

Da Vinci's Lady: Part 1

She had always been a mirror, I realized. Identical until it was broken.

When Nate announced that he had a serious girlfriend, mom had insisted that he bring her home for Christmas. When he said she was coming, my mom pulled out all the stops: food, decorations, the whole welcome wagon. My mom had us dust off the two illuminated reindeer in the basement and the house smelled of her cinnamon babka that she only baked on special occasions. Honestly, I think I was the most excited to see this girl. From what I had heard, she was perfect for Nate. And if she was perfect for Nate, she had to be something special.

It wasn't like my brother Nate was unpopular with girls at any point in his life. In fact, he often regaled me with his stories of women he met on his campus and had to force away. He was the more popular of the two of us with more natural charisma than I knew was possible. We shared the same dirty blonde hair and slightly crooked smile, though I was thin and bony by comparison. Nate was a football star in both high school and college, as good-looking as he was athletic. As everyone had said in high school, Nate 'broke records on the field and broke hearts off it.' Two girls in my grade had actually gotten into a fight over him. It was still referred to as 'The Brawl in D Hall', even after Nate graduated.

Christmas celebrations arrived, and my parents were on pins and needles. After my grandparents showed up, my two cousins came with their parents. We all spoke in hushed tones about this mysterious new influence that could, as my

aunt Linda put it, 'make an honest man out of Nate.' When we saw his car pull up, the whole family made a move for one of the front windows to catch a glance. My mom honestly gasped as the mystery girl climbed out of Nate's passenger side.

After the usual interlude of conversation, Nate finally brought the girl forward. "Everybody, this is Natalie."

Natalie exceeded expectations, I had to give Nate that. She was blonde, though Natalie's hair was a curtain of curled bronze as opposed to the platinum or gold he usually preferred. From the moment she walked in, her bright green eyes disarmed my family's normally scrutinizing gaze. She charmed everyone in the room with a smile and a flash of her eyes. Natalie was a dance captain for the school and had seen Nate playing. As a first year starter, how could she resist his usual charms? Almost as impressive was that Nate was still with her since the end of football season.

Nate stayed downstairs with Natalie, while she partook in the "tradition" where the family questioned her until they found out everything that they wanted to know about any of Nate's girlfriends. Honestly, it was just an excuse for my aunts and grandmother to be unrestricted in how nosey they were.

"You're studying math? What do you plan on doing with that?"

"How often do you attend church?"

"How long were your parents dating before they married?"

To escape the embarrassing barrage, my cousin Dale and I went upstairs. His sister Kate, equally uncomfortable, followed us. The three of us settled into my room, occasionally hearing laughter through the metal vents that connected the house. Kate settled into a corner away from us, returning her attention to her book. I wasn't surprised. We had only invited my sulking, brooding cousin Kate to be nice.

"She's something else, huh?" I asked my cousin Dale. It was more of a statement than a question, the answer already provided by my eager eyes.

My cousin Dale nodded with a huge smile on his face. "She's the kind of girl you dream about, you know?" I was glad I wasn't the only one who thought she was beyond perfect. Dale and I went back and forth for a few minutes going over her looks and grinning like mad fools the whole time. It wasn't for about ten minutes that my cousin Kate finally spoke up.

"Yeah, I don't know..." Kate shrugged, not looking up from her book, a massive tome of Western philosophy. "There's something a little too...Da Vinci about it, you know?" I wasn't surprised Kate had something to say to about this. She always liked spoiling the fun when Dale and I got excited about anything, from girls to football. We thought she would be happy about having another girl close to her age in the family. Honestly, I don't think she was even reading. Just trying to look more adult than everyone else and taking every opportunity to roll her eyes. She was really into experimental art, while I could barely spell 'existentialism'.

"What do you mean by 'Da Vinci' about it?" I asked.

"Well, there's this conspiracy theory," Kate began, switching into professor mode. "That Mona Lisa was a man or a self-portrait. Either his younger self or a feminine version of his own face."

"I'm struggling with your overly complicated metaphor." I was certain Kate was just trying to sound more intelligent than me. If I just let her know she won, maybe she'd stop.

"Don't tell me you didn't notice," Kate said. "They look like they could be twins!"

"Twins?" Dale asked his sister. "Really?"

"You're joking, right?" Kate sighed, pointing at me. "Just put a wig on his brother and you won't see a difference."

"No way," I said. That didn't add up in my mind. I'd known Nate for too long to see him resembling a girl in any way.

"Okay, fine..." Kate picked up my laptop and opened up to Facebook. She pulled up Nate's profile and found a picture of him and Natalie together. She turned the computer around and showed me.

"Same color eyes," Kate began, "same color hair, same cheekbones, same nose...tell me that you at least see *one* of those things."

I looked at the picture. Sure, they were both blondes. Maybe their noses were similar...and maybe their eyes were really alike in color...and maybe—

"Oh God," I said, astonished. I wasn't sure not really sure if that was the right response. I already felt guilty about being attracted to my brother's girlfriend. Now I was finding out I was attracted to my brother's face. I could hear Freud laughing from his grave.

"So, the boy finally gets it!" Kate laughed. "I wonder if they're related or something."

"How did I miss that?" I asked. "More importantly, how did you notice?" Now that I was aware of it, I couldn't stop looking at the picture.

"Guys!" My aunt Linda called. "Dinner!"

I squirmed at the prospect of sitting across from my brother and his new twin. I didn't feel too hungry.