

"Footprints"

Episode #153

[Immediately After #152]

[Previously ...](#)

*Danielle fled the church just minutes before she and Andy were to be married. Later, her father and brother figured that she must have returned to the family's home in San Diego. Andy went in search of her.

*Sparks flew between Sarah and Matt. She cut things short, however, and admitted that she is pregnant. She agreed to meet Matt later to discuss it.

*Nick overheard the tail end of Ryan's conversation with Claire, during which the rape was discussed. A furious Nick confronted his son, who screamed that he never raped Claire!

TEASER

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

Sarah cringes as the Dixie Chicks' "Goodbye Earl" begins playing over the sound system of the cozy coffeehouse. She just isn't in the mood for this sort of frolicsome tune - maybe something more along the lines of, oh, a funeral dirge might be more fitting right about now.

She draws her knees up closer to her chin as she repositions herself on the vintage orange couch. She raises the oversized mug of cappuccino to her lips and, the moment she lowers it, its soothing effects are gone.

"Hey," Matt says quietly as he takes a seat on the couch beside her - though he takes care to leave a few feet.

"Hi," Sarah answers. Her voice is so thin it surprises both of them, and she makes a concentrated effort to beef it up when she adds, "I'm glad you're here."

"So am I ... I've been turning this conversation over in my head every moment I'm awake. It's sort of a relief to just be here, knowing that I'm gonna get some answers."

"Yes, you are," she says, trying as much to convince herself of this as she is him.

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

TAYLOR HOME-

The home where Brent, Danielle, and Josh Taylor each spent the majority of their upbringings is a comfortable-looking place. With its fresh coat of beige paint and dark brown roof, it is hardly a remnant of the era - the 70s - in which the family purchased it.

Andy steps out of his rental car and onto the sidewalk, standing in one spot as he admires the house. Perfect for raising a family, he reflects, and his mind immediately shoots back to the house back in King's Bay that he bought for himself and Danielle to do just that. He can feel so freshly the excitement that ran through his body when he bought the place, when he blindfolded Danielle and brought her there to propose marriage ...

Now I'll be lucky if I can get her to talk to me, he thinks as he takes that first difficult step up the pathway to the front door. He spoke to Bob on the phone very briefly last night, though, and he knows that if he's ever going to confront Danielle, now is as good a time as any.

He takes his final step and raises a finger to tap the doorbell.

MORIANI HOME-

"What do you mean, you didn't rape Claire? I just heard both you and her say-"

Ryan stops Nick with a pair of raised hands. "Dad ... just listen to me."

"I was trying to, but you stopped making any sense!" Nick shouts. His voice echoes off the vaulted ceiling and open staircase of the foyer.

"That's because you won't let me explain!"

"Then do it already!"

Ryan takes a deep breath, steadying himself before the urge to lunge at his father becomes too overwhelming. His efforts are successful after a few seconds and he looks up from the floor, a tentative calm inhabiting his face.

"It was years ago - during that summer I went to Chicago. She was there, too, living with her mother ... That was one of the major reasons I went, I think. I thought it would be the greatest summer of my life."

He pauses somberly. "But as it turns out, going there was the biggest mistake I have ever made."

Nick, hanging on Ryan's every word, resists the push to speed the story along with a scream. He waits

for his son to flesh out an explanation.

ACT ONE

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

Now that they're actually sitting here, having this conversation that they both have spent so much time imagining and dreading, neither Sarah nor Matt is quite sure where to start. It is Matt who finally takes the initiative, though not in the most gutsy of ways.

"How've you been lately?"

Sarah looks up at him from the calm brown sea inside her mug. "Fine." She pauses, as if considering this. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"Good." Matt has turned sideways so that one leg is up on the couch and he is facing her. "How do you, uh, feel?" He gestures down towards her stomach.

"Okay, I guess," she answers with a soft nod. "It hasn't really been that bad."

