

## "Footprints"

### Episode #186

#### [Five Days After #185]

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

*\*Brent spent Christmas with his family in San Diego, while tensions continued between Molly and Sarah at the Fishers' holiday celebration.*

*\*Claire refused to heed warnings by Tim and Paula that her mission to find incriminating evidence against the Morianis could be dangerous.*

*\*Andy's latest attempt at dissuading Katherine from marrying Nick backfired when she accused him of trying to exact revenge on her for her past misdeeds.*

## FISHER HOME

She can't get that look out of her head.

The way Sarah had stared at her -- her gaze so piercing, so filled with bitterness and hostility -- had chilled Molly to the core. And it is continuing to do that even now, days later.

Molly points the remote at the television and hits the 'off' button. There's no use trying to watch anything now. Her mind is in overdrive and it doesn't show any signs of letting up anytime soon. *To think that my own sister could hate me so much ...*

The ringing of the doorbell cuts into her thoughts. It takes a moment for it to register, and it is only at the second ring that Molly is driven to her feet. She crosses through the living room and into the entryway, peeking out the side window to see who's at the door.

Anxiety pushes her quickly to the door. She fumbles briefly with the locks -- the same locks she has been undoing for who knows how long -- and yanks the door open.

"Just the person I wanted to see," Brent says.

"Really?"

"Yep. You busy?"

"No, not at all. Come on in," she says, stepping aside. She closes the door behind him. "So what brings you by?"

"Nothing special, I guess. I just got back last night and I thought I'd come catch up on everything here."

"How was San Diego?"

"It was ... nice. Peaceful. It was good to spend Christmas with my dad and my brother and sister. It's been too long since I did that."

"How's everyone doing?"

"Really well. Josh is working at the newspaper with my dad. Danielle's going back on tour next week."

"I should give her a call sometime."

"Yeah, I think she'd like that." He slumps down onto the sofa. "So how was Christmas around here?"

"Surprisingly without incident," Molly says. "Did you hear that it snowed here?"

"Really? Wow ... Just my luck to miss a white Christmas, huh?"

She grins. "Guess so. It was nice, I must say. I think it may have saved Christmas, actually. There was a little bit of tension floating around in this house."

"What kind of tension?"

"Well, I didn't experience it all firsthand, but from what Tim tells me, my father was getting worked up about my mom again, and Claire brought up the Morianis again, which didn't go over well with my mom or with Tim. And of course there was Sarah ..."

"What'd she do?"

"Nothing." Molly gives an uncomfortable shrug. "Not really."

Brent casts her a dubious look.

"She gave me the nastiest look," Molly confesses. "I don't know what the hell it was supposed to mean ... I was just standing there talking to Jason about this whole ... situation, and I look up and Sarah's glaring at me--"

"What were you and Jason talking about?"

"Just--" Her explanation stumbles as she tries to figure out what is safe to say. "About

how there's all this bad blood between Sarah and me because of her pregnancy and everything."

Brent shakes his head, feeling rage and regret flare up simultaneously within him. "I wish we could just erase this whole stupid situation."

"Little late for that." Molly sits down beside him.

"Unfortunately, yeah."

Molly hesitates before she speaks, trying to read his face. She can't -- at least, she doesn't think so. "Speaking of which ... Did your trip do you any good on that front?"

He looks up at her sharply. "What do you mean?"

"I know you didn't *just* go to San Diego so you could spend Christmas with your family," she says. "It was also so you *wouldn't* be spending it here, right?"

"Right," Brent answers after a brief silence.

"So did it help?"

"Huh?"

"Being away," she says. "Did it help give you a new perspective on this whole mess? On your marriage?"

Brent looks away, not at anything in particular, but not at Molly. "Yeah, it did," he finally says.

## **KING'S BAY MALL**

Claire can feel the bag's handle falling from her hand before it actually breaks. She instinctively reaches down, hoping to get a hand on the bag itself before it falls from her grip, but her timing is too slow. The side of the bag no longer supported by a handle sags and its contents, piled high, go tumbling out onto the floor. Claire stops in her tracks and sets down the rest of her bags as she kneels to pick up the spilled goods.

"Need a hand?"

At the sound of the familiar voice her eyes immediately rise. "I think I'm okay," she says

to Andy, "but thanks. These stupid shopping bags ..." She scoops everything back into the bag and stands, now struggling to redo the delicate balance she had achieved in carrying all the bags.

"I thought Christmas was a week ago," Andy says. "Are you just treating yourself to some after-the-fact shopping?"

"Apparently you're not familiar with the concept of returns and exchanges," she smiles. "I think there's an unwritten rule that at least 40 percent of a family's Christmas gifts must be unsuitable, thereby making me eligible for yet another trip to the mall."

"I was actually returning something myself," he informs her with mock pride. "The requisite ugly sweater from my aunt. She buys one every year and every year I return it. It's a good thing I only see her once or twice a year, or she'd be wondering where they all went."

