

FOOTPRINTS
episode #138
[immediately after [#137](#),
new year's eve]

TEASER

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
MIDNIGHT

CROWD: Three ... two ... one ...

And suddenly, the count that has seemed to last forever is over. The last second lingers, static for a moment that just hangs, before everyone bursts out with an equal mix of joy and amazement.

CROWD: Happy New Year!

The rapt quiet of all assembled erupts into madness - happy madness, but madness nonetheless - as well-wishes circulate through the room.

Bill and Paula, and Tim and Claire fall into comfortable yet passionate kisses.

Molly and Matt turn to each other awkwardly. Their eyes connect ... and in that moment, both are certain that they are ringing in the New Year as simply friends.

MATT: Happy New Year.

MOLLY: You, too.

They smile sincerely at one another, but there is something solemn about each of them. Matt casts one more furtive look over at Sarah and Brent, who are engrossed in their own New Year's kiss. He quickly turns back to Molly, and for a split-second, he swears he sees her gazing on the same scene.

Their eyes connect again - this time with mutual looks of guilt.

Meanwhile, Jason and Courtney end their own deep kiss. Almost immediately, Courtney's attention is caught by something behind Jason. She points, but he is already turning around to see what it is.

The couple stands side-by-side, watching Alex and Lauren kiss!

ACT ONE

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
AFTER MIDNIGHT

Danielle and Andy drift apart as they come out of their celebratory liplock.

DANIELLE: Happy New Year.

ANDY: Happy New Year to you, too. And Happy Century, Happy Millenium ... It's amazing, isn't it?

DANIELLE: That we're actually experiencing this?

ANDY: Yeah. There's something so ... so magical about tonight. It really feels like a time for new beginnings.

The sparkle in his deep, blue eyes wields something like a magnetic effect over Danielle, and for a short while she is entranced. The sensation fades, however, as time and reality jab their way back into the picture. Danielle finds herself left with a feeling that's not quite pure - in fact, it verges on unsettling.

ANDY: Is something the matter?

DANIELLE: No, uh ... No.

The second "no" is much more assured, as if she has gathered her thoughts and refocused herself.

Meanwhile, Claire and Tim stand near Paula and Bill.

CLAIRE: So that's it?

BILL: I guess so.

CLAIRE: So much for millenium madness, huh?

Her sarcastic smile and lift of the eyebrows spurs agreeable laughter from the others.

PAULA: Well, I, for one, am not complaining.

TIM: Me neither. Call me crazy, but a nice, normal New Year's Eve seems a little better than rioting and hellfire.

BILL: I would tend to agree.

Claire hardly hears the words. Her gaze is focused somewhere beyond Paula and Bill, where a shadow - or at least she hopes that's what it is - has snagged her attention.

CLAIRE: You know, um, I think I need to get some air. It feels awfully stuffy in here all of a sudden.

TIM: I'll go with you.

CLAIRE: No, no, you stay here. I'm fine - I'll just be a minute.

And with that, she breaks away, heading for the terrace.

ACT TWO

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
AFTER MIDNIGHT

Alex and Lauren's lips part slowly, uncertainly. For a minute they linger just a microscopic distance apart, before reality settles in. Alex draws his lower lip in, tucking it under his front teeth. Then their heads pull back sharply as the surprise factor really hits them.

LAUREN: Umm ...

A nervous giggle busts out of her.

ALEX: I'm sorry. I-I'm so sorry.

LAUREN: Why?

ALEX: Because ... I-I shouldn't have done that. I guess I just got caught up in the moment, and- ... I'm sorry.

LAUREN: Don't be.

He was almost expecting such a response, but it nonetheless takes him by surprise.

ALEX: Really?

LAUREN: Yeah ... I'm not.

Her voice is soft and reflective. Alex finds something inside him jumping for joy at hearing her say this.

They are unaware of the attention being paid to them by Courtney and Jason.

COURTNEY: Did you see that?

JASON: How could I miss it?

Courtney herself is now beaming.

COURTNEY: Oh my gosh, that is so cool! I bet Lauren is so excited!

