

Da Vinci's Lady: Part 4

Natalie ended up going back to school after the summer. Her face had healed up for the most part and if you hadn't known, it would have looked halfway to normal. You might have felt something was off if it was the first time seeing her, but you weren't really sure what was wrong. She still wasn't smiling as much, but at the same time, neither was Nate. Her scars were still very visible if you know what she looked like before, and Nate still thought that he was trapped.

Natalie had stopped dance team but still came to every one of Nate's games. I had gone to one of the games and sat next to Natalie. She was quiet and when she did speak, it was a hoarse whisper.

"It's been a while, hasn't it?" She whispered, trying to start a conversation. She was wearing oversized sunglasses that took up most of her face. Her hair was much shorter than when I last saw her, but it had grown back to a simpler bob. I was a little surprised that she started the conversation.

"Yeah," I answered. "Not since last winter, right?"

"Right," Natalie said. She was quiet again.

"Nate says you took some time off?"

"You don't have to act like you don't know," Natalie said, grimly pulling down the glasses. I could see the outlines of scars around her eyes. Her left eye had been affected by the accident, dulled to a cloudy grey that Nate had said was hypersensitive to light. The skin graft had taken but was still very visible if you knew what to look for. I was startled, of course. Even with all the preparation, the

pictures, the stories, Natalie's face was still surprising. I did my best not to show my reaction, but something must have come through.

Natalie frowned and pulled the glasses back on. "I don't like showing them off, obviously," she said, "But I suppose you should know."

As bad as it sounds, I was glad that Natalie was the way that she looked now. She was still very pretty but didn't look as much like Nate anymore. Her face was rough but had fragileness to it. It was like the cracked face of a porcelain doll—pretty, but broken.

"Things haven't been easy, between your brother and me. It's not his fault, I know. I've started seeing a therapist about it. I'm just...angry. And he takes the brunt of it because it's all he can really do."

"I understand," I told her. In all honesty, I didn't. She looked down at the field and found Nate as the team was warming up. I followed her gaze and saw Nate raise his hand with a halfhearted smile. To my surprise, she had actually smiled back. It was still the same grin.

"It still hurts a little," she said, rubbing her jaw. "Smiling. But it gets easier. Time, you know?"

The team lost, but to be honest, I hadn't come for the game.