

"Footprints"

Episode #189

<Shortly After #188>

[Previously ...](#)

- *Molly was surprised to see Brent and Sarah arrive at the party together.*
- *Despite attending the party with Alex as "just friends," Lauren continued to hold out hope that he might want to renew their relationship.*
- *Ryan caught Claire lurking around the Moriani home and brought her down to the cellar -- where he got locked in with her.*
- *The mobsters whom Nick was supposed to meet discovered Tim hiding on the pier.*
- *Andy was so distracted by his thoughts that he failed to notice that his car was barreling into another vehicle until it was too late.*

MORIANI HOME, CELLAR

"Hitting it isn't going to get us out of here," Ryan calls across the cellar.

"It might," Claire replies, trying with as little success as her several previous attempts to pry the steel doors open.

"Nope, I don't think you're going to get anywhere. You're just giving me a headache." Ryan, sitting on a box, drops his head into his hands. "I should've left the cuffs on you. At least you wouldn't have been able to make such a racket."

She sneers at him and then strikes the doors again. "Well, there's no need to keep me tied down, since we're apparently not going anywhere anytime soon."

He hears Claire sitting down -- at last -- on the steps. He finishes rubbing his temples and looks up at her. For a moment their eyes meet, but the hold is quickly broken. He isn't sure which of them jerks away first.

"I don't know where my cell phone is," she says. "I thought I had it on me ... Then I'd be able to call the police and get the hell out of here."

Ryan ignores the mention of the authorities as best he can. "Mine's in the house."

"Doesn't do us a lot of good there, does it?" She brushes her dark hair back with her whole hand. "Dammit, why did you have to drag me down here?"

"Because we didn't need you making trouble at my father's wedding."

"Is that a hint that I'm onto something?"

"Not at all." Ryan stands up and stuffs his hands into his pockets. "I just think that my father would prefer not to have his wedding interrupted by someone slinging totally unfounded accusations."

"I'd hardly call them unfounded," she replies with a sarcastic laugh.

"You don't have any proof, do you?"

"No, but ... I have enough to create some suspicion, don't you think?"

He shrugs. "I don't know. I guess we won't get to find out, will we? Because we're both going to be sitting down here at least until that wedding is over, unless my father is for some reason stricken by lunacy and decides to come search for me. Which I doubt will happen."

"Tim knew I was coming over here," she says, bristling at the thought of Tim sending her on this wild goose chase. "He'll come looking for me eventually."

"What a guy." Ryan begins pacing back and forth over a small area of the cement floor. "Your hero, right?"

She just stares blankly at him.

"I never knew you to need someone to play that part for you, Claire. You were always more than willing to be your own hero."

"I still am."

"Then why do you let Tim be in that position? It sounds like you let him dictate an awful lot of what you do. And you're just going to sit here all night until he comes and rescues you."

"That's not--" She stops herself. She doesn't need to be getting into this now. She doesn't need to be discussing her Tim-related issues with Ryan, of all people. "Besides ... if there's anyone I need to be rescued from, it's you, don't you think?"

She can see something flare up in him. She isn't sure what it is -- anger, remorse, frustration, or what -- but it fills his face almost instantly with a burning shade of crimson. His shoulders tense visibly, crunching up closer to his ears, and his hands ball up into tight fists.

And suddenly, once she sees his reaction, something is sparked inside her. Horrible images -- the images of gnashing limbs and muffled cries that have filled her nightmares for so many years -- flood her mind. She can feel the pressure on her arms, pressing them down, all over again. His breath, hot and disgusting against her neck, is there again. She is no longer in the cellar, but back in that living room all those years ago ...

"Get away from me!" she shrieks, flailing her arms. Ryan has now come close enough that she strikes him, and the first impact just drives her to keep going. She batters him with her hands, fighting so hard now against the demons of the years.

When Ryan snaps out of his momentary shock, he grabs her arms firmly. She cries out even louder and it is clear to him that she is reliving the rape. But he doesn't care -- not now, not after seeing her react so violently to him.

"Stop punishing me for this!" he screams in her face.

STATE ROUTE 207

The screeching and crackling of metal is still fresh in Andy's ears. He sits up straight and tries to breathe, but his organs feel as though they are jumping against the inside of his chest and then ricocheting against his back. He remains still, unmoving except for the trembling in his hands, his legs, and just about every other part of his body.

I'm alive. The thought comes at him out of nowhere. He hadn't even considered the fact that he might somehow be dead. The whole thing just happened too quickly for that. But now a wave of relief floods his body as he realizes that he is alive and, from what he can tell, okay -- unlike the car, the front end of which has crumpled up before him.

