

## "Footprints"

### Episode #206

<Immediately After #205>

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

*\*Andy and Claire discussed how lonely he is without Katherine or Danielle. When Claire left, Andy fell into quiet reflection -- but was jolted from it by Maggie's arrival!*

*\*Courtney tried to assure Lauren that what happened with Alex was not Lauren's fault.*

*\*Matt attempted to talk Sarah out of seeking revenge against Molly.*

## ANDY FITCH'S APARTMENT

"Maggie!"

"That would be me," the raven-haired woman grins. "You're not busy, are you?"

"No," Andy says, shaking his head as if to escape from the thoughts that were consuming him just a moment ago. "No, not at all."

"Terrific ... So, are ya happy to see me?"

"Very," he answers with a smile. "But what are you doing here?" He steps out of the doorway, motioning for her to come inside.

"I'm in town on business. I got in this morning. I've been doing work junk all day. I figured I'd pop on over here and let you know that I'm around."

"How long will you be in town?"

"A couple of days, at least." She shakes her head, though a sparkle of amusement keeps the gesture from being too serious. "My father handed me this huge project. They're planning to put in a new business complex downtown -- on Arbor."

"You're working on that?"

"Yep. I'm heading the design team, actually."

"Wow. Very impressive."

"Very intimidating! This is an awful lot of responsibility, you know that?"

"I can imagine."

"Ahhhhh!" she mock-screams, pretending to tug at her hair. "But anyway, how's everything with you? I'm sorry I didn't keep in better touch -- I'm not so great at that."

"You're quite forgiven," he grins. Then his expression takes a turn for the somber. "Things are ... okay. I suppose I can't really complain."

"But ..."

Andy pauses, trying to gather the right words in his head.

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As usual, a strong undercurrent of noise is buzzing through the bar and grill. The steady hum of pool games and conversation is engaged in constant battle with the radio, which is currently playing R.E.M.'s "Imitation of Life."

Against the back wall of the restaurant, Jason slides into a booth opposite from Lauren.

"Thanks for meeting me," she says, taking a sip of her iced tea.

"Not a problem," he says. "Besides, we don't spend enough time together, just the two of us. It'll be fun."

She shrugs. "Maybe not. There's some serious stuff I wanna go over, Jason."

He folds his hands in front of him on the table. "All right."

There is nothing but silence between them for a moment, until Lauren speaks. "First of all, I want to--I want to apologize."

"What for?"

"For causing all this trouble between you and Courtney." She notices the surprised look on his face, tinged with a bit of embarrassment, and quickly adds, "She told me that you guys had a fight the other night because of Alex and me. I just want you to know I'm sorry about that ... It's bad enough that I've made this mess for myself, and it's even worse to let it interfere in my friends' lives."

Jason soaks up the apology quietly and then says, "It's not your fault, Lauren. Stuff

happens."

"For whatever it's worth, I'm sure things will get better with the two of you. Courtney does love you, and I know you love her."

"Things are okay," Jason says. "It's not like we aren't speaking or anything. We've been skating together and talking and all that ... It's just a little awkward."

She nods, accepting this and looking a little bit relieved. And then she is quiet again, as if preparing herself for something.

"The truth is," she says, "that I wanted to see you tonight for a really specific reason."

Jason just looks at her. He's pretty sure he knows where this is going.

She confirms his suspicion. "I wanted to know if you have any idea what's going on with Alex."

Right at that moment, the waitress arrives at their table. Ordering a Sprite allows Jason a moment to stall -- but that's all it is, a moment.

## **THE FISHERMAN'S PIER**

"Is it always this mobbed?" Matt asks, glancing around the restaurant. Even from the entry, he can tell what a zoo it is tonight -- people chattering loudly, the wait staff rushing around, and the entry packed with people waiting to be seated.

"Not this bad," Sarah says. "I would venture to say it's a bit more zoo-like tonight than usual." She flashes Matt a goofy grin.

He just rolls his eyes, though he doesn't completely hide the glimmer of amusement. Sarah looks down at Victoria, sitting quite alertly in her arms, and puts a finger to the smiling baby's cheek.

"At least someone thinks I'm funny," she says.

"It's only 'cuz she's not old enough to realize what a dope you are," Matt shrugs. "Just wait 'til she's fifteen, sixteen ..."

Sarah holds up a hand. "Don't scare me." She is about to add something else when her attention is diverted. "Dad!"

Bill looks away from what appears to be an intense conversation with the hostess. "Sarah, Victoria, hi!" he calls. His face beams -- at least, as much as it can -- but his genuine pleasure at seeing his daughter and granddaughter can only do so much to push the franticness away from the front of his mind.

