

Homecoming Queen
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(*Young Adult Fiction, Second Place Winner*)

Tristana held the gun to her forehead and waited. Waited for the right moment to pull the trigger and say goodbye. She wasn't afraid of what waited at the other end, didn't know what was going to happen, but anything was better than this. This world of pain and torment that had become her life. She couldn't remember back to the days when life had been carefree and happy. When life had been easy, when she had been a child and naive to the world's cruelties.

She sat in the soft sands of California. Everything was peaceful as wave after wave crashed into the shore. After the wave crashed, it would disappear, she was ready to disappear. To become as the wave did, unremembered.

Tris had picked out her outfit for this day, had everything all planned months ahead. She was ready to die. She wore a light blue dress, the same color as her eyes. The color of the sky when it touched the sea. Her golden blonde hair she had left to float down her back, she didn't want to hassle with it on her last day. She wanted a relaxing day for her last, she deserved at least one.

She released the trigger.

Everything was dark when she woke, she was in her bed. She rushed to stand and turn on the light. Was yesterday a dream? She had been so sure that it was real. Why wasn't she dead? She was supposed to be away and gone, she was not supposed to have to continue living this lie of a life.

She stood in the middle of her room- her room wasn't much. She had a giant four poster bed, and cheerleading items hung on her wall. Her walls were painted light pink, they hadn't changed since she was eleven. Most of the things in her room hadn't changed since she was eleven.

Tris quickly dressed in a white crop top and a black mini skirt, before plopping in front of her giant mirror to work on her make-up and hair.

Tris was everyone's cliché dream, she had even been her dream once. She was blonde, popular, a senior, super skinny, 5'6", had blue eyes, a cheerleader, had a rich family, and she lived on the beaches of California. But Tris wasn't perfect and she hated herself for that. She hated everything about herself, that was why she deserved to die. No matter how she looked, how she acted, how much money she had. They never would love her, just the image she portrayed.

"Hey, babe." Tylar leaned over and kissed Tris' cheek as she sat in his black jeep.

"Hey, Tylar." Tylar was her boyfriend. He was also the quarterback for the football team. Like everything else, cliché.

"You coming to the party at my place tonight?"

"Wouldn't miss it."

"Good." He wrapped his arm around her. It wasn't that Tris didn't like her boyfriend, because she did. Tylar just didn't know her. Nobody did anymore. Not since she was eleven and was still full of endless dreams. Now, she understood that life wasn't all sunshine and rainbows. That unicorns don't exist and that dreams were for the weak.

They arrived at school shortly, it wasn't a long drive. She and Tylar didn't talk much, they didn't have much in common and they knew nearly nothing about each other. They dated for practical reasons, for popularity. Her friends had pressured her into dating him. Going out with the head of the football team was important, apparently.

"Tris! Wait up!"

Tris turned around at the sound of Cate's voice. Cate wore white shorts and a light pink top. Cate had dyed her brown hair so it faded from brown to blonde and she had it curled today. She and Cate were the same height and had been best friends for as long as they could remember. They knew everything about each other, and they were as close as sisters. Tris wouldn't have survived high school this long if she didn't have Cate. Technically she didn't if last night's dream was any indication, but none of that was Cate's fault.

"You're coming to my house to get ready for the party right?"

"Of course! You know you should stop worrying. You're going to be homecoming queen, everyone would be dumb not to vote for you."

"What if I vote you in?" Cate laughed, her voice like tiny musical bells.

"Yeah, no. We made a deal. You get fall homecoming and I get the basketball one."

"Sure." Tris internally sighed.

She hated court and never wanted to be homecoming queen. She and Cate though had been shopping for the perfect dress for the last month, she just didn't have the energy to dress up and play a part. Not with everything else going on in her life.

She passed through the school day and cheerleading practice in a daze. She smiled and waved to people but none of it was real. She longed for when it was just her and Cate and no one cared what you looked like.

They drove Cate's car to the party and walked in together, the party had already started.

"Hey, babe." She turned up to look at Tylar as he crushed her lips with his alcohol-scented breath. She just smiled and kissed him back. "You're the prettiest girl I know," he said before walking over to his friends.

Tris looked around for Cate, but she had already disappeared into the crowd. Tris just walked to the back porch. Tylar had a big house, but she knew her way around. It seemed like the whole school was here. She just hoped she did nothing stupid.

"Hey, Tristana right?"

Tris turned to see who else was on the porch with her. It was a guy, she could hardly make out his features in the dark but he had blonde hair and deep blue eyes. She could get lost in those eyes, but she had a boyfriend and wouldn't dare cheat.

"Tris."

"You're going out for homecoming queen, right?" She groaned. Why did everyone always bring that up? She couldn't go through one conversation without someone mentioning homecoming.

"Yeah."

"That must be fun."

"It's not." She didn't know why, but she didn't want to lie to him. She was just so tired of faking everything.

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"No, I am. I shouldn't have told you. I have to go find Tylar." She left in a hurry. Why did she tell him homecoming wasn't fun? He might not vote for her and she needed all the votes she could get. She didn't want to run, but she wanted to lose less and homecoming was tomorrow.

"Hey, have you seen Tylar?" She asked Ben, Tylar's best friend.

"Last I saw he went upstairs."