The next realization that hits him is that the car is still running, strangely enough. He can hear it groaning and wheezing, alternately. Immediately he puts it into reverse and pulls away from the other car, wanting to untangle the mess even just a little bit. When he is a safe distance away, he puts the car into drive and moves forward again, but to the side. The car sputters as it settles on the side of the road, and before Andy can put it into park or remove the key from the ignition, it dies.

During the moving of the car, the idea that has been dominating his thoughts is that of the other driver and the other car. Who did he hit? What kind of damage has he caused? He notices, with a certain degree of shock, that the damage he caused to the other vehicle, an SUV, is minimal -- a little bit of denting on the rear end, but that's it. The SUV moves with ease to the side of the road, in front of his car.

He watches as a woman emerges from the driver's side. The first thing he notices is how

attractive she is, peculiarly enough. She appears to be in her early thirties, with dark hair, almost black, its tips reaching for her shoulders. Andy pulls the release on the door and he hears it pop open, but he remains in his seat. The woman approaches the driver's side of his car, but still he does not move. He does not want to face this, not now ...

But she is there and he has to. He opens the door and slides out of the car, studying the damage as he does so -- perhaps so he will not have to look this woman in the face.

"I-I'm so sorry," he says finally, bringing his eyes up to hers, if only for a moment. "I wasn't paying enough attention--Are you okay? Do we need to call anyone?"

"I'm fine," she says, her tone impatient. "Look, can we just trade information and get out of here? This isn't something I want to be dealing with right now."

"Oh, uh, sure." Andy ducks back into his car and emerges a moment later with a pen, a slip of paper, and his insurance information. He quickly scribbles down the necessary information and hands it to her. As she writes down hers, Andy slips back into his car and tries the key in the ignition. No response. Muttering, he reaches for his cellular phone.

"Got an important call to make?" the woman asks, the element of sarcasm in her voice quite pointed.

"I need to find a ride," Andy explains.

"I take it you were headed somewhere important."

"Very." He scrolls through his list of numbers for Claire's cell phone and dials it. The call goes through, but the only response he receives is endless ringing.

The woman observes him as he listens and sees his hope fade to annoyance. He punches in another number -- Tim's -- but the voicemail answers.

"Here's my info," the woman says, handing it to Andy as he tosses the phone onto the passenger seat of his car.

"All right," he says. "Look, I'm really very sorry about this. I was overinvolved in my thinking and I was rushing to get somewhere ..."

"Big New Year's Eve party?"

"Not quite." He picks up the phone and begins dialing directory assistance. "My mother is getting married in a few minutes."

"Oh, wow." The woman's tone softens. "Well, um, can I give you a lift?"

He is clearly taken by surprise. "What?"

"I can drive you where you need to go, if it's not too far out in the boonies or anything. By the time you wait for a cab, you'll miss the wedding."

"I couldn't--"

"It's no trouble," she insists.

Andy nods his head after a thoughtful pause. "Deal."

KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL

*I won't go, I won't sleep, I can't breathe
Until you're resting here with me.
And I won't leave, I can't hide,
I cannot be
Until you're resting here with me ...*

Molly listens to the plaintive sounds of Dido's "Here With Me" with unusual intensity, staring out into the crowd of dancing couples. She absorbs every word, soaks up every mournful note, as she does everything she can *not* to watch. But try as she might, she cannot keep her gaze from drifting over to the furthest side of the floor, where Brent and Sarah are swaying slowly together.

She finishes the rest of her drink. With a sigh, she heads back over to the bar and ponders what she will have next. Behind her, the song comes to an end, something of which she is only vaguely aware.

"Hey." The voice, little more than a whisper, brushes against her neck.

"Oh, hi," she says, turning to find Brent. The bartender holds out her drink and she takes it. Immediately she feels that a sip is in order.

Brent requests two drinks and then looks back at Molly. "Having fun?"

"I suppose." She tries to think of something else to say, but her mind is suddenly blank -- or, at least, there is nothing in it that she can express.

"I just thought you should know: Sarah and I ... just because we're here together doesn't mean ..."

She looks over at him and realizes that he is staring straight ahead at the bar. "You don't owe me any sort of explanation," she says.

He continues gazing directly in front of him as he replies. "Maybe not. But I felt ... I felt like I should explain. Sarah just asked me to come here tonight as kind of a test run. To see if we could just spend some civil time together. That's it."

"I understand." Molly watches as Brent takes the drinks from the bartender.

"I'll talk to you later, okay?" he says. "I should get back over there."

She nods and he moves away. She takes another sip of her drink and then turns around. Her eyes follow Brent as he goes back to Sarah, hands her her drink, and sits down beside her at a table with two other couples.

You've got to stop this, Molly scolds herself mentally. *It's pathetic -- it's ridiculous.* And yet she can't pull her gaze away from him.

THE STREETS OF KING'S BAY

"You don't have to thank me anymore. I swear."

