

Nik E, NiCo, Sonny-Emily And Beyond

My Thoughts on the Present Pairings at General Hospital



For one of the few times in my long soap opera life, I don't understand where TPTB at General Hospital are going with these present pairings. I'm a reasonably intelligent person, but I simply cannot wrap my mind around what I'm supposed to take from GH in its present state. Good storytelling must be consistent. You have to give consistent pointers to the viewers via dialogue, action, or symbolism. Instead of consistency, it seems that TPTB are simply throwing crap at the walls in the hope that something sticks.

First, I have to admit my bias. I don't want Nikolas with Courtney. I don't like her. She's as common as dishwater and as useless as a three-legged dog. Beer and chips broads with the arms of a stevedore and the mind of a simpleton do not appeal to me. (No offense intended to Alicia Leigh Willis who I assume is quite lovely as well as smart.) The bottom line is that I prefer a slim, intelligent lady with class, a graceful princess who is caring, understanding, and enduring for my prince.

That being said, I lived through the Time of Craziess when Nikolas thought that he was in love with Gia. So, I could have tolerated his choice of Courtney as the Cassadine consort if TPTB had not destroyed my favorite character in the creation and re-writing of the Nikolas and Courtney pairing.

Second, as so many angry posters have already pointed out on the boards, Nikolas and Courtney did have an affaire. Whether their affaire evolved into another type of relationship such as love is, of course, subject to interpretation. But, it was at first an affaire. Lucky labeled their actions as such as did Elizabeth and several other people. Most telling was Nikolas's own reaction. For a man who was not engaged in an affair, he certainly looked guilty when Emily arrived at that beachfront hotel and, I'm assuming that all of that eye-rolling and searching the ceilings is evidence of his inner turmoil because of his guilt.

Another poster on another board who claims to know the "Real Nik" argues that he must love Courtney or he would not have said so. That is, I must consider that Nikolas is as good as his word. According to this poster, if he claims that he loves Courtney, then he does. For the One True Prince of old whom I knew and whom I loved, this was true. But, I don't know the man currently on my screen. He's a liar and a cheat, and I can't believe one word that comes out of his mouth. I want to believe him, but since he has broken faith with me (via his marital vows to Emily), I can't trust anything that he says.

As the One True Cassadine Fan, I am left with trying to adapt to Nikolas's newfound love. My problem is that I find Nikolas's treatment of Emily so abhorrent that I simply cannot get past it to embrace NiCo.

It seems to me that TPTB have totally underestimated my level of repugnance at how Nikolas treated Emily in the aftermath of her rape. They transformed Nikolas into a spoiled weakling of a man in constant heat who deserted his princess when she lost her sparkle. My Nikolas, the Nikolas with a heart, the good Cassadine and Stefan's hope for the future, would not do that. He would not engage in such heartless behavior.

Nikolas has always been steadfast in his devotion. Indeed, his watchword was that he "cared too much." According to Helena who detests this characteristic in her grandson, Nikolas's sensitivity was the result of Stefan's upbringing and Laura's genes. Yet, in the space of a few weeks, this Cassadine with a heart has cast aside his wife, his marriage, and his future to take up with a common trailer park trash of a woman without background, breeding, or heritage. With the exception of Edward the Eighth, I can't think of any other member of royalty who has behaved with such utter disregard for his responsibilities to his House, his lineage, his destiny. No, not even the coldly cruel Henry the Eighth or that great womanizer Henry the Second.

I cannot understand that TPTB could not anticipate the level my hostility for this storyline—which seems to be shared by other GH fans. Granted, posters on the Internet are merely a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of GH viewers, but if the outpouring of hatred on all the boards and across all the boards is any indication, most people have not embraced NiCo. Instead, they consider it to be the vilest piece of GH writing in a long, long time. We live in a much more free-and-easy moral age, but spouses are still expected to be faithful to each other. To break one's marriage vows for lust (without valid cause or justification) is still taboo, especially when the ink is not dry on the marriage certificate or when your wife is in the woes of the worse trauma of her life.

