

Da Vinci's Lady: Part 3

About a month after the Da Vinci fiasco, Natalie had gone to the store while Nate was in class. There had been some kind of accident, but Nate didn't like explaining it. I never heard what had happened completely. I only ever heard bits and pieces: the car, a truck, gas and a spark that had changed pretty much everything for the two of them.

It was like something out of a Greek tragedy. Natalie's body wasn't hurt, but the burns had gotten pretty bad on her skin. Her whole face had been wrapped up in gauze for days. Natalie's parents had opted to take her out of school, but things were still up in the air with her and Nate for a while.

Even after the doctor's told her it would be safe to take it off, she left the bandages on. It was weeks before Nate got to see her without them. He had gone to visit her and talk with her but found things were especially tense. I saw pictures of him sitting next to her trying to look happy while she was still in recovery. He occasionally came home with cuts or bruises from when she'd throw things during a bad day. Nate told me about this every weekend he came home, which suddenly increased in frequency.

"She's getting to me, man," He told me once when we were sitting in front of the TV together.

"Why is she so angry anyways?"

"Trauma can do that to a person," Nate said. "She just doesn't know how to deal with people like this. She hates getting sympathy, but people won't really

talk to her otherwise. I know she won't mean to, but...you can't take some things back."

"Then why keep dating her?" I asked. "It's obvious that things aren't working out, right?"

"It's not so simple. I wish it were, but it's not. I mean, think about it. I dump her after her accident when our relationship, on the surface, is exactly the same to everyone else. As far as their concerned, I'd be dumping only because of her accident. Anyone I tried dating after that would just remind me that I dumped a girl with a messed up face. Besides, I'd never find another girl like her...there's something about her you know?"

"Yeah," I sighed. "Something..."

"But every time I look at her now and try to remember who we were, I only see the accident. I barely remember who she used to be. I get chills."

I nodded. There wasn't really an appropriate response.

It got to a point where he might as well have just stopped dating her, but he insisted they were still together. I started to worry, but then I remembered this was Nate. He was bound to bounce back any day now. Something would happen and he would get that brilliant idea to get things back to the way they used to be.

Nate never bounced back, even when Natalie started to get better. I saw them together on Facebook. She'd gotten some skin grafts, but it didn't look very good, initially. She had kept the bandages on for a while longer than people thought she would.

Nate's grades started to go. He seemed less interested in football. When he wasn't at home, the only person he seemed to be around was Natalie. At times, it was like all they had was each other. I remember talking with Kate while I was still waiting for Nate's big comeback. Inevitably, the conversation shifted back to Nate.

"He'll come back around, you'll see," I told her. "He'll be his old self again soon, don't worry."

Kate shook her head. "I don't think so."

"You don't know that." Nate was going to be all right. If he wasn't, what hope was there for anyone else?

Nate started coming home more frequently. Weekends, pointless observances and any opportunity that he would be able to drive down and back was suddenly a chance for Nate to escape from Natalie's anger. Nate told me about what Natalie was like these days.

"She was angrier than she used to be," he explained. "One minute, we're having a normal conversation and almost connecting again, and the next she's screaming for me to get out of the room."

She would throw things and yell at him for things that seemed inconsequential. He had put a soda can on the floor once and forgotten it was there. She had walked by, knocked the can over and lost her temper, throwing the can across the room and hitting his head. He had tried to explain that he was

sorry, but she didn't stop throwing cups, magazines or books at him. It was around this time that I realized how bad things were for Nate.