"Good," Matt says, shaking his head up and down. He feels like an idiot repeating himself but he cannot think of anything more useful to say - or, at least, a tactful way to say what he would like to say.

"I haven't gotten sick very much or anything," Sarah adds. She sounds absent, somehow.

"Is everything all right?"

"Huh? Yeah, of course ... everything's fine, I told you."

"You just sound sorta distant." Matt's comment hangs in the air, absorbed by both of them but expanded upon by neither.

He gives himself a mental kick to keep going. "So, uh, how far along are you?"

Both are aware of how serious, despite its casual tone, this question is.

Let the games begin, Sarah thinks with a heavy pang of guilt.

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

TAYLOR HOME-

"Hey," Josh Taylor says quietly when he sees Andy on the other side of the door.

"Is Danielle here?"

"Yeah. Come on in."

Andy does just that. This is his first glimpse of the inside of the Taylors' home and the interior strikes him much as the exterior did: comfortable. The floor of the entry hall is carpeted in a tan color that continues into the living room. To Andy's right, just a few feet away, is a staircase leading downward, to what - from what Andy can tell - appears to be a finished basement-turned-rec room.

Josh closes the door and says, in the same hushed voice, "She's in her room. End of the hallway on the left."

Andy nods appreciatively and begins his slow walk down the hallway. As he approaches its end, he can see light coming out of the bedroom on the left. The door is open.

He stands just outside the room. If Danielle were looking at him, she would see him as the main feature - a tortured, weary-looking subject - in a piece of art surrounded by the doorframe. But she's not looking; she is lying on her side on the bed, facing the other wall. Andy peers over her shoulder just enough to be able to tell that she is reading a novel.

He clears his throat.

Immediately she turns over and catches sight of him. Her face is not painted with shock or anger or anything so harsh - it's as if she has been expecting him all this time.

Andy thinks he might even see a hint of relief in her face.

ACT TWO

MORIANI HOME-

"I should've just kept my mouth shut. I really should've," Ryan muses quietly, almost privately. "But I couldn't ... I felt like I had to do something."

Nick feels like an outsider listening in on someone's private ramblings. "Do something about what?"

"About the whole thing - her and him and everything that happened. I couldn't leave it the way it was."

Silence settles over them. Nick is about to burst in once again when Ryan picks up the story back at what seems to be the beginning.

"She got really mad at me about something stupid," the younger man recalls. "I should've just let her get over it. But I felt like I had to make everything okay, so I went to see her."

He stops again. Nick can tell that Ryan is reliving every moment of that day in vivid detail, too vivid to disturb. He decides to listen and save his questions for later.

"At first she tried to get me to leave, but I wouldn't. I told her we had to talk ... She let me come in. It wasn't really as hard as I thought it would be to get her to forget it - we started talking and everything. And then we started ... kissing."

Some part of Nick feels uncomfortable hearing about this, but he's so mesmerized by the whole story that he feels he must let it go on. It does.

"We were ... doing more than we'd ever done before. It was fine - until he came in."

"He?"

"Stan."

"Your father?"

Ryan nods grimly.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

Sarah purposely takes care to keep her eyes from moving away from Matt. She pauses and immediately fears it is too much, but it is no more than a tiny hiccup in the flow of the conversation. Then she says, "Five months."

"Are you sure?" His quick response makes it clear that he has done the math time and time again, and Sarah's answer is one month short of the life-changing number he's calculated.

"Yeah," she says, though her breathing suddenly feels very labored.

"So that means ..."

"You don't have anything to worry about."

For some reason, Sarah isn't too surprised that Matt doesn't look completely relieved.

The whole thing seems sort of anti-climactic to him now. "So," he adds, scratching the back of his head, "is it a boy or a girl?"

"I-I haven't found out."

"You've had all the tests and stuff, right?"

Her response is too slow in coming to allow her space for any more lies.

