

"Footprints"

Episode #152

[The Day After #151, Evening]

[Previously ...](#)

*Ryan denied knowing anything about Nick's business and Claire asked him to find out if Nick's mob ties played a role in Katherine's shooting.

*Brent and Molly kissed but were interrupted - and seen - by Danielle.

*Jason questioned Alex's decision to pursue a relationship with Lauren.

TEASER

MORIANI HOME-

The doorbell calls Ryan to the foyer. He undoes the multiple locks and opens the door; what he sees elicits both a flutter of joy and a pang of worry.

"Hi," Claire says, pushing her dark, straight hair back over one shoulder of her tan raincoat. Ryan notes that she looks like the perfect subject for the moody backdrop of the gray sky.

"Hi," he says after a prolonged appraisal of his visitor. He is reluctant to inquire about the purpose of her visit, though he's pretty confident she's not here solely out of a desire to see him.

He doesn't have to. "Have you found anything out?" she asks, her voice stinging with the chilliness of the no-nonsense mentality she's adopted with him.

His response is delayed long enough to rile up Claire. She demands, in a louder voice this time, "Have you?"

"Shh!" he warns. He holds a finger up to his lips before adding, "My father is upstairs."

"Does it matter?" she says defiantly. "He knows just as well as I do that this is all his fault!"

BROOKS HOME-

"I hate this song!" Alex cries, though a smile remains plastered on his face.

"No you don't," Lauren says, turning the radio up even louder as Britney Spears's voice begins singing "Oops ... I Did It Again" and Lauren sings along:

*I think I did it again
I made you believe
We're more than just friends*

Lauren rises from the bedroom floor and, standing, begins to dance as well. Alex groans and then laughs as she continues:

*It might seem like a crush
But that doesn't mean
I'm serious ...*

She pulls him to his feet and, still dancing, tries to coax him into joining her. He has little spasms of rhythm but for the most part stands still, laughing. Lauren sings along:

*But to lose all my senses
That is just so typically me
Oh baby, baby*

And, through both of their laughter, she plants a heavy kiss on Alex's lips.

KING'S BAY MALL-

Brent's gaze moves along the windows of the stores he is passing. He sees clothes, CDs, sports memorabilia, and countless other things, but nothing grabs his eye. Finally he pauses to collect his thoughts and he raises his eyes to look at the stores around him. He never makes it past the first sign, though - he is distracted by something else entirely.

"Hi," Molly says meekly.

"Hi," Brent responds, echoing the uncertainty in his sister-in-law's voice. He lets his thoughts take over and it is several seconds before he realizes that he isn't saying anything, and that this is probably making things worse. "So, uh, what are you doing here?"

"Just ... shopping," Molly says.

Brent finally looks directly at her and is unnerved to see that her eyes are fixed firmly upon him.

"How about you?" she finally asks.

"Huh?"

"What are you doing here? You looked pretty intense a minute ago."

"Oh, I'm shopping for a birthday present for my brother, actually," Brent says. The words spill out quickly and he is amazed his tongue doesn't trip over them completely.

Awkwardness and its accompanying silence again settle over them - if they even left to begin with, that is.

Molly breaks the quiet spell again. "Have you heard from Danielle?"

"Not directly, no. But my dad and Josh went back to San Diego with Andy to find her and I guess she was at the house."

"So what's going on? Did Andy get her to calm down?"

Brent shakes his head sadly. "No - and it's all our fault."

ACT ONE

MORIANI HOME-

Claire allows her last remark to sink in for a moment before she continues, "So, have you found anything out?"

Ryan's answer is slow in coming. "No ... Not really, no."

Immediately she lets out an exaggerated huff and slumps her shoulders. "Ryan, I thought you said you were going to do this. It's important."

He opens his mouth to fire some poorly thought-out excuse, but luckily she interrupts. "The cops are getting suspicious, too. They were asking me about you guys."

"About my dad and I?"

"Yeah. My brother-in-law is the police commander and he called me in yesterday to talk about you - your dad, mainly, but still ..."

"What'd you say?"

The desperate note in his voice isn't lost on Claire and she pauses a moment to calculate an effective response. "I told him that my dad had connections with your dad and that it's possible that Nick had something to do with Katherine Fitch getting shot-"

"He didn't."

"What?"

"He didn't." Ryan takes a prolonged breath and then says, "I haven't found out anything you'd find useful. What I have found is that it's not very likely my dad had anything at all to do with the shooting."

"Dammit!" Claire's outburst is quiet and said mainly to herself.

"Why is this so important to you?"

"Because ..." She stops as though that is enough; it's been rationalized so much in her head that there doesn't seem to be any need to say more.