"I'm sorry," Andy says, trying to manage a smile. "It's just that I'm so on edge as it is, and the last thing I was expecting was to get a ride from a woman whose car I just ran into--"

"Wasn't exactly the New Year's Eve I was planning, either." She turns to him with a smile that he recognizes as quite genuine. "But hey, it's already been weird ... why not go for the gold, right?"

Andy stares out the car window and watching the passing scenery for a moment through the darkness. "Do you mind if I ask why you don't seem to be doing anything extraordinary tonight?"

"This isn't extraordinary?" She flashes him that grin again, all full, red lips, and he cannot

"I mean, to celebrate New Year's."

"It's complicated," she says, refocusing on the road as she shifts her hands on the steering wheel. "I was in town for a business deal, and we got our signals crossed--"

"In town? Where are you from?"

"Seattle."

"Not so far away."

"Nope. Close enough that I figured that even after all the crap I went through yesterday and today with these clients, I could get home in time to celebrate with my family."

Andy considers inquiring about this family, but he shoves the thought aside. First things first.

"So that's what I was up to when you rammed into me," she continues.

"You were going home to be with your family? I didn't realize -- I never would have accepted a ride with you if I'd known!"

"I'm not missing much, believe me."

He waits for her to elaborate, but she doesn't.

"Take a right here," he tells her.

She does that and then shoots him a quick glance. "Do you mind if I ask why you seem so stressed out over this wedding? This isn't seeming the usual pre-wedding hijinx."

"I would welcome some hijinx," Andy sighs. He senses that Maggie -- as she reported her name -- would like some more explanation, so he adds, "I'm trying to stop my mother from going through with this marriage. She's making a colossal mistake."

"Don't like the guy?"

"Not much to like about him. I'm fairly certain that he's the reason she was in a coma for weeks last spring."

"Ouch."

"Exactly. He's ... mixed up in some terrible things, and I can't let her marry into that."

"I would think not." She looks at him again. "So what are you gonna do, burst in and drag her out of there?"

"Left here," he indicates with a nod at the approaching intersection. "If that's I have to do, I will."

They ride along in silence for a few moments. "Just take this next right," he tells her.

"It's that one," he points towards the house. There isn't any need -- the street is lined with vehicles anyway. Maggie guides the car in behind a Lexus sedan.

"Here goes nothing," Andy says, unfastening his seatbelt.

KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL

"Ten ... nine ..."

Bill looks down at Paula's beaming face. He reaches out and takes her hand in his. They've counted down to the New Year so many times together, but every time it seems to be a special occasion, a moment to be remembered. Looking at his wife, holding onto her hand, Bill feels that spark that he knows has kept them together for so long, despite everything else.

"Eight ... seven ..."

Jason observes the affection between his parents. He wraps his arm more tightly around Courtney's shoulders, pulling her body closer to his as they count down to 2001.

"Six ... five ..."

Next to Courtney and Jason are Alex and Lauren. Though they are standing separately, their stolen glances at each other connect them. Their eyes meet and, as they count, the gaze holds.

"Four ... three ..."

Sarah holds onto Brent's arm. She looks up at him. *This is it*, she thinks. Brent is here with her and they're going to ring in the New Year together, ready to put behind the pain of the past year and embrace a new beginning.

"Two ... one ... Happy New Year!"

The partygoers erupt in celebratory cheers. Bill and Paula come together in a loving kiss. Jason leans in to Courtney and presses his lips to hers. He can feel her smiling even as they kiss.

Alex swallows hard. As the crowd around here falls into kisses and embraces, he places a hand on Lauren's cheek. This is it -- this is what he wants. It can be like this.

She doesn't fight it. Their faces draw together and, after a frozen moment of chills, their lips meet.

Sarah waits for the moment, tries to make it last. She has been praying for this for so long. Her eyes are fixed upon Brent's and his upon hers. Their heads move closer to one another, a scene so familiar to Sarah and yet so far off these past few months. *Just like it used to be*, she thinks as they meet ...

She feels only the brushing of Brent's lips against hers. In an instant, the gap has been widened. He is standing upright, looking at her with a very different expression than he was just a moment ago -- at least, as far as she can remember.

She notices that his lower lip is trembling. "I can't do this," he says.

FITCH MANSION

I can't believe I actually made it here, Andy marvels as he rushes inside the mansion and through its halls. The walls and the floors seem to stretch on endlessly, holding him back from his destination, and it feels as though it takes him an eternity to reach the ballroom.

When he finally does, he hurries through the open French doors. Already he can hear the minister's voice, but for some reason, it doesn't register in his mind that the ceremony is at this point. He continues and pushes his way through the curtains that separate the reception area from the space that is being used for the ceremony.

"By the power vested in me," the minister says ...

Andy shoves the curtains apart, almost getting tangled in them, and freezes at the end of the aisle. Katherine and Nick are standing up front, their backs to him, as the minister finishes that awful sentence. And for some reason, he cannot move.