Recently, I have found GH writers to be more and more arrogant as to what they think that they can sell to the viewers. Winning an award like an Emmy can do that to you. That being said, Jill Farren Phelps is a seasoned executive producer. My mind boggles that she thought she could sell the following fact-pattern as a love story without destroying the Nikolas character in the process.

- Husband is jailed for a crime that he did not commit.
- Wife risks her personal safety to get him out of jail.
- Wife is successful but gets brutally raped in the process.
- Husband gets out of jail and wants to immediately resume their passionate sex life even though the wife is terrified by his touch since he looks exactly like her rapist.
- Husband is impatient, sulky, and demanding because his wife can't get over her rape fast enough for him. Plus, she no longer sparkles.

- Husband gives it the old school try but deserts his traumatized wife who obviously still loves him.
- Husband takes up with the local stripper who, though newly married and seeking respectability, can't keep her panties up.

That's right. Nikolas deserted his raped, traumatized wife for Courtney, the town tramp who, in turn, broke her vows to a good, decent man who did nothing but love her and give her exactly what she wanted. Okay, why am I supposed to like these people? Why am I supposed to condone their behavior? Why am I supposed to care? Frankly, I don't. TPTB can't sell it because I refuse to buy it.

That's right. I don't buy that Nikolas is in love with Courtney because regardless of what comes out of his mouth, he acts as if he is still in love with Emily.

I've always felt that TPTB insert subtle pointers as to where a storyline is going. Sometimes when I'm in the middle of their storytelling, I miss these pointers because it is often hard to tell the forest from the trees, especially when the storyline is rushed or is unanticipated. I accept that I have to retrace plot and plot points to understand the story. Thus, at Lucky and Elizabeth's wedding reception, when Emily (who clearly wanted to try again) went to Nikolas and asked him whether the fairytale was over, and Nikolas gulped some alcohol and said that it was, my heart sank. I saw that scene as the Nike swan song. My mind registered that this pairing was over and that TPTB intended to go with NiCo.

But, then the train wreck occurred, which turned Nikolas's rejection of Emily on its head. How am I supposed to understand Nikolas's behavior towards her during that drama? My eyes are bias, yes, but I saw more than friendship. I saw a man who grabbed the woman that he loved and who held on to her like he would never let go. It was classic Nike angst in a crisis. He certainly didn't hug Elizabeth or Robin or even Courtney in the way that he hugged Emily. Yet, just a few hours before, at the wedding reception, Nikolas professed his love for Courtney. In short, how am I as the viewer to reconcile his declaration of love for Courtney with these facts?

- Lucky's statement in the park that he thinks Nikolas and Emily will find their way back to each other.
- Alan's comments that Emily and Nikolas are still deeply in love.
- Jax's statement that he feels sorry for Courtney because Nikolas is still hung up on Emily.
- Alexis (who often serves as the Voice of Wisdom, the Oracle of Delphi on the GH canvas) coming down on the side of Nike.

- Lucky's statement to Nikolas that he may find out that he never stopped loving Emily.
- Alexis telling Nikolas to "follow his heart" with Nikolas then turning to see Emily.
- Nikolas's statement about ruining his perfect love and all the mistakes that he made, including meeting Courtney, an indirect reference to breaking his marriage vows.
- The entire wedding ceremony in which, symbolically, Nikolas and Emily reaffirmed their vows.

I can't reconcile what I am seeing on my screen. Because I can't, I am utterly frustrated and confused. For example, why rebroadcast Nike's wedding during the Thanksgiving holidays, if NiCo is the pairing of the future? Surely, an early NiCo scene (such as their first accidental meeting on the hospital rooftop) would be the best promotion of this pairing. Also, why continue to have Nikolas and Emily front and center on the GH site for ABC Daytime? Since they changed the graphic to include the newest Carly, shouldn't Nikolas be moved to the Jax's spot to reflect that Nikolas and Courtney are now a couple? These are questions for which TPTB are not sending clear answers. I would never enjoy NiCo, but I'm so busy trying to figure out the future storylines to put any energy into embracing it.

