

"Footprints" Episode #237

[Previously ...](#)

**Lauren visited Alex looking to right the situation between them, but could only bring herself to offer him the possibility of forgiveness. He was troubled by the thought that he had ruined his friendships forever.*

**Sarah had a run-in with Diane Bishop and the two women were surprised by how well they related and how much they had in common.*

**Molly and Brent confessed their love and shared a kiss, but parted uncertainly.*

KING'S BAY MALL

*Sleighbells ring
Are ya listenin'?
In the lane,
Snow is glistenin' ...*

Aretha Franklin's soulful voice dances in the air, adding that extra little touch of holiday magic to the department store. Sarah hums along unconsciously as she sorts through the racks. She is trying -- so far in vain -- to find that shirt she noticed last week and bookmarked in her mind. She knew the instant she saw it that it would look perfect on Matt, and now she's kicking herself mentally for not picking it up then and there.

Of course, after the other night, she knows that she needs to give him something more significant than just a shirt. But she has no idea where she might even begin searching for a more meaningful gift.

With an annoyed huff she steps back from the rack. It's not here, same as it wasn't here the last three times she sorted through this set of shirts.

"Hey!" calls a voice from only a few feet away. Sarah is surprised at the ease with which she recognizes it.

"Hi," she says to Diane as she turns around.

"I thought I saw you in there," Diane says as she pulls a stroller into view. "I've got someone with me you might wanna see."

Sarah brightens at the sight of Samantha and kneels down to greet her niece. "Hey there, cutie! Having fun Christmas shopping?"

"We're all done with that," Diane says, as though the idea that she wouldn't be is absurd.

"We just ventured out for the sales." She shakes the two bags in her hands.

"You're shopping for yourself?"

"Yeah, why not? Nothing to say I can't give myself a couple gifts, too, you know?"

"I guess not," Sarah chuckles. She gives the same rack of shirts another halfhearted perusal. "I'm still trying to get all my gifts taken care of."

"What a pain in the ass. There's an upside to not having that many people to shop for, I'll tell you that."

"Yeah, I bet." Sarah is about to continue the same line of conversation when another thought hits her out of the blue. "Hey, what are you still doing here, anyway? I thought you'd have gone back to L.A. for the holidays."

Diane shrugs. "Not a hell of a lot left for me out there, to be honest."

"Aren't you working out there?"

"Not anymore." Diane shakes her head, and loose strands of her short black hair jump accordingly. "I've got my apartment out there 'til the end of this month, but I don't think I'm gonna go back."

Now Sarah's interest is piqued, thanks to both concern for Claire and Samantha and sheer curiosity. "So are you planning on staying in King's Bay now? What happened in L. A.?"

BRENT TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

"I thought I was coming over to wish you a merry Christmas, but apparently I had the season wrong," Molly cracks as she removes her coat.

Brent doesn't look too concerned. "There's not much of a point in decorating, is there? I'm not even going to be here for Christmas."

"Still ... don't you want some of that Christmas feeling?"

"If you're talking Bing Crosby blaring on the stereo and pine needles all over the place, I'll pass, thank you very much."

Molly shakes her head with amused disapproval. "You're really getting into this bachelor thing, I see."

"Nah," he says. "It's just been an insane year. I don't think a low-key Christmas will be a bad thing."

"Then going home and spending it with your family is probably what you need," Molly agrees. "I only hope things stay tame around here, too."

"You mean with Sarah?"

"Yeah. I haven't even seen her since the other night. I'm sort of waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"If she has her way, it'll be two shoes dropping, and they'll fall right on our heads," he adds wryly.

Molly is quiet for a moment, and when she speaks again, her voice is much lighter. "I can't say I blame her entirely."

"Me neither. Although tossing you in the bay may have been crossing the line a little--"

"Well, yeah. But the fact that she got out of line doesn't make me feel any better about what's happened. And it doesn't make those things she said any less right. We hurt her really badly, Brent."

"I know," he answers immediately. "I wish none of this ever had to happen. I knew a long time ago that Sarah and I shouldn't have gotten married ... I just wish we'd been able to acknowledge that before there was so much damage done."

All Molly can muster in response is a sad "Yeah."

An uncomfortable silence, heavy with words left unspoken, blankets them. Then, abruptly, they both look up and begin talking.

"Look, about the other night," Brent says when Molly cuts herself off, "I've been thinking, and ... I just want you to know that I'm not sorry it happened."

"You mean ... ?"

"Yeah, the part with us. I meant what I said, Mol."

"I meant what I said, too."

"Good," he says, adding hastily, "But that doesn't get us too far, does it?"

"No, I guess not."

"We can't just leave it hanging," he says with obvious difficulty. "So ... where do we stand? Where do we go from here?"

MARSHALL APARTMENT

"This is kind of fun, don't you think?" Sally asks with a broad smile as she drapes another strand of tinsel on the tree with a flourish.

"Guess so, yeah," Stan shrugs. He looks at the decoration in his hand -- a ceramic scene of a snow-covered cottage with two children standing outside it -- in confusion.

Sally notices his bewilderment. "That can go on the windowsill."

