

"Footprints"

Episode #149

[A Few Hours After #148]

[Previously ...](#)

*Courtney urged Alex to get his budding relationship with Lauren back on track after the confusion of Valentine's Day.

*Having seen Brent and Molly kiss, Danielle confronted her brother. He admitted that he has feelings for Molly.

*Just before she was set to walk down the aisle, Danielle disappeared from the church, leaving behind her wedding dress and a note.

TEASER

ST. LOUISE DE MARILLAC CHURCH-

"It wouldn't be fair to either of us if I went through with this. You know that as well as I do, whether you want to believe it or not."

Andy reads the words aloud for what must be the tenth time. Though Bob, Josh, and Tim are in the bridal room with him, he is oblivious to their presence. The only thing that matters right now is the note in his hands - and Danielle herself.

"I just don't understand why she did this," Andy says. "Finally, everything was wide open for us, and then-bam! She goes and throws it all away."

"Danielle is just going through a rough period, Andy," Bob says, clasping a hand down on the younger man's shoulder. "It's like we discussed before ... She's having a really difficult time with this situation with your mother."

"Difficult? I think this goes a little beyond that," Andy retorts with a snide grin. "She let it ruin everything!"

Tim steps forward. "Nothing is ruined, Andy. I'm sure that once you talk to Danielle, everything will be cleared up-"

"And how do you suggest I do that? She didn't exactly leave a forwarding address!"

"Andy, calm down," Bob says with the perfect blend of authority and calm.

"I can't!"

"You need to," Bob insists softly. "Especially if we're going to find Danielle."

"Again, how am I supposed to do that?"

"You don't have to."

Andy throws up his hands. "Well, it doesn't look to me like she's coming back!"

Bob shakes his head. "That's not what I meant." He pauses, taking the time to make eye contact with Andy. "I think I know where Danielle is."

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT-

Sarah's voice comes to Brent from within the sizable closet of the master bedroom. "I still can't believe Danielle ran out."

With a sigh, Brent drops back onto the bed. He runs his hands over his face wearily.

"I mean, I thought for sure she wanted to marry Andy," Sarah continues, emerging from the depths of her wardrobe in a pair of silk, maroon pajamas.

"Things happen," Brent says absently, maneuvering the bow-tie of his tuxedo off of his neck with numb fingers.

"Yeah, but ... Danielle? Something like this? I just can't imagine what would drive her to do something like this."

Brent puffs his cheeks up with air as he remembers his words to his sister just hours ago ...

"I just envy the fact that you're marrying someone you know you want to spend the rest of your life with. I wish I'd taken more time to think about my decision."

And it's all because she caught me and Molly, Brent thinks.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

The oversized mug settles back down onto its matching blue saucer with a clink. Lauren swallows the

rich, warm sip of vanilla mocha and again looks at the door.

Nothing.

Where is he? If he doesn't show up-

And suddenly, he's on his way over to her table.

"Alex!" she calls out cheerfully, though he's only a few feet away.

"Hey," he responds, crinkling his dimples with a smile as he takes a seat across from her.

"I was beginning to think you'd stood me up," she says with a smile that shows too little humor.

"Nah, I wouldn't do that to ya," he grins. "Besides, I'm the one who asked you to meet me here."

"Which would just make it worse if you did stand me up."

"Yes it would. But ... I'm here."

"I'm glad."

"So am I ... because there's something I need to lay on the line with you, right now."

ACT ONE

ST. LOUISE DE MARILLAC CHURCH-

At first, Andy can't help but think that Bob is fooling with his mind. The somber look on the older man's face, however, makes it quite clear that he is not.

"Where?" Andy asks. His voice is suddenly thin and without dimension.

"Back home - in San Diego. It seems odd, I know, but I can't think of anyplace else she would go if she were planning on getting away ..."

Josh, who until now has been standing to the side quietly observing the scene, appears to light up. "The treehouse!"

"That's what I was thinking," Bob says, turning slightly to face his son as well as Andy.

"Treehouse?"

