

"Footprints"

Episode #181

[Shortly After #180]

[Previously ...](#)

**Brent reminded Sarah of the damage that her affair with Matt did. She questioned whether Brent loves her, but they were interrupted by a call informing them that the results of the paternity test are ready.*

**Matt admitted to Molly that he has feelings for Sarah.*

**Lauren told Courtney that Alex's behavior made her think that they do not have a future together.*

**Claire's determination to bring down the Morianis grew stronger, but a discouraged Ryan avoided contact with her.*

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

The hectic world of the hospital is swirling all around them, but Sarah and Brent are almost entirely removed from it. They stand in an otherwise empty waiting room, outside the office of the doctor who has summoned them here. Though both have alternately been sitting and standing in the fifteen or so minutes since they arrived, they are both currently on their feet and pacing over the grayish-blue carpeting.

The itch of impatience becomes too strong for Brent. He stops moving. "How long is this going to take?"

"'Til whenever the doctor's ready, I guess," Sarah says. "Besides, we have to wait for Matt."

She sees the aggression building in his face and begins watching it, but her study is brought to an abrupt end when he suddenly turns and starts pacing again.

"Come on," she hears him muttering.

"Brent."

He stops again. "Yeah?"

"Do you think you're ready for this?"

He looks at her askew. "Huh?"

"Are you ready for this? To find out if you're Victoria's father?"

"What do you think? Of course I am! This not knowing is driving me crazy--"

"That's not what I mean," she says firmly, as if he really does know exactly what she is referring to.

He just narrows his eyes to ask for clarification.

"I mean, are you ready to know either way? Like if it's not you -- are you ready to give her up ..." The question trails off, though, as she considers her phrasing and the possibility that he could still be a major part of Victoria's life regardless of the test's outcome. Almost instinctively, she offers a silent prayer before she continues speaking.

"And what if she is yours? Would you be ready to just settle down for good and raise her with me?"

"Sarah--" He begins quickly and then interrupts himself. "I ... I don't know what I think right now. Let's just get through this announcement and then we'll see what happens."

"Fine." Sarah folds her arms over her chest, as if protecting herself, though she isn't quite sure from what.

"How about you?" he asks suddenly.

"What?"

"Are *you* ready for this?" he questions. "Are you ready to have to deal with everything that's going to come out of this?"

She shrugs. It is not a gesture indicative of apathy, but rather an unwillingness to face the finality that is about to descend upon them.

"Do you have a preference?" Brent asks.

"What?"

"For the father," he says. "Are you hoping it's either one of us more than the other one?"

MARSHALL APARTMENT

Her hand falls from the door after three quick knocks. Anxiety fills Courtney's body: She isn't sure what to expect when the door is opened. *If* the door is opened.

Thankfully, it is. And despite her fears, Alex looks normal, okay. She realizes that she was half-expecting him to look like the mess that he apparently must be. But he is dressed in regular clothes, clean-shaven, his eyes are not bloodshot, and he doesn't look any more pale than usual.

"Hey," she greets him.

"Hey. What's up?"

"Just thought I'd drop by, that's all. Is your mom around?"

"Noo ..."

"Good." Courtney steps inside the apartment and closes the door for him. "I was hoping we'd have a chance to talk."

He restrains the impulse to fight her concern and stands there, hands hanging uncomfortably by his sides, waiting for her to make the next move.

"Are you all right?" she asks, looking right at him, her features filled with worry.

He shrugs off the comment. "Yeah. Yeah, of course."

"Have the last few days been that great?"

"Huh?"

"Lauren told me about what happened at her house the other day," Courtney explains. "How you got all upset and told there was something she needed to know and then just took off without saying anything."

"Oh, that. It was nothing," he says, knowing as he speaks that he is doing an awful job of throwing her off the trail.

"It doesn't sound like it was 'nothing,' Alex."

"Don't worry about it."

"I can't *not* worry! There was obviously something that you wanted to tell Lauren, but for

some reason or another you didn't think you could. That's why I'm here -- if there's something you want to talk about, that you need to talk about, you can tell me. I want to listen."