Before Claire can respond, the disabled bag again falls from her hand. This time, thankfully, nothing spills out. She reaches down to pick it up but Andy beats her to the punch and takes it for her.

"Are you almost done?" he asks. "I can give you a hand with all of this if you'd like."

"I was actually on my way to the car. But really, it's fine. I can manage--"

"Nonsense." He takes two more bags from her hands. "I'd be glad to help."

"Thanks," she says after a moment of consideration. She shifts the bags she is still holding to make things easier. "I'm parked out there." She nods with her head toward an exit not far from them.

"All right." He begins walking to the exit, leaving her no choice but to cave entirely and accept his assistance. "So how did your Christmas go?"

"It was fairly quiet," she says. "The snow was nice, wasn't it? It set a real mood."

"It did," Andy agrees. "I'm sure the kids loved that."

"They did. And just to have a white Christmas -- it was a treat. How was yours?"

"Along the same lines -- nice and quiet. I spent the day with some friends. We had a good meal, caught up on each other ..."

"You didn't see your mother?"

Andy pauses in front of the exit, his left side leaning against the door, ready to push it open. "No. I think that might have taken the 'nice and quiet' part out of the day, and that wasn't exactly what I wanted to do." He pushes the door open and they exit the mall.

"Are things really that bad between the two of you?" Claire asks as she leads the way through the parking garage.

"Unfortunately, yes. I shouldn't be surprised, I suppose. I knew it wouldn't be easy after everything she did concerning Danielle. I suppose I just expected that she would be the one trying to get through to me, not the other way around."

"Still no luck in talking her out of marrying Nick, I take it."

"None at all." They stop beside Claire's car. "I tried to make her understand that there's a firm possibility that Nick's connections could have been the cause of her shooting, but she wouldn't listen to me."

Claire considers this as she unlocks the car. She pops the trunk and they both begin loading the shopping bags into it. "Just because she didn't admit something could be wrong doesn't necessarily mean that you haven't made her consider the possibility."

"She has been known to be stubborn ..."

"Exactly. Maybe your mother doesn't want to give you the satisfaction of knowing that you're making her question this marriage."

"Could be," Andy muses, a hand to his chin. "But she's still going through with it. I only have a little over 24 hours to stop her, Claire."

"We'll come up with something," Claire says, lowering herself into the car. "I promise."

## **FISHER HOME**

"It did?" Molly asks.

"I suppose," Brent shrugs. "Being away just convinced me that I'm sick and tired of all of this. It's completely exhausting. I'd love some peace. Heck, I'd even settle for a couple of days where I could just not think about everything."

"I know the feeling." She leans forward, her elbows on her knees. "So what are you going to do now?"

"About Sarah, you mean?"

Molly nods. For some reason, she feels dirty even doing that, even implying that she is curious about Brent's intentions regarding the future of his marriage.

"At this point, I really don't want to see her," he says. "I mean, what the hell am I supposed to say to her?"

"Tell her how you feel. If you can't do that at this point, I don't know how you're ever going to get anywhere." Immediately she regrets the statement. "I'm sorry -- it was stupid of me to say that. Of course it's not that simple."

"It could be. But the way Sarah and I communicate ... I don't know if anything resembling honesty is even possible. It's like we just keep going in circles, you know? One of us screws up, we pretend to patch it up, and we move on to the next mistake. It's almost been three years, do you realize that? *Three years* of this."

"I'm sorry," Molly finally says, unsure of what else there is to say. "I know this is really difficult for you ..."

"It's got to be hard for you, too. You've been dragged into this far more than you ever should have been."

Neither of them even realizes the pause that occurs, the space during which there are no words. They just share a look, each trying to understand the other.

"I should go," Brent says abruptly, standing. "I need to get to the station and get caught up."

"That's probably a good idea," Molly manages to say as she follows him to the door. "I, uh, I'm glad you came by. Good luck with everything, okay?"

"Thanks." He opens the door. "And thanks for being here. I think I would've gone insane by now if I didn't have you to unload all of this with."

Molly responds with a smile. In slipping out the door, Brent doesn't notice the bittersweet edge to her grin, or the unspoken words that rest on her lips ...

He shuts the door behind him. Molly turns, leaning her back against the door. *Brent ...*

Meanwhile, outside, Brent is barely off the porch when he freezes in his path. A few seconds of awkward silence pass, and he is the one who finally breaks the lull. "Sarah."

## MORIANI HOME

The car settles in behind the BMW. Claire sits there for a moment, the engine still running, as the warnings -- the voices of Tim and Paula -- fill her head. She reaches up and turns the key, quieting the car. *I have to do this.*

She gets out and marches up to the front door, not allowing herself enough time to be plagued by doubts. Her finger shoots up and is about to press the doorbell when she hears a voice.

