

"Footprints"

Episode #191

<The Morning After #190>

[Previously ...](#)

**Being trapped in the cellar with Claire pushed Ryan to confessing that Stan was her rapist. Although she fought the truth, it was clear that she finally remembered Stan as the culprit.*

**Andy was unable to stop Katherine from marrying Nick. He and Maggie rang in a belated New Year over drinks.*

**Tim lay alone on the pier after being shot by the mobsters.*

**Stung by Brent's announcement that their marriage is over, Sarah stormed out of the party -- but not before angrily tossing a drink on Molly.*

MORIANI HOME, CELLAR

The noise -- the shuffling of metal, some creaking -- comes first to Claire in the darkness of her sleep. It increases, growing less distant until she realizes that the noise is not part of some nightmare and that she is awake.

She has awoken so many times during the night that this latest revelation means nothing ... until a glimmer of what she realizes is sunlight, breaking through the crack in-between the doors, catches her eye. She sits up straight against the cellar's cold wall and lifts her head from her shoulder.

She fights the negligible amount of sleep she received and the haze it is holding over her. The noise, she realizes, is the sound of someone coming into the cellar. She looks quickly over to the opposite wall and sees that Ryan is still slumped against it, asleep. Then her gaze returns to the doors -- just as they burst open.

Claire watches as Nick Moriani descends the stairs into the cellar, early morning sunlight flooding in from the now-open doors behind him. She knows that in a moment he will spot her and the game will begin.

And it does. Nick's head rotates slowly as he scans the cellar. He passes over Ryan's motionless body and continues until his gaze settles upon Claire. "Have a nice night?" he sneers.

It doesn't even cross her mind to become engaged in a verbal sparring match with him. She just wants to get out of here, away from last night and back to the reality she knows. She pulls herself to her feet.

Her cold stare shoots right through Nick and out at the world pouring in from the open doors behind him. She needs to get out there. She bolts for the stairs, but Nick steps in front of her and stops her with a firm grasp of her shoulder.

"Where are you off to so quickly?"

"Let me go," she snaps, yanking herself away from him. "I need to get out of here -- I need to go see Tim ..."

"Very well," Nick says after a pause.

"What's going on?" Ryan interrupts, trying to clear his head with a few quick shakes. He stands slowly.

"I figured you must be down here," Nick explains, strolling closer to his son. "I saw a phone lying by the doors, and the lock looked like it had fallen into place strangely."

"We got locked in." Ryan shakes his head again as he tries to wake up. "I'm sorry I missed the wedding -- did everything go all right?"

"It was wonderful," Nick says. He folds his hands in front of him and looks over to Claire, expecting a response. He receives none.

"You're lucky we didn't plan on leaving for the honeymoon until this morning," he says, turning back to Ryan. "If I hadn't come back here to pick up a few things, you might've been stuck in here for days."

There is again no response.

"Quiet crowd in here," Nick mutters.

"I need to get out of here," Claire blurts out suddenly. She isn't sure why she says it -- it's not as though she needs to explain herself to these two. She charges up the stairs and disappears out the doors.

Nick watches her bizarre exit. "What happened in here last night?" he asks Ryan.

"Nothing ... Being locked up all night wasn't either of our idea of fun, that's all."

Nick nods, pursing his lips. "I would imagine that would be the epitome of fun for you."

"Yeah, well, it wasn't."

"Why not? What happened between the two of you?"

ANDY FITCH'S APARTMENT

Maggie brings the car to a stop beside the curb, per Andy's instructions.

"And this," he says, "would be my humble abode."

"Looks pretty ritzy to me." She studies the complex, with its clean beige exterior, obviously large apartments, and spacious balconies. "I'm not seeing too much of that humble thing."

"Shut up," he says with a laugh as he opens the passenger-side door. He turns as if ready to slide out of the car and then stops, turning back to face her. "Thank you."

"For the ride home? No problem. We've been all over the place anyway, haven't we?"

"Very true. I don't believe I have ever taken a walk through the park until six in the morning on New Year's Eve before."

"And I don't believe I've ever taken part in interrupting a wedding before," she says. She notes the immediate melancholy that fills his expression. "I'm sorry that didn't go how you wanted it to."

"No need for apologies," he replies with a shake of the head. "Or consolations, for that matter. I have spent the better part of a night unloading my emotional baggage on you, and you've done an unbelievable job of lifting my spirits."

