

## Da Vinci's Lady: Part 5

Nate's graduation party was almost as big as that Christmas. My aunts were mercifully less obtrusive about Natalie as she made her way up the driveway. She still preferred to wear the glasses, but they hid less of her face than before.

"Welcome back," my mother said, with a more careful hug than the last time they had met in person. Natalie embraced my mother a little tighter, as if giving her permission.

"I missed you at the last game," Natalie said. "We ended up winning by a rush."

"Well," Nate said, "it would have looked bad if I lost the last game of the season."

"So," I said, looking to Natalie, "you're doing better?"

"Much," Natalie confirmed. "And I think I have you to thank for that in part. You're very sweet."

We made our way to the backyard. The family had already gathered there, as well as a few of Nate's high school friends. Before long, things felt like they had at that first Christmas. If anyone had any reservations, they said nothing. A few questions came up over the course of the barbeque.

"Did you get that teaching job at the school you taught at a few semesters back?"

"Is the law firm going to pay well?"

"Is that a ring on your finger?"

Kate's question made everyone perk up. Collectively, our gaze shifted down to the simple ring on Natalie's finger, decorated with a sparkling stone. Natalie raised her

hand with a faint smile. “We were going to wait until after dinner, but we do have an announcement to make.”

Natalie told everyone the story of how Nate proposed. It was on the football field, last game of his college career and the last time he’d be on the field before graduation. Nate had organized for a few friends to hold up signs in the crowd, so he could propose at the end of the game. Her old dance team had convinced her to come to one last time and cheer Nate on.

“So,” Natalie continued her story over burgers, “the captain comes up to me and hands me a uniform. She said it wouldn’t feel right if I wasn’t there for the last game and said I should come back, the other girls be damned. Naturally, I wasn’t on the front of the team again, but it was good to be back where I felt like I was home.”

When they won, Natalie had rushed the field, but was floored when she turned and saw the message in the stands. “I had no idea what was coming. You should have been there when Nate proposed, though! I thought he was going to cry.”

I shoved Nate hard. “Way to not tell anyone!”

“You would have run your mouth off, you little twerp!” Nate pushed back, grinning. “Besides, we’ve been living together so long, why are you even that surprised?”

“Even I had my suspicions,” Natalie said. “It seemed fitting that he would do it at the last game.”

“Does this mean we can expect grandkids?” My mother appeared, suddenly.

“Ma!”

“It’s just a question, Nathan!”

“At least we’ll have a good idea what they’ll look like,” Natalie said, nudging Nate.

“Both our hair color, one eye each, identical noses...”

“Wait, you guys knew?” I asked.

“We dated for four years,” Nate said, shrugging, “you think no one told us we didn’t look the same?”

“I didn’t notice until my roommate said something. After that, it was just a running joke for the longest time. We almost went as each other for Halloween one year.”

“Mom always said I’d never meet anyone good enough for me. So I went and met me!”

“You are such a narcissist!” Natalie laughed, brighter than I’d seen her in a long time. Kate looked across the table at me and smirked, satisfied. Well played, Mr. Da Vinci. Well played.