

"Footprints"

Episode #157

[Several Days After #156, Evening]

[Previously ...](#)

*Alex continued to delude everyone - including himself - by building a relationship with Lauren.

*Tim, Molly, and Jason got Paula to admit that she had another son, who she gave up for adoption because he was the product of an affair she had while engaged to Bill.

TEASER

KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL-

"Congratulations, all of you," Helen says, bestowing kisses upon Courtney, Jason, Lauren, and Alex, in that order.

"I always knew I'd see this day, but it's so strange that it's actually here," she adds, standing back to admire Courtney in particular.

"Don, come here!" Helen calls to her husband, who is just a few feet away. When he comes over, she says, "Take a picture of me with all four of the kids."

"We took enough at graduation, didn't we?" Courtney asks. Already it is too late - Helen has pulled them into a pose and Don is snapping the photo.

"You're nuts, Mom," Courtney laughs as she gives her mother a hug.

Meanwhile, Paula has come up behind Jason. She places her arms over her son's shoulders and leans her head upon his back.

"I can't believe this," she sighs. "This really is the last step - you're an adult now."

He turns his head sideways, enough so that she can see his face, and smiles.

"You're the last one," she says, more to herself than to Jason. "This is the last time I'll ever have to go through this ..."

"Are you thinking about ..." he asks in a hushed voice.

He doesn't need to complete the thought. Paula raises her head and nods.

"Mom ..."

"I can't help it," she says. "This is such an occasion. How am I not supposed to think about it? I'm standing here thinking that I've been through this three times before, but there could have been another ..."

"Have you been okay?" Jason asks. He pulls her gently away from the others so that they can talk. "Everything's been so crazy these last few days, with getting ready for graduation and all - I haven't had a chance to ask you."

She sighs again, though this time, it seems as though she is trying to force all her woes out with the air. "I'm fine. It's not great, obviously - your father has been really quiet."

"At least he's not screaming and yelling."

"I'd prefer that. It's odd - he never yells about major things like this. Only about trivial things. If he were yelling, I'd know it would pass. But the way he's been these past few days - quiet, brooding, cold - it's as though I don't know him. And it's terrible."

Jason folds her into a hug before anyone else has the chance to see how emotional she has become.

Anyone, that is, except Sarah.

She, Brent, Tim, and Claire are all standing beside the decked-out buffet table, in the midst of a light conversation, when Sarah's eye is caught by her mother and brother. She can tell from the seriousness in their demeanors that something is off.

Tim sees her looking at Paula and feels a stab of guilt. He can't believe Sarah doesn't know what he, Molly, and Jason know, at least not yet. I'll tell her later, when we're alone, he thinks.

Sarah startles him from his thoughts with a tap on the shoulder. "What's with Mom? She looks really worried."

Tim swallows, looking as he feels - like a deer caught in headlights.

ACT ONE

KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL-

The idea of escaping hits Alex, but it fades as quickly as it came. He knows he's been caught and so he just stands there in the middle of the party.

"You must be Lauren!" Sally says loudly as she draws closer to them.

Lauren nods and smiles.

"Lauren, this is my mom, Sally," Alex says with a forced smile. "Mom, this is Lauren Brooks."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Sally grins, shaking Lauren's hand with great vigor.

Sally leans over to Alex. "She's very cute!"

Alex coerces his lips into turning upward in an uncomfortable smile.

"Well, congratulations on your graduation," Sally says to Lauren.

"Thank you," Lauren answers, beaming.

As Alex stands there, watching the two women wading in the waters of easy conversation, he can't help feeling a pulse of discomfort. It suddenly strikes him that he now cannot turn back without, at the very least, disappointing someone.

He exhales, his eyes still focused on Lauren and Sally talking. Then I won't turn back.

Across the large room, Sarah is waiting for a response from Tim.

"Tim? What is it?"

The moment his sister speaks these words, Tim realizes that he has given himself away.

"Can I talk to you alone?" he finally asks, tipping his head towards a corner.

"Yeah, of course," Sarah says. She turns to Brent and excuses herself with a look. As she and Tim step away, Sarah notices the glance that goes between Tim and Claire, a glance that tells her that whatever Tim is about to tell her, Claire already knows.

