t say anything; he wouldn’t let her get a word in. To be fair, the words Ace wanted to get in were that she didn’t care about what he said and would prefer banging her head through concrete than continuing to listen to him, but she couldn’t even.

“-lbums of theirs discuss particular Twilight Zone episodes and themes.”

He took a breath after that line, and Ace took her chance.

“Cool.”

She wandered off from him, no longer concerned with the TV or him. She just wanted to sit down on the couch. Looking around, she noticed that every delinquent in the building had occupied all the couches. They stretched over armchairs and lazed on ottomans. Some were sitting on the back of the chairs, and one was on an overturned coat rack. Ace found a place on the loveseat where two people were sitting as close as they could to each other and sat there. The couple didn’t mind; they hadn’t noticed they had melted into each other. Their lips engaged in a feverous lock. Ace saw that this intimacy wasn’t unique to them; it seemed like every delinquent was doing some profane act. She looked around, and some exchanges of saliva and sweaty hands grabbed sweaty parts. Ace watched people whose middle names she hadn’t known, but she saw

them reach second base with Kyle from Home Economics or Sarah, with whom she had gone to the gym. The worst thing she saw was Jaxx entertaining a host of delinquents on the Lawson couch. The men were like vultures surrounding her, and she played the role of carcass very well. The talons of her suitors tenderly handled her subtle pink body. They were able to grow familiar to her breast but never dared penetrate the thin piece of cotton that barely served as protection. Ace could hear Riley giggle as they scraped and stung her, and she didn't know whether to feel bad for her or envy them. She settled on erasing them from her mind and getting up to venture to the kitchen to find Teagan.

Ace found Teagan praying at the dining room table, their head down. She dared not interrupt the service, so she went to the corner closest to Teagan, plopped down, and began to watch them. Ace knew to refrain from interrupting Teagan while they were praying; it always yielded terrible results. Teagan also wondered why Ace had no empathy. Weren't they a Christian once, too, didn't they prey? Ace couldn't get into it, but she stopped praying long before she decided to no longer call herself Christian. September 16th, 2011, was the last time she prayed. She remembered that because she wrote it down in the Junior Bible that her dad had given her that day. And that was also the day she learned that praying didn't work because even after she kept praying, he didn't stop. So she stopped, praying, that is. She never closed her eyes and bowed her head again, and when asked to in church, she'd just fidget with whatever she had with her: keys, safety pins, broken pencil sharpeners. That's what she was doing now; she had taken the pencil sharpener out of her pocket and entertained it, fidgeting with it. She only looked up once she noticed Teagan's head pop up and their rise from the table. She ran over to her, begging for her presence.

“Hey Ace, I hope you’re having fun; I’m sorry I had to drag you to this thing.”

“Yeah.”

Ace didn’t know how to tell Teagan that she wasn’t; she didn’t think it really mattered to say to them.

“Time to go?”

Ace asked, hoping this to be true. The blade encouraged the execution of this idea.

“Uhh, yeah, I think s-”

“Gather around everyone.”

Jaxx began to announce, interrupting Teagan.

“Everyone upstairs, we’re playing spin the bottle.”

“-So.”

Teagan finished their statement as the rest of those that occupied the kitchen left toward the door, and a group of the delinquents led by Jaxx ventured upstairs. Ace stood in place, tugging on Teagan’s sleeve, watching Jaxx’s body move up the stairs, eventually blocked by her lackeys, the vultures.

“Yeah, Ace, we can go.”

“But what if we didn’t.”

“You want to stay?”

“They’re doing something up there.”

“Yeah, spin the bottle; you wanna do it?”

Ace blushed and turned away.

“I wanna go. Are you coming?”

“Fine then, I’ll watch.”

They trudged upstairs, following the delinquents, Riley, and the lackeys up the stairs. Ace's heart was beating, fast. She was excited for the opportunity of a bottle, allowing her a chance with Teagan. How many times do you have an opportunity to kiss someone you're in love with? Was she in love? Anyways. She nearly tripped up the stairs, dragging Teagan behind her.