"Because ... ?"

"Because - it's time the two of you paid for all the pain you've caused so many people!" she practically shouts. Again he flashes her the "shh!" look.

She keeps going, in a more hushed but no less hostile tone. "I cannot wait to see the two of you behind bars for all the terrible things you've done. This town will be so much safer once you're out of the way."

Ryan raises an eyebrow. "Are you speaking on behalf of the entire town of King's Bay, Claire? Because this sounds like more of a personal thing to me."

She freezes.

KING'S BAY MALL-

"Our fault? What are you talking about?"

Brent glances around before answering, though he doesn't even realize he's doing it. His answer comes in the most secretive of voices. "Have you completely forgotten her wedding day?"

"Wha-" The exact incident to which he's referring springs to mind and Molly's generic answer becomes

very impassioned. "No! Of course not!"

"Do you remember the way Danielle acted when she ... saw us? It was weird."

"I guess," Molly muses. "But what does that have to do with her skipping out on the wedding?"

"I think it scared her that much," Brent says. "I think Danielle got so freaked out by the idea of marrying anyone that she didn't know what to do." His conversation with his sister comes racing back to him ...

"There are major problems between Sarah and me."

"That doesn't give you a right to go off and kiss her sister!"

"It's not the first time," he shoots back. Though the statement is intended to make things not seem so bad, he immediately realizes that those words alone won't get the desired effect. He continues before Danielle can yell. "I was ... attracted to Molly before Sarah and I got married."

"What?" Danielle's rage has vanished, replaced by a stunned type of quiet. Things she has viewed as truths are disappearing quickly and she is trying to steady herself in a situation that she no longer recognizes.

"Molly and I kissed the night Sarah and I got married," Brent explains. "Before Sarah asked me to elope. And it hasn't gone away."

"Why'd you say yes to Sarah, then?"

"Because ... I don't know. I thought I could make whatever I felt for Molly go away. It was guilt and stupidity and denial, all wrapped together-I don't know."

Danielle turns her head sideways and looks at him out of the corner of her eye. "So all this time you've been married to Sarah ... you've had feelings for Molly?"

He swallows another lump before answering. "Yeah."

"And you haven't acted on it at all until now?"

"No - not physically, anyway. But it's killing me, Danielle ... What you saw was the result of my being so frustrated with Sarah and having Molly there for me, like always-" He stops himself. "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."

Molly cuts into the too-vivid memory. "All Danielle did was walk in on us ... together, right? Why would that be enough to scare her out of marrying Andy?"

ACT TWO

BROOKS HOME-

The kiss trails off as Lauren and Alex part lips slowly. The connection finally breaks and Alex immediately turns his eyes away.

"What's wrong?" Lauren asks.

"Nothing - nothing," he says hurriedly, turning back to her.

There is something strange in the air, something Lauren doesn't recognize, and she says the first thing that comes to mind to push the unpleasantness aside.

"Now it's your turn."

"Huh?"

"The next song," she explains. "You're singing it."

"What?" He gives a little laugh that is close to a giggle. "No ..."

"Yes! Yeah, come on!"

"No, I can't, I can't," he protests, but she has already taken hold of his hands and has begun shaking them.

"It'll be fun," she says with a pleading look.

He's sold. "Fine, fine."

The Britney Spears song hits its end and there is a moment of silence, during which Alex says a silent prayer for a commercial or a completely un-singable song. Unfortunately, what he hears next is the opening of N Sync's "Bye Bye Bye."

"C'mon, Alex ..." Lauren grins.

MORIANI HOME-

"No!" Claire fires back after a prolonged pause. "I ... I'm past that, Ryan. I'm not wasting any more time dwelling on ... on what you did."

Ryan seethes silently and lets the sting wear off before he says, "Why is this suddenly your cause, then? I'm sure there's something else you could be doing besides checking up on my father and I-"

"You're right, there is. And you know what? I should get going." Claire's voice rings with acerbity. She turns and begins to walk, but stops when Ryan speaks again.

"You can keep walking away, Claire, but it's not going to mean anything until you stop these visits for good. And I don't think that's something you're ready to do, is it?"

Claire remains with her back to him as the comments seep in. It is several seconds before she whips around and shouts, "I'm not the one who's obsessed with you, Ryan! Why can't you see that? God - you're the one who raped me!"

Her eyes burn into his just long enough to brand the message into him. Without another word, she turns back around and heads away.

Ryan is still digesting this scene when he hears footsteps descending the stairs. He turns around just as Nick settles on the foyer's floor.