"Yeah," Josh continues. "We have this treehouse out back - from when we were little. 'Til she moved here, Danielle would always go out there to think or write or whatever."

"I'm willing to bet she's on her way there now," Bob says. "She can't have been gone long - I'm assuming she didn't have a flight booked beforehand."

Andy gives an ugly scowl.

"So if we move, we might even catch her at the airport," Bob concludes.

Andy doesn't miss a beat. "Let's go."

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APT.-

"Danielle, of all people," Sarah says for no particular reason, oblivious to the spaced-out expression on her husband's face. "I just thought she had a level head ..."

"So did I," Brent says, slowly coming out of his quiet trance.

Sarah lowers herself down carefully to sit beside him on the bed. "If she was having doubts - there would have been so many better ways to handle them than by running out the way she did." She pauses thoughtfully. "I can only imagine what must have been going on in her head today."

Brent groans to himself and tries not to let it show on the outside.

"But anyway," she says, turning and draping her arms over his right shoulder, "we have more important things to tackle."

"Oh, really?" Brent raises his eyebrow in a gesture as suggestive as the tone of his voice. Immediately he regrets it - he doesn't even know why he did it.

"Yeah." She rests her head on his shoulder. "But I want you to know that I'm sorry I threw such a fit before. If you don't think you're ready for a family, then fine. Whatever happens, happens."

"Exactly," Bret says. Story of my life, he thinks, equally rueful and sarcastic.

"So ..." Sarah raises her head and he turns to look at her.

"What?"

"I was just thinking I needed to change the subject," she grins, easing into a kiss.

The only lips he can feel are Molly's.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

Lauren looks at Alex expectantly, trying to ignore the anxious screaming in her head while Alex fidgets.

"Yeah?" she finally prompts him, unable to wait any longer.

"About Valentine's Day," he stammers after a prolonged scramble for the words he's practiced so much and lost so quickly. "A lot of stuff went wrong."

"Courtney told me the whole thing."

"Good, because I don't know if I could tell it coherently," he smiles. "But the point is, I want to make it up to you."

All she can do is nod. It seems an appropriate response - besides, she is too wrapped up looking at the deep chips of his dimples and the crystalline blue of his eyes.

"Besides," he adds, "I know we ... took a big step on New Year's and then nothing really happened. It's time we got it all out in the open."

Lauren says exactly what she's thinking: "So where does that leave us now?"

ACT TWO

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL-

In the clammy silence of Intensive Care Unit 5, Andy stares down at his mother's motionless figure. The pale blue sheet is pulled over her body, over that stupid hospital gown. The same one! Andy considers the thought and decides that whether or not the gown has been changed, he's tired of looking at it every time he visits.

"I'm here, Mother," he says, his voice not more than a whisper. "I thought you should know how

everything turned out today ... It wasn't good."

He lifts her hand. Like everything else, it feels frighteningly cold; still, he doesn't want to let go.

"She's gone," he says softly. "Danielle. She just ... left. Right before the wedding. She left a note that didn't make any sense ..."

He leans in closer.

"You won, Mother."

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APT.-

Sarah doesn't sense much initiative from Brent, but she doesn't let it bother her. Maybe he's holding back because of the argument before, or ... because of Molly - but it doesn't matter. Something is telling Sarah to stop feeling sorry and to make it work.

She continues working on Brent's mouth. There are flickers of action on his part, but they flare up and then fade out without ever really combusting.

She manages to ease him onto his back and she follows him down. Leaving a kissed pair of fingers on his lips, she worms her way down his body. Her fingers work expertly on his belt, undoing it and sliding it off in one slick motion. They move to the button of his pants ...

And she feels it. The mound of her stomach brushes against his leg. It's not much contact, but it's enough to make Sarah feel a little pressure. In an instant, she is on her feet.

Brent shoots up to a sitting position. The relief and disappointment almost cancel each other out and he looks at her with a kind of hesitant confusion. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, I-I don't feel well," she replies. The words trip out without any grace.

"What do you mean?"

She takes a deep breath, though it does absolutely nothing to steady her. "I think I'm gonna be sick."

