

"Footprints"

Episode #161

[Several Days After #160, Evening]

[Previously ...](#)

*Alex grew upset watching Jason kiss Courtney. He resolved, however, not to back out of his relationship with Lauren.

*Word of Sarah's pregnancy spread.

*Molly was baffled by an entry in Sarah's appointment book to go meet with a Dr. Brandt - the name of the doctor at the abortion clinic.

TEASER

CHASE CABIN-

"Bring her in!" Jason calls. He steps to the side, opening up the doorway so that Alex and Lauren can lead in a blindfolded Courtney.

"Can I take this thing off yet?" she asks impatiently.

"Uh, yeah," Jason says. "Untie her, guys."

Alex begins working at the knot in the makeshift blindfold, a navy blue bandana.

"This better be good," Courtney says amiably. "I've spent half my freakin' birthday in the car without being able to see anything ..."

"Hey, we did let you talk," Lauren pipes in. "That's gotta count for something."

"Yeah, yeah," Courtney gripes, though a smile remains plastered on her face. "Will ya get this thing off already, Alex?"

"I'm trying! But somebody-" He shoots a playful glance at Lauren, "-tied it all tight."

"Well, I didn't want her to be able to see!" Lauren says.

Alex struggles for a few more seconds until Jason steps in to help him. He reaches up to undo the knot, which he has to admit is absurdly complex, and his fingers brush Alex's.

The two young men make the briefest eye contact before Alex steps back.

"There, I got it," Jason announces at last. He holds the bandana in place, though, and motions for Lauren to come over and hold it.

"Take it off already!" Courtney yells.

The other three laugh. Jason steps back around in front of Courtney and signals to Lauren to get the blindfold fall.

It does, and the rustic yet comfortable interior of the cabin is revealed to Courtney. Familiarity brings a smile to her face. "I hadn't even thought of this!" she says, drawing Jason into a hug.

"I got the keys from your mom," he says. "I figured we might as well get away to celebrate."

"It was a great idea!" Courtney enthuses before sliding into a liplock with him.

Lauren slides her arms around Alex's middle and drops her head onto his shoulder as they watch the happy couple. Alex never moves his eyes from Jason's face; he takes in every motion, every dip of the head and every twitch of the lips, as Jason continues kissing Courtney.

Something inside Alex sighs heavily.

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER-

"Thanks for meeting me," Sarah says, taking her seat across the table from Matt. "I know it was short notice, but I just needed to talk, I guess."

"No problem," Matt says as he puts down his menu. "So shoot - what's wrong?"

"This is big stuff," Sarah begins.

"There's nothing wrong with the baby, is there?"

The inquiry is enough to give Sarah pause, but she recovers quickly. "No, no. Baby's fine ... but it's related to that."

Matt rolls out a hand, inviting her to go on.

"I told Brent."

Matt looks a bit relieved. "You did?"

"Yeah. Though actually, he sort of found out."

"How?"

"Okay, brace yourself. This is where it gets complicated."

POLICE STATION-

"What are you doing here?"

"I got off work early," Molly explains. "Thought I'd come by and see if you had any news on the Morianis."

Brent tips his head towards the back of the hallway. "Come into my office. We can talk there."

Molly follows him. It is only once the door is shut that he says anything else. "I sent some guys over to question Nick again the other night."

"Anything come of it?"

"Not really, no." Brent opens the top drawer of a file cabinet and begins thumbing through its contents to find the appropriate spot to replace the file he's holding. "But I did talk to Claire at the graduation party the other day. I haven't told you about that, have I?"

"Nope."

"Well, it turns out," he begins, and then pauses to stick the file in its place. He closes the drawer and continues. "It turns out Claire had been conducting her own little investigation already."

Molly leans against the desk. "In what sense?"

"Like, she made a deal with Ryan Moriani that if he found evidence that Nick had any fault in Katherine's shooting, he'd turn it over to her."

"And what would he get in return?"

"A shot at being friends with her again," Brent says. Seeing Molly's stymied reaction, he adds, "I know,

it's weird. I was trying to warn her to be careful about it, but she just kept assuring me that everything's under control. And then she asked me to promise that I wouldn't tell Tim about any of it."

Molly folds her arms in front of her chest. "I don't get why she's doing this."

"Neither do I. But something's telling me there's more to it than we know."

"Me too," Molly agrees. "You don't think ..."

"What?"

"That Claire's had an affair with Ryan?"

ACT ONE

CHASE CABIN-

Lauren extends a hand and Jason hands her the car keys.

"Where you going?" Courtney asks.

"I've gotta get stuff from the car," Lauren says.

"What'd you do, bring an overnight bag?" Courtney queries with a grin.

