

"Footprints"

Episode #154

[The Day After #153, Afternoon]

[Previously ...](#)

*Brent told Molly that he thinks Claire has more to do with the Morianis than she let on.

*Danielle told Andy that they just cannot be together.

*Alex told Jason that he thinks Lauren can help him move on, but later he felt guilty getting cozy with her.

TEASER

TIM & CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT-

"Can you gimme a hand here?"

Tim hears his wife's call from across the apartment. He bounds to the back bedroom, the one occupied by the children, and finds her in the process of changing Samantha's diaper.

"What's wrong?" he asks, slowing down.

"I'm just a little short on free hands, is all," she says, gesturing with her chin down at the wriggling child. "She's getting all squirmy."

"Here, I'll hold her down." Tim does just that and, within a minute, the task is completed. Samantha is placed back down on the floor beside Travis amidst a sea of toys.

"Ah, family life," Claire smiles.

"You like it and you know it."

"You got me," she concedes, leaning a shoulder against the white wall. "Believe me, there are far fewer things I'd rather be complaining about than this."

Tim returns her grin and tacks on a peck on the lips for good measure.

"Do you realize how good these kids have it, Tim? I mean, they've got us - we'd do anything for them. Your parents would, too. And even Diane would do anything for Samantha. ... I just wish I'd been able to grow up the same way. Like you did."

"That may not have been as real as we thought it was," he says. They both know exactly what he's

talking about - the adoption papers.

"You just need to confront your mom about this once and for all."

"I know," he says. "And we've tried, Jay and I. But she's hiding something, and - I don't know, I'm wondering if the fact that she's hiding it is a sign that we should forget the whole thing."

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
TAYLOR HOME-

An uncomfortable warmth fills Danielle's gut as the car pulls up in front of the house. From her spot on the porch, she has an excellent view of it - it's a newer model, gold-colored - and is certain it is a rental car. Which means ...

Andy looks right at her as he steps out onto the curb.

"Hi," he calls up the walkway.

"Hi," she answers, her voice catching so that hardly any sound at all comes out. She raises a hand slightly in a wave so that he won't think she's being completely rude.

He comes up the walkway and pauses just in front of her. "Would you mind talking now?"

"Not at all," Danielle says. And it's true: Since his visit yesterday, Danielle has almost been looking forward to today's talk. She places aside her book and lowers the radio, which is spouting commercials at the moment.

"All right, then," Andy says. He talks a seat in a wicker chair identical to the one in which she's sitting and just inches away.

"What do you want to know?"

His eyes bulge in annoyed amazement. "What? How about why you ran out on our wedding?"

"I explained that yesterday, Andy." In a way, she suddenly doesn't feel like dredging it all up again.

"But I need to hear it," he responds in a pleading voice. "I just need to hear it and absorb it and-maybe I can understand it."

He takes a deep breath. Danielle can tell he's readying himself to say something difficult.

He is. "If you can make this make sense to me, I'll go home and we can call the whole thing off for good."

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER-

"I have been eating here way too much lately," Alex says as he unscrews the lid of the ketchup bottle. He flips it upside down and waits ... nothing. He gives it a tap and, suddenly, a blob of ketchup falls onto his French fries. He turns the bottle right-side-up before too much escapes and sets it back in the middle of the table.

"It's good food," Courtney says. "Besides, I'm comfortable here."

"Well, seeing as how Jason's dad owns it ..."

"That probably has a little bit to do with it." She smiles and then forks some of her chicken Caesar salad into her mouth. When the bite is done, she adds, as an afterthought, "When else have you been here lately?"

"Oh, uh, just the other day - Jason and I had lunch here." Uncomfortable as he is saying it - he has this terrible paranoid feeling that Courtney will somehow know exactly what he and Jason were discussing - he feels a surge of pride at being able to say that he and Jason lunched together.

"Oh," Courtney replies, none too fascinated with the news. Her eyebrow hooks up as she asks, "And how about Lauren?"

"I can't say we've been here together."