"What's going on?" Sarah asks, stepping forward.

"We're short a cook. One of them quit on me this afternoon -- I'm still trying to figure out why. And apparently half the town has chosen tonight to have dinner here."

"Well, uh, do you think you could squeeze us in?" she asks cutely.

"I'm pretty sure I can," Bill says, "although you may have to wait awhile to actually eat."

"Not like we've got any hot plans for the evening," she shrugs.

"Great." He goes back to consulting with the hostess for a moment and then turns back to Sarah. He is about to say something when he notices Matt standing behind her.

Sarah realizes immediately why her father's expression has stiffened.

"Dad ... you remember Matt," she says, marvelling at the oddness of the situation and hoping that it will go well.

"Yep," Bill says. "Of course." There is no trace of real warmth in his voice.

"Nice to see you again," Matt offers, though he knows the gesture isn't really going to get him anywhere.

"So how about that table?" Sarah cuts in.

Bill tips his head towards a corner of the restaurant. "Let's go."

They file over to the table, Sarah following Bill and Matt following her. The whole thing feels like a tightrope walk to her, and she finds herself suddenly wondering what possessed her to bring Matt here.

## **ANDY FITCH'S APARTMENT**

Andy draws in a lengthy breath and then pushes his words out quickly with the air.

"But ... things aren't exactly terrific, either."

Maggie tilts her head compassionately. "Is it more stuff with your mother?"

"Oh, yes."

"No luck in talking her out of staying with that guy?"

"Unfortunately, no. She's completely convinced that he only married her for the most noble of reasons."

"Or she's trying to convince herself of it."

"Exactly." He sighs. "But earlier today, I found out something that may be able to change things."

Maggie looks genuinely excited by the news. "What is it?"

"My mother had money transferred out of one of the accounts we share -- and moved it into a joint account with Nick."

"So you think," Maggie says slowly, "that he's trying to get to her money?"

"I know it. At first, I thought that he really did care about her, but he was being selfish and putting her in danger. Now I'm beginning to think that his only real interest is in business, and my mother just happened to be a convenient source of funding."

"That would certainly explain why he wanted to marry her so quickly."

"Yes, it would. And maybe if I can convince her that he's after her money, she'll be angry enough to leave him."

"Well," Maggie says, "I'll do whatever I can to help you out." The softness in her eyes tells Andy that she is sincere, and that recognition tugs at something inside of him.

"Thank you."

"Glad to be of service." And suddenly her demeanor changes. "But right now, I think I can be of a different kind of service."

Andy eyes her suspiciously, with a hint of humor, trying not to get too ahead of himself. "Is that so?"

"Absolutely. And the first step--" She places a hand on each of his shoulders. "--is for you to put all of your worries aside for the night."

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"Jason? Do you have any idea what's up with Alex?"

Jason stares at Lauren as an odd tension hangs between them. He knows he's staring, and he knows it must seem odd, but it's all he can do right now. After steeling himself a bit, he swallows -- not too hard, he hopes -- and looks directly at her. "I'm not sure," he says.

"What do you mean, you're not sure?"

"Exactly that -- I'm not sure. Alex hasn't told me anything, exactly, so I--I don't know what to tell you."

She shakes it off. "All right. I figured you didn't, but I figured it was worth a try. I thought maybe Alex had confided in you or something. Maybe he would feel more comfortable telling you instead of me or Courtney ..."

Jason doesn't say anything.

"But I guess if you knew anything, if it was anything that serious, you would've told me or Court already," she says. "Oh well ... I guess I'll just have to give him space, or make him feel comfortable enough to open up to me, or something."

"Look, Lauren," Jason says suddenly. "There's--there's something I've been meaning to talk to you about."

"What is it?"

"About Alex."

She looks at him a little sideways. "Yeah?"

"I just think ..." He drops his head into his hands and leaves it there for what seems to both of them to be an eternity of seconds. At last, he raises it, though he looks more at the booth than at Lauren herself. "I think maybe you should forget the idea of having a relationship with Alex."

Now she looks at him sharply. "Why?"

## THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

"I think a night out will do you a world of good," Maggie beams, as if she's proud of herself for getting Andy to come out with her.

He shrugs. "It can't hurt."

"No, it can't," she says as they enter the restaurant.

The first thing either of them notices is how packed the entry area is.

"Although being caught in a stampede might not be so good," she adds, looking around in a little bit of horror as they push their way up to the hostess.

Andy is about to inquire about the wait when he sees Sarah across the restaurant. He waits only a second before her gaze catches his, and she motions for him to come over.

