

## "Footprints"

### Episode #188

#### <An Hour After #187>

#### [Previously ...](#)

*\*After Claire explained why she must follow Nick to his meeting at the pier, Tim agreed to accompany her.*

*\*Andy headed off to meet Claire and Tim, promising Katherine he would return with evidence to convince her not to marry Nick.*

*\*Nick received a mysterious phone call that seemed related to Andy's mission.*

*\*Sarah asked Brent to give her another chance by attending the New Year's Eve party with her.*

*\*Lauren told Courtney that, although she is willing to be simply friends with Alex, she still wishes her relationship with him could have worked out.*

## PIER 20

The moon's glow fills the surface of King's Bay, slinking over the water like melting butter. It mingles with more intrusive reflections, those of the lights from the buildings that surround the bay. The sheer amount of lights make it quite clear that the city is alive and hopping for New Year's Eve.

Surprisingly little of this light is spilling over onto the pier. It sits shrouded in the night's darkness, shadows flung carelessly here and there. And even though the rest of King's Bay seems to be very much alive, the pier feels somehow removed from all that.

Tim cannot help being careful about how heavily he puts his feet down, although he is well aware that caution is probably in his best interests. He does not even realize how tightly he is holding his breath until he is able to stop creeping and take cover beside a wall and behind a number of barrels.

He turns back to Andy. "Are you starting to get nervous?" he asks, his voice hushed.

"I have been since I left to meet you," Andy answers. "This feels like something out of a movie, doesn't it?"

"Yeah ... although I've been in some pretty bizarre situations, I must say. Sometimes I think my whole life feels like a movie."

"I don't think that's a good thing."

"Probably not."

The men duck behind the barrels, crouching more than enough to be sure that they cannot be seen from the pier itself. Tim immediately notes how uncomfortable the position is, and he cannot help but wonder how he can hold such a pose for however long this is going to take.

He doesn't have much time to worry about it. He and Andy both watch as two men, dressed in what appear to be fine suits, stroll out onto the pier. Neither is doing anything particularly threatening, yet they somehow manage to appear quite menacing.

The men stand together for a few seconds before one begins pacing. Each of them casts a few casual glances around and then at his watch. This seems to Tim to go on forever, though he is too wary of being discovered to risk even a look at his watch.

Finally the one who is pacing stops beside the other. "Where is this guy?" he wonders.

"I hope he's not tryin' to stand us up," says the other. "'Cuz that would not be the smartest move."

The first man shakes his head disapprovingly. "I hope -- for his sake -- he decides to show up," he says after a long pause.

Andy shoots Tim a confused look. Tim replies with a mini-shrug, too nervous to express fully all the questions that are darting around in his head right now.

## **MORIANI HOME**

Claire slips out the driver's side door of her car, her gaze focused firmly on the house several hundred feet away. She parked out here so she could watch the house without being spotted -- so she could follow Nick in case there were a last-minute change of plans.

*Tim didn't want me to go to the pier, she thinks. He wanted to keep me as far away from this whole thing as possible -- as far as I'd let him keep me, that is. She sighs and looks down the road again. There haven't been any cars going in or out of the Morianis' driveway in the half-hour that she has been sitting here. Nothing. This entire little assignment is nothing.*

She walks the distance to the foot of the driveway and stops. There are no vehicles in the driveway, but that doesn't necessarily mean anything. She wanders up the driveway, closer to the window where she overheard Nick making his plans for tonight.

*Nick's not here, she tells herself. He's off at the pier like I knew he'd be. And I'm here doing nothing when I should be--*

The annoyed thought meets a quick end. She feels herself being grabbed from behind. A hand clamps over her mouth, stifling the cries that almost immediately leap from her chest. She squirms and tries to wriggle free, not giving up on the muffled shouts. But her efforts are only enough to stall what is happening, not save her from it.

As if in slow-motion -- and yet far too quickly for her to do anything about -- her entire body is dragged backward, her heels digging into the gravel driveway and yet doing her no good at all. Now she is being pulled not only backward, but downward. Down wooden steps. She refuses to let her feet step down them in the intended rhythm, so they strike the steps awkwardly, sending surges of pain through her legs. The pain only intensifies her cries, and she continues fighting even when she feels the cold steel of handcuffs snapping around her wrists.

The hand, apparently needed elsewhere, leaves her mouth. "Let me go!" she screams, kicking a foot. A hand, either the one that was previously on her mouth or another one, grabs her ankle. Soon handcuffs are binding her ankles together as well.

"What the hell are you--" But she stops. The whole thing is suddenly too much.

"Comfortable?" Ryan asks, looking up at her as he tightens the cuffs around her ankles.

## **KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL**

"How's it hangin', kids?" Courtney, wearing a broad grin, sweeps up beside Alex and Lauren through the party's crowd.