"Glad I could be of service. And for what it's worth, you *did* do your fair share of listening. I don't think I've done that much talking about my rollercoaster of a marriage in a long time. I didn't realize how much I needed it."

"And I didn't realize how much I still needed to talk about my mother and Danielle ... but I guess it was everything that happened last night that made it all come spilling out. I'm just thankful I didn't have to be alone after seeing my mother marry that man." He smiles. "And I'm thankful I was able to spend the time with someone so enjoyable."

"You do realize how high this is going to make my expectations next time my car is rear-ended, don't you?"

He shrugs. "Could be worse things."

"I suppose so," she nods, grinning widely.

In the momentary lull, their eyes catch. The silence is extended as they stare into each other, reading and wondering ...

"I'll give you a call," Andy says suddenly. "To discuss paying for the damages and everything." He slides out of the car.

"All right. It was, um, nice meeting you." She raises her eyebrows and flashes him a vibrant smile.

"You, too. Bye." He closes the car door. "Have a safe trip home."

"Thanks. Take care." She rolls up the window and starts the car again. Andy ascends the stairs to his apartment but pauses at the door, watching as Maggie's SUV pulls away from the curb and out of the complex.

He reaches into his pocket and fingers the card with her number on it, staring off at the path of Maggie's vehicle long after it is gone ... and, finally, he finishes unlocking the door and enters the apartment.

FISHER HOME

Molly does not hear her mother's slippared footsteps coming towards the kitchen. She sits at the table, elbows propped up and her face resting in her palms, her eyes cast down into the soothing brown of her morning coffee.

Paula pauses at the entrance to the kitchen, seeing Molly's preoccupation. The older woman leans against the wall and folds her arms in front of her body. She silently watches her daughter, almost able to feel the confusion and frustration that Molly seems to be channeling into the coffee.

"I didn't expect to find you up so early," Paula finally says.

Molly's head jerks up to Paula with a start. "Oh, Mom ... sorry, I was just spacing out."

"I could tell." Paula walks the few steps to the table and settles into the chair to Molly's right. "Does this have to do with what happened last night?"

Molly's mouth opens and then closes again. Her eyes droop back downward. "No ... no, that wasn't a big deal, Mom."

"Your sister flinging a glass of champagne in your face in the middle of a party isn't a big deal?"

"She was just reacting badly to whatever was going on with Brent, that's all." She risks a glance up and sees Paula's skepticism. "She was!"

"I don't doubt it," Paula responds. "But I do think that there's more to this story than anyone has told me so far."

"It's nothing, Mom. It's not anything you need to worry about."

"When one of my daughters throws a drink at the other and tells her to go to hell, I think I have a right to start worrying."

Paula reaches over and takes hold of Molly's hand. "It's pretty obvious to me that this situation, whatever it is, has you very concerned. It's not going to do any good to keep it to yourself."

Molly considers making a crack about the irony of her mother's comment, but opts instead for silence.

"Something is clearly bothering you," Paula says softly. "I get the distinct impression that it involves Sarah and Brent."

Molly turns her head to face away from Paula.

"I'm right, aren't I? Molly, please, let me help before there's any more damage to this family. Tell me what's going on."

MORIANI HOME, CELLAR

"It was nothing," Ryan manages after what seems to him far too long a silence. "Honestly. It's just difficult to be around Claire -- especially in a situation like that. I'm sure you can understand."

"Of course," Nick says. "And I'm sorry that you had to spend the night in here. When you didn't show up at the wedding I assumed that something had gone wrong, but I couldn't very well slip away to check on you--"

"I can handle myself."

"I'm sure you can. But I think a little assistance in getting out of here was necessary, no? I tried your phone, but your voicemail answered."

"I left it in the house," Ryan says absently.

"Ah. Well, on the plus side, you did keep Claire from interrupting the wedding. Excellent work on that front."

"Everything went all right?"

"More than all right. Katherine's son burst in and tried to convince her not to leave with me--"

"He didn't find anything out at the pier, did he?"

"It certainly didn't seem like it. If he did, he kept it to himself, and he was desperate enough that he would not have done that."

"You stayed away from the pier, right? Claire said that her husband and Andy Fitch were going to be hanging around there."

"Everything went quite smoothly with the meeting, don't worry. And when Andrew came in -- I worried for a moment, but Katherine really made him look like a fool. It was beautiful." He lapses into quiet, patting his silver mustache. "I've got her, Ryan. I've got her and I've got the money."

"You really think you can swing this?"