"I've been faithful to the schedule thus far, haven't I?"

Panic strikes her and she turns around, expecting to see Nick right there, his silver mustache being pushed up by that damn arrogant grin. But he isn't there -- she sees that immediately. And his voice sounds removed anyway, as if it's close but separated from her somehow--

The window. As her eyes sweep over the side of the house, it catches her eye. A window, no more than ten feet away from her, is open. *You idiot*, she laughs at herself. *How could you not tell that was where his voice was coming from?* And as she peeks inside the window, she realizes Nick is reclining in the living room, his back to the front door and the telephone held to his ear.

"You can't just demand more money now," he tells whoever is on the other end. Her interest piqued, Claire moves in as close to the window as she can without throwing herself in the shrubbery or making herself overly visible. She ducks down so that she can no longer see inside.

"It's not my fault the damn thing fell apart to begin with!" Nick cries into the phone. "I--" He is cut off and must wait several seconds before he can speak. Even from outside, Claire can feel his impatience. "I have it all worked out, okay? You'll get the money. You've been getting it so far, haven't you?"

The conversation sounds so familiar to Claire, so similar to the ones she overheard her father engaging in when she was younger. She strains to listen even harder, hoping that she will somehow be able to hear something even better ...

"I'm getting married tomorrow night," Nick says, obviously trying to keep himself in line. "I can't--" Another interruption. "Seven o'clock? That's two hours before the wedding!"

How do you--"

Claire commits the time to memory, hoping ...

"Fine! I'll be there, okay? Seven o'clock at Pier 20. Fine."

She hears the beep signifying that the phone has been turned off and the call ended. Her first instinct is to fly away, to rush to the car and speed off. But she knows she cannot be that obvious ... so she waits. She hears movement, but isn't sure what it means. Finally she creeps back over to the front door, crouching and praying that she isn't being watched. She peers into the living room and sees that Nick is nowhere in sight. *Oh well, she thinks. If they see me, they see me.*

She makes her way back to the car, trying to be as quiet as she can, and slides inside. She hesitates a moment in starting it, fearful of the noise it will make, but she knows she has to. Steeling herself beforehand, she turns the car on and maneuvers it out of the driveway as quickly as she can. Once she is back on the road, navigating her way away from the Morianis' home and back to her own, does she allow her mind to go free again.

"I've got it," she says aloud, too pleased to keep the dialogue in her head. "This is our ticket."

## **FISHER HOME**

"Hey," Sarah says, as taken aback to see Brent as he is to see her.

"Hi." Brent looks around for a moment, lost. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to pick up something from my mother," she says, trying to hide the annoyance the question triggers in her. "I think the better question is, what are you doing here?"

He swallows. "Just catching up. I got back last night and I wanted to see how the holiday was here--" He stops himself before the rambling begins.

Sarah knows exactly what he was here for, but she reminds herself that causing trouble is probably not the best strategy right now. "So how was your Christmas?"

"Pretty good. It was nice to spend it with my family, you know?"

"Yeah ... How's Danielle doing?"



"She's good. Busy. She's on a break from the tour for the holidays, but she heads back out on New Year's Day." The discussion feels as though it has already exhausted itself, but he pushes onward. "How about you? Good Christmas?"

"As good as it could have been," she says. "It's still a little awkward being with my whole family after everything, especially with Victoria here ..." She lets the comment drift off, not wishing to turn this into another analysis of her mistakes.

Brent is silent.

She takes a deep breath. "It wasn't right, Brent. It wasn't complete -- it wasn't Christmas. Not without you."

She takes his hand, holding it with both of hers. She waits for him to jerk away but it doesn't happen.

"I miss you," she says softly. "I need you ..." She releases his hand.

"It's not this easy, Sarah. I can't just listen to your apologies and absolve you of all wrongdoing. We can't just put this behind us."

"I know. I know that. But now that we've had some time apart--"

"You can't speed this along faster than it's supposed to go. I need space, I need to clear my head ..."

"And I'm going to give it to you. But I'm not going to forget you, Brent. I can't."

He doesn't respond.

"I--I need to know that you're still willing to give this a shot whenever you're ready," she says. "Or at least that you haven't ruled out the possibility of being willing."

Brent stares into her face. He can't help it -- he wants to know what's going on behind it, in her mind and in her heart. After all the lies and half-truths ... trying to read her is the only honest bet.

The one thing he is certain he sees is desperation.

"Do something for me," she says.

"What?"

"Give me a chance to prove that this is worth a second shot."

He looks up at the sky, so calm today. A deep breath passes before he speaks. "How do you want me to do that?"

"Be my date for the New Year's Eve party."

## **END OF EPISODE #186**

*Should Brent attend the party with Sarah? Is the marriage even worth another shot? Let us know what you think about this story and this episode at the Message Forum!*

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