Nikolas's behavior towards Emily and hers towards him during the train wreck foretold that Courtney is nothing more than an obstacle, an impediment (a sexed-up Mary Bishop or a dumb-downed Zander Harris, if you will) that Nikolas and Emily have to overcome before they unite. Thus, based on that, I assumed that NiCo was not long-term despite Nikolas's avowal of love for his mistress to his brother. But with Nikolas's claim that he did not have an affair, but instead that he fell in love, are TPTB now telling me that Nike is no longer the story? Frankly, I just don't know.

Which brings me to my third point. Why would I care if Emily and Nikolas get back together? More bluntly, why would Emily want this man? Why would any self-respecting woman want him? For me, loving him is simply not enough. I don't think Emily should hate Nikolas for what he did to her or want payback, but his desertion of her under these circumstances is so contemptible, I don't see how she **could** love him. Thus, I have to wonder what Emily would get out of a Nike reunion.

- Nikolas has money. Emily has a fat trust fund; plus, Jason would give her every penny that she wanted. Emily doesn't need a rich man.
- Nikolas has a handsome face and the body of Apollo. Port Charles is overpopulated with good-looking men.

- Nikolas is good in bed. Well, I'm sure that, when Emily is ready, she could find a man to take care of that department for her.

I'm too old and too wise for a Nike reunion to be based on love alone. Love, at least Nikolas's form of love, is too fleeting, too painful. The TPTB must give me some other compelling reason, besides love, for Emily to want reunite with this man. He is so utterly worthless. There is no coming back from what he did. Trust me on this. What any woman wants in a marriage is not money, a handsome partner, or sex. It is her husband's strong arm to lean upon in her greatest hour of need. On this point, Nikolas is a failure. For how ever much he may be prepared to fight for his mistress, he lacked the staying power to fight for his wife.

More importantly, and this is what is driving me crazy, why didn't TPTB realize that the Nikolas character would be destroyed under these circumstances? A prince cannot desert his princess. A prince cannot desert his princess during her greatest distress. A prince cannot take up with the village strumpet when his wife is going through the greatest horror of her life resulting from her efforts to save him.

A competent executive producer (and/or her staff) should have seen, must have realized, that the destruction of the Nikolas character to pimp NiCo would mean, necessarily mean, that NiCo would ultimately fail. The Nikolas character is well established. He is Laura's son. He is the good Cassadine who turned his back on the evil machinations of his family. I saw him grow up from student-prince to a manly monarch in charge of his own House: ambitious, steadfast, loyal. I know Nikolas Cassadine. Nikolas Cassadine would not abandon his wife—under any circumstances.

Indeed, I would go one step further. The one constant of Nikolas's most recent romances is that he did not terminate them. Gia broke off their engagement. Lydia divorced him. Mary divorced him. Despite Nikolas's claim to be a modern prince, he is essentially old-fashioned. I mean, Regency old-fashioned. Under those rules, he knows that a gentleman never engages in any behavior that would expose a lady to reproach. A lady may break off an engagement; a gentleman cannot.

Nikolas "Mr. Manners" Cassadine was raised to be a gentleman. Remember when Nikolas and Emily staged that fake termination of their engagement, with Emily asserting that their engagement was at an end and Nikolas protesting. Helena said, "Now, Nikolas have the good manners to take Emily at her word and agree to end it." That is how Nikolas Cassadine was raised: to be a gentleman.

Which brings me to my next point. If TPTB want NiCo to work, then they need to completely remove Nikolas from any interaction with Emily. I will never believe that he loves Courtney while he continues to act as if he loves Emily. On this fourth point, I have to address Tyler Christopher's acting choices.

Christopher's Nikolas romantically interacts with Courtney in the same way that he romantically interacted (and interacts) with Emily. His body language, his mannerisms, his speech—his style—is the same as if Nikolas is actually interacting with Emily not Courtney, as if Courtney is a mere stand-in, a pale, cheap substitute for Emily.