Stan obliges, though none too excitedly.

She pauses mid-move, with another piece of tinsel in her hands ready to be hung. "You're not much for getting into the Christmas spirit, huh?"

"I dunno," he says. "Seems a little pointless, doesn't it?"

"No! It's fun!"

He doesn't seem too convinced. But before Sally has the chance to try and sway him some more, the front door opens.

Alex freezes the moment he steps inside, clearly a bit taken aback by the scene in front of him. "Uh ... hi."

"Hi," Sally greets him vibrantly. "Wanna help us finish decorating?"

The young man's gaze darts about the room, already very outfitted for the season, as far as he can tell. He withholds a crack about the North Pole throwing up in the apartment.

"No, I'm fine. You guys finish up."

Sally shoots him a look that's meant to wonder if he is crazy. "You sure? We're having an

awful lot of fun."

"I'll pass." He makes his way to the kitchenette and pulls the refrigerator open.

Sally is right on his heels, and the moment he rises from the fridge with a can of Sprite, she is in his face. "What are you doing, trying to make Stan feel uncomfortable here?" she hisses.

"No, let him get as comfortable as he wants." Alex pops open the can and takes a sip. "So he's in on the Christmas decorating already, huh?"

"I asked him to spend the holiday with us. We've been getting pretty close, you know."

"Great. So what, are you two gonna, like, get married now?"

She shoots him a cold, hard stare. "What would be so bad about that?"

He simply rolls his eyes. "Oh, nothing. We could be one big, happy family, right? You know how bad I always wanted a daddy ... what a Christmas gift."

"Don't get bratty with me!" Sally snaps, doing what she can to keep her voice down.

"I wasn't aware that I was," Alex says dismissively, pushing past her. He disappears into his bedroom and emerges a moment later. "I'm going out. I'll see you later."

"Fine," Sally says without much feeling as he blows out of the apartment.

KING'S BAY MALL

"I'm not working for that company anymore, that's all," Diane says casually.

"Ah." Sarah hesitates, unsure whether she should pursue this any further, but she can tell that there is something Diane is withholding. "Are you sure that's all? Is everything okay?"

"Everything's fine." The response is clipped and snappish, and it gives Sarah pause.

"So," she says, trying to move gracefully away from whatever it was that appeared to set Diane off, "are you settling back here?"

"Maybe. Now that I've got Samantha, who knows? I figure I might as well stick around

until this custody thing is resolved for real, and that could be a couple months. Plus I've got a guy I'm sorta seeing ..." Diane spots the opening for a shift in the conversation and leaps on it. "Hey, how'd it go the other night with your husband?"

The change in Sarah's mood is very visible. "Oh, just wonderfully. He tried to force divorce papers on me."

"Did you sign 'em?"

"No! He's not getting off the hook that easily. And then, to top it all off, my sister showed up. I completely blew up at both of them."

Diane's lips twist into a smirk. She is clearly relishing the story. "Good for you."

"Not only that," Sarah says, encouraged by Diane's reaction, "but I got so fed up with Molly that I shoved her into the bay."

"Whoa!" Diane's eyes grow a little wider.

"She deserved it."

"Well, if she's moving in on your husband, then maybe she did. I remember the way she jerked Brian around for months ..." Suddenly Diane gets a little quieter.

"Yeah, causing people grief seems to be at the top of her agenda these days--" Though she would gladly continue, the ringing of her cell phone interrupts her.

"Hello?" she answers. She listens to the voice on the other end and the vengeful delight begins to fade from her smile. "Yeah, sure. That sounds ... really nice. What time? ... All right, yeah. I'll see you then, if I don't talk to you before."

She hangs up the phone, looking quite satisfied.

"What was that?" Diane asks, her interest captured once again.

"Matt," she says, then adds hastily, "Victoria's father. He wanted to know if I'd like to spend Christmas at his place."

"You said yes, I presume."

"Yeah, of course."

"So ... Is there something going on with the two of you now?"

"Nah." Sarah shakes her head quickly but then pauses. "I don't know. I mean, we're bonded because of our daughter. It'll be good for her to spend Christmas with both of us."

"Mm-hmm," Diane nods knowingly.

BRENT TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

"Honestly ..." Molly draws in a deep breath and then releases it just as noisily. "I don't know. I care about you, Brent, I do, but--it seems really inappropriate to take this any further."

"You're right," he says, though it sounds more like a submission than an agreement.

She can see his displeasure. "That's not how I want it to go, but it has to be that way. Under different circumstances, who knows? But not now, not like this. We can't pretend that nothing has happened."

Brent forces his good judgment to override his emotions. "I know. It's going to be a long road to healing, for Sarah and for both of us. We don't need to complicate things even more."

He falls silent and lets his eyes sweep over her. A gentle hand reaches out to touch her cheek. "Mol, if things weren't like this ..."

She feels her own resolve wavering and finally has to brush the hand away. "I know. But they are ... It's too soon to make any decisions."

"Yeah."

There is a stretch of quiet just long enough for both of them to hear the strange sound. They share a look, each wondering if the other heard it.

"What was that?" Molly asks finally.

"I don't know," Brent says, but then he raises a palm. "Hang on."

