

>>FOOTPRINTS<<
episode #137
a few days after [#136](#),
new year's eve

TEASER

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
NIGHT

Bill and Paula Fisher's annual New Year's Eve party is officially in full swing. Blondie's "Maria" provides an energetic backdrop for the friends, family, and coworkers bobbing on the dance floor.

Tim stands by the buffet table, his hand clasped around a drink fresh from the bar. He nods up at Sarah as she approaches him.

SARAH: Hey, there! Long time no see.

TIM: Yeah, really. What'd you and Brent do for Christmas?

SARAH: We had Andy and Danielle over. A nice, quiet day.

Tim smiles.

TIM: That's the best kind.

SARAH: I've noticed.

She grabs a plastic cup and spoons a few ladles' worth of blood-red punch into it.

SARAH: I dropped by the apartment the day after to see the kids and give them their presents, but you weren't there.

TIM: Yeah, I know. I got back like 10 minutes after you left, from what Claire said.

He takes a quick sip of his drink.

TIM: Claire loves the clothes you got Travis and Samantha.

SARAH: I'm glad. I had fun picking them out.

He nudges her suggestively.

TIM: Getting ready for the not-too-distant future, maybe?

A crestfallen air sweeps over Sarah as she recalls her disastrous attempt to discuss the subject with Brent ...

SARAH: What?

BRENT: I don't know ... Just surprised, I guess.

SARAH: Why?

A "duh" expression fills his face, though in a light sort of way.

BRENT: I guess I just wasn't expecting it, that's all.

SARAH: Oh ...

She takes a thoughtful pause, then launches back into the conversation.

SARAH: Well, don't you think it would be a good idea? I feel like we've really recommitted to each other, and our lives are pretty stable-

She stops. The unenthusiastic look hasn't left his face.

SARAH: You really don't want a baby?

In attempting to answer, his mouth trips over every word.

BRENT: I just-Well-You know ... It's not ... I don't know. It just doesn't feel right, not now.

SARAH: I don't know.

The subject is clouding her head, and she thinks it best to steer away from it.

SARAH: So, anyway, how are you and Claire?

TIM: Fine, I guess. I think she's a little ticked because of all this attention I've been giving Mom, but-

Sarah's eyebrows scrunch together in confusion.

SARAH: Why does Mom need attention?

ACT ONE

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
NIGHT

Jason and Courtney are moving to the sounds of Eiffel 65's "Blue." Courtney's eyes go wide with wonder as they take in the vivacious decor of the ball room.

COURTNEY: Jeez, can you believe this whole millenium thing? It's so weird ... Everyone's been talking about it for so long, and now it's here, and we're living through it.

JASON: Yeah, it is pretty cool.

COURTNEY: Think about it - we're living one of the huge moments in history.

An impish smirk appears on his face.

JASON: I'm just glad I get to share it with you.

He plants a kiss right in the middle of her forehead. She looks up at him, beaming - but, as Jason notices, the expression continues even when she looks past him, over his shoulder. He turns to see what has her so thrilled.

His eyes fall upon Lauren and Alex, entering arm-in-arm in sharp black eveningwear.

Across the room, Helen approaches Paula, who is standing idly by Bill's side as he talks to a coworker.

HELEN: Look at the kids. They look so happy.

She pulls Paula a few feet to the side and points her so she can see Jason and Courtney.

PAULA: They do. Gosh, do you remember last New Year's Eve? Shannon was here making trouble between the two of them.

HELEN: And we all thought Courtney was crazy for not trusting her. She seemed so harmless ...

The two women share a sigh and a concerned look.

PAULA: I guess it just goes to show that trouble can spring up from the most unexpected of places.

Little does Paula realize that, only a number of feet away at the buffet table, she is being discussed.

SARAH: What do you mean? Why has Mom needed extra attention?

Tim's lips are frozen.

SARAH: Tim? What's going on?

TIM: It ... it's nothing.

He can feel the urge to spill about what he found on Thanksgiving sliding back down to the depths of his stomach, far away from his dangerous tongue.