He doesn't know what to say.

"Alex, we've all come to really care about you in the last year and a half -- me, Lauren, and Jason. And if something's wrong, we want to be able to help you out."

He grapples with temptation for a painful moment before shaking his head.

"No," he says. "There's no need for this. I've made it this far on my own and I can make it the rest of the way. There isn't any reason to make things even more complicated."

She shoots him a quizzical look. "What does that mean?"

MORIANI HOME

Claire takes the final step, pulling herself up onto the porch of the Morianis' expansive home. She pauses -- stalling, perhaps, she realizes -- and gazes around her. *Why am I here?* she wonders. *After all they've done to me, I should just stay as far away as I can get.*

Her mind is quick to pick up the other side of the argument as well. *That's exactly why you need to be here. To make them pay. And to stop them from hurting other people, like Andy's mother.*

She raises a tentative finger and pushes it into the doorbell. Her stomach clenches for a static moment -- in reality, just a split-second, though it feels far longer to her -- before the bell responds with a chime. As she waits, she recalls Ryan's reaction to her at Windmills the other day ...

"Yes, I do. Leave me alone, do you understand? I don't want to be around you now!"

She'll break him. She has to. What a change: Suddenly she is the one trying to draw him in. She is reflecting upon this odd role-reversal when the door opens.

She isn't ready for it, and it gives her a start. She nearly jumps backward when she sees Nick in the open doorway, just a few feet in front of her.

"Claire," he says, already wearing that smirk that has forever irritated her. "What can I do for you?"

"I need to see Ryan," she answers coldly.

Nick simply raises his eyebrows before informing her, "He isn't here. He may be back soon, though. Would you care to wait?"

His smugness gives her an extra push, and she finds herself saying, "With you? Never."

"My, I'm flattered." He looks her up and down, as if doing so will answer his questions. It also makes her feel that she is on display, that he is somehow in control, something of which Nick is well aware and takes full advantage. He takes his time in examining her.

"It's amazing how you've grown," he muses. "I remember when you were just a little girl, and a teenager. You were beautiful even back then, of course, but now ... Your father must have been proud of the woman you became."

"Don't you dare start with my father."

"He was a good friend of mine," Nick says, folding his hands together in front of himself. "Why shouldn't I have the right to discuss him, especially with his daughter?"

"He was a terrible man! I'm sure you've heard about everything that he did to me!"

"He did it out of love, Claire." As cheesy as the words could sound, they don't, because of the superiority Nick is injecting into them. He makes it sound as though he is explaining the most obvious thing in the world to a completely ignorant Claire. "He wanted what was best for you. Maybe things didn't turn out the way he'd hoped, and maybe he didn't make the best decisions in trying to get there, but he certainly had your happiness in mind."

"If you honestly believe all that, you're sicker than I thought."

"Testy, testy," he says, shaking his head while wearing that obnoxious grin. "You know, after everything that you put your own father through for this husband of yours, you'd think that you would understand better than anyone that love can make it worth doing stupid things."

She narrows her eyes in a blend of anger and confusion. "What is that supposed to mean?"

Nick chuckles lightly. "There's no need to put on a show, Claire. I know what you're *really* doing here."

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

"You. Of course, you," Sarah says, although the statement is more difficult to make than she thought it might be.

Brent is quiet. He realizes that perhaps he was looking for some sort of easy out, something overt to throw in Sarah's face. Without that, he is not sure how to respond.

Sarah reads his silence as suggestive of doubt. "That's what I want more than anything," she says, placing a hand on the back of his neck. "I just want you and me and Victoria to be one happy family--"

He jerks away from her suddenly and turns to her with hurt eyes. They might be described as cold, except that the warmth of his still-fresh pain is burning visibly inside them.

"You threw that chance away when you slept with Matt and then lied about it!" he hisses.

Sarah cannot break their eye contact, fearing that if she does, she will never be able to regain it, that she will never again be able to stare into Brent's eyes or have him like this, one-on-one.