"Not quite," Lauren says, "although I think this stuff'll get us through the night just fine."

Courtney raises an eyebrow.

"Remember all those stops we made? One of 'em was a liquor store ..."

"Ah!" Courtney nods in understanding.

"Yeah," Jason says. "So if we're gonna put any of it to use, we've gotta go get it."

"Here, I'll go with you," Courtney offers. Lauren shrugs in agreement and the girls head outside.

"This was an awesome idea," Alex says. "We can all just chill and have fun. It'll be a good way to celebrate."

"Yeah." Jason looks out the open door, into the barely-fading sunlight. "I hope so."

"Huh?"

"I just have this weird feeling, now that we're actually up here. Like this is gonna be a huge disaster."

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER-

"That's weird, about your mom," Matt says.

"Yeah, I know." Sarah takes a moment to examine an item on the menu before continuing, "But it's like I haven't even had time to digest it. All this stuff is just coming at me left and right."

"It's not like you didn't know you were pregnant, though."

"Well, no. I've known for months ... but telling Brent, actually explaining it to him - that was big." She is about to say something more when a perky waitress appears and takes their drink orders without her smile ever wavering.

"I wonder if I was ever like that," Sarah muses when the waitress disappears.

"What do you mean?"

"So ... happy. That girl - Jennie - my dad says she's never not happy. It's like she's oblivious to how crappy life can be." Sarah pushes a hand back through her dark blonde hair and leans back in her chair. "I'm having trouble remembering a time when things seemed like that."

Matt is tempted to reach across the table and hold her hand, but he catches himself. "Your life isn't terrible. I mean, you're stressed out, yeah, but things could be a hell of a lot worse."

Sarah doesn't even have to try to imagine the possibilities. "Yeah, I know. But everything is just constantly so mixed up ..." She puts her head down on the table, resting it on top of her folded arms.

"Don't do this to yourself," Matt says.

She raises her face. He puts a finger under her chin, lightly lifting her head up.

"You've got too cute a smile to hide from the world."

POLICE STATION-

"An affair? Hardly." Brent swats a hand through the air, as if tossing the idea away. "She really has something against that guy - and his father, too."

"Yeah, but ... I don't know," Molly says, trying to sort out everything in her head. "They definitely have some kind of past, and for her to want to nail them this badly ..."

"I see what you mean."

"It makes sense, doesn't it? So maybe it didn't happen recently-"

"I can't see her doing that to Tim."

"Neither can I." Molly takes a few idle steps forward, walking with her arms crossed in front of her. "But there is - there was - something between her and Ryan. Even the way she explained who he was to me - she seemed awkward."

"Maybe that's why she doesn't want Tim knowing about any of this. She just doesn't want him to know that she has a serious past with this guy if Tim hates him so much."

"Maybe. Or maybe Tim knows and that's why he doesn't like him."

"That could be."

Molly continues pacing, now moving back towards the desk. "Whatever the deal is, I get the distinct impression something bad happened between her and Ryan. She can't hate them this much because Nick used to do business with her dad-"

"Stop!" Brent says, clamping a hand over her shoulder. She turns around, taken aback, and he grins, "You're making me dizzy."

"Sorry. I'm just trying to figure out how all this fits together."

"It's not really any of our business."

"No," Molly says. "Unless it could put Claire or Tim or the kids in danger. And I'm getting the feeling that's a distinct possibility."

ACT TWO

CHASE CABIN-

Alex eyes Jason with confusion. "What do you mean?"

"I have no idea," Jason says, still not looking at Alex. His gaze remains fixed on the outdoors. "Maybe it's because of last time Courtney and I came up here."

"Why? What happened?"

"You know crazy Shannon? She was having someone follow Courtney, and he threw a rock through a window. It's wasn't like traumatic, but it was scary, and it was just the beginning of that whole ordeal."

"I still can't believe that story," Alex says in amazement. "You guys got tangled up with a real-life psychopath."

"Talking about Shannon?" Courtney calls as she and Lauren troop back inside.

"You got it," Jason answers. "Is that everything?"

"Yep," Lauren says, getting everything over to the small, round, wooden table in a corner of the kitchen.

"Shannon was ... fun," Courtney says, heavy with sarcasm, as she comes back over to the guys. "Of course, she repeatedly ruined my life and nearly had me killed, but she was a real winner." She rolls her eyes.

Jason slips an arm around Courtney's shoulders. "Yep, I sure know how to pick 'em."

It takes a moment for the joke to sink in before Courtney smacks him in the chest.

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER-

Matt was perfectly aware of what he was saying, but as awkwardness settles over them, he realizes that it may have been too much. Even admitting that, however, seems difficult.

