

"FOOTPRINTS"

Episode #144

[The Day After #143, Mid-Morning]

[Previously ...](#)

*Jason confronted Alex about the Valentine that he found on Courtney's car. Alex explained that it was for Lauren, but not before tearfully confessing that his previous advance on Jason wasn't just a result of having had too much to drink.

*Nick and Katherine shared a romantic dinner and a kiss. When they went out into the street, however, a spray of bullets rang out and Katherine was shot.

TEASER

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL-

Nick hoists himself out of the uncomfortable waiting-room chair, tossing the two-week-old copy of TIME magazine back onto the small table beside him. He resumes his pacing across the marked-up tile floor, listening to the clicking of his loafers - the same clicking that whittled away the minutes of the previous night.

Pausing, he fingers the quarter and dime in the right pocket of his pants. The coins have been ready to go for some two hours now. He casts a quick glance at his wristwatch and then at the payphone across the room, idly stroking the fresh stubble on his chin.

"I've got to do this." He huffs into his mustache and removes the scrap of paper from his other pocket as he makes his way over to the payphone.

APARTMENT BUILDING, MARSHALL APT.-

Courtney's hand pounds two forceful knocks on the door and then falls to her side. When, after several seconds, there is no answer, she repeats the action.

This time there is a response, and a hurried one, at that. Scrambled metallic shuffling precedes the opening of the door. Alex finishes pulling on a gray T-shirt and finally sees her.

For Alex the scene is eerily reminiscent of last night's confrontation, but he manages a pleasantly surprised face in greeting her. "Courtney? What's going on?"

She shoots him an icy glare and lets it sit for the perfect amount of time before pushing her way past him

into the apartment. "How could you do this?" she blurts out, her face contorted in an equal mixture of aggression and betrayal.

"Do what?"

"Back out at the last minute like that!" she cries, arms flung in the air. "I thought you were gonna set up this whole elaborate surprise for Lauren!"

Alex swallows, preparing to feed her the lie over which he stayed up much of the night agonizing.

ACT ONE

ANDY FITCH'S APARTMENT-

Andy's ear perk up at the distant ringing. It sounds again, and he rotates the shower's knob back to the "off" position. He pushes the glass door open and hurries out of the shower and into the bedroom, grabbing a towel on the way. He clumsily wraps it around his waist as he grabs the portable phone off the bed and turns it on with the other hand.

"Hello?"

"Is this Andrew?" asks the voice on the other end, a voice Andy doesn't recognize.

"Yes," he answers somewhat hesitantly. He cradles the phone between his ear and shoulder as he uses both hands to adjust the slipping towel.

"This is Nick Moriani," explains the faceless voice.

The name triggers a pale memory for Andy. "How can I help you, Mr. Moriani?"

"I'm calling about your mother. I was out with her last night, and ... there was an accident."

The pounding of Andy's heart is suddenly much heavier against the inside of his chest. "What kind of accident?"

"Your mother was shot." Nick's voice is raw with emotion, and it quickly travels along the phone lines to Andy.

"What?!?" His body jerks with surprise, and the time the towel does fall off. He barely notices. "What happened-"

"It was a drive-by shooting," Nick explains. "She didn't seem to be the target, but-

"Where is she? Is she okay?"

"She's at Memorial Hospital. I'm here with her." He pauses, and Andy can hear him take a deep breath. "I know you and she haven't been close lately, but I think you need to-

"I'm on my way." Andy turns off the phone with the push of a button and makes a beeline for his dresser.

MARSHALL APT.-

"What are you talking about?" Alex asks, tossing in a pinch of defensiveness for good measure. "I did my part - I waited at the park for her to show up until like ten o'clock last night!"

"You did?"

"Yeah."

Courtney's sigh is accompanied by a shake of the head. "Oh, jeez," she mutters.

"What?" Alex moves closer and this prompts her to turn her back to him. "Court, what is it?"

"A big misunderstanding, apparently," she replies after a moment of quiet. With another sigh she turns back around. "Lauren never got your Valentine."

"Oh my gosh," Alex says, covering his mouth in a fairly convincing show of horror. "So you thought I never left one for her?"

"Well, yeah ... I checked the windshield like you told me, but I didn't see it."

"I did put it there, Courtney."

After a few seconds of reflective quiet, she responds, "I believe you. I mean, anything could've happened to it - wind, some stupid kids, whatever. I just got so angry seeing Lauren all depressed that you didn't do anything for her ... I'm sorry."

He dismisses the apology with a flip of the hand. "Don't worry about it. You had every reason to be upset." He pauses. "I guess I should've fool-proofed the whole thing a little more, huh?"

She shrugs and they lapse into an uncertain haze of silence. It is Courtney who breaks it.

"So you just thought she was standing you up?"

"Well ... yeah." He scratches the back of his neck despite the complete lack of an itch. Ignoring the flicker of guilt, he reminds himself that he's only doing this to protect Jason. "I felt stupid enough already, so I didn't want to, like, track her down and make things worse, you know?"