TIM: She's just been getting really emotional lately - about us being grown up and all. It's got to be hard for her.

Sarah considers this for a moment.

SARAH: Yeah, I guess so.

Both of them instinctively snap into happier-looking moods as they catch sight of Claire approaching.

CLAIRE: Hey, Sarah!

Her voice is full of genuine warmth.

SARAH: Hey!

CLAIRE: Would you mind if I stole my husband away for a dance?

SARAH: Not at all.

She steps aside, clearing the way for them to head to the dance floor. They have taken but two steps, though, when she stops them.

SARAH: Hey, wait.

Both Tim and Claire turn around.

TIM: Yeah?

SARAH: Have either of you seen Molly tonight?

CLAIRE: You know, I haven't.

TIM: Me neither.

He searches the crowd for just a few seconds before finding a head and pointing to it.

TIM: There's Mom. You might want to ask her.

SARAH: Yeah, maybe I will.

She gives the room one last, sweeping look - no Molly.

SARAH: Well, I'm gonna go find Brent. You two go on and cut a rug.

Tim and Claire smile as they take off. Sarah remains standing where she is, unconsciously brings a well-manicured fingernail up to her teeth before realizing and yanking it away.

SARAH: Where the hell are you, Molly?

ACT TWO

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
NIGHT

Courtney motions for Alex and Lauren to come nearer.

COURTNEY: You two look so cute!

LAUREN: Thanks! Hey, if that the dress I helped you pick out last summer?

COURTNEY: Yeah.

LAUREN: Wow, it looks really good.

Courtney does a mock curtsy.

COURTNEY: Thank you very much.

LAUREN: Hey, have you seen my parents around here anywhere?

JASON: Last I saw, your dad was over there-

He stands on tiptoe and stretches his arm to point over the crowd.

JASON: -with Don.

LAUREN: Okay, cool. I've gotta go ask him something. I'll be right back.

She takes off, leaving the other three on the edge of the dance floor. Courtney starts cavorting to the song "Blue" once again, singing along.

COURTNEY: "I'm blue, da-ba-dee, da-ba-die ..."

She grabs both the guys, but neither is very receptive to dancing. Undaunted, she launches into conversation.

COURTNEY: Did you guys hear what they were saying on the radio about this song? It's not "da-ba-dee, da-ba-die," but "I'm in need of a guy" - or, at least, that's what people were saying.

Alex can feel his cheeks burning up, and he tries to exercise all the willpower he can to stop them from filling with red.

Elsewhere in the room, Brent is engaged in conversation with Bill and Paula. Sarah creeps up behind him and places her index finger to her lips, warning her parents to keep quiet. She stands in silence, waiting for an opportunity, and gets it when Brent lifts his arms from his sides to gesture. Sarah's hands settle over his sides and squeeze, eliciting a yelp as Brent turns around.

BRENT: God, you scared me half to death!

Sarah runs a hand over the surface of his gelled hair.

SARAH: I'm sowwy, baby.

She speaks in a voice that one might use on an infant.

BRENT: I think you can be forgiven.

SARAH: Glad to hear it.

Bill and Paula smile as Sarah ends the playful exchange by presenting her husband with a peck on the cheek. Paula's eyes are soon pulled to the entrance, however.

PAULA: Oh, look who's decided to make an appearance.

She says this jokingly, but all humor is lost on Brent and Sarah as they turn to see the source of the comment. Brent is so surprised by what he sees that he doesn't even notice his wife's reaction, which is decidedly more stunned.

Sarah does all she can to keep her jaw from hitting the floor as she watches Molly walk in on the arm of Matt Gray.

ACT THREE

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
NIGHT

In the wake of Courtney's comment about the song lyrics, Jason and Alex have fallen quiet.

COURTNEY: Guys?

Jason shakes his head in an attempt to get rid of the haunting images flooding his brain.

JASON: You know, I just remembered-I've gotta go, uh, ask my mom something. I'll be back in a minute, okay?