When they had arrived upstairs, they all entered Jaxx's room and formed a circle. Crisscross applesauce, they sat devoting themselves to their spots. Ace and Teagan arrived and placed themselves where they could find a spot. Apparently, the plan had shifted from Spin the Bottle to Never Have I Ever and then to finally 7 Minutes in Heaven so they could still use the bottle prepared for it. Jaxx's closet was perfect for the game. It had a lock, a vent so the rest could sneakily hear inside, and trim. Small closets were better, making it steamier and cherished. Ace thought if only the empty Budlight declared it.

Round and round, the bottle spun, seeing Teagan giggle with delight, intending to pass down if the bottle turned toward them. It saw Ace biting her nails, almost praying for a miracle. It saw lackeys and vultures who, in the comfort of Jaxx's room, had taken its claim on her, getting familiar with her lips and the delicate metal on her chest. It saw Jaxx give in to their demands, and her carcass flailed but still gave attention to the bottle. It saw Teagan again. If turned toward them, they'd surely pass up the offer, but now they giggled. Ace, praying while biting her nails, begged. Vultures, comfortable and dutiful, ate away. And Jaxx let them have their way. Then it saw Teagan again and stopped.

“Into the closet, you go!”

“Uh No No tha-”

“Oh, and take Ace with you.”

“Wha me?”

Teagan was pushed into the closet, followed by Ace. Teagan had to bend over drastically, nearly breaking their back to fit in. The lock turned, and Jaxx began to laugh. “Have fun in there!”

Her lackeys followed suit, and their laughter soon turned to moans. They had found something to occupy themselves.

Contained, Ace had to stare at Teagan’s chest, and her leg was folded in half. An uncomfortable position and it hurt worse that it seemed that her fantasies were mere follies because it didn’t seem like Teagan was in much of a mood.

“Let us out of here! You can’t leave us here!”

Teagan’s words were drowned out by the music that seemed to travel from the living room inside the chamber. They then strained their neck to look at Ace.

“I don’t think they can hear us.”

“Oh yeah, well, I hope they can hear th-”

“BBBBBBRRRRRRRR”

The sound of a trumpet blared from within Ace’s head before she could speak. It pierced through cortices and membranes and sounded so crisp it gave her a chill. Teagan heard it, too. Ace grabbed their forearm and could feel their skin was filled with goosebumps. The vultures outside must have also heard it as they began to react.

“What was that?”

“Did you hear that?”

“It was so loud?”

“Was it a trumpet?”

All Ace and Teagan could do was look at each other wide-eyed. Ace's next move was to hit the door really loudly. But as she went for a hit, she was interrupted by a-
“BBBBBBRRRRRRRR”

There it was again, and even louder, too. Ace could hear crying now. Was it Jaxx? She heard running up the stairs and a voice. It sounded like Riley's.
“Hey, Is everyone okay”

“BBBBBBRRRRRRRR”

This sound was now followed by screaming. It was Jaxx's voice screaming and crying now. It was followed by her lackeys's comfort.

“What the fuck just happened to Riley?”

“It's just his clothes?”

Ace heard this and grew even more scared. Did something happen to Riley? Only leaving h-

“BBBBBBRRRRRRRR”

The sound. The trumpet. It was becoming harder to bear at this point. Ace could still hear the others outside the door reacting to what had happened, and she kept trying to make enough noise to get their attention. Teagan did the same. They attempted to sway their feet back and forward to hit the door.

“BBBBBBRRRRRRRR”

“Waaahhhhhh”

Jaxx wailed, and from inside, Ace and Teagan could hear her flail about and wrestle with something they began to call out to her.

“Jaxx! Jaxx! OPEN THE DOOR!”

“BBBBBRRRRRRRR”

“JAXX! WE’RE STILL IN HERE!”

“Huh, oh my god, I’ve gotta.”