Christopher is a damn fine actor. He is The Expert at playing Nikolas. He must know that he has not created a different lover for Courtney. Or if he did not know, then the executive producer, the writers, or directors should have noticed it and gave him suitable advice. If Christopher wants me to buy NiCo, then he must create a new set of romance traits for this new “love of his life” because his acting choices of prostituting Nike to sell NiCo are not working. Every time that he does that open-palmed stroke of Courtney's hair or calls her “baby” or tells her to “come here,” I think of Nike and my allegiance to Nike is reaffirmed. Henry the Eighth called all six of his wives “sweetheart,” but when Christopher's Nikolas interacts with Courtney as if she is Emily, Nike is cheapened and NiCo is not developed.

As Christopher is the consummate professional, what he shows me on the screen is not happenstance. He always makes acting choices in each scene to give me hints not only about Nikolas's inner thoughts and feelings but also about the storytelling. The fact that his acting choices for Nikolas's romance with Courtney parrot his acting choices for Nikolas's romance with Emily says what? He is not the fine actor that I think that he is. No! Never! It would not be difficult for him to recreate a different set of mannerisms (lover nuances, if you will) for NiCo. That is well within the range of his talent. But he hasn't done so. Why?

Is Christopher implicitly sending a message to me that this romance for his character is not real, that Courtney is an Emily substitute? That Nikolas is so devastated by the loss of his “perfect love” and his clear wrongdoing in that destruction that he will latch on to anything, any woman, to make that hurt go away, even if it means that he has to act the same way with Courtney lover-wise as he acted with Emily. Is that the message? Or is Christopher a one-trick pony, reusing (indeed, abusing) Nike to prop NiCo? Given his talent, I don't think so. Christopher has the acting chops to make his character's mannerisms fresh, to not recycle Nike, to give Nikolas's supposed love for Courtney a new and different element. But, he has not. I can only conclude that Christopher's choices (or lack thereof) means that his character's love for Courtney is without substance.

Christopher's Nikolas has made up this whole, big romance in his mind, a romance that isn't real, but serves as a justification for his contemptible treatment of his wife. And, to quote the language of the streets: That's messed up. A thought pattern such as “I'm with this woman, with whom I have nothing in common and barely know, and I act like she is the love of my life when she isn't, even to the point of patterning my mannerisms to match those with my real love in a pathetic attempt to convince myself that I love this woman so that I can justify my mistreatment of my wife, who is the real love of my life and who I shamefully abandoned” is messed up thinking. Even for a dark and brooding Cassadine.

If Christopher's Nikolas is no longer in love with Emily, then his character needs to act that way. Sonny and Sam have remained friends—in part as an acknowledgement of their tragedy of losing a child—but I no longer see a romantic tie between them. After two failed marriages, Ric and Elizabeth are close friends and confidants. But Ric loves Alexis; Elizabeth loves Lucky. None of these actors portray their characters as feeling anything but abiding friendship arising out of a failed love. So why is Christopher's Nikolas different? Is it because TPTB have told him that NiCo is merely an ugly detour to Nike? I believe so.

Of course, Nikolas must be in love with Courtney if NiCo is going to work at all. I have to give TPTB credit where credit is due. They don't easily let go of an idea, even in the face of insurmountable odds and the greatest of viewer distaste. In an effort to cramp NiCo down my throat, the explanation for Nikolas's behavior has gone from lust to love in the matter of weeks. NiCo started as just friends: Two people with troubled marriages whose respective spouses did not or could not understand their inner turmoil. Courtney was there for Nikolas, providing him with the understanding that supposedly Emily was not giving him. In turn, he propped up Courtney's flagging ego, giving her the attention that Jax was supposedly lavishing on Elizabeth. Then, suddenly, with one kiss, commiseration turned to lust. And, my adoration for The One True Prince (for whom I would once crawl through a wall of fire to worship) has vanished.