"... I now pronounce you husband and wife."

The pocket of air that has lodged itself in Andy's chest releases. "No!" he cries out. He

can feel the assembly turning to stare at him, but he knows that it is too late. It's over.

And from her place at the head of the room, Katherine shoots Andy the coldest look that he has ever seen her give.

MORIANI HOME, CELLAR

Ryan's voice brings Claire back to reality, and a wave of anger surges through her. She shoves Ryan away from her forcefully. "Stop punishing *you* for this? Has it even occurred to you that I'm the one who's still suffering? Not only do I have to live with those memories for the rest of my life, but then you show up in King's Bay wanting to be friends again and I'm forced to relive the whole thing even more than I already do!"

"You're the one who's been chasing after me," he spits. "For weeks you've been hunting around, sniffing for clues--"

"Only because I want to get you out of my life, this time for good! Don't you even try to turn this around on me!"

"I don't have to. 'Cause it's true, Claire, you know it as well as I do. There's something inside of you that just won't let you stay away from me."

The words tear through Claire's insides, but she remains focused on that crazed twinkle in his eye. He's close to the edge, that much is clear to her.

"I just want this to be over with!" she shouts, shoving him again with all her might. "I want to forget about you and I want to forget about everything that happened--"

"I think it's a little late for that, don't you?" he fires back.

"If it is, it's your fault!"

"That is such bull! You have become so obsessed with this little witchhunt that you can't even recognize the truth anymore!"

"Oh, that's rich -- you lecturing me about truth."

She can tell that she has struck a nerve. Unable to respond, Ryan grits his teeth. Tension seems to be building inside of his head and finally, when it becomes almost unbearable, he clutches his head between his hands.

"Shut up!" he screams.

Claire is silent. The display is unsettling, a reminder of how volatile he can be, and her mind again flips to the terrifying scene that played out so many years ago in a Chicago living room.

"This is all his fault!" Ryan wails angrily. He turns his back to her and covers his face with his hands. "He did this! He screwed everything up so badly!" His body is shaking, she can see.

"What? Who?" she asks in frantic confusion, trying to sort out what is happening. She is certain that she heard his voice being broken up by tears, and her hunch is confirmed when he swings back around.

His face is streaked with the trails of fallen tears. "Do you really not remember? Don't you get it? It was him, it wasn't me!"

"What?"

"I didn't rape you!"

PIER 20

"What do you think you're doin'?" the mobster repeats gruffly.

Tim may as well be naked -- at least, that's how it feels. His hiding place has been destroyed thanks to his clumsiness and the fallen barrels, and now he is just crouching in the shadows, in plain sight for the two men whom he has been observing.

He cannot answer the question.

One of the men abruptly moves closer to Tim and grabs him by the collar. "What are you doin' here?" he demands.

Tim struggles to his feet. "Nothing. It's not ... I was just--"

"You was just what, spyin' on us?"

Tim keeps his mouth shut.

"Whoa, whoa, hold on," says the other man. "Look at him."

The man who has been grabbing Tim's collar releases it and steps back. The mobsters stand side-by-side, examining Tim.

"It is, isn't it?" the first one says.

"Yeah." The second man shakes his head. "I dunno why Moriani would send his kid to take care of this. Oh, well ... Did he give ya instructions for what he wants to do with the rest of the money?"

Tim's eyes go wide. "No, no. I'm not--"

"Do ya at least have what he owes us for today?" Tim sees the man fingering what he is sure is a gun inside his jacket.

"I don't have anything," Tim says.

"Who the hell does he think he is?" one of the men exclaims. "Thinks he can keep jerkin' us around like this -- it ain't gonna work."

"Look," Tim says, "I'm--"

"You shut up," the man barks, suddenly whipping out the gun and jamming it into Tim's chest.

"But--"

"I don't wanna hear another word out of you. If Moriani thinks he can play games, then fine. We can do that."

Tim clenches his eyes closed, not wanting to have to see this. He feels the gun's barrel digging into his chest -- and then the pressure released. The gun is being pulled away. He opens up his eyes and sees the men stepping backwards away from him.

"You just tell your daddy," the man with the gun says as he backs up, "that we can arrange other ways of erasing his debt."

Tim gulps. He watches the men backing away, moving away from him, and the pressure of the situation begins to ease up. He draws a deep breath, making up for all the air he's missed in these tense moments--

But he doesn't get to release the air. It catches in his chest again when he sees the man raise the gun. It catches the moonlight and glints brightly.

That flash of light is the last thing Tim sees. The gunshot sounds and, before anything else can register, his world falls to black.

END OF EPISODE #189

What should happen between Claire and Ryan now? And what about Tim? Let us know what you think! Comments, questions, and suggestions are all welcome at our Message Forum!

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