

"Footprints"

Episode #203

<The Day After #202>

[Previously ...](#)

**Claire was cool with Paula, who later shared with Bill her concern that Claire is trying too hard to suppress her grief over losing Tim.*

**Alex broke up a passionate moment between himself and Lauren after she asked him to make love to her. He rushed out, apologizing.*

**Courtney went to see Jason, hoping to make amends for their earlier rift, and told him she was ready to make love. Jason -- who had just had an unsettling encounter with Alex -- was unresponsive and let Courtney leave.*

**Nick panicked after learning that Katherine had not yet authorized his access to her bank account.*

CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

Paula brings her hand back up to the door and raps three more times. She waits, listening for some type of response, but hears nothing. After several seconds of consideration, she knocks again.

Relief sweeps over her when she hears footsteps coming towards the door. She waits, anxiety lingering inside of her, as she listens to the door being unlocked. And the sight of Claire, once the door is open, relieves her even more -- even though the first thing she really notices is how ragged Claire looks.

"Sorry," Claire says, closing her eyes briefly. "I was just taking a nap."

"Oh." Paula hesitates a moment and then says, "I see. I'm sorry I woke you up ... but I've really wanted to talk to you."

Claire seems to consider turning her away, but instead sighs. "Come on in."

Paula enters the apartment. Like every other time she's been here since Tim's death, the experience feels almost surreal -- as if it's simply not possible that she can be in this apartment that she helped her son move into, where she watched him build a family ...

She feels herself being swept up all over again and she shakes her head, as if to shake off the sensation. She focuses on Claire, trying to figure out exactly what it is that's making the younger woman appear so worn-down lately.

"Claire," she says softly, "I'm concerned about you."

Claire raises a palm. "Don't be."

"Why not? Because you want to pretend that you can do this all by yourself? This isn't healthy, Claire. You've been through -- goodness, you've been through a horribly traumatic experience."

"Yes, I have. And I'm trying to move past that."

"You're not ready to move past it!" Paula says, raising her voice slightly but doing everything she can not to seem as though she's attacking Claire. "You lost your husband. I can see that you're still trying to figure out how to live your life without him. You're lost -- I can see it in your eyes."

"I am lost," Claire replies. "But we all are, right? You and Bill lost a son. Molly, Sarah, and Jason lost a brother. Travis and Samantha lost their father. Everything's up in the air for all of us. And it'll take time before we figure out how to get past our grief."

"Of course. You're right. But you've been so distant lately. You don't come over to visit anymore. We haven't had a real conversation in weeks, maybe even months. It's as though you're not even a part of this family anymore."

"I'm not! I was your daughter-in-law. Now that Tim's gone--"

"You *are* still a part of our family," Paula says, placing a hand on Claire's shoulder. "You're the mother of our grandchild. And we love you. Family isn't about a certificate."

She sees Claire soften before her eyes, but there is some kind of internal struggle going on inside of her. And before either side can win out, there comes another set of knocks on the door.

"Hold that thought," Claire says, moving to the door. She pulls it open quickly -- and gasps.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE

Lauren sets down her coffee cup on the small table and slides into the chair. "I don't even know where to start."

"The beginning?" Courtney suggests with a sarcastic grin as she sits down across from Lauren.

"It was weird," Lauren says. "Everything was going so well ... It was getting really, really

intense. And then he just stopped and bolted again."

"*Again?* What is going on with him?"

"I don't know ..." Lauren drops her head into her hands. "It's something major, though. He just gets this look -- this look of total, like, fear or something. It's bizarre."

"I'm sorry," Courtney says, casting her eyes downward sympathetically.

"So am I. I thought this was actually going somewhere."

Courtney sighs. "I'm really sorry."

"I was gonna go over to see you last night, after it happened," Lauren says, "but I figured you and Jason would be busy."

"Oh, that we were."

"That doesn't sound too encouraging."

"It shouldn't." Now it is Courtney's turn to pause, running a hand back through her sleek, dark hair. "Right after we left the movie theatre we got into an argument. So I made him take me home."

"Oh, wow. Is everything okay now?"