But something in the corner of her eye catches her attention. Brent sees her gaze wandering and looks over his shoulder. He sees Matt standing by the entrance to the waiting room, looking quite deliberately away from them.

"I'll be back in a little while," Brent says abruptly. He stalks off before Sarah can even make an attempt to stop him.

Now she makes eye contact with Matt. They approach one another tentatively.

"Any word yet?" Matt asks.

"No." As important as this information is, it is currently serving a secondary role: It is standing in the place of having to acknowledge anything deeper.

"Is ... is everything okay? With Brent?" Matt asks. He quickly realizes how stupid that sounds and he adds, "I mean, right now, with me being here. He didn't seem too thrilled."

"He has every reason not to be," she says.

"Maybe I should go. You two can get the news yourselves and then tell me later. Maybe it'd be easier that way."

"No. No, Matt, you need to be here."

He nods lightly.

"Brent can deal with it," Sarah adds without any real prompting. "Don't worry about it."

"Okay." Matt surveys her for a moment, taking in her downcast eyes, drooping shoulders, and hands wedged into her pockets. "Are you all right?"

"Should I be? Think about why I'm here."

"Good point. What'd he say to you just now?"

"What?"

"What'd Brent say to you? Whatever it was, it's obviously bothering you."

"Oh, it was -- it was nothing," she says unconvincingly. Matt flashes her a look and she breaks. "He said that I ... threw away whatever chance there was of me, him, and Victoria getting to be a happy family."

"Do you think he meant it?"

"I don't know. He's still trying to deal with this whole thing, I guess. And I have to try to understand that." She pushes several stray strands of dark blond hair out of her face. "But I'm really worried."

"About what?" Matt knows what, but he doesn't want to be the one to say it.

"That I may be losing him for good," she says. "That everything is ruined." She walks a few steps past Matt, not really for any purpose other than to delay speaking.

"It has to be him," she finally says.

"What?"

"He has to be the father. Otherwise there's no way he won't leave me for good."

The pronouncement twists like a knife in Matt's heart. He can feel his face grow several shades lighter as he tries not to let his expression change.

MARSHALL APARTMENT

"Nothing," Alex answers, shaking his head. "It doesn't mean anything. Just that things are probably a lot crazier for you guys with me around."

"You forget about the whole Shannon thing," Courtney reminds him.

"True, true ... So maybe I don't quite live up to that standard of trouble. But I'm sure you would've had some more peace if I hadn't come around."

"*What* are you talking about? Alex, you haven't caused any trouble, believe me! We love having you here."

He doesn't look at her. He swallows hard and then shrugs.

"Am I picking up on some self-esteem issues here?" she asks, putting an arm around his back.

"Yeah, maybe," he says with another shrug.

"Do you wanna talk about it?"

He wraps his arms around her and pulls her closer. "I guess. Kinda."

"Come on." She leads him over to the pale blue sofa and sits, bringing him down with her. She lays her head on his shoulder. "What's going on?"

"I don't know. The usual, I guess."

"The usual?"

"Yeah. I always wind up doubting if people actually like me, I guess. I'm just not used to having good friends. I never did in high school and in college ... it was hard."

She looks up at him sideways. "Why?"

"I ..." He draws a deep breath, trying to calm himself as much as possible. It doesn't particularly work. "I've just never felt like I belonged. I don't know ... I feel like I'm

always pretending with people, like if they got to know me they wouldn't like me. And the few times I've thought I was becoming close friends with people, it always turned out badly." As odd as it feels to say aloud everything that he has worked over in his mind so many times, it feels strangely nice and the words seem to flow.

"How did it turn out badly?"

"There weren't, like, any disasters or anything," he says. "Just that I've never really had friends I was totally comfortable around. That's why I haven't really had any lasting friendships, I think. When I start being myself more and I see more of their real personalities, I just find out it's not a good match."

"You've got a good match with me, Alex. I promise." She strokes his soft, dark hair in silence for a moment. "Whatever's going on -- if there is anything going on, or if you ever just wanna talk -- I'm here for you. I wanna make sure you know that."

"I do," he says softly, staring off at the ceiling.