Sure enough, it is coming from outside. Brent slides over to the door and listens as the noise continues. Scratching, it sounds like.

He eases the door open and for a second sees nothing. Then he looks down.

"Oh!" Molly cries out. "How cute!"

"He must be lost," Brent says as he kneels down and pets the puppy on the head.

"It's a pug," Molly says, joining Brent on the floor. "These are so adorable."

Brent shoots her an amused look. "Really, you think so? I would've taken you more for a poodle woman."

"Poodles?!"

"Yeah, you know -- pink bows attached, prancing around with that snotty attitude," he grins.

"No way. I think dogs like this are so much cuter." She spends a few seconds petting the puppy and then reaches under its neck. "Here, it's got a tag. Let's call the owners."

"All right, I'll get the phone." Brent rises and makes his way across the room.

Molly follows him, scooping the puppy into her arms as she stands. "You are too cute ..." she coos as the dog eagerly licks her face.

Brent cannot help but smile. "Hey, read me the number."

Molly obliges and then immediately goes back to playing with the puppy, paying only minimal attention to what Brent is saying on the phone. Before she realizes it, he is hanging up.

"The owner is coming over to get him," he says. "She only lives a few doors down."

"All right, good. I'd hate to see this little guy be lost." The puppy offers a few more playful licks. "Although I guess I wouldn't mind keeping him. He's absolutely adorable!"

Brent's smile broadens as he watches the scene. It only makes him have to work harder not to reach out and pull her to him.

"Yoohoo," Molly calls. "You off in outer space?"

He shakes his head. "No, not at all. I'm right here." His mind fills in the rest, the part he

knows he shouldn't speak: *And there's no place else I'd rather be.*

MARSHALL APARTMENT

Stan lets the tension in the room fizzle before he dares to speak. "What was wrong with him?" he asks finally.

"He's in one of his usual moods," Sally says. "I swear, I never knew such a moody kid."

"I know whatcha mean! My kid's exactly the same way." He stops to ponder. "Though I guess he's not much of a kid anymore."

"That is a strange situation you've got going on there."

"Tell me about it. And that father of his, he doesn't make it any easier. He's always tryin' to make it difficult for me to get to Ryan -- like he's such a damn good influence."

"Like you said, Ryan's not such a kid anymore. He can make his own decisions."

"I think it's too late for that, maybe. Like Moriani was able to poison his head so much when he was younger that he's just brainwashed now." Stan busies himself with another decoration, trying to find a place for it.

Sally takes it from him and immediately finds it a home on a shelf, among a village of other knick-knacks. "So what, he just won't talk to you or anything?"

"Yeah. And the weird part is, we used to talk pretty regularly before I came here. I don't think his old man really knew about it, but we'd talk on the phone and I'd stop in every now and then. Now it's like--nothin'. It's like he doesn't want any part of me all of a sudden."

Sally cozies up beside him and offers him a comforting pat on the back. "I wish I knew what to tell you, but I don't. I'm having about the same amount of luck getting through to Alex."

"You got any idea what's up with him?"

"No clue. He was mixed up with this girl a while ago and I think that went sour, so who knows? My ex's daughter has been floating around a lot lately, too--"

"I remember her. Cute girl, long, dark hair, right?"

Sally nods. "That's the one. He's probably caught up in some drama with the two of them. He's always been really moody, anyway. He comes out of it when he feels like it."

Awkwardness surfaces as they each realize they have no more insight on their respective situations. Stan saves the moment by turning the tone completely.

His fingers snake seductively down Sally's back. "So whattaya say we make a little holiday cheer of our own now?"

"Sounds good to me," she grins as they let their troubles of a moment ago float away.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE

"Dammit," Alex mutters as he scratches the pen through the last string of words he laid down in his notebook.

This isn't working. It hasn't been working for weeks, months, however long it's been since he began trying to get this thing in motion.

It should be gelling by now. It's not like this is an unfamiliar story. All the other times he's tried to start a novel in the past, he's struggled because he never had a good enough idea of what the story should be or why he was trying to tell it. But this story -- he knows this story, probably better than he even wants to.

Maybe that's the problem, he tells himself as he sets the pen down and drops his head into his hands. *If only I didn't have to write this thing ... If I could just let it go ... Then maybe things would get easier.*

But he can't let it go, he knows that now. He tried to bury it for years, but it was always there, lying dormant. And when he let himself back into that time again, it was as though the floodgates had been opened. He's been obsessing over all of it for weeks on end.

That was the last time he had hope -- really, truly had it. Jason's support has been an amazing sigh of relief, but at the same time, it's been a burden. Because he has had to accept that it's never going to be anything beyond friendship. Not that that's a bad thing, but it would be nice to have the possibility of something else ...

Like I did once. It was more than the possibility; it *was* something else. But before he realized what it was, what it could have become, it was gone. And right now, there's a hole inside of him whispering that it will never be like that again.

END OF EPISODE #237

What do you think has Alex so wrapped up in the past? What did you think of the scenes between Stan & Sally, Sarah & Diane, and Molly & Brent? Please join us in the Message Forum to share your thoughts!

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