"Honestly, I don't know. I went over there later because I felt bad, but he was acting really strangely. I--" She leans in closer. "I told him I was ... ready. And I was. I thought it was gonna happen ... and then he just sorta cut me off."

Lauren flashes a stunned look. "*Jason* made you stop?"

"I know! Something was wrong. I think he's still mad at me."

"What was the fight about?"

Courtney hesitates. "He was getting upset about--about the way I've been pushing this thing with you and Alex."

Lauren waits a moment as the information sinks in. "Jeez," she says with a shake of the head. "What the hell is going on with these guys?"

"I wish I knew."

FITCH MANSION

"Guess who!"

"I'm stumped," Katherine says playfully after a mock pause. "Whoever could it be?"

Nick removes his hands from her eyes and she turns to face him. He examines her, the understated paintings on the living room wall providing a backdrop for the vision. "And how is my beautiful wife doing?"

"Wonderfully," Katherine says with a broad smile.

"Excellent. And I have some news that could make things even more wonderful."

"Oh, yes?"

Nick nods. "Well, possibly ... I just had a meeting with my investment broker."

"Good news?"

"Very much so. He's found a terrific new investment opportunity for me--for us. It's a company he's been following for quite awhile and it looks like it's ready to explode any day now."

"So are you going to invest in it?"

"Absolutely," Nick says. "At least, I'd like to. But I have a bit of a problem." He lets his face droop with regret.

Katherine takes the bait. "Why? What's the matter?"

"I don't have the actual cash to make the investment," he explains sadly. "Everything is tied up at the moment, and in the time it would take me to free up the money I want to put into this company, it would be too late."

Katherine doesn't respond, so Nick takes the initiative to cast another line. "So I was wondering ... if you'd be willing to put in the money."

CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

"Hi," Claire says calmly. "Um, come on in."

Ryan shoots her an almost puzzled look and then comes inside a bit hesitantly. His gaze falls upon Paula.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he says. "I didn't mean to interrupt. I can come back--"

"No need," Paula assures him, holding up a hand. "I was just on my way out."

Ryan nods and steps back, giving the women a chance to finish their conversation.

"Think about what I said," Paula says. "Please."

Claire accepts the statement with an uncomfortable smile. "Thanks for coming by."

"I'll see you soon," Paula says as she steps out into the hallway.

Claire closes the door behind her and leans against it. She looks directly at Ryan.

"Was that Tim's mother?" he asks.

"Yeah," Claire answers, sounding exasperated.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine! Why does everyone assume that I'm falling to pieces?"

Ryan lets the comment pass and then says, "You surprised me when you invited me in. I was expecting another blowout."

"I didn't want to get started in front of Paula, that's it. Don't get excited."

Ryan tries to hide his disappointment, but even in that moment of gathering himself, it shows through.

"So what are you doing here?" Claire asks. "What reason could you possibly have for needing to see me now?"

"I don't have a reason," Ryan says with a shrug. "I guess ... I just need *you*."

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE

Lauren picks up her mocha and takes a sip. She sets it back on the table roughly and props her chin up in her hand. "Maybe Alex isn't the weird one," she says.

Courtney tilts her head slightly. "What do you mean?"

"Maybe I'm the reason this isn't working. I've never had good luck with guys -- maybe there's a reason why."

"That's ridiculous, Lauren."

"Is it? I mean, you've practically had to coach me through this whole thing, and I still couldn't hold it together."

"You said yourself that things were going well this time around," Courtney says. "Alex is the one who freaked out on you."

"But maybe he did it because of me. There must be a reason he doesn't want to get close to me. Maybe it's just 'cause I'm me."

Courtney shakes her head. "No, no, no."

"I dunno," Lauren says glumly. She returns to the mocha for a lengthy gulp and stares off reflectively as it glides down, warming her throat.

"Don't start thinking like that, Lauren. It's not you."

Lauren doesn't say anything.

Courtney grabs her friend's hands. "Look at me."

"What?"

"Look at me."

Slowly Lauren brings her eyes up to Courtney's.