Her voice lowers, albeit unintentionally, as she continues.

COURTNEY: You know, I think Alex likes her, too. We talked about it on Christmas, and that's the impression I got.

JASON: Really?

He finds himself worrying that perhaps his skepticism is showing through a bit too much.

COURTNEY: Yeah, I think so.

Jason isn't really sure what he should be feeling - surprise, anger, relief, or some twisted combination. As he actually tries to figure it out, he discovers little more than a jumble of confusion and a knot in his stomach.

On the other side of the room, Molly tugs her eyes away from Matt's, and they instinctively drop to the floor.

MOLLY: So, um ... Happy New Year.

MATT: We went through that already.

She smiles halfheartedly, as though she realizes that it's not even worth the effort.

MATT: Are you okay?

MOLLY: Yeah, yeah. Why wouldn't I be?

He casts a sideways glance at Sarah and Brent, who are now in each other's arms.

MATT: I don't know. That was kinda the point of me asking you.

She raises a hand to wave off the conversation.

MOLLY: Don't worry about it.

She catches Matt looking at her quite seriously, almost as if he's examining something.

MOLLY: What?

MATT: No, I was just wondering if I could ask you something.

Molly doesn't approve or reject the request - she just waits for the question.

MATT: Why are things so tense between you and Sarah?

ACT THREE

EXT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL - TERRACE
AFTER MIDNIGHT

Claire doesn't even notice that she's holding her breath as she lets the door click back into place behind her. The January air assaults her bare shoulders, her arms, her face, her hands. Still, as the tremors of a shiver rattle her, she's certain it's not just the cold.

Her eyes dart around - nothing. What in the world? She's so sure she saw-

CLAIRE: Am I losing my mind?

VOICE: Not at all.

The voice is so calm, she can practically see the face grinning. And sure enough, that's what she sees as she turns around: a self-satisfied grin plastered on Ryan's face as he steps out of the shadows.

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
AFTER MIDNIGHT

Molly feels strangely compelled to answer Matt's question.

MOLLY: Sarah and I ... We've never exactly been best pals.

MATT: Not even when you were little kids? You'd think with sisters that close in age-

MOLLY: It just never worked out that way, I guess. We're just ... different. Sarah always went out and chased whatever she wanted, and I liked to be all careful and just watch and learn. Different personality types, you know? We clashed when we'd play together, and I guess it just spiraled from there.

MATT: That kinda sucks.

Molly shrugs.

MOLLY: It's not that bad. I've gotten used to it.

MATT: Still ... It can't be fun. I've seen the way the two of you act around each other. It's like you're always ...

His hands make a juggling motion as he fumbles for the right word.

MATT: ... competing.

It's the word that Molly was thinking, too, and hearing it aloud makes her heart skip a beat. Thankfully, she doesn't have to respond, because Danielle and Andy approach them.

MOLLY: Hey!

DANIELLE: Hey. We're going to head on out of here. Would you let my brother know?

MOLLY: Why don't you just-

She turns around to find Brent and Sarah sharing an intimate dance.

MOLLY: Yeah, sure.

DANIELLE: Okay, thanks.

MOLLY: No problem. And Happy New Year. I'll call you, okay? We need to get together or something.

DANIELLE: Sounds good! Bye!

ANDY: Goodnight ...

He slips away, following Danielle's lead. Molly watches the couple leave with a prolonged stare, dreading the idea of turning back to Matt and having to continue their conversation.

ACT FOUR

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
AFTER MIDNIGHT

Bill catches the sadly pensive look on Paula's face from halfway across the room. He increases his pace for the rest of the way over to his wife, who is momentarily standing alone by the now-ravaged buffet table.

BILL: Paula ...

Her head does a shake before she looks at him, and it's obvious she is extracting herself from another world.

PAULA: Oh, Bill-

BILL: You have got to stop doing this to yourself.

PAULA: Doing what?

He shoots her a critical look. After nearly thirty-four years of catching her wearing that look in lonely moment, Bill knows as well as Paula does that she has no doubt what he's talking about.