"Jeez," Courtney mumbles again. She runs a hand through her dark hair pointlessly. "I guess you'd better go talk to her, then."

Alex freezes, the reluctance in his face unmistakable. "No - I can't."

ACT TWO

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL-

"Claire!"

The sound of her name turns Claire around quickly. For a moment she almost smiles and waves, but reason gets the better of her. A polite nod seems more appropriate.

She can tell by the rawness in Andy's face that he has already heard the news. "Looking for your mother?"

"Yes." His eyes dart around the fluorescent-tinged white walls; he cracks a knuckle without even realizing it. Claire can't help but notice that despite the bronze of his tan, her friend appears sickly and wan.

"Follow me," she says, and he falls into step behind her. She leads the way down a corridor and they hang a left, a right, and another left. And suddenly he can see Katherine.

The blinds on the window of her room have been shut, but the glass pane in the middle of the door, bearing the label "ICU 5," serves as a cruel frame for her head, of which Andy has a profile view. She appears to be asleep, but with all the machines and objects churning away around her, she might as well be dead.

Andy fights past the shock long enough to turn to Claire. "Can I see her?"

"Yeah, of course." She moves forward and opens the door gently. "You can talk to her, but don't expect a response."

"What, she's in a coma?"

Claire nods somberly. Her eyes are warm and compassionate, and her mouth is tucked up in a sympathetic manner. Andy gives her a look that conveys his appreciation and heads inside the room.

She watches sadly as he assumes a position by Katherine's bedside and can't help but he lifted back to another hospital, so many years before ...

As vividly as the present, Claire can see her mother's pasty face staring up at her from a hospital bed, using the last shreds of energy to ward off the tears and put on a weak smile.

"Be good. I love you."

And that was it. She'd slid back into unconsciousness and hadn't woken up again. At least I got to say goodbye, Claire thinks. What if Andy doesn't?

She is yanked from this heavy fog of thoughts by a voice from the past - only it's here, right behind her.

"What's on your mind?"

She turns, more as a reflex than anything, and finds Ryan's eyes focused right on her face.

MARSHALL APT.-

Courtney simply stares at Alex, awaiting the logical explanation behind his refusal to go see Lauren. It never arrives.

"What are you talking about, Alex? One stupid misunderstanding and you're giving up on Lauren completely?"

"No, but ..." He turns around, suddenly feeling unable to face her. "It just seems like - a sign, or something. If we were supposed to be together, it would've worked out."

"Oh, come on! You can't give up just because of something like this."

"Well, I am!" He whips back around, hostility swirling deep in the troubled blue waters of his eyes.

"Why?!"

"You-I just don't think it's a good idea, okay?" He drops down onto the couch and gazes away from her.

"Alex, what are you talking about?" She sits down beside him, pulling one knee up to lie flat on the couch. "I thought you wanted to be with Lauren."

"I just ..." Whatever halfhearted response might have slipped out fades away entirely as last night's scene replays in his mind ...

JASON: Alex ... Don't beat yourself up over that. You were just drunk-

ALEX: No!

Pure, unbridled emotion tears out of him with the rip-roaring attack of flames springing from a suddenly ignited track of gasoline.

ALEX: It's not that simple, Jason! I know you want it to be - God, I do, too, more than anything! That's what I've been trying to do all this time - keep it simple, keep it in the back of my mind. But it just kept sticking itself right up there in front!

His speech is flowing so smoothly that it's as if he's not addressing another person at all. It sounds rehearsed, familiar - like Alex has turned it over in his mind so many times that the words have left permanent prints.

ALEX: So I thought, okay, I can deal with this. I just have to keep it to myself. And I tried - I tried so hard! But it just snapped that night. It was like it kept building up and building up and I had nowhere to get rid of it ... so eventually, it all just came flooding out.

He studies the blankness of Jason's face: the face that he spent so many moments giddy with joy over back when they met - jeez, practically a lifetime ago now. So much has changed since he first arrived in King's Bay, and for some reason all Alex can feel as he mulls it over is a gaping canyon of sadness.

"Is there something else going on?" Courtney wonders aloud, trying to read the complexity in his face. "Something that's keeping you from getting together with Lauren?"

ACT THREE

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, ICU #5-

Andy stares down at the motionless features of his mother's face, framed by loose, free curls of reddish hair. She looks so ... different. With a stab of guilt, Andy is hit by the fact that he hasn't even seen his mother without full makeup in over a year.

"God, Mother," he murmurs. "How did everything get so complicated?"

Because she didn't want to let you live your life, his mind whispers. He turns his back to her and shakes his head, but all it does is mix everything up further. He takes a deep breath and listens to the warring voices inside of him:

She's your mother. She raised you.

Yeah, she brought you up exactly the way she wanted and then refused to accept that you'd ever want anything else.

But look how close you used to be. Especially after your father died.

She did horrible things behind your back to ruin your life! Doesn't that tell you what kind of person she really is?