"Now listen," Courtney says. "Whatever's going on with Alex is his thing. It's not just you."

Don't get all down on yourself."

Lauren exhales slowly, heavily. "Why can't this just work out? I mean ... Everything seems so right about it. Alex and I have such an awesome time together. And then he just pulls these random freakouts ... You know how much I like him, Court."

"Yeah, I do." Courtney squeezes Lauren's hand. "But you've gotta have faith. Either Alex is going to come around or you're gonna find someone who's an even fit."

She squeezes again. Lauren manages a weak nod, and Courtney can tell that she's not buying it.

FITCH MANSION

"Of course."

Nick is ready to break into a more impassioned argument, but Katherine's words register just as he opens his mouth.

"Really?" he asks with surprise.

"Absolutely," she smiles. "I wouldn't want you to miss out on what sounds like an excellent opportunity. Besides, we had discussed forming a joint bank account. We can go open a new account and I'll have some money transferred into it."

Nick is still trying to calm himself mentally as he puts on a cool smile. "Wonderful. Thank you very much."

"It's not a favor, dear. I married you because I trust you." Andy's admonitions from her wedding night and from the weeks before begin ringing in her ears as she adds, "I don't want this to be like a business arrangement, and I don't want to operate on the assumption that things are going to go sour."

Nick draws her into his arms. "I'm glad you feel that way. I couldn't have put it better myself."

Her hands settle onto his back and tighten the embrace. Nick holds her as relief washes over him. *Finally ... I can be rid of this debt.*

But there is something else there, riding right on the tail of that pleasant thought. And it's a distinctly unpleasant feeling.

Nick tries to quiet it as he silently marvels at how wonderful it will be to be free of his debt after so long.

CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

"Oh, come on," Claire scoffs after the briefest hesitation. "Save it."

"I'm serious!" Ryan insists. "I do need you. Claire, you--you're the only woman I've ever wanted like this -- even remotely like this. What we had--"

"--was a teenage thing. And it's not as if that went too smoothly."

"Just because it didn't go smoothly doesn't mean it wasn't *good*," he counters. "And come on, how could it have gone smoothly, with our fathers and everything?"

Claire pulls her lips together tightly and shakes her head. "No. No -- it's in the past."

"Not because we wanted it to be!"

He sees that all-too-familiar flaring of nostrils as Claire inhales sharply ... but suddenly, she is left without anything to say. And Ryan knows exactly what is going on.

"You keep thinking about the rape," he says. "I can tell. You're looking to fall back on that as a reason to push me away."

"Well, it is kind of a big deal, don't you think?" she fires.

"I never said it wasn't! But it wasn't--it's not what you've thought it was for all these years. I know that must be a huge shock, and it probably doesn't even seem real to you sometimes ... but you believe me. You believe what I told you on New Year's. I can see it."

Claire says nothing.

"I know you need to get used to it," Ryan continues. "I understand that. And I'm sorry ... I'm so sorry for letting you believe that it was me all those years. Not just because of what it meant for you and me, but because I know how hard it must be to believe the truth now."

Claire turns her head to the side and focuses on the carpet. "Ryan, I spent all those years believing that you were the one who raped me. For you to spring that on me -- for me to

have all of that come rushing back into my head all of a sudden -- especially after losing Tim ... I can barely even handle it."

"I know," he says gently. "I know. But you do believe me. And that ... it tells me that there is something here, that we haven't totally lost whatever we used to have."

She doesn't look up at him. "This really is not a good time for you to be trying to sweet-talk me."

"I'm not. That's not what I'm trying to do. I just--I want your friendship. I want your acceptance. I want to try to put all of that confusion behind us and get along."

Claire takes a slow breath, opening her mouth as she prepares to speak. But another series of knocks on the door cuts her off.

"What is this, a freaking parade?" she mutters as she turns back to the door and opens it up.

And this time, what she discovers gives her genuine reason to gasp.

"Hello, Claire," coos Diane Bishop.

END OF EPISODE #203

What did you think of this episode? What's going on with Claire and Ryan? And how about that ending? Come and share your thoughts over at the Message Forum!

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