"Thanks." She walked up the marble steps, wanting to find either Tylar or Cate. She just didn't want to be alone and needed the closest people right now to hang with and get wasted with. Tylar was probably playing video games in his room so that's where she would head.

"This room's occupied." She heard Cate's voice when she opened the door and then she turned on the light. "Hey!" She watched as they turned their heads towards her.

"Really? You're supposed to be my best friend Cate! And you're my boyfriend! How could you cheat on me?!"

"You know we only date for looks. And I know everyone is supposed to be really nice to you, 'cause of your brother. But you had to know it wasn't real."

"Well, we don't date anymore!" She yelled at him before running out of his house, trying to hold back tears the whole way. To heck with them all. She didn't need them.

She walked back to her house. It wasn't a long walk, but it was long enough to cool her down. She should have expected this. He was using her for another pretty smile that he could call his. Well, not anymore.

Homecoming came as expected with a giant party in their gym. The ideal location to throw in a bunch of teenagers in dresses and tuxes. It obviously made perfect sense. Everyone huddled together to find out who would be homecoming Queen and King. Tris wasn't surprised when they said her name.

She was perfect.

She had dressed flawlessly. She wore a white backless knee length tulle dress from a top dress designer. Her family was rich and her father liked to dress her and her mom up after he hurt them. To complement her dress, she wore silver stiletto heels. She was stunning and she knew it, but that didn't

mean she liked herself anymore.

Tris also wasn't surprised when they called Tylar's name for the king. They twirled around the dance floor and they both smiled like yesterday didn't happen. Like the world was perfect and they themselves were perfect and had no problems. She just went with it, the façade real for everyone else.

She smiled throughout the night, acting like she was having the best of times. She could win a Grammy for her acting. After all, she had been acting since she was eleven.

Since her brother died and her family fell apart.

Her father now came home drunk, came home different than how he would leave. Alcohol was his way to recover from Dylan's death. The problem was when he would drink too much, he would hit them. Her father always cried after, would apologize and buy them whatever they wanted. Her mother's way of recovery was cleaning. Her mother would clean everything, but no one would talk of that day. Of the car crash, how Tris was hurt too. No one talked in her family anymore.

She was beautiful as she walked into school Monday morning, but the week had been long. Her father had come home Sunday night drunk, again.

Her mother had cried before getting back up and acting like nothing had happened. Tris did the same thing, appearances mattered.

"Tristana! Hey, it's Kai."

She looked over at the voice. It was the guy from the porch. He had a backpack swung around one arm and was holding a skateboard. He held out his hand and she shook it, something not commonly done by high schoolers.

"I just moved here last week."

"Well, it's nice to see you again."

He laughed. "No it's not. Don't lie, I know your secret."

She tensed, how did he know her secrets?

"Wow, chill. You froze up, I won't hurt you. I'm sorry, I was just joking about homecoming."

She breathed a sigh of relief. He didn't mean it like she thought. He didn't know her, but that was a nice change. He wouldn't be fake to her, hopefully.

"Call me Tris."

"Whatever you say, Tristana."

"Where did you move from?"

"What, can't tell from my coolness? I'm from the island! Hawaii, baby!"

She laughed and it felt real.

"Lookin' good, Tristana."

"Can't you call me Tris like everyone else?"

"But I'm not everyone else."

"You're right."

They were at the beach. He had invited her out surfing and she didn't have the heart to tell him at the time, she didn't know how to surf. So she sat in the sand as he covered her legs with sand. She had told him when they got there, he didn't look mad or anything. Had just asked her what she wanted to do. Now, he was making her into a sand mermaid and she was having fun.

"Why do you like hanging with me?" He leaned back in the sand next to her.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, everyone else seems to want to be around me for my money or my beauty, but you don't ever mention either."

"That's because I don't need your money and I like being around you, not your face."

"Why?"

"You're real."

"But I'm not."

"You're real. No one else would have told me they didn't like being homecoming queen. That's not something you hear everyday. Most would kill to be in your shoes, but it's not just where you are that should matter but who you are."

"Thank you."

"Yeah, now why do you hang with me?" He said standing. "I think it's because you can't surf and need an instructor, race you to the water!" He yelled as he sprinted towards the blue.

"No fair!" She yelled, struggling to stand as she raced to the water.

Nothing changed at home, nothing changed at school, but something changed in Tris. She had once hid, acting like everything was okay. She had once imagined how the world would move without them.

When she was in elementary school, she would dream of what would happen when she wasn't there, wasn't at school. If life was the same or if everyone was sad that she was gone. She never knew, there is no way to know. It's the part of your brain that wants to be everywhere, see everything, and miss nothing. She had once wanted to know, but it's also those thoughts that begin so simple and end in thinking of life without you. Would life be better? Would everything go on as normal? Would anyone even care if she wasn't around? Was she even important? Was she worth loving?

She was, and she realized that now. She and Kai became close friends, she eventually told him

about her family and everything about her. He had done the same. He wasn't all rainbows and sunshine, he was real and had had pain in his life too. We all have pain, but it's not the pain that describes you but what you do during and after that defines you. She knew that now, but it was too late.

"My baby! Somebody save my baby!" Lucicla, Tristana's mother cried. Robert, Tristana's father pulled her into his arms. There was nothing they could do. She was gone.