He hardly even waits for a response before taking off. Courtney doesn't even notice his haste: She's been waiting to have a few moments alone with Alex.

COURTNEY: So you took my advice, huh?

Alex's brow crinkles in confusion.

COURTNEY: About Lauren.

ALEX: Oh, yeah.

She waits for him to say something more, but it doesn't come.

COURTNEY: So? You guys having fun so far?

ALEX: We've been here, like, ten minutes!

COURTNEY: Well, you're either enjoying yourself or not. Are you?

ALEX: Yeah, of course.

Courtney clasps her hands together happily.

COURTNEY: Good! You know, I'm not sure if I should be saying this, but ...

ALEX: But what?

He feels the slightest swoosh of nerves in his stomach.

COURTNEY: Well, there's a reason I wanted you to ask Lauren tonight. She ... she really likes you.

ALEX: That's what I was afraid of.

He mutters this and sighs simultaneously as he turns around, but Courtney nonetheless picks up his words.

COURTNEY: Afraid of? Why?

Elsewhere, Tim and Claire step off the dance floor and nearly walk right into Andy and Danielle.

TIM: Hey! We haven't seen you two all night!

DANIELLE: You all ready for the world to come crumbling down at the stroke of midnight?

CLAIRE: Guess so ...

The couples share a brief laugh.

ANDY: Well, I know that as long as I'm here with the woman I love-

He squeezes Danielle a little closer to his side.

ANDY: -I can handle just about anything.

Danielle finds that the statement makes her feel funny - and not in a good way.

DANIELLE: So, uh, what did you guys do with the kids tonight?

CLAIRE: We managed to find a babysitter. How, I don't know, but we got one. So she's at the apartment with Travis and Samantha.

DANIELLE: Are you sure she won't try to throw a party or something?

CLAIRE: No, I don't think so. We told her she could have a friend or two come over, and she showed up with one other girl and a stack of movies. She seemed pretty quiet, didn't she, Tim?

She looks over at Tim and finds that he's not paying one bit of attention. His gaze is focused on Paula, who is standing distractedly by Bill's side as he talks to a group of people.

CLAIRE: Tim?

At this repetition of his name, Tim snaps out of his daze.

TIM: Yeah?

Claire shoots him a look that conveys her annoyance, equal parts frustration, anger, and bewilderment.

CLAIRE: Can I talk to you alone?

Andy and Danielle have already taken their cue and are ready to shuffle off the moment Claire turns to them.

CLAIRE: Would you excuse us?

They mumble a few words in making a hasty departure. Claire takes Tim by the shoulders and squares him up to face her. He finds himself nearly shuddering at the sight of the boiling emotions in her face.

CLAIRE: Would you mind telling me what the hell is going on?

Despite his best efforts, Tim stutters in responding.

TIM: W-what do you mean?

CLAIRE: With you - with your mom! Why are you so preoccupied with her lately?

Meanwhile, the party has all but stopped for Sarah and Brent. Each is watching Molly and Matt's

entrance with an eerie intensity.

MOLLY: Hi, guys ...

She looks beautiful in her maroon dress, with a complicated web of straps that reaches over her shoulders. Her hair is swept up into a neat, single bundle that rests towards the back of her skull, except for the two dark coils that hang down alongside her cheeks.

MOLLY: I, uh, think you both know Matt.

BRENT: Of course.

He hesitates for just a second before he speaks, and then overcompensates by grabbing Matt's hand for a shake that is awkward in its quickness.

MOLLY: Sarah ...

She infuses the single word with all the attitude she can muster.

MATT: Hi.

He lifts a hand in a stiff greeting that, for lack of a better term, might be dubbed a wave.

SARAH: Hi.

She reaches up a hand to brush the tiniest wisp of hair off of her forehead in an exaggerated gesture meant to fill the silence of inactivity.

MOLLY: So, how's the party been so far?

BRENT: Oh, uh ... Good, I guess. Not exactly as much excitement as last year, but I'm thinkin' that's a good thing.