"Absolutely," Nick says breezily. "Our debt is as good as gone ... all thanks to the new Mrs. Moriani."

TIM & CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

Simply seeing the inside of the apartment brings renewed life to Claire's weary body and mind. She is back in the comfort of her own home ... in the strange comfort of the reality that she has always known and upon which she has based so many of her words and actions ...

She closes the door behind her as quickly as she can. Her body flies towards the bedroom, desperate for the solace she hopes to find there.

"Tim!" she calls out as she bustles into the room.

But the room is empty. The bed doesn't appear to have been touched all night. Claire stands in place, attempting to absorb this latest unexpected twist.

Quickly she peeks into the bathroom, then back in the living room and the kitchen, just to be sure. Tim isn't anywhere to be found. And from what she can tell, he never came home last night.

ANDY FITCH'S APARTMENT

Andy steps out into the bedroom. The air is cool against his naked upper body, still steaming from the heat of the bathroom. That shower felt wonderful after the night he had ...

What a night. He hasn't had one like it since college, as far as he can remember. Certainly not one as completely exhausting and yet totally invigorating all at the same time. He can't quite figure out how he feels: The feeling of sorrow that his mother actually married Nick is great, but it is being blanketed by a different feeling, a lighthearted one--

The phone tears him from his wandering thoughts. He makes his way across the bedroom and picks up on the second ring. "Hello?"

"Andy," comes the familiar voice on the other end.

"Claire. What did you wind up--"

"Have you seen Tim?"

"What?"

"Tim," she repeats. "When did you see him last?" There is a frantic note in her voice that sets Andy on edge.

"At the pier," he says. "Why? What's wrong?"

"He never came home last night, as far as I can tell."

"What? I had to leave the pier before Nick showed up, but Tim stayed behind to see what would happen--"

"So you don't know what happened to him after that?"

"No."

"Dammit ... All right, I need to keep searching. I'll talk to you later, okay?"

"Okay. Good luck."

There is a click in Andy's ear. He hangs up his own phone and places it back on the receiver, turning the strange conversation over in his mind. Something didn't sound right with Claire.

She's just worried about Tim, he reasons as he strips off his towel and begins getting dressed. I wonder what happened to him. I should have checked back in -- but I was so preoccupied ...

With Maggie. Even though he knows it shouldn't be happening right now, a smile curls his lips.

FISHER HOME

Molly draws a deep breath and covers her eyes with her palms. "It's really complicated, Mom. I don't even know if I *can* explain it ..."

"Try," Paula urges. "Please. I don't want to allow what's going on between you and Sarah to--"

"I can handle it! Don't worry." Molly sighs heavily and turns away.

Paula is about to do some more gentle nudging when the ringing of the phone pulls her away from Molly. She rises and goes over to the counter where the phone is resting, keeping an eye on Molly as she does so. "Fisher residence," she answers.

"Paula," Claire says desperately.

"Claire. Good mor--"

"Have you seen Tim?"

Paula pauses. "What?"

"Did you see Tim at all last night?"

"No ... I thought I'd be hearing from one of you at some point, but I never did."

"Jeez." Paula can hear Claire's breathing grow heavier. "Okay, can you keep the kids for a little while longer?"

"Of course. They're still sleeping--"

"Great. I just need to -- look, I'll keep you posted, okay?"

"Posted? Claire, what's going on?"

"Nothing," Claire says. "I mean, I have no idea. Tim never came home last night."

Paula draws in a sharp breath. "He didn't?"

"No. Look, I'm going to try to figure out what happened. I'll let you know what's going on once I have some idea myself."

"Okay. I'm sure everything's fine, Claire."

"Bye." Claire hangs up abruptly.

Paula slowly sets the phone back down on the receiver.

"What was that?" Molly asks.

"Tim ... he never came home last night," Paula reports, concerned shock already flooding her face and her voice.

"Where was he?"

"I have no idea. Claire didn't tell me much, just that she was looking for him." Paula closes her eyes. "I knew something was off when they asked me to take the kids last night. I knew something strange was happening, because they wouldn't have skipped the party otherwise."

"I'm sure everything will be fine," Molly tries to reassure her, although her own conviction sounds less than genuine.

"I hope so." Paula takes a few of what are supposed to be calming breaths, to no avail. "I really hope so."

END OF EPISODE #191

What do you think happened to Tim? Should Molly confide in her mother about the situation with Brent and Sarah? Your comments, predictions, suggestions, and questions are all welcome at the message forum!

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