Frankly, I resent that TPTB sent out Christopher and Willis to pimp NiCo in the soap opera magazines as animalistic, as two good people who cannot control themselves, as two married people deeply in love with their respective spouses but who are such slaves to their lust that they must break their marriage vows to have sex. I resent that. Unlike his grandfather and father, Nikolas has always chosen love over lust. Kathleen Bell and Lydia Karenin flung sex at Nikolas and he turned them down. In the cottage, after the Halloween gala, Nikolas told Emily that he would rather wait before they consummated their love until Emily was sure. Is this the behavior of a man who cannot control his baser instincts? I think not.

As I said, TPTB now have to rewrite NiCo history so that it is more than a lust-driven, dry-hump on the docks. Under this rewrite, when Nikolas was sneaking around, lying, cheating, and whoring on his wife, he was actually falling in love with Courtney. In some respects, this rewrite parallels the cancer storyline in which Nikolas and Emily accidentally fell in love when Emily—with the best of intentions—tried to spare Zander pain. In this rewritten version of NiCo, Nikolas needed Courtney's help during a rough patch in his marriage and unintentionally fell in love with her. I don't buy that rewrite because if Courtney wanted to help Nikolas, she should have sent him home to his wife instead of aiding and abetting him in an affair. However, I understand that if TPTB are going to salvage the Nikolas character at all or restore any of his princely honor, he *has* to be in love with Courtney. He has to think that he loves her enough to fight for her. His lust for her, resulting in the suborning of her marriage vows, is not enough to redeem him because before the ink was dry on her marriage certificate, before her bridal presents were opened, before her honeymoon was over, he had broken up her marriage to a kind, decent man. I have no use for Jax, but he does not deserve a deceitful wife or to be cuckolded by a young stud who is less than half his age.

As an aside (and although Skye fans may disagree), I can understand the righteous anger of the Jax fan base. This character, once a powerful corporate raider, has been reduced to a figure of fun who can't keep his wife of less than three months from straying. His neurotic, near psychotic, behavior during Elizabeth's pregnancy was painful to watch. He has been defeated time and time again by Sonny who is portrayed as the stronger, more resilient, more manly man. It was Sonny not Jax who pulled the sword from the stone. It was Sonny's sperm that won the race to impregnate Sam. It is Sonny who has a houseful of children compared to Jax who shoots blanks. It is Sonny who has three children by three different women compared to Jax who has to pay a woman to have his child. Now, after gutting the Jax character until he is the weakest male lead on the GH canvas, he is made a fool of by a faithless wife (who his mother warned him not to marry!) and a barely-tried prince who should have had more honor.

Which, obviously brings up the other reason why TPTB must now attribute Nikolas and Courtney's lust to falling in love. As part of the NiCo storyline, TPTB took six of the most beloved, well-established and well-developed characters and deformed them into selfish, immoral creatures that no one could (or should) like.

- The once resourceful Lucky is twisted into a pimp who allows his girlfriend to sell her body to pay his medical bills.
- The earth-mother Elizabeth is prepared to give up a child of her body for filthy sou.
- The once sensitive Jax (viewed fondly by both his ex-wives) turns into an underhanded, overbearing louse who threatens to take an innocent child away from its birth mother.
- The Prince of Princes (now the Prince of the Clay Feet) lacks the resolve to fight for his wife and his marriage, instead wallowing in lust for his mistress.
- The once strong Emily, who had the guts to risk her life to save her husband, now falters and shames her husband by supporting Sonny over him, and then takes refuge in Sonny's home.
- The warmhearted Courtney, on the road to being a respectable matron, the champion of needy children, doesn't smack some near-stranger's face before sending him home to his wife when he kisses her on the docks in a drunken stupor.

I don't know these people and I don't want to know these people. And, I am not alone. The flat-line of the ratings proves that. But, I have no sympathy for Phelps, who is probably desperate, at this point, to hit a home run before she is given The Axe. As an experienced executive producer, she had to know that destroying six well-loved characters—all at the same

time—for an iffy “baby for money” storyline with no lasting effect on the GH canvas would alienate a broad range of fans and character-based fans and couple-based fans in particular. Moreover, she had to know that breaking up NikE, a super-couple nearing the popularity of Luke and Laura, was foolish and foolhardy. I can only shake my head at the stupidity of promoting shock value plot points as opposed to compelling storylines.