"Sarah! What are you doing? This is serious-"

"I know! It's just-I didn't find out that long ago, and ..." The remainder of her excuses die on her lips.

"Doesn't Brent care? I would think he'd force you to go in and-" He stops himself. It's too obvious what's going on.

"Does Brent even know about this, Sarah?"

ACT THREE

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

TAYLOR HOME-

"Danielle ..."

She doesn't react to Andy's saying of her name. Nor does she make a move as he steps inside the bedroom and closes the door. She just stares at him, quiet and a bit scared-looking.

"Can you please tell me what's going on?" he asks suddenly.

Still no response.

"Danielle, please ... I think I deserve to know what this is about. Whatever it is, you can tell me. You could've told me back in King's Bay, before the wedding-"

"No, I couldn't!"

He is taken aback by her abrupt outburst. Several heavy seconds pass before he speaks again. "Why not?"

"Because ... you never would've understood."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I know you!" she cries. "You wouldn't have listened. You would've told me it was a phase or jitters or something like that, something I'd get over in a little bit so we could live happily ever after!"

"I-" But he can't counter her claim with any degree of honesty.

Despite the increased volume of her voice, it still doesn't sound angry. It's more than that - desperate is the first thing that comes to Andy's mind as he listens to it.

"Please," he repeats, "explain this to me. Maybe you couldn't say it then, but you can now ..."

He waits anxiously as, after a period of silence, her lips part slowly.

MORIANI HOME-

Ryan looks squarely at Nick. "He came in like a bat out of hell, drunk as usual - that was when it was getting more and more frequent." He sighs heavily and Nick thinks he sees a tear forming in each of his son's eyes.

"He just threw me aside and jumped on top of Claire. He started ripping the rest of her clothes off - I tried to get up and help, but he kept hitting me and screaming and ... I guess I just got so dazed that I stopped trying. He made me watch ..."

"Stan raped Claire?"

"Yeah ... and then he screamed at both of us, told us we were worthless, and left again."

Ryan is standing at the foot of the stairs, his hands on the carved wooden ball the end of the banister. Nick moves up behind him and places a hand on Ryan's left shoulder. It rests there as Ryan continues.

"Claire didn't even know what had happened, I don't think. She was totally out of it. When she woke up later I ... God! I pretended like I had no idea what happened, like I'd just fallen asleep or something. She got dressed and ran out of there ..."

He pivots back around sharply to face Nick. "We didn't talk for a couple of days. Finally I worked up the courage to go see her and that was when I realized - she thought I was the one who did it."

Nick tries to sound as understanding as possible as he asks, "So why didn't you just set her straight right then and there?"

ACT FOUR

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

Before Matt can repeat his question, a waitress approaches and delivers his drink, a steaming vanilla mocha in a mug equal in size to the one Sarah is holding. Matt thanks the waitress, who departs.

"Sarah? Have you told Brent yet?"

She shakes her head slowly.

"Why not?"

"I'm trying, Matt. I really am." She takes a deep breath, every last particle of air draining from her body before she says, "I just haven't found the right time yet."

"You can't wait forever! It's gonna be showing soon, isn't it? I don't think he's stupid."

"I plan on telling him" she says. "Soon."

"Why haven't you yet? Is it because ..." He doesn't need to finish.

"No, no. It's just ... I've tried to bring it up and he got into this whole thing about he doesn't think he's ready for a family just yet. I couldn't tell him ..."

"So what are you gonna do, just surprise him?"

"No! I just need to figure out a way to do it without getting him upset-"

"All you can do is hope for the best," he interrupts. "There isn't gonna be any perfect time when he'll magically think it's the most wonderful idea ever. Maybe there will be some adjustment period - maybe he'll need time to absorb it. But Brent's a good guy. He'll accept it, believe me."

She is again silent.

"You have to tell him, Sarah. He deserves to know that he's going to be a father, don't you think?"

She cringes inwardly.