"Too busy doing other stuff, huh?" She puts on that smile that drives Alex crazy, that fills him with guilt and makes him desperately crave a change of subject.

So he looks away from her.

"Alex?" She notices his uneasiness. "Is everything okay between you and Lauren?"

ACT ONE

TIM & CLAIRE FISHER'S APT.-

Tim's comment is still lingering in the air, its spell unbroken, when the doorbell rings. It does the trick: Tim and Claire snap out of their listless states and head for the living room.

"Hey!" Tim cries when he opens the door. Molly steps inside and they hug.

"Hey, Molly!" Claire says cheerfully. "What brings you by?"

"Actually," Molly says, pausing a moment, "there's something I need to talk to you about."

"What is it?" Tim asks.

"I need to talk to Claire alone."

"Oh." Tim begins to move towards the hallway again. "I'll go hang out with the kids for a little." He slips away.

"What's going on?" Claire asks when he is gone. She leads Molly over to the sofa.

"I really have no idea. I thought you could help me out with that."

"I'm not following-"

"Why don't we sit down?"

Claire nods and they do.

"So what's this about, Molly?"

"I'm worried about you," Molly says.

"Why?" Claire's brow wrinkles with confusion.

"Because," Molly explains, "I have this terrible feeling that you're mixed up in something you can't get yourself out of."

Claire responds with a look that says "Huh?" for her.

"Nick Moriani - does that name ring a bell?"

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

TAYLOR HOME-

Danielle cannot help softening her voice as she begins. "I don't know how I can explain it, other than to say that it just didn't feel right anymore."

A glimmer of hope flashes in Andy's eye. "But it did?"

"Yes," she says, noting his quick optimism.

"Then maybe it's something that'll pass-"

"Because it doesn't anymore." She gives him a long stare before pulling her eyes away. "That's why I was scared of telling you. I knew you'd try to make it sound like a phase or something I'd grow out of. But I haven't and I won't."

He is silent. She can see the truth melting into his body, at last.

"Like I said, I don't know how to explain it," she says. "I just knew that I couldn't commit to spending the rest of my life with you when I didn't think I really wanted to, and I didn't know how I was supposed to tell you that.

"I can't help thinking that we just moved so quickly into everything that we never had time to figure out exactly what we were doing," she continues. "Everything that happened with your mother - that sort of forced us into declaring ourselves soulmates. And we just got so locked into this idea of what our relationship was and would be that we never really stepped back to think about it."

She is taken aback by the calm with which Andy replies after an extended moment of silence.

"Maybe you're right."

ACT TWO

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER-

"Yeah," Alex blurts out after being quiet for a second too long. "Yeah - everything's fine. Why wouldn't it be?"

"I don't know," Courtney says with a shrug. "I just get the impression that things are really hot and cold between the two of you. One minute you're indifferent and the next you're all over each other."

"It's just new, that's all. Besides, I haven't exactly had a lot of relationships ..."

"Neither has Lauren. I mean, she's dated a lot, but not seriously."

"That's more than I can say for myself."

"I find that so hard to believe," she says with a grin. "I would've thought girls would be all over you."

"Yeah, well ... It's not like there wasn't the potential, but ... I don't know."

"You just never found anyone you clicked with enough to get serious?"

His eyes focus on the corner of the table as he shrugs.

TIM & CLAIRE FISHER'S APT.-

Claire draws a sharp breath before she says anything and Molly is already convinced that she is on the right track.

"Claire?" Molly finally asks.

"Of course it rings a bell," Claire manages to say. "But I don't see how that means I'm in trouble-"

"It doesn't. At least, I hope it doesn't. Brent was just concerned about the way you reacted to his questioning."

Claire shoots her sister-in-law a hard stare. "There's nothing to worry about."

"Good. We were worried that maybe you'd been roped into something by Moriani-"

"Moriani?" Tim asks from the hallway.

"Tim!" Molly scolds. "I told you I needed to talk to Claire in private-"

"This isn't anything I don't know about," he assures her as he reenters the living room. "But Claire hasn't been anywhere near Ryan in months."