Molly chuckles. Sarah, seeing this, follows suit, though a bit more uncomfortably.

MOLLY: You mean with Diane busting in and climbing out on the ledge? Yeah, I think so.

She turns to Matt, who looks understandably confused.

MOLLY: Complicated story ... This nutty woman who was in love with our brother crashed the party last year.

MATT: Maybe I should just be glad I missed it.

MOLLY: I think so.

The sight of Matt sharing a laugh with Molly, of all people, sets off a strange spark inside Sarah.

SARAH: Hey, Mol, can I talk to you for a minute?

MOLLY: Yeah-

She looks at Matt.

MOLLY: Hang on a sec, okay?

Matt nods, and Sarah leads Molly away. For a minute, she considers moving across the room, but thinks that would just raise suspicion. Inside, they wind up in a corner not too far away from the men.

MOLLY: What is it?

Sarah rolls her eyes.

SARAH: Oh, come on, Molly. What the hell are you trying to pull?

ACT FOUR

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
NIGHT

Courtney is puzzled by what she thinks Alex muttered.

COURTNEY: Afraid of? Why?

ALEX: Because ...

With that word, he realizes he's lost all chance of pretending he said anything else. Mentally kicking himself, he flings himself into another excuse.

ALEX: Because, we're such good friends. I'm not exactly the best guy with all this relationship stuff, you know?

COURTNEY: So tell Lauren that. I'm sure she'll appreciate you being honest.

He cracks a sarcastic smile.

ALEX: If only it were that easy.

She responds with an encouraging pat on the back.

COURTNEY: Don't stress out about it, okay?

A clearly unsuspecting Lauren returns to what she sees as a casual conversation.

LAUREN: Stress out about what?

ALEX: Oh, nothing.

His eyes dart over to Courtney to make sure she's not going to say anything, but he can tell she isn't.

COURTNEY: You know, I should go find that boy of mine. I'll find you guys later, 'kay?

Alex and Lauren agree with nods. As Courtney walks off, she notices that they've begun dancing.

Behind Alex's back, she shoots Lauren a "thumbs-up" sign.

Claire and Tim, meanwhile, aren't quite so peaceful.

CLAIRE: Tell me, what is going on?

TIM: I told you, she's just-

Claire is already shaking her head.

CLAIRE: No. Your mom isn't that upset because she's suddenly feeling all nostalgic. Something's up.

Tim remains quiet, though it's a guilty, defeated sort of quiet.

CLAIRE: Tim, you know better than anyone how much your mother means to me. God, she's practically adopted me! If there's something wrong, I want to know.

He lets another thoughtful second pass before speaking.

TIM: It's just ... There's not really anything to say. I just get the feeling that she's hiding something.

An image of the adoption papers he found on Thanksgiving flickers in his mind.

CLAIRE: Any idea what?

TIM: Um ... not really. She's just been secretive - and really depressed, almost.

CLAIRE: Have you talked to her about it?

TIM: I've tried. She's not exactly being cooperative, though.

CLAIRE: No, I guess not. Do you want me to talk to her?

Tim's reply comes almost before she has finished speaking.

TIM: No. Don't. I haven't even said anything to my sisters or brother yet.

Claire nods, ostensibly accepting this - but on the inside, the wheels have started spinning.

Tensions are also running high in the corner, where Sarah is staring Molly down with stone-cold eyes.

SARAH: What do you think you're doing?

MOLLY: What do you mean? I'm just-

SARAH: Trying to make me miserable, I know.

Molly twists her face in puzzlement.

MOLLY: Is this about me bringing Matt? Look, I needed a date and he seemed like a nice enough guy - and a smart enough one to know that I'm not looking for some big, grand romance.

She accentuates these last few words with a some upward-sweeping hand movements.

SARAH: You sure about that?

Both her words and her face are infused with an underlying nastiness.

MOLLY: You know, what is your problem?

She tries to push past Sarah, but her arm is grabbed.

SARAH: Don't you dare start acting all innocent with me, Molly! I know damn well what you're trying to do!

