

Da Vinci's Lady: Part 2

The meal was, in as few words as needed, awkward. Across the ham and green beans, I couldn't stop staring at Natalie, but it wasn't the same kind of staring as before. Now, every time I looked at her face, I saw my brother staring back at me. I officially hated Kate more than ever. I watched them and noticed it wasn't just their faces that were similar, but they acted alike and talked the same way. When Nate would be mentioning something to my uncle about the football games, Natalie was facing the other direction and talking to my mother about her time on the dance team. Nate would be telling Dad about a class giving him trouble and Natalie would be talking to Kate about studying with Nate all night for a test in that class. It was like they more than looked alike, but thought the same things.

Afterward, we all sat around the living room or milled around the kitchen, talking and drinking coffee. I was sitting alone in the living room, collecting my thoughts, when the last person I wanted to talk to that night sauntered over to me.

"Do you mind if I sit here for a bit?" Natalie asked. I didn't say no. In fact, I don't remember saying anything. I just awkwardly signaled for her to join me on the couch.

"I don't think we've officially met," Natalie said with a smile. "You're Nate's little brother, right?"

"Only by three years," I rushed. I didn't inherit the same charm that Nate seemed to have.

"Well," Natalie said, "he always talks about you."

"He talked about you whenever he came home. There wasn't much for us to go on, but he got everyone pretty excited to meet you."

"I hope I haven't disappointed you, then. I haven't, have I?" I looked her in the eyes. She smiled and I felt my hairs rising and goose bumps popping all over my arms. I wasn't sure how to answer. She had lived up to Nate's standards, but Kate's observation had set everything in a different light. I wanted to tell her why she unnerved me. I licked my lips and finally answered her question.

"No," I lied. "I can see why he likes you so much."

"Well, it looks like Nate wants me to talk to your aunt again," Natalie sighed, "We'll be seeing plenty of each other though, don't worry."

I nodded and smiled. I couldn't help but let out a small breath. I saw Natalie walk over to Nate and slip her arm around his back. They smiled and I couldn't help but feel an eerie chill. I told myself, after a while, it didn't matter what I thought. Nate was happy and it didn't matter what I thought of her in the end. It was Nate's life.

The whole time that Nate and Natalie were with us, they stayed in his old room, right next door to mine. I had these weird recurring dreams, where I would be looking in a mirror and looking back at me was Natalie, or sometimes a girl

version of me would be looking back. I'd say they were nightmares, but they were never really that terrifying. Just unsettling.

As soon as Nate left, things were actually pretty normal for me again. Without her in the house, I was able to put Natalie out of my mind and get out of those dreams. Nate kept talking about what they were doing together. It was like they never left each other's side. Which was why it was such a miracle he wasn't in the car that night.