Brent watches the odd pale of her face as she hurries into the bathroom.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

"I don't know, I guess," Alex says, putting his palms down on the table. "What do you think?"

Lauren is silent for an extended moment. Her eyes travel around the coffee house; when they return to Alex, she speaks. "I'm glad you got this conversation going, because I never would have said any of this on my own ... I really like spending time with you, Alex."

He smiles, but the charming nature of his usual smiles has been replaced by an I-don't-really-know-what-to-say character.

It doesn't matter - Lauren continues. "New Year's was ... amazing." Dumb choice of words, she scolds herself, but she keeps going. "I had so much fun, and ... at midnight ..."

"I had a really good time, too," Alex jumps in, saving her from the awkwardness of pulling the statement together.

"Good." She giggles, at her own goofiness as much as anything. "I don't know what else I'm supposed to say, but ... I really hope this turns into something."

"That's why I wanted to talk to you."

Lauren's heart makes a momentary leap into her throat, but the fear subsides once he continues.

"I'd really like to give us a shot, Lauren." And without really having any idea what he's doing, he leans across the small table and meets her eager face.

They are oblivious to the light jingling of bells that signifies the opening of the door. Nor do they notice the familiar couple walking in.

But the couple notices them. A grinning Courtney turns to Jason, who is too stunned by the sight of Alex and Lauren kissing even to look at his girlfriend.

ACT THREE

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL-

"You got what you wanted," Andy murmurs to Katherine's unconscious form. "The wedding didn't happen."

He sniffs loudly. "But this isn't over, I swear. I'm going to find Danielle and get this all straightened out and then everything will be the way it should be right now."

No response. Her utter silence strikes him as perfectly fitting - spiteful, gloating. The softness he's felt for her lately has already stiffened up ... but it's not completely gone.

"I need to go, Mother," he says, standing and releasing her hand. "But I will be back, with Danielle."

The fingers of his left hand stroke her cheek. "Just promise me you'll be here, too."

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APT., BATHROOM-

Sarah sinks to the floor, leaning against the locked bathroom door. She knows full well that she isn't going to vomit, but she has no intention of letting Brent know that.

That feeling, of her stomach - the baby - rubbing against him, it was too much.

I can't keep doing this.

But what else is there to do? Tell Brent when he clearly doesn't want a child yet?

Matt's face springs to mind: warm, strong, protective - and the bearer of her worst secret.

Suddenly the nausea is very real.

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APT., BEDROOM-

Brent pulls himself up to a sitting position. His belt is lying beside him and he picks it up slowly, exhaling deeply. But it's not enough to force out his troubles.

What the hell is wrong with Sarah? That look on her face was too much for simple illness. Although maybe it's just the whole situation ...

Whatever the story, Brent nearly forgets the matter entirely as the memory of his kiss with Molly earlier today floods back. Her scent - sweet, light - fills his nostrils. For a moment, he is certain she's here.

But she's not.

And he can't help but consider the question: What the hell is wrong with me?

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

Jason is able to tuck his surprise away, at least externally, as Courtney leads him over to the table where Alex and Lauren have just concluded a soft kiss.

"Whoooo," Courtney teases as they approach. Alex and Lauren finally turn and see their friends.

"What was that I just saw?" Courtney asks, glowing as if she herself were involved.

"Nothing, nothing," Lauren demurs with a sheepish grin.

"I thought you guys were at that wedding," Alex interjects.

"Let's just say it didn't pan out," Courtney says. "Sooo ... we decided to come get some coffee."

"Pull up some chairs and sit with us, then," Lauren says.

Courtney turns to grab two chairs from the empty table behind her. The still-speechless Jason, despite his better judgement, can't help flashing Alex a totally baffled look. Alex's eyes tell him they'll discuss it later.

Neither of the young men is remotely aware of the song playing over the hangout's speakers - Sugar Ray's "Falls Apart." It plays on in the background ...

*It falls apart,
By itself ...*

END OF EPISODE #149

[Next Episode](#)