"What's going on?" Sarah asks in a tone that is dripping with desperation the moment they are away from others.

"It's complicated, Sarah," Tim begins. Without saying hardly anything at all, he has already shown her

that it is going to be quite a task to extract the truth.

"Tim, this obviously has something to do with Mom, so I think I have a right to know. What is it?"

"I'd rather tell you in private, when we can all sit down and talk-"

"You can't do that," she says forcefully. "Not now. Just tell me what it is, already."

ACT TWO

KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL-

The quick exit made by Sarah and Tim has left Brent and Claire standing alone. Awkwardness floats in the air between them; it is clear to Brent that Claire knows what is being discussed in the corner, while he doesn't. It doesn't seem appropriate for him to pry, either. The alternate topic that springs to mind isn't exactly pleasant, but once it hits him, he knows it will not go away without being addressed.

"Can I ask you a question?" he begins.

"Sure," she responds. The memory of their last encounter flashes in her head and she is certain what the question will be before it is asked.

"Well, Molly said that Nick Moriani has a son - apparently, you and he used to be pretty close."

Claire nods.

"Molly told me that Tim said the son had contacted you a couple of times since they showed up in King's Bay." He pauses and watches Claire's facial features do a telltale squirm.

"So why didn't you tell me about him when I was asking you all those questions about his dad being connected to the mob?"

"This is so odd, isn't it?" Paula says, clasping her hands together.

Bill doesn't turn around. "What?"

"That we're celebrating Jason's college graduation. He's the last one we'll ever do this for ..."

"Yep." From behind, Paula can see Bill's arm rise and his head tip back slightly as he takes a drink.

"Bill, why are you doing this?"

Everything is static for a moment, until finally Bill turns himself around slowly. "Why am I doing this?" He laughs icily. "You pushed me to it, Paula! I warned you to stop, not to dredge up the past, but you just kept pushing and pushing - and you finally went too far."

ACT THREE

KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL-

"We finally got Mom to tell us what's had her so on-edge lately," Tim says after a drawn-out pause.

"Well, what was it?" Sarah asks eagerly. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, she's fine. Dad's fine. It's nothing immediate like that."

"Then what was it?"

"Like I said, it's really complicated. I don't feel like discussing it in public like this."

"Tim, just tell me," she urges.

Clearly she has pushed him to the point where he would like to tell her, but he is still battling himself on it.

He finally snaps. "Fine."

"Well ... ?"

"It sort of started on Thanksgiving," he explains. "Mom was really upset, almost hysterical. I went up to check on her, and-she was crying over some papers."

"Papers?"

"Yeah. Adoption papers."

"What?"

"It's not what you think," he says, holding up both hands. "It's not one of us."

"I'm lost."

"So were we. It turns out that, before I was born, Mom had another son, and ... she gave him up for adoption."

Sarah feels all the breath in her body catch in a single pocket in her chest.

"It was my secret! I felt it was time to tell the kids!" Paula argues.

"That's where you're wrong! It was our secret. I don't know why you have refused to accept that for so long!" Bill turns his back to her again.

This time, Paula leans in closer to him, standing on tiptoe to speak just over his shoulder. "How did this affect you, Bill? I'm the one who had the affair. I'm the one who had a baby that I gave up-

"And I'm the one you cheated on!" If not for the party going on around them, he would be screaming, but he has opted for a harsh whisper instead.

"That doesn't mean you did anything shameful, Bill. You were having problems and I-" She stops. "Ahh."

"What?"

"This is making sense now. All those times you said you didn't want the kids to think worse of me-what you meant was that you didn't want them to think any worse of you."

Bill almost protests but feels a sudden drive not to do so any longer. He remains silent instead, and that is all the confirmation Paula needs.

"I know I hurt you, Bill. And the fact that I did that-it makes me sick to think of it. But I've also made my peace with the mistake I made and the choices that followed. So if I want the kids to know so I can really have that peace-Bill, it's not my fault that you still feel embarrassed that you were impotent thirty-five years ago!"

ACT FOUR

KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL-

"I don't know," Claire says casually. "I guess it never seemed important enough to mention-"

"The son could lead us to evidence that Moriani had something to do with Katherine getting shot!" Brent's features are strained by frustration. "This could be so useful for us in nailing Moriani."