PAULA: I'm sorry. It's just-Tim's been really suspicious lately. It's ... it's almost like he knows.

BILL: He doesn't.

PAULA: No, he couldn't. But it has me thinking about it more and more ...

Her sentence fades as memories once again threaten to consume her. Recognizing this, Bill pulls her back to the present.

BILL: Stop it. Paula, it's not good for you to be so focused on that.

PAULA: Well, it's kind of difficult when I have to keep it all to myself!

Her sudden rage catches Bill off-guard, but he does his best to remain calm.

BILL: You don't have to keep it to yourself. We can discuss it-

PAULA: That's not enough anymore!

She speaks through gritted teeth, her nostrils flaring as she tries to keep the words from simply exploding out of her.

PAULA: All we ever do is go around in circles, anyway. I am tired of treating this like some dirty little secret!

BILL: It's not exactly something to tell the entire world about!

PAULA: Maybe not, but why not our own children? You'd think they, of anyone, would have a right to know!

BILL: Paula-

She holds up a hand to stop him.

PAULA: This really is not the place to get into this. We can continue this at home.

BILL: Fine.

His emphasized frustration accomplishes nothing: She storms off coldly.

Molly, meanwhile, brings herself to face Matt again, but to her relief, Brent and Sarah have left the dance floor and are coming over to them.

SARAH: Well, Happy New Year, you guys.

MOLLY: You too.

She can feel awkwardness beginning to settle in.

MOLLY: Oh, uh, Brent - Danielle and Andy just left. She wanted me to tell you they'd gone.

BRENT: Why didn't she come tell me herself?

MOLLY: I don't know. I guess she didn't want to ... interrupt.

Brent feels his cheeks filling with red, and his eyes plummet to the floor.

The conversation is brought to a halt by the voice of the DJ, who uses a microphone to grab the attention of most of the room.

DJ: All right, everybody, it's time to mix things up a little! Everybody grab someone you haven't danced with tonight for this next song!

The crowd hovers in a state of general confusion as the a cappella voices of the Backstreet Boys begin "Show Me the Meaning of Being Lonely." As mournful guitar notes take over, people begin to fall into place with new dance partners.

Matt locks eyes with Sarah and pulls her to him. Looking lost, Brent and Molly look at each other uncertainly.

BRENT: Wanna dance?

Molly hesitates, grappling with herself for a moment.

MOLLY: Sure, why not?

They come together, fumbling a bit to fall into the proper position. They latch on, linking their arms around one another but concentrating on maintaining an appropriate distance.

EXT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL - TERRACE
AFTER MIDNIGHT

Claire gapes at Ryan, her face painted with a mixture of astonishment and fright.

RYAN: Surprised to see me?

CLAIRE: Uh, yeah, just a little bit.

Her sarcasm comes through strongly, despite the slight wavering of her voice. The cocky smirk reappears on Ryan's face.

CLAIRE: What the hell are you doing here?

RYAN: I just ...

He moves closer, placing his hands on her arms.

RYAN: ... I wanted to see you.

She takes a hasty step back, effectively pushing him away.

CLAIRE: How'd you get out here, anyway?

RYAN: I have my ways.

That grin again - only this time, there's something a little creepy about it.

CLAIRE: Well, why'd you come out here? Didn't that sort of defeat the purpose of trying to see me? Or were you trying to get my attention?

RYAN: I didn't have to try.

She responds with a puzzled look.

RYAN: You always seem to find your way to me all by yourself.

ACT FIVE

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
AFTER MIDNIGHT

Back inside, Jason and Lauren are sharing a dance.

JASON: So, didja have a good time tonight?

LAUREN: Most definitely.

JASON: Gee, I wonder why.

Their movement quickly dwindles down to nothing.

LAUREN: It's that obvious, huh?

Jason crinkles his nose as he replies with good-natured sarcasm.

JASON: Just a little bit.

They resume their dancing, which is little more than swaying as a backdrop for the conversation.

LAUREN: I want your opinion. What do you think of Alex?

JASON: He's a really nice guy.