"Uh, great," Alex replies with a laugh. He looks around the room, densely populated with guests. "Jason's parents always manage to throw such an awesome party."

"I know. I've been coming to this thing for years and years, and it's always been such a perfect way to spend New Year's Eve," Courtney says. "Mmm ... except for that one time when Shannon showed up with the sole intention of making me miserable, but aside from that -- yep, awesome party."

"You're awfully chipper tonight," Lauren says.

"When am I *not* chipper?"

"Excellent point." Lauren takes a sip from the cup she has been holding for some time

now. "Where's Jason?"

"Talking to his sister, I think."

In the background, the song that is playing comes to an end, and N Sync's "Bye Bye Bye" begins. Courtney grabs both Lauren and Alex by the hands.

"C'mon," she says, pulling them towards the dance floor, "we've got to dance to this!"

Reluctantly, they follow her to an empty space on the floor and begin dancing. Courtney lip-synchs the lyrics as she dances.

Lauren can't help but be reminded of a similar instance ... a time when she talked Alex into performing karaoke to this same song for her. With a heavy heart, she continues dancing, trying not to let her drooping spirits show in her expression. She steals a glance at Alex, who is moving to the song, albeit a little uncomfortably.

She is still watching him when Courtney speaks up again, and his discomfort increases quite visibly.

"Aren't you two glad you decided to come together?" Courtney asks.

Lauren waits a moment for Alex to say something, but the space is filled only by the song, so she replies, "We're just here as friends, Court. You know that."

"I know, I know."

They continue dancing in silence, though their expressions speak volumes. Courtney studies both of her friends. Alex casts his eyes at both her and at Lauren; she can see the flickers of nervousness clearly. And Lauren stares at Alex while he is looking away, drinking him in, and then looks to Courtney helplessly.

## **KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL**

Meanwhile, across the room, Jason is watching his girlfriend dance. The urge to join her is strong, but he knows that there is a more serious matter at hand.

"I know it's stupid," Molly is saying, "but I guess I was hoping, in this kind of dreamy way, that Brent would have come to the party with me."

"It's not stupid, Molly," Jason says. "When you've got feelings like that for someone, of

course you're gonna wish that you could be at something like this with them, especially if it's New Year's Eve."

"Yeah ..." Molly reaches up to brush back her hair, an instinctive move to fill the space in which her thoughts overwhelm her ability to speak, but she realizes that she cannot move her hair, which is swept up tonight. "But I mean, I know it's not possible. We just don't have that kind of relationship. And to push the boundaries by spending tonight together wouldn't have been a good idea." She sighs. "It's just hard trying to block out all these ideas."

"I can imagine."

"Especially because it's been going on for so long ... It's like it's some kind of pattern or routine now. I can't *not* think about Brent, or want him to be here with me."

"Do you think maybe it's more than genuine feelings?" Jason asks, darting his eyes around to be sure that their conversation is private. "That you've gotten so used to putting Brent in that position in your mind that it just happens automatically?"

"That's the worst part," Molly says, shaking her head. "If it were just part of some bizarre pattern I'd gotten into, it wouldn't be so real -- maybe it wouldn't be so painful. But I keep trying to discredit these feelings in my mind, and ... all I can come up with is that they *are* real."

Jason sighs heavily. "I don't know what to tell you, Mol. I know you realize that this isn't ever gonna go anywhere -- it can't."

"I do realize that. As much as I don't want to. But what's even worse is that I feel like it taints our friendship, like by having these feelings, I make the friendship less meaningful. And I hate that feeling." She stares off across the room, focusing on nothing in particular.

Catching the wistful glaze that has fallen over her eyes, Jason puts an arm around her shoulders. "I know how rough this is on you. But I want you to know how much I respect you for handling it the way you are. It must be hard seeing Sarah put him through all of this ... and I know you've been tempted to just let loose on her. But you're doing the right thing by trying to stay out of it."

She leans her head on his shoulder. "And I still wonder if I'm too involved ..."

Jason is in the midst of formulating a response when he catches sight of the doorway. He considers turning Molly the other way, but he knows that her eyes are also scanning the room and he can feel her body tense against his when she sees what he has seen.

They watch in silence as Sarah and Brent enter the party arm-in-arm.

## MORIANI HOME

"What do you think you're doing?" Claire shouts. "Let me go!"

Ryan shakes his head and shoots her a sly grin. "Not yet, my dear. You're going to have to wait here a little while."

She jerks her wrists as far apart as the cuffs will allow. "Damn you! Let me out!"

"No." Ryan hoists himself back up the steps to the open entrance. "I know what you were trying to do tonight."

Her throat instantly dries up. She swallows, the muscle movements suddenly rough and uncomfortable.