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

TAYLOR HOME-

"I'd known it for weeks," Danielle begins. "Or at least, I suspected it. I just had this feeling that if-if I went through with this wedding, I'd be making a huge mistake."

"What made you feel that way?" Andy asks, moving a bit closer but feeling he must maintain a certain distance.

"I don't know," she says. "I really don't. There were just all these little signs and it started to make sense to me. Something inside felt that things had changed."

"But nothing changed! The weeks before the wedding were the most peaceful ones we'd ever had!"

She looks at him with a pained expression. "And that was a change. Do you realize how much time we spent fighting things - between your mother and my going on tour ... How is your mother, anyway? Any news?"

"I spoke to her on the phone this morning. She's awake and back at home, but she's still a bit out of it, I think. But she's getting better."

"Well, I'm glad. I'm glad she's recovering. Hopefully she'll be able to put this behind her and move on. Because you know what? I think that's what we all need to do."

Her words echo in Andy's ears. The first few times they bounce off his exterior, but slowly they begin to penetrate the surface. He has only begun to absorb them as he asks, "So what are you saying? This is it?"

"It has to be."

"We have been through so much, Danielle-

"But does that mean anything if it doesn't feel right?"

"It does!"

"No, it doesn't. We got so swept up in everything that we just moved too fast, and by the time we actually had to look at where we were, we just sort of assumed this was forever. I don't think either of us really looked deeper than that - at least, not until I started to ..." She trails off, simply at a loss for words.

Andy finds that he can't argue with what she's saying. "I-I need to go. I just ... I don't know, I need to process this. Is it all right if I come back tomorrow?"

Danielle nods, her lips held together lightly. She watches Andy open the door and exit, closing it softly behind him.

Somehow she knows that no matter what happens tomorrow, this is it.

MORIANI HOME-

Ryan shrugs, almost as if he doesn't even know how to explain it. But he does. "I guess, at first, I just didn't know what to say - I didn't want to believe that he had done that. My father! Do you have any idea how horrible that was, to have to see it then and to have to relive it in every nightmare I have?"

Nick feels that no response is the appropriate one and just stands, waiting for the rest.

"Part of it was that I wanted to protect him. I knew if he got caught he'd go to jail and I'd lose him ..."

Nick feels he must interject some sort of logic. "It's not as though he'd raised you, Ryan. He was your biological father, that's it. You'd only found him a few months before that!"

"At that point, I didn't want to go back to you. Not after Mom died - it was all too soon. So I figured that if I didn't tell Claire it was him, Stan wouldn't get in trouble."

"And he didn't," Nick adds.

"No. But Claire remembered something - she remembered enough to know what had happened, just not who had done it. I think she blocked that out or something. And she hasn't remembered, to this day. She's gone on thinking it was me for all these years."

"Why haven't you told her now? We've been in King's Bay for a year and you haven't given up chasing her."

"I've wanted to, believe me," Ryan responds. "It's been on the tip of my tongue more times than I can count. But I just feel like I can't do it."

"You don't owe anything to Stan. He ran off and he sent you back to me anyway."

"And I'm glad he did. I don't think I could have lived with him much longer, knowing what he'd done. He never brought it up, of course - I don't know if he even remembers, or if he thinks I don't remember."

"Don't you think it's time you told Claire? You owe it to her - and you owe it to yourself."

Ryan doesn't say anything.

Nick continues. "And who cares about Stan? You haven't seen him in years. He's written you, what, ten letters? Why protect him anymore?"

All Ryan can do is shake his head. He sits down on the bottom step of the staircase and drops his head into his hands.

Nick simply watches. He notices a faint heaving, some sort of rocking - he suspects it might be crying.

That's exactly what it is. When Ryan looks up again, his face is stained with the salt of disgusting nightmares.

"I wish I could tell her, Dad. I really wish I could. But I just don't think I can do it." A sob breaks up his speech. "And I can't just forget it, either, because I can't forget about her!"

END OF EPISODE #153

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