"Why are you so hell-bent on getting him?"

"Because," Brent explains, "it's so obvious that he's involved in all sorts of mob activity. It amazes me that he hasn't been caught on anything yet. I'd love to be the one to make something stick."

"I wouldn't mind it, either," she says.

"Would you be willing to help? If you could just get the son to say something--"

"I've tried. Ryan's not giving anything up."

"Well, what'd you do?"

Claire pauses a moment. "He's been trying to get himself back in my good graces since he showed up in King's Bay. Soo ... I told him that if he found any connection between his father's business and Katherine's shooting, I'd be willing to give him a second chance."

"A second chance at what?"

"I don't know. Being friends. But he didn't turn anything up."

"You're sure?"

"I think I'd have noticed," she remarks with a grin. Suddenly, however, her demeanor returns to serious. "Brent, do me a favor."

"What?"

"Go ahead and do whatever it takes to get Nick. I, of all people, would love to see him locked up - but please, don't let Tim find out that I've been in contact with Ryan."

Brent is tempted to ask why, but he resists.

"Okay?" she asks, a hint of anxiety showing through.

"Okay."

"Hey, graduate."

The words are almost mumbled into Courtney's ear from behind. She turns to look at the person speaking them, but in no time a pair of arms is wrapped around her body, holding her tightly.

"Same to you," she says, turning her eyes over her shoulder to Jason.

"I can't believe we're done!" he enthuses.

"I know," she says. "Of course, now that means we have to go out and do something productive with our lives ..." She sighs half-mockingly.

"It'll be fine." Jason turns her around so that they are face-to-face. "'Cause I'll be here with you every step of the way."

He presses his lips against hers and the passion of celebration consumes them.

From not that far away, Alex watches them, oblivious to what Lauren is saying at his side.

ACT FIVE

KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL-

"Keep your voice down!" Bill shoots Paula the sternest of glances.

"I'm sorry," she says, bringing her volume down a considerable amount. "But it's not anything to be ashamed of. Especially since you had four children after that!"

"I'm not ... ashamed," he says weakly.

"I don't know what else to say, Bill. I just don't see how your part of this could possibly be worse than mine."

"And that's exactly the problem," he retorts. "Your part of everything is always more important."

He turns to walk away but turns back before he takes even a step.

"Now, please, no more about this. We don't want to ruin Jason's graduation day."

And he leaves her standing there. There is something about the way he says the words - spitting, almost, despite their absolute practicality - that stings her.

The urge to cry is one that she suppresses by only the narrowest of margins.

"What?"

"Mom had another baby," Tim repeats slowly, recognizing the shock value of this information. "A son. Before any of us were born."

"Like when she was a teenager?"

"No. When she was engaged to Dad."

"Then why'd she give it up?"

"Because," Tim begins and then stalls. The whole concept is just weird to him, and saying it again - he's explained it to Claire and to himself countless times already - is just as awkward as the first time. "She had an affair."

Sarah is stunned into silence.

Tim places a hand on his sister's shoulder. "I know this is weird, but-"

She slaps his hand away. "How could you guys not tell me about this? Don't you think I deserved to be there to here it with you?"

"Sarah, we tried-"

"I don't believe you did this!"

Molly and Claire are standing about fifteen feet away and their attention is caught by Sarah's rising voice. They look over at her and Tim just as Sarah begins running away from him.

"Sarah, wait!" Tim calls out.

Sarah turns as she runs, without any real intention of saying anything more, but just for the sake of it. As she does so, she slams directly in Molly.

"Whoa, Sarah-"

"Shut up!" she snaps, scooping up her fallen purse off the floor and dashing out of the banquet room.

Tim, Molly, and Claire all exchange looks that combine worry, surprise, and confusion.

"I'll go after her," Brent says, hurrying towards them. "Let me just take her home and try to calm her down."

Agreeable nods from the other three are all the confirmation he needs to take off.

Another moment passes before Molly's eye is caught by something brown on the floor. She bends down to have a closer look and sees that it is a small book. She picks it up and looks at the front page.

"It's Sarah's appointment book," she says. "She must've dropped it. I'll take it back to her later."

Already something inside is whispering to her to peek at the book's contents.

END OF EPISODE #157

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