Fifth, I suspect that TPTB want to rebuild the Nikolas character. To me, they have done everything in their power to remind me that this imposter on my screen is indeed Prince Nikolas Mikhail Stavrosovich Cassadine. Since Nikolas’s first accidental meeting with Courtney on the hospital rooftop, I have been presented with more of Nikolas’s personal history than in years—all in an effort by TPTB to convince me: (a) that Nikolas would cheat on his wife; (b) that Nikolas is in love with Courtney; and (c) that this is really Nikolas acting without honor. I have re-experienced tales of his continental upbringing, his formal training and education in Stefan’s home, and his unique Russian-Greek heritage. Courtney, who doesn’t know Nikolas, may be a believer, but I am not. For I know Nikolas. He did not, for example, grow up in “a cold home.”

Stefan went out of his way to ensure that Nikolas’s home on the Island was warm and loving. He faced Helena’s censure by treating Nikolas with kindness, reading bedtime stories to him each night. He taught Nikolas horseback riding, chess, and martial arts. He traveled all over the world in search of the best apples because young Nikolas loved applesauce, apple juice, apple crusts, anything with apples. He blooded his hands staging a coup to prevent Helena from turning Nikolas into a “twisted little creature” without morals. He dedicated his life to Nikolas, loving the boy beyond all reason, cherishing him, treasuring him. Decidedly, Nikolas’s home, as a child, was not cold. Formal, perhaps; but certainly not cold. But then Stefan was a formal man, not a cold one.

Of course, Courtney doesn’t know Nikolas so she believes anything that comes out of his lying mouth. I know better. More importantly, Emily knows better. And so does Lucky and Elizabeth. If Nikolas had pulled that “Woe Me” routine with them, they would have laughed in his face. The young musketeers always teased him without mercy anyway, especially when he insisted on eating pizza with a knife and fork. Lucky wasn’t kidding when he said that Nikolas didn’t know how to make toast or put gas in his own car. Remember how Lucky and Elizabeth snickered when Nikolas suggested that they take some of the furniture from Wyndemere for their new apartment. Lucky and Elizabeth refused with a sly, laughing look at Emily. They know that Wyndemere is a ghoulish mausoleum, a throwback to another era. Courtney doesn’t know that. As poor, ignorant trash from Atlantic City, she thinks that rich people actually live in homes like Wyndemere. And, she now fancies herself as the Lady of the Manor as evidenced by the way that she enters Nikolas’s study. Her body language proclaims: “This is how rich people live. I want to be like them. Nikolas’s home is now *my* castle.”

So, TPTB’s attempt to rebuild Nikolas (to restore his honor, if you will) fails because it is all part of the fraud and the fake that permeates NiCo. It’s all Candyland. There is no tension, no conflict to NiCo. Nikolas is the empty-headed prince who understands the needs of his simple-minded princess like no other man (not A.J. or Jason or Brian or Jax). Whatever he says

is good and right and perfect to Courtney's ears. He can do no wrong, having rescued her from the clutches of her evil husband. In turn, she is perfect for him in her unique, big dumb blonde kind of way. She does not require that he work at a meaningful, mature relationship. She certainly does not require that he feel the pain of his failures as a husband. It's all fun and sex and giggles. But, like spun candy on a rainy day, NiCo will frizzle at the first storm.

I applaud TPTB for recognizing that putting a new face to Nikolas Cassadine may help to rebuild this character. It was quick-witted of them to use Christopher's recent injury as an opportunity to distant Christopher's face from the destruction of his character, no matter how briefly. It is an old soap opera trick: when a character is indubitably painted into a corner, change the face of the character. It is usually promoted by TPTB in the soap opera magazines as "taking the character in a different direction." It usually means that the character's portrayal will not be offered a new contract upon its expiration.