Her face tells him that this isn't exactly the in-depth analysis for which she is looking.

JASON: What do you mean?

LAUREN: Like, do you think he's the type of guy I could have something serious with? Something like you and Courtney have?

His slowness in responding is not lost on her.

LAUREN: What?

JASON: No, nothing. I was just thinking ... maybe you should just take this thing one step at a time. Make sure he's as into it as you are.

LAUREN: I think he is. Or at least, I hope he is.

She shrugs with a carefree smile, too excited by the night's events to worry.

LAUREN: I just get the feeling we're in for something big here.

That's what has me so worried, Jason is tempted to reply.

EXT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL - TERRACE
AFTER MIDNIGHT

CLAIRE: What possessed you to come here, anyway?

RYAN: Like I said, I just wanted to see you.

CLAIRE: You just wanted to see me? Ryan, what if-

She stops herself mid-question.

RYAN: What if what?

What if Tim had seen you out here? she answers in her mind. He'd have killed you-or me-or maybe both.

CLAIRE: Nothing. I just mean, I can't believe you snuck into the party. How long have you been out here?

RYAN: Not long at all. And believe me, it wasn't that hard to get out here.

Claire sighs, shaking her head in amazement.

RYAN: Claire, I needed to see you. I needed-I need-to make things right.

CLAIRE: Make things right?

RYAN: Yeah ... remember Christmas Eve? You just ran off on me.

CLAIRE: I needed to get home. Tim was sick, and the kids were there with him-

RYAN: Whatever I did, I want to make it up to you.

She throws her hands up in frustration.

CLAIRE: You didn't do anything!

RYAN: Then why are you being so distant with me? Claire, it's a new millenium - a time for new beginnings.

CLAIRE: What's that supposed to mean?

Ryan muddles through a mess of words to find an appropriate response.

RYAN: Just ... please, don't shut me out anymore.

Claire is holding her hands together tightly in a ball, bringing them up to her face and then back down again aimlessly.

RYAN: Look, you should get back to your party.

He opens the door for her, taking care to keep himself out of the open doorway. She takes a step inside and then takes one glance backward - but he's gone.

INT: KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL
AFTER MIDNIGHT

Sarah does her best to be subtle in scooting herself and Matt over several feet on the dance floor, far enough from Brent and Molly to talk freely. Once this task has been accomplished, she leans in closely enough to be over the music - but not close enough to stir up the suspicion that has filled Sarah's nightmares since that haunting night.

SARAH: Look what you did!

She nods over at Brent and Molly.

MATT: Well, we're supposed to be friends.

SARAH: We are friends!

MATT: Then what am I supposed to do, treat you like the plague? I think it's okay if we dance together.

SARAH: I guess so.

She shoots another look over at Molly and Brent, who are silently staring at each other.

SARAH: Would you look at her? She's loving every minute of this!

MATT: Sarah-

She doesn't even hear him.

SARAH: You know, I am so sick of her little games! She's always running to Brent about something. And remember when she just "happened" to show up at the coffee house that day we were supposed to meet there? She must have found out we were meeting, one way or another. And bringing you tonight - it was just another little thing to try to make me uncomfortable.

MATT: Gee, thanks.

SARAH: No, seriously, she's trying to get to me.

MATT: Do you think she ... knows?

SARAH: No, she can't.

She turns her head to look at her sister and husband, and keeps looking at them as she speaks.

SARAH: I don't think she does. But she does know that you caused tension for Brent and me before, and she's probably hoping you'll do it again.

MATT: Do you really think Molly would do something like that? She doesn't seem like that type of person.

Sarah turns sharply back to him.

SARAH: Oh, she is ... whether she realizes it or not.

Brent and Molly, meanwhile, have been dancing in relative quiet until this point.

MOLLY: For as much hype as it got, you'd think this new millenium would at least feel different from the last one, wouldn't you?

BRENT: It doesn't.

Molly lets out a heavy sigh. She looks absently over his shoulder but resists the urge to lay her head on it.

MOLLY: I know.

END OF EPISODE #138

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