"That was easier than I expected," Andy says.

"What?" Maggie asks.

"I see a friend over there," he says. "And she just happens to be the daughter of the owner."

He leads her over to the table where Sarah, Matt, and Victoria are seated.

"Andy!" Sarah exclaims. "It's been forever."

"It really has. How are you?"

Sarah pauses a moment to consider the question and comes back with, "Not so bad. How about you?"

"I can't complain," he says. He turns to Matt. "Matt, isn't it? It's nice to see you again."

Matt nods. "You too."

Andy steps back a little, as if presenting Maggie. "I'd like both of you to meet Maggie

Hudson."

"Nice to meet you," Sarah and Matt say almost at the same time.

"Maggie, Sarah and Matt. And this--" Andy rubs the baby's head lightly. "--is their little girl, Victoria."

"It's nice to meet you," Maggie smiles.

"Listen, why don't the two of you join us? Otherwise you'll never get to sit down," Sarah says.

Sarah gets up and goes to the other side of the booth, sitting beside Matt, and Andy and Maggie slide into the empty side.

Andy glances around the restaurant in a bit of amazement and then looks to Sarah. "Why does it seem so out-of-control tonight?"

"My dad said they're having some staff problems," she explains. "At the rate things are going, we may never eat."

The comment hangs over the table for a moment. Then abruptly, Matt signals for Sarah to let him out of the booth. She does.

"Where are you going?" she asks.

"I'll be right back," he says, heading off.

Sarah flashes Andy and Maggie a puzzled expression.

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"Because." Jason folds his hands on the table awkwardly and watches his fingers dance clumsily with each other as he tries in vain to find a comfortable position for them. "You're gonna wind up getting hurt really badly."

He watches Lauren for some sign of acceptance, but he sees her lips twitching with protest.

"Look at how all over the map he's been so far," Jason cuts in. "He--he's been giving you totally opposite signals, right? I really don't think that's gonna stop, Lauren."

She is quiet for a moment. "I guess not."

"I think the best thing for us to do right now is just be good friends to Alex," he continues. "That way he can--maybe he'll be able to sort out whatever's going on in his head."

She nods glumly. "That's probably a good idea ... Yeah."

He breathes an internal sigh of relief. "I'm glad to hear you say that."

"Well, I'm not an idiot. The logical part of me can tell that this thing isn't going to work." She pauses. "But I wish it would. I mean, I feel comfortable with him, and ... we can have a lot of fun together, but he's really good for having serious conversations sometimes, too. And he *is* really hot. It would be perfect, wouldn't it?"

Jason is saved from having to respond by the return of the waitress.

## THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

"She really is adorable," Maggie says as Victoria coos happily at her. "How old is she?"

"She'll be eleven months this month," Sarah says. She reaches out and strokes her daughter's cheek with a finger, which Victoria moves to grab. Sarah lets her take it, and Andy and Maggie watch the little show in comfortable silence.

Sarah looks around the restaurant yet again. "I'd like to know where Matt got to."

"Do you want me to go check the men's room?" Andy offers.

"Actually, that may not be such a bad idea. I wonder--"

Sarah's wondering is cut off as she sees Matt approaching. Maggie and Andy see it, too, and the three of them share a confused look as Matt comes over to the table, carrying a plate and wearing an apron.

"I brought out an appetizer," he says.

"What'd you do, steal it from another table?" Sarah asks, half-laughing.

"Actually, I made it."

"What?" She waits for him to drop the joke and chuckle, but he does no such thing.

Her face twisted with confusion, she asks, "You just barged into the kitchen and made your own food? That's not really the point of this whole restaurant thing--"

"I just thought your dad could use some help back there. So I'm gonna be doin' a little cooking tonight."

"You can cook?"

"Indeed I can," he says. He addresses Andy and Maggie as well as Sarah as he adds, "So I guess I'm not gonna be eating with you guys tonight. Sorry about that."

Andy says with a brush of the hand: "Don't worry about it."

Sarah is still staring at Matt incredulously. "You cook?"

"Yeah," he says, leaning down and giving Victoria a kiss on the head, "I cook. And I'll see ya later, okay?"

Sarah just nods and he heads off again.

She looks back to Andy and Maggie. "What just happened?"

"I think Matt just threw you a little bit of a curve ball," Maggie says.

"I think so, too," Sarah agrees, shaking her head. She watches Matt head back into the kitchen. *So what else don't I know about you, Matt Gray?*

## **END OF EPISODE #206**

*What did you think about Matt's surprise? How about Andy and Maggie? Let us know what you thought about this episode over at the Message Forum!*

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