MOLLY: Oh, come on-

SARAH: You just shut up! Stop torturing me like this!

With that, she shoves Molly aside. Molly doesn't head back to Matt, though; she stands where Sarah has left her, trying to shake off the creepy feeling induced by Sarah's bizarre intensity.

ACT FIVE

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
NIGHT

The minutes until midnight have begun to peel away more rapidly, and now just a handful remain. Claire can see this anxiety beginning to show in people's faces as she worms her way through the clusters of partygoers. She feels it, too, though she's trying to suppress it, at least until the task at hand is completed.

She smiles warmly as she makes eye contact with Paula and briskly walks the remaining few feet over to her mother-in-law.

CLAIRE: Hey. Are you all ready for the next millenium?

PAULA: I suppose so. I've got my space suit and my flying car all ready to go.

The women share a giggle, and Claire thinks: She certainly seems fine.

CLAIRE: So, how are you? We haven't had much chance to talk lately.

PAULA: Isn't it amazing how the holidays will do that to you?

CLAIRE: Yeah, tell me about it ... But really, how are you?

PAULA: Oh, I'm fine. Same old stuff, I guess.

CLAIRE: Are you sure?

Paula casts her a confused look.

CLAIRE: Tim is really worried about you.

She finds herself waiting for a response that she realizes is not going to come - at least, not of its own accord.

CLAIRE: Paula, is everything all right? Tim said you've been really upset lately-

PAULA: It's sweet of you two to worry, it really is. But like I told Tim, there just isn't anything that dramatic going on.

Claire replies with an "Are you sure?" look, and Paula nods, albeit with a touch of agitation.

PAULA: You know, we should round the family up for the countdown. It's almost midnight.

CLAIRE: Good idea.

Across the room, Brent and Matt have been left alone together.

MATT: So, uh, you're working with the police again, huh?

BRENT: Yep ...

He scratches the back of his neck.

BRENT: Yep.

He looks over at the women, who appear to be involved in some sort of heated discussion.

BRENT: So are you gonna stay in King's Bay permanently?

MATT: I'm not sure ... I thought I would, but I don't know. It seemed like a good idea to try to start fresh, but ...

Brent shrugs in an attempt to be sympathetic, but he can't think of anything to say.

He doesn't need to, anyway. Sarah returns, wearing the broadest and most friendly of smiles. Molly is not far behind, though she looks far less perky.

SARAH: I think the countdown is going to start soon.

Brent gives his watch a quick glance.

BRENT: It should. It's 11:59.

As if on cue, Paula approaches them.

PAULA: We're trying to get the family gathered up for midnight ... Follow me.

She says all this without ever stopping walking, and her daughters and their respective escorts fall right into line behind her.

They come to a spot where Claire has already rounded up Bill, Tim, Jason, Courtney, Don, and Helen. No sooner have they congregated than does the rest of the crowd - led by the DJ and a large screen that has been mounted on the wall, broadcasting local coverage of the festivities - begin counting down to the new year.

CROWD: Ten ... nine ...

Paula smiles up at Bill, her eyes already filling with tears of joy and amazement.

CROWD: Eight ... seven ...

Courtney turns to look into Jason's face. His arms remain hanging over her shoulders as the count goes on.

CROWD: Six ... five ...

Lauren and Alex turn to look at each other at exactly the same moment. Their eyes lock and their lips stop counting, preparing for midnight as they draw nearer ...

CROWD: Four ... three ...

Tim holds tightly onto Claire, his arms wrapped around her midsection. Their heads are close, close enough so that their cheeks sit lightly upon one another. Tim closes his eyes, relishing the feeling.

CROWD: Two ...

Sarah clasps Brent's left hand with both of her own, feeling each beat of her heart's joyous rhythm bounce off the inside of her chest. She doesn't notice Molly, standing beside them with Matt, staring at Sarah and Brent intently. Molly's lips fall dead, abandoning the count, as she is hit with the reality of what she will be witnessing in just two seconds.

CROWD: One ...

END OF EPISODE #137

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