Andy returns to the bedside, trying to digest all of this. He tries to clear his head and stitch up the torn seam where indecision is clawing its way inside him, but it's too late. He cannot do anything but stare at his mother, frozen in time.

And suddenly, from someplace deep inside, he becomes aware of a faint voice pleading, *Wake up, Mother. Please don't die.*

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, ICU-

Outside the room, Ryan's expression does a shift from cockiness to concern. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Claire replies with a hyperactive shake of the head.

Ryan raises an eyebrow. "Then why are you crying?"

"I'm not-" But she is. She pauses, suddenly aware of a single ball of tears hanging from the inside corner of her eye.

"Did something happen with Tim?"

"No!" she cries, as if the idea is completely absurd. "Nothing like that."

"What, then?" He waits, but she doesn't respond. "Claire ..."

She tosses her head back in defeat. "I was thinking about my mom, okay?"

He softens even more. "What about her?"

"When she died ... I just started thinking about the last time I saw her."

Without hesitation, he draws her into a hug. She doesn't fight it. "I remember that. I was in the waiting room for hours, and when you finally came out, I could just tell ..." They fall into a cumbersome silence, each remembering the scene through a separate pair of teenage eyes.

"I remember how totally helpless you looked then. It was horrible." Ryan steps back, keeping a gentle hold on Claire's arms while tying her down with the unbreakable ropes of his compassionate gaze. "I saw that look in your eyes, and I wanted so badly to make it go away ..."

And before Claire even knows what is happening, his lips are upon hers in a tender kiss.

ACT FOUR

MARSHALL APT.-

Courtney's question lingers, the unknown answer growing in severity with every passing second.

"Huh, Alex? Is there something else going on?"

Alex just continues to stare at her for a minute before he shakes his head. "No, uh - no. I'm just trying to clear my head, is all. I slept really crappy last night." He pauses long enough for a loud exhale. "You know those nights when you're so tired you feel like you're gonna pass out, but you just can't shut up your head up for two seconds so you can actually do it? It was one of those."

Courtney tips her head to the side in understanding. "You were thinking about how screwed up last night got?"

"Yeah." He was, indeed, but not for the reasons Courtney thinks.

"I'm sorry everything got screwed up," she offers, sitting up straight. "I just hope you don't let this ruin everything, Alex. Lauren still wants this."

"Yeah," he muses aloud, more to fill the space than anything else. At last, he stands, saying, "Look, I just need some time to sort everything out, okay?"

"Fine," comes the response as Courtney rises, as well. "I'll go, then." She makes her way over to the door. "I'll call you, okay?"

"Sure."

Courtney opens the door and raises a hand in a goodbye wave before exiting. Alex moves over to the closed door and finally leans with his back against it, rubbing his forehead. *What am I supposed to do now?*

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM-

A shuffling fills Nick's ears and he awakens from his nap with a start in time to see a woman and a child exiting the room. Rubbing his eyes, he realizes that he doesn't remember when he fell asleep. A glance at his watch reveals that it has only been fifteen minutes. As everything comes flooding back to him, he wonders if Andy is still in with Katherine. There's no telling how that could be going, he wonders.

The poor woman - took a bullet right through the gut. The doctors gave him a list of damages it had done, but all Nick can really recall is that her prognosis was given as iffy.

"Dammit!" he grumbles, finishing the thought in his head: *Ryan was right. They were coming after me and they decided to get her as a warning.*

He closes his eyes again, wondering how he is going to manage to dig his way out of the various holes of this predicament.

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, ICU-

Ryan's lips rest on top of Claire's, wrapping her up in the comfortable cocoon of the past. After a moment, however, she feels a sudden pressure. His lips aren't pushing any harder, but all Claire can feel is a terrible grinding, the forceful gnashing of tongues and teeth and saliva. With a horrified gasp, she shoves him away.

"Get off of me!"

Ryan looks around, making sure that she hasn't attracted any attention to them. She hasn't. "Claire-"

"Shut up, you maniac!" Her eyes burn into his with an unrelenting fire. "What the hell do you think

you're doing?"

"I'm ... I'm sorry," he stammers. It is apparent that the weight of what he has done is settling down upon him, as well.

"Sorry? Do you realize what you just did to me?" she cries, trying to keep herself from shouting. "That-that kiss, it took me back to ... you know." The tail end of this sentence dies, not because of a lack of emotion, but because of an excess of it.

"I didn't realize-jeez, Claire, I'm sorry." His eyes plead with hers. "I was just trying to-"

"Get to me, I know," she huffs.

"No." He stops, seeming to deliberate something. "I need to tell you-"

"I don't care. You'd better leave, okay? This whole obsession needs to end, and it needs to end now."

Ryan's lips twitch with the formation of words, but they are never spoken. He turns and retreats as Claire watches, doing her best to push the suddenly vivid images of that long-ago encounter with Ryan back to the crevice of her mind in which they'd been hiding.

END OF EPISODE #144

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