"Good. And Jason and Lauren, too. That's why I think it might be foolish to just end this thing with Lauren -- you guys could be missing out on a really good thing just because you're having trouble getting through the initial stages."

"Maybe."

"Just don't write off a relationship with Lauren, not yet. It could be good for you."

"Yeah," Alex says, his voice almost a whisper.

MORIANI HOME

Fear strikes Claire straight through the heart. She draws in a sharp breath but covers it as much as she can, shaping her face into a scowl. "What are you talking about?" she asks defiantly, as if she has absolutely no idea what Nick might be getting at.

"It's Ryan," Nick answers after a pause just long enough to make her heart pound a little harder. "Obviously you can't get yourself to stop thinking about him."

"Yeah, that's it," she sneers.

"Don't play sarcastic with me, Claire. And it's not doing any good, anyhow -- if you weren't drawn to Ryan in some way, you wouldn't allow him to be any part of your life at all."

The smirk returns. "I can read you, Claire. There isn't any need to hide your feelings in front of me."

"Shut up!" she snaps. "The idea that I would think of Ryan that way -- that I would be drawn to him at all -- is absolutely disgusting! You have got--"

"--some nerve, yes, I know. Look, Claire, I have more important things to worry about than your dysfunctional feelings for my son, all right? So if you'll excuse me ..." He begins to slide the door closed.

"I swear, the two of you are going to get what's coming to you!" she warns through gritted teeth. "You're not going to have the chance to hurt anyone else!"

"Fine, Claire," Nick says with a dismissive roll of the eyes. He shuts the door almost fully and then stops, inserting his head into the opening. "And about Ryan: don't be surprised if there's something out there to change your mind about him." He shuts the door before she can respond.

She stomps a foot angrily on the porch, continuing to stare at the closed door. With a huff, she turns and stalks back to the car.

Inside, Nick steps back from the peephole in the front door. "Claire, Claire, Claire ..." he says. "I don't know what you think you're doing ... but you'd better stop before you wreck that happy little life you seem to treasure so much."

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"I'm sorry," Sarah says, and Matt becomes aware that his efforts to cover up his disappointment were unsuccessful.

"I just meant ... God, I'm sorry I dragged you into this," she says. She reaches a hand up to his cheek, but before it rests on his skin, she realizes how inappropriate this might be and she pulls back.

"I let you drag me." He shakes his head. "I could've stopped you and I didn't."

"And I could've thought harder about using you to get back at Brent."

The reality that this is exactly what she did hangs awkwardly between them and they lapse into silence.

"I'm sorry," she repeats, turning her head to the side so that her gaze is not focused upon him. "I just wish that none of this had to happen. I wish that you and I could go back to being friends like we were before -- when I could share things with you and we could talk and there wasn't all this other stuff ... before I hurt you."

Matt is quiet. When she brings her eyes back to his, he momentarily moves his away. But they come back and meet hers again.

"Do you think we could go back to that?" she asks. "I mean, however this test turns out, things will be a little different, but I want to go back to the friendship we had before."

"Yeah ..."

"Could you forgive me for everything? For dragging you along like I did and for lying all that time?" She allows only a brief pause before adding, "I know it's a lot to just forgive, but I want you to know that I realize how horrible I was and how badly I hurt you and -- could we try to go back to that friendship?"

Matt takes a deep breath. "I don't know. I don't know if it can be like that again--"

"Mrs. Taylor?"

Both Sarah and Matt turn to find the doctor beside them.

"Oh, uh, yeah," Sarah says, pulling herself together. "Hi, Doctor."

"Hi," the doctor says. He appears to Matt to be in his late forties or early fifties, with salt-and-pepper hair and a matching beard framing a chubby face. "I have the results of your daughter's paternity test."

"I, um, I need to find my husband," Sarah says, giving a quick look over one shoulder.

Brent appears at her other side. "I'm here."

Sarah finds that she cannot even look at either man. She keeps herself focused on the doctor.

"Are you all ready?" he asks.

The three of them nod.

"All right," the doctor says. "The father of your baby is ..."

END OF EPISODE #181

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