"Dad!" Ryan gasps. "Wh-"

"Shut up," Nick commands. "You'd better have one hell of an explanation for what I just overheard!"

KING'S BAY MALL-

It takes Brent a moment to realize that he's been caught in a tricky spot - Molly has no idea of the conversation he had with Danielle. When the realization does hit, though, a sharp flash of adrenaline sets his heart pumping and his stomach burning.

"Brent?"

"Oh, it's just - I don't know, I think she just panicked," he says.

Molly responds with a quizzical look but, thankfully, it only lasts a second. "It's just odd. I've never

known Danielle to act like that."

"Yeah you have. She acts on impulse a lot of the time - like when she decided to just up and move here. Or all the times she stood up to Katherine. It's just that it's never been as dramatic as this."

Molly considers this and then shrugs. "Yeah, I guess you're right." The topic lingers until she wonders aloud, "So what's Andy gonna do now?"

"My dad said that he's staying down there and he's gonna try talking to her soon. He just wants to give her time to cool off."

"That poor guy. He has to deal with her and with his mother-"

"Which reminds me," Brent interrupts. "There's something I need you to do for me."

ACT THREE

BROOKS HOME-

The vocals begin, but Alex is quiet - at least in terms of singing. He can't help but snicker at himself and the situation in general.

"C'mon! You know the words," Lauren enthuses. When he tries to shake his head, she cuts him off. "I know you know 'em!"

In-between laughs, he begins singing along:

*... I know that I can't take no more,
It ain't no lie
I wanna see you out that door
Baby
Bye, bye, bye*

Lauren has resumed dancing and has managed to get him moving, albeit a bit stiffly, as well. She joins in on the singing now:

*Don't wanna be a fool for you
I'm just another player in your game for two
You may hate me but it ain't no lie
Baby bye, bye, bye*

Something comes over Alex and, as the second verse begins, he swoops his head to the side right along with the music. He takes over the singing:

*Just hit me with the truth (oh)
Girl, you're more than welcome to
So
Give me one good reason, baby
Come on*

Lauren picks up the next part as though this were a planned act:

*I lived for you and me
But now I've really come to see
That
Life would be much better
Once you're gone*

And they can't get any further. The laughter takes over and the two crumble to the floor together as Lauren throws all her weight onto Alex.

"Ahhh," she shrieks crazily, for no particular reason.

"You are nuts!" he chuckles.

"Damn skippy," she smiles. "And I'm takin' ya down with me!"

She drops her head down to rest on top of his chest. With her eyes now off of his face, Alex can't help but let his discomfort show, even if he's not aware he's doing it.

Lauren's hands come to lie on his chest as well. Alex resists some inner urge to break away and just lies there, trying to zone off his thoughts as best he can.

KING'S BAY MALL-

Brent's statement brings a look of confusion to Molly's face. "Is it about the shooting?"

"Sort of. It's about that Moriani guy, at any rate."

"And?"

"I called Claire into the station yesterday to talk about him, to see if she at least remembered him," he says. "She does. And from the sounds of it, she remembers him a little too well."

"What do you mean?"

"I have no idea. I just got the impression that she was holding something back."

"Hmm." Molly dwells on the idea for a minute. "Do you think it was directly related to the case?"

"Again, no clue," he says, waving the question off with a backward flick of his wrist. "But I'm sure there was something ... and if she's mixed up with this guy - I'd like to get her out of it, if we can. It can't be good."

"So what, you want me to figure out what it is?"

"Yeah. I mean, you don't have to snoop or anything. Just ask her. You don't even have to tell me what it is ... I just want to be sure she's not in any trouble with him or anything."

"Okay," Molly agrees, though she's not sure why she says it.

MORIANI HOME-

Ryan's breathing has all but stopped in the aftermath of Nick's demand. That authoritative roar would have been enough to frighten him out of his wits, but he's also unsure of what exactly Nick overheard.

"Wha-"

"You raped her?" Nick thunders, cutting off and making unnecessary the question Ryan was asking. "How could you even think of doing something so completely-"

"It's not like that!"

Ryan's outburst is enough to quiet Nick. The younger man continues, "Is that all you overheard?"

Nick nods contemptuously.

"Then you have no idea what the truth is! Just let it go, okay?"

"Let it go?" Nick bellows. "I just found out that my son has done something despicable, something-God, something crazy. I'm supposed to just toss it aside and forget it?"

His eyes burn into Ryan with an uneasy disbelief. "You raped her?"

"No!"

The word comes out before Ryan even realizes it. When he does, it's too late - the others are on their way and they feel too good to ignore.

"I never raped Claire!"

END OF EPISODE #152

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