While I suspect that Willis did not want to renew her contract—I can certainly understand her desire to distance herself from the vitriol—I'm willing to bet my best church hat that her decision pleased TPTB. With Willis's departure, they have the opportunity to put a new face on the Courtney character, in the hopes that a new face will make viewers forget Courtney's role in breaking up Emily's marriage and her cruelty towards Jax. How many viewers remember that Nikolas repeatedly lied to Elizabeth when Gia ran a red light and struck Courtney's car? How many viewers remember, as part of the cover-up, that Nikolas paid a witness to say that Courtney was at-fault? Not many, because the face of Nikolas at that time was not Christopher's but Colton Scott's.

However, don't misunderstand me. I shed no tears that Willis is out of a job. She promoted NiCo as animalistic and as two good people who couldn't control their sexual urges, uncaring that my favorite character would be destroyed in the process. If her promotion failed and she lost the role of Courtney, so be it. I'm a cynic, but I'm no fool. She had to have realized that co-starring opposite Christopher could provide the same rocket explosion to her career as it did for Natalia Livingston's career. She was pretty much dead in the water, anyway, when her character was removed from the Carly-Jason-Sonny storylines. Plus, despite the fact that TPTB created contrived obstacle after contrived obstacle to prop up Casper (remember the bet, the troublesome foster children, the yellow sheets of all Jax's women), the pairing never reached the insane popularity of Nike.

Lastly, and this is my final point, a recast of the Courtney character may be the only salvation for NiCo. In my opinion, to make NiCo work TPTB must: (a) remove Nikolas's from Emily's orbit; and (b) push a Jax-Courtney-Nikolas triangle with the new face of Courtney.

Let Courtney spin between her lover and the father of her child. Play up the storyline of a good woman torn between doing the right thing (i.e., providing an intact home for her child) and following her heart (i.e., finding joy with her lover). Have her wallow in martyrdom as she sacrifices her love for Nikolas for the sake of her baby. Let both men make fools of themselves as they try to give her what she needs at any given moment. Allow them to goad each other as

Courtney suffers every conceivable medical crisis known to science. Have them stroke her, pet her, pamper her, cajole her, as the two men stare daggers at each other and come to blows. Push Jax as the villain who won't graciously step out of the picture so Nikolas's desire to be the father of the child can be fulfilled. Allow Nikolas to go equally sinister with Jax and steal the baby. With Jax out of the picture, the road to Candyland Heaven for Courtney and Nikolas is paved. Remember how Nikolas squeezed Zander out of his paternal rights when Elizabeth wanted to raise her child with Ric. Play up that angle until some fan base, somewhere, embraces NiCo.

In the meantime, what about Emily? It's clear that TPTB are going to give me a Sonny-Emily pairing in some shape, form, or fashion, even if my fellow fans beg them not to. I doubt that I can avoid that stake to the heart since the writers seem tantalized by the outcry against it. Pushing aside the shock value, which may cause a temporary boost in the ratings, I can see how a Sonny-Emily pairing would work. But, I doubt that TPTB have the finesse to pull it off.

Fudge the numbers as you will, the truth **is** the truth. Sonny is some 20 years older than Emily. Nikolas was 16 years old when he came to Port Charles in 1996. Emily, the youngest of the musketeers, was only 13. Lucky and Elizabeth were a few years older than Emily at 15. She is a young woman of 22 now, but she was a mere child of eleven when Sonny was already a small-time hood, an established local mobster in his mid-20's. He is approaching 40 years old these days, a middle-aged father with three small children. While the tale of an aging satyr falling in love with the nanny is a common one, these Lolita stories are roundly condemned.

Let's face it. Sonny served as a father figure for Jason, who considers Emily to be his baby sister. Sonny is a contemporary of Luke and Laura, Jax and Alexis. He has been married four times, has had at least eight significant sex partners, and has impregnated four different women. If all his children had survived, he would be the father of six. If Emily married him, she would be marrying the lover of her ex-husband's aunt as well as her brother's ex-wife's brother. And, that's just icky.