"I saw you lurking around yesterday," he explains. "It wasn't until earlier today that I figured out you must have overheard my father planning that meeting. So I made sure he skipped it."

Claire doesn't say anything. Ryan studies her for a long moment.

"You lose," he finally says, pulling himself halfway up through the exit.

"Damn you!" she cries again, tugging at the cuffs and trying to kick her feet. "You can't do this to me!" She tries hopping closer to where Ryan is, but she makes it only a few steps before losing her balance.

She tumbles over and reaches for the stairs to catch herself. Her hand instead snags Ryan's leg and he is pulled downward as well. As he falls, his hand snags the open door.

He and Claire fall to the floor in a heap. He quickly moves off of her, aware even at this moment of the discomfort of the situation.

"Let me out of here!" Claire shouts again, struggling to her feet.

"Not yet," he says. He pulls himself up, adding, "You don't need to be causing any trouble tonight."

She again lunges for the exit, but this time she catches herself on the stairs.

Ryan's heart begins beating harder and faster. He scrambles back up the stairs and pushes on the now-closed door. "Dammit!"

"What?" Claire can already feel the chill spreading through her body.

"We're locked in."

## PIER 20

The minutes that have passed have taken their toll on Tim's knees, and he is actively battling the urge to fidget. He tries to adjust his stance without too much actual motion, without much success.

"Where is this guy?" one of the men out on the pier wonders. The other shrugs, his expression filled with outrage. They both resume the pacing they began some time ago, glancing around for some sight of Nick.

Andy rotates his wrist so he can sneak a look at his watch. His eyes require a moment to see the position of the hands through the darkness. Finally he is able to read the time.

"I need to get out of here," he whispers to Tim. "I have to go try and stop the wedding." His voice is less a whisper than simply nothing, but the movements of his lips are enough to tell Tim what he is saying.

Tim nods, not wishing to risk any more words than necessary. He gestures for Andy to take off and then watches as he looks around for some way out. Quickly, Andy begins crawling away from Tim in the direction opposite the pier. It becomes clear to Tim that Andy has been studying an escape route for some time. Andy crawls through the darkness, creeping with the slowness of dripping molasses but not making a single sound. Finally he disappears around a corner and out of sight. Tim can feel his body relax, though he is not exactly aware when it tensed up so tightly.

"I'm gonna call him," one of the men out on the pier announces. He pulls his cellular phone from his jacket. Tim watches intently as the man moves to turn the phone on.

"You've gotta be kiddin' me ..." the man mutters.

"What?" his partner asks.

"The damn thing's dead." He tries once more to turn the phone on, without success, and then stuffs it back into his jacket. "For all we know Moriani's been tryin' to get us the

whole time we've been here."

"Still doesn't mean he's allowed to just not show up!"

"No, but at least we coulda not wasted all this time. C'mon, let's go." The men begin to walk off. As they do so, Tim relaxes even more. He finally allows himself to shift out of the uncomfortable pose he has been holding for so long -- and, in the process, strikes one of the barrels that is shielding him with his arm. It loses its hold on the barrel beneath it and crashes to the ground.

Tim tries to duck even lower, but he knows it is too late. Even though he cannot bring himself to look up, he can hear the men approaching him.

One of their hands grabs his collar. "What do you think you're doin'?" the man asks gruffly.

## STATE ROUTE 207

Andy's car plows through the darkness, mowing down each inch and each foot of night air as he surges forward. He looks at the clock on the dashboard and presses the accelerator a little bit harder.

*Something strange is going on, he thinks. Nick must have known we were going to be at the pier -- that must be why he didn't show. And with us distracted ... he's free to marry my mother.*

The numbers on the digital clock advance, wiping away another minute. Andy's heartbeat feels as though it is quickening with every passing second.

"I can't let Mother marry him," he says, as if hearing the words aloud will somehow make the resolution easier to achieve.

He guns the gas even harder and the car roars, seeming to match the accelerating pool of thoughts in his head. *How did everything become so horrible?* he wonders. *It wasn't that long ago that Mother and I were getting along so well -- before Danielle and Nick came along.*

The thought of Danielle, of his mother's haughty attitude and her apparent belief that she could control Andy's life, unconsciously makes him ease off the accelerator a bit. But then he thinks of his mother in the hospital, unconscious -- all because of Nick, probably. The pressure hits the gas again.

"I need to stop her from doing this," he mutters. "I need to--"

He goes silent as he sees the taillights in front of him, hurrying up to meet his face, it seems. He slams on the brakes, but even in that instant, he knows it is too late.

His body seems to go numb as the car's wild movements take over.

## **END OF EPISODE #188**

*What did you think of this episode? Let us know at the Message Forum!*

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