The force of a body hit the door, and Ace could hear Jaxx’s wails, which were only separated by the piece of wood that was the door. She continued to cry.

“They’re all gone.”

Teagan and Ace remained confused but banged harder, and Ace began to twist the doorknob vigorously. And then-

“BBBBBRRRRRRRR”

“It filled their heads again, accompanied by Jaxx’s screams. The scream’s source was also from inside, just like the trumpeting noise. And then there was quiet.

Still, Ace and Teagan sat in the closet.

“Hello?” Ace said, and she jumped because her own voice had frightened her. She continued to turn the knob on the door but got no result. Her hands went to her mouth, and she began chewing. Slowly, she slumped further down in the closet, trying to see underneath the door and out to the room. She got low enough to see something, and she removed her fingers from her mouth and stuck them out underneath the door, trying to grab what she saw. Her index and her middle finger pinched it and dragged it back into the closet and Ace held it up. It was a hot pink micro bikini top. Ace and Teagan both knew where it came from. They both screamed and threw the garment. Teagan began to cry.

“Ace, what the fuck was that?”

“The Rapture?”

“No, No, NO, it couldn’t, that’s.”

“I guess it is all real.”

“No, that can’t be right,” Teagan slammed their hands into the walls.

“Teagan, what el-”

“THAT CAN’T BE! Because why wouldn’t I go.”

“Go where.”

“TO HEAVEN, ACE!” Ace fell quiet. And the room remained quiet for a while. Until Ace decided to speak.

“I don’t know.”

“I’ve done what I was supposed to, didn’t I. Morally right.”

“I guess so.”

“Have I not? Why’d I follow that stupid book if I don’t.” Teagan began to sob again. Ace didn’t say a word.

“Is it because I’m-” They sobbed harder. Ace knew Teagan’s following words and still remained silent.

“If it didn’t matter why’d I do all this stuff for, why’d I-” Teagan looked at Ace wide-eyed again.

“Why’d I transition, why’d I come here, why’d I save myself for marriage? I’ll never-” Teagan’s eyes expanded, and they stared at Ace. Replaced with fear was lust, and she thrust herself toward Ace.

“You’ll ne-” Teagan’s lips interrupted Ace’s question. The warm lips enveloped her, and Ace could only feel shame. She threw Teagan off of her stern. Teagan hit the back of the closet with such force. They rendered out a few words.

“I’m sorry, Ace.” And Teagan went silent.

Ace began to fear now, and she prodded Teagan's body several times. She saw that she was still breathing, but it seemed Teagan was unconscious. Left with only her thoughts now, Ace took out the blade. She fidgeted with it and let it walk up the distance of every one of her fingers and then her arms, just thinking. She thought of how odd it all was how a storytelling she had been told so long ago had come to life. It was as if she was downstairs and witnessing Santa eat his milk and cookies. She couldn't help but laugh to herself, but that soon turned into tears. They fell from her cheeks and into her hands and warmed the blade. It was an inviting warmth. Ace considered her odds. Outside the door, was there anything for her? Inside was full of trauma she couldn't unpack as it suffocated her in this small space. Indeed, the blade had more influence than ever now.

Ace thought of her friend Teagan, and it made the blade turn, firm in her hand. She thought of the hot pink bikini and the metal and the blade inched toward a malleable barrier. Ace thought of the old torn-up children's bible and what had become of it, and the blade had settled. It chipped away at the door. It marred away white paint and then wood and then woody flesh. It splintered and cracked to Ace's will. She engraved her last will and testament into the door as she bore into it next to the doorknob, trying to break through a small hole. The blade did have its backside and cut deep into Ace's hands, but she worked and struck away. Striking so fast that blood sloshed onto her face. She continued still. Etching and scoring her way out. When the wood had weakened enough, she scooped out the pulpy insides to make a hole her eye could fit through. She bent over backward to put her face into the hole. And when she looked out, she saw... light.