Bewilderment twists Molly's face. "Who's Ryan?"

ACT THREE

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

TAYLOR HOME-

Danielle cannot get over the feeling that she has to say something, but she can't fathom what it might be. What slips out is, "Andy ..."

"Maybe you're right," he repeats. It seems to be more for himself than for her.

"Is this making sense to you, Andy?"

He nods reluctantly, as though his head is suddenly too heavy to move any faster.

"The last thing I wanted to do was hurt you," she says, taking his hands in hers without even realizing it. "That's why I couldn't ever work up the nerve to say any of this - I knew you'd just get hurt and that was not something I wanted to see." She tries to make eye contact but it's impossible: His gaze is fixed upon the wooden planks of the porch.

"I'm so sorry," she whispers.

"No, I am," he says, loosening himself gently from her grasp. "I let myself get so swept up in the idea of some grand affair that I just got lost sight of reality. It never occurred to me - I never let it occur to me - that maybe you weren't as happy as I was."

"It's not that I don't value you," she says. "We formed a bond that I would love to hold onto as a friendship. And I owe you so much in so many ways ..."

"But you just don't love me."

The words strike Danielle as cold and sharp. Her first instinct is to protest, but she is all too aware that she can't do that without invalidating all of the truths that she's managed to tell Andy after all this time.

All she can offer is another apology. "I'm sorry ... so sorry."

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER-

"So your birthday is coming up soon, huh?" Alex asks quickly to swing the subject away from himself.

"Yeah," Courtney says. "Right after graduation."

"Any idea what you're gonna do yet?"

"Not a clue. Last year Jason left me a string of clues to lead me to a picnic ... I have no idea what's going on this year."

"Jeez! You guys have been together for a long time!"

"Yeah, that was right before you moved here, actually," Courtney muses. "Gosh, we have been together for a long time ..."

"You really have," Alex agrees. He picks up a ketchup-soaked French fry and sticks it in his mouth. "Can I ask you something?"

"Yeah, go ahead."

"How serious are you guys?" Alex asks carefully.

Courtney's face crunches up for a second in thought. "That's a hard question to answer," she finally says. "I mean, it's more than just dating, because we've been friends for so long. But it's not like we've talked about marriage or anything like that."

"Oh." Further inquiries dance on the end of his tongue but go unspoken - that is, until Courtney catches Alex's eye.

"What?" she asks.

"Nothing."

"No, you looked like you were gonna say something."

"Well, uh-you know, it's nothing, really."

"Alex-" she begins, only to cut herself off. "Ohhh ... I see what you're getting at."

"No, Court, really," he protests, holding up his hands.

"To answer the question, no," she says calmly. "We haven't ... slept together yet. And to tell the truth, I don't know if we will."

"What?" Alex's eyes go wide.

TIM & CLAIRE FISHER'S APT.-

"Ryan ... Moriani," Tim says slowly, giving his sister a baffled look. "Isn't that who you're talking about?"

"I'm lost," Molly says.

"Okay, okay," Claire jumps in. "Tim, we were actually talking about Ryan's father, Nick. And Molly - Ryan is Nick's son. I, uh ... I used to know him."

"'Used to' is the operative phrase," Tim says. "He spent a couple of months hanging around her before she finally got him to bug off."

Claire can't help noticing the relief in her husband's expression.

"So what's this about his father, then?" Tim asks.

Molly and Claire share a look that decides Claire will be the one to explain the situation. "Nick has been seeing Katherine Fitch. Brent thinks that Nick's connection to the mob might be related to Katherine's shooting."

"Ah."

"So," Molly continues, "there's nothing going on with this guy - either of them, I guess - that you need help with?"

"No. Of course not." Claire supplements her response with a vigorous shake of the head.

"Is that why you came over, Mol?" Tim asks.

"Pretty much, yeah."

"If you're finished, then, there's something I need to talk to you about."

"What?"

Tim gives his wife a glance that confirms the topic he is about to bring up. "It's about Mom."

ACT FOUR

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER-

"Not that we won't ever," Courtney explains. "But I've waited this long and I really feel like I should wait until I'm married, you know?"