"Thanks," Sarah finally says, her voice quiet. "It's nice to know I've got someone standing behind me."

"Glad to do it." Matt turns his menu over again, scanning everything another time without really considering any of it. "But it's not like I'm all the support you've got. You're lucky you've got such a

good family. And Brent - he took the baby thing well, it sounds like. He could have gone totally ballistic on you."

"That's true. But it's nice to have you here ... You don't get mixed up in any of this crap. My family has this whole thing with my mom going on, and I'm still really annoyed with them for that, and Brent - I don't know what's going on with him, sometimes."

Matt decides not to pursue that topic any further. "You've got a lot of people, regardless. You're lucky."

"Yeah, I am," she concedes. "Why don't you ever get down like I do? It seems like you do this for me way more than I do for you."

"Because," he says, "I am a firm believer that everything works out for the best. I try not to get myself too sick over things."

"I wish I could be like that."

"Why can't you?"

"I don't know ... I'm just always worried that something is going to go wrong. Between Brent and Molly and the baby ..."

"Everything will be fine, Sarah. I promise."

She does her best to nod convincingly, although she can't forget everything she already knows - and what she's discovered, time after time, is that something always creeps up to complicate what seems simple.

POLICE STATION-

"I just don't want to jump to any conclusions," Brent says. "It's not gonna help anybody in the long run."

"You're right." Molly relaxes and again leans against his desk. "But anyway, how are you? I know you must've had a weird couple of days."

"To put it lightly."

"So how are you? Come on, open up a little. It's good for you."

Words and emotions are swirling around in Brent's head, but they're not ones he can say - especially not to her. "Molly, you'd better go."

"What? Why?"

"Because," he says, opening the door. "You need to. I shouldn't be standing here going on and on to you."

Molly moves towards the door, albeit reluctantly. "Brent, I'm your friend. If there's something you want to talk about-"

"There isn't. And right now, what I need to do is go home to my wife."

Molly gives him another baffled look before taking off. Brent makes haste in closing the door behind her.

"I've got to go home to Sarah," he says aloud, returning to his desk to gather up his things.

ACT THREE

CHASE CABIN-

A significant amount of time has passed. Though the sun has not gone down outside, its intensity has dimmed enough so that the cabin is resting in relative shade and coolness. Several of its windows are open and a cool evening breeze is floating in, creating a comfortable environment for the three young adults spread around the living room.

"What is Alex doing?" Lauren asks, cranking her neck around to look back at the hallway.

In a moment Alex appears. He is looking upward, somewhere above the other three, with a mock dramatic look on his face as he sings, "I, I just died in your arms tonight ..."

"You are so weird!" Lauren yells, throwing a pillow at him.

Alex catches it in his arms with a bit of fumbling - and then lifts it up with his teeth. He growls and flings the pillow back at Lauren, but it hits Jason. Alex is already laughing wildly.

"Okay, bud," Lauren says, rising. "Have you had enough already? I don't want you doing anything too stupid."

Jason, who is watching them, suddenly finds his eyes locked with Alex's. The memory of that night several months ago pulses between them, fresh as ever.

WELLS STREET-

Molly's focus is mainly down on the ground as she walks the short distance to her car. She looks up instinctively, though, when she sees the feet of someone she has nearly bumped into. It's Matt.

"Hey," he says, and his voice tells Molly that she doesn't look as drained as she feels.

"Hi," she smiles, doing her best to uphold the happy facade. "How's it going?"

"Good, I guess. Everything's sorta hum-drum, you know?"

"Wish I did," she says casually. "Hey, have you heard about Sarah yet?"

"About the pregnancy?" He pauses just a fraction of a second, recalling his discovery several weeks ago. "Yeah. As a matter of fact, I just had dinner with her."

"Oh. How'd she seem to you?"

"What do you mean?"

"How's she dealing with it?" Molly asks. "I saw her the other day, but she was her usual nasty self with me."

"Really? She seems pretty excited about the baby," Matt says.

"She didn't seem upset or anything?"

"Well, she was a little out of it - but she was explaining that there's some family stuff going on, which you obviously know about," he says. "Why?"

"Why do I care? Because I'm getting the impression that something is wrong and she's not telling anyone."

Matt cocks his head to the right and what is unmistakably concern overtakes his face. "What makes you think that?"

"She dropped her appointment book the other day," Molly explains, "and I picked it up. I-I noticed that she had an appointment with some doctor I've never heard of, one who isn't associated with the hospital."

A Dr. Brandt."

"Maybe she was just getting the baby checked out by someone else," Matt says.

"Maybe."

The wheels in his head are already spinning.

END OF EPISODE #161

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