If graphics, like pictures, speak a thousand words, then the graphics on the message boards promoting a Sonny-Emily pairing are screaming. In the wedding scene picture, for example, Sonny looks like the proud papa who's happy that he could give his virgin daughter the church wedding that she always wanted. Another picture should be captioned: "Irate father gives wayward daughter a stern talking-to for breaking curfew." In short, Sonny looks like what he is—a man who has lived life to the fullest. Emily looks like the role that she has been assigned on the GH canvas—the innocent girl next door, the young man's sweetheart. Any pairing of these two must be handled carefully or Maurice Benard will look foolish. His character too would suffer, changing from the powerful, take-no-prisoners Sonny to the caricature of the dirty old man sexing up his teenage babysitter.

Despite all of TPTB's pimping and the uproar from the fans, I doubt the Sonny-Emily pairing will amount to much. My best guess is that Emily will be used as a foil to prevent Sonny and Carly from reuniting. Carly has already made it clear that she intends to get Sonny back. She

has a history of going psycho-Mama Bear when she feels that another woman is trying to take her place in Papa-Bear's bed or is stealing the hearts of her baby bear cubs. So, I see Carly lying, threatening, and haranguing Emily in an effort to banish Goldilocks Emily from the home front. I can even see her accusing Emily of going after Sonny to get back at Courtney for stealing Nikolas. Of course, Sonny will serve as Emily's protector, truthfully pointing out to her that Emily stepped in to take care of the boys when Carly was too sick to do so. Sonny's protective attitude towards Emily will only infuriate Carly further, leading to a spiral of her despicable behavior. Eventually, though, I'm willing to bet that Sonny and Carly will reunite.

I can certainly understand the appeal of a Sonny-Emily pairing for TPTB. Such a pairing would permit them to take the soap in a different direction. It could be written so that Sonny decides to leave the gangster life—something that he would not do for Carly—for the love of the good, innocent Emily. Stories of bad boys being reformed by the love of a good woman abound in literature, in film, and in real life. Romance novels, including the dime store Harlequins, made a fortune from the plot of the dark, isolated (usually cynical and sardonic) older man who is changed by the selfless devotion of an ingénue. I would not be surprised if TPTB are setting up a modern-day, mobster version of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*.

If TPTB do decide to present a Sonny-Emily pairing, then Benard must be prepared to change his acting choices. While Benard's Sonny can rant and rail and throw things at Carly (who can give as good as she is given, besides being a nasty piece of work), such behavior by his character towards the gentle Emily will label Emily as an abused wife. Frankly, I doubt that Benard has the talent to add any layers to his character for—unlike Christopher—he **is** the quintessential one-trick pony.

Of course, many NikE fans are eagerly anticipating a Sonny-Emily pairing. These fans theorize that a jealous Nikolas will come to his senses when and if Emily moves on to Sonny. Thus, they see a Sonny-Emily pairing as the death of NiCo and the rebirth of Nike.

I am not so certain that their theory is correct. There is no guarantee that the upcoming storylines will be written with Nikolas continuing to be in Emily's orbit. Indeed, by the time that a Sonny-Emily pairing is fully developed, Nikolas may simply not be involved with his ex-wife (much as Lucky rarely had contact with Elizabeth during LiRic) or he may simply not care that she has found love with another man (much as Sonny did not care that his old flame Sam was dating Jason). While I'm sure that Nikolas will not approve of Emily's romance with the aging mobster, he may not be jealous and he may even support her wishes. Nikolas did not like Zander, but he still supported Emily's relationship with him. Similarly, Nikolas did not approve of Elizabeth's marriage to Ric, but he did everything to assure her happiness, including exposing himself to jail-time. So, as much as I want to believe it, I have to be open to the possibility that a Sonny-Emily pairing will not be the certain impetus to a NikE reunion as so many fans have theorized.

I have to close with this thought. Although I desperately want Nikolas and Emily to find their way back to each other, I want the **real** One True Prince on my screen more. Much more! The

rebuilding of this character is paramount for me, more important than NikE or NiCo or a Sonny-Emily pairing.

*One glance of his eyes slays me.
One pout of his lips commands me.
For Nikolas Cassadine, my heart beats solely.*