Alex mentally kicks himself before agreeing, "Yeah. Have you guys talked about it?"

"Not really, actually. I don't know, it just hasn't ever been a total full-blown issue."

"Shouldn't you kinda discuss it a little, at least? When you're together that long ..."

"You probably have a point," Courtney says. "To tell the truth, I'm a little creeped out about something."

"What?"

"You remember how we told you about crazy Shannon, right?"

"Yeah ..."

Courtney puts an expression on her face that says it all.

Alex leans in closer, surprised. "He slept with her?"

"Yep," Courtney says. "As usual, she manipulated him into it - she got him drunk enough so that he had no idea what was going on. But still ... that was his first time. It can't be a good thing to have to hold onto for the rest of your life, knowing that you were more or less raped just because you trusted someone enough to talk to them."

Alex's heart begins thumping more heavily on the inside of his chest and he can feel his stomach growing heavier. He finds himself at a loss for any meaningful words, too consumed by that surreal memory of the night of Jason's birthday party.

TIM & CLAIRE'S APT.-

"What about her?" Molly asks. There is a palpable intensity in both her voice and her face that confirm for Tim and Claire that she is recalling Paula's recent odd behavior.

Tim folds his hands together. "Do you remember that day she had us all come over and acted like she had something important to say - but then just stopped?"

"Yeah," Molly says. "I've been trying to figure it out, but I can't think of anything." She pauses. "She's not sick, is she?"

"No," Tim says, "though it's not like I know anything anyway. But I'm pretty sure it's not her health that's been making her act so strangely lately."

"Then what?"

"I found some adoption papers in her room on Thanksgiving."

The revelation hits Molly hard, though she has no idea what it means. "What do you mean, adoption papers?"

"I have no clue," Tim admits, shrugging his shoulders. "They were old - I didn't see an actual date, but they definitely weren't recent."

"Well, what'd they say?"

"Again, no idea. I only got a glimpse at them before she came back. I had to act like I hadn't seen them."

"Have you said anything to her yet?"

Tim shakes his head. "I've tried to. I can't come out and say it, I don't know why. But I've been hinting at it, and I think she suspects that I know something, but she doesn't want to give something away if it's not necessary."

"So what do we do now?"

"I told Jason about it," Tim says. "I'd like to tell Sarah, too. And then I think the four of us need to sit her down and find out what this is all about. Obviously she's been really concerned about it lately."

Molly gives both her brother and Claire a troubled look, not sure what she can or should say while the information and all its possible implications are still working its way into her system.

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

TAYLOR HOME-

"So where do we go from here?"

Danielle knew the question was coming, but the moment Andy utters it, she cringes. She finds that as much as she's thought about answering it, she cannot think of a single useful thing to say right now.

"Danielle?"

"Oh, uh, yeah," she says, shaking off the haze of her jumbled thoughts. "I ... Look, Andy, I don't want to make this any more difficult than it has to be. And I think I might as well just say it."

"Say what?"

"This ..." She draws a sharp breath, clamping a hand onto her forehead. "I just don't know how to say it."

"I don't think you need to be worried about hurting my feelings right now," he blurts out, his voice rife with venomous sarcasm. Immediately he realizes what he has said and turns away.

"I know this is hard," Danielle says. "I really do. I've been agonizing over this for how long - months, now? But we're not doing ourselves any good by trying to save something that just isn't there."

Andy so terribly wants to fire back a protest, to toss some water on the scalding tongues of the flames that are her words, but he knows he cannot.

"This needs to be the end," Danielle finally says in one rushed breath.

Andy swallows hard and turns back to face her. "I just don't understand ..." He doesn't need to elaborate further.

"This has to be it, Andy."

The radio, long forgotten, is now humming Boyz II Men's "It's So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday." The *a cappella* tune plays on behind them ...

*I thought we'd get
To see forever
But forever's
Gone away ...*

And they just stand there, shaded from the afternoon sun, captured in a moment that will never exist

again.

END OF EPISODE #154

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