

## "Footprints"

### Episode #210

#### <Immediately After #209>

##### Previously ...

\*Andy, Maggie, and Brent tried to convince Katherine to leave Nick.

\*A fire broke out at the Fitch mansion. Katherine was trapped and urged Nick to save himself, but he and Ryan saved her anyway. Andy and Maggie managed to escape, but Brent was pinned underneath a chandelier.

\*Things remained awkward between Courtney and Jason.

## FITCH MANSION

The sky is on fire.

That's what it looks like to Andy as he watches the flames, looking almost bored with their gutting of the mansion, reaching up to streak the night sky with terrifyingly brilliant yellows, oranges, and reds.

Now the lights of the fire trucks and ambulance have joined the flames in the sky. The emergency lights bounce off of the almost-black background and disrupt the fluid strokes of the fire's chillingly graceful display.

Andy watches the fire fighters rush inside and is instantly awaiting their return. He keeps hoping he will see one of them emerge, assisting a weary but no-worse-for-the-wear Brent in walking to safety. He can feel Maggie's fingers curled over his shoulder, trying to reassure him, but it's not helping. Not enough.

"Commander Taylor -- he's still inside?" Katherine asks as grimness returns to cloud her relief.

Andy merely offers a nod in response.

"He was trying to clear a path for us to get out," Maggie says, "but a chandelier fell and-- he got caught underneath it. We tried to get him out, but ..." She trails off bleakly and then casts another hopeful glance at the house.

Nick steps forward, coming up right behind Katherine, and rests his hands on his wife's shoulders. "Who's trapped inside?"

"A friend of mine," Andy says curtly.

Katherine casts a disapproving glance in her son's direction and then explains to Nick: "Brent Taylor. The police commander."

Nick is sure that he sees a flicker of discomfort roll over Katherine's face as she mentions Brent to him.

He looks back and catches Ryan's waiting eye. They share the briefest moment of worry before Nick turns back to Katherine.

"Does anyone have any idea how this started?" Maggie asks, surprised to recognize that even now, she feels the need to make conversation.

"Ryan and I were in the study and we heard Katherine shout that there was a fire," Nick offers.

"I don't know where it came from," Katherine says. "I was in the guest bedroom and I thought I smelled smoke. Before I knew it, there were flames tearing across the carpet ..."

A surge of activity from the house interrupts the conversation. The assembled group turns to find a firefighter rushing back down the driveway. He doesn't so much as pause as he hurries past the group and goes straight for one of the paramedics. After a quick exchange, the firefighter heads back for the house, trailed by a group of paramedics and a stretcher.

"Did you get him out?" Andy shouts, hoping to snag someone's attention.

"Yeah," the firefighter calls back, falling momentarily into a slower sideways jog. "But we've gotta get him to the hospital right away."

Maggie's grip on Andy tightens, trying to offer more security, but he feels her hand go cold and fall away as Brent's motionless body is whisked down the driveway and into the ambulance.

In an instant, the ambulance is gone, roaring its way to the hospital. But now the sirens don't sound comforting to Andy -- they sound urgent, desperate.

*Please save him, Andy's mind whispers.*

## **KING'S BAY PARK**

Elsewhere in the city, the night is not so frantic. At least not on the surface.

Jason sits on one of the swings, his hands curled around the cool metal links of its chains. He is swinging back and forth slowly, dragging his feet through the bark as the events of the past few weeks brush over his mind.

When Courtney called him half an hour ago and asked him to meet her here, he flew out of the house and through the streets without so much as a beat of hesitation. He wanted to beat her here, partly because he didn't like the idea of her roaming around the park at night by herself ... and partly because he just wanted to get here.

The tone of her voice on the phone -- it was like she was right on the verge of something. Like once they both got here, got to see each other in this place where they spent so much time when they were younger, then everything might be okay. And even the possibility of that was enough to drive Jason here without a second thought.

"Just let everything be all right," he whispers to the sky. He notices that it is filling with stars all of a sudden, like hundreds of thousands of pins are pricking holes in the dark canvas and letting the light on the other side shine through.

*Or maybe that's just wishful thinking about the light shining through,* he thinks, still gazing up into the night.

One word from the edge of the playground completely dismantles all of his thoughts: "Hey."

He turns, a little startled but mainly relieved, to look at Courtney.

## KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

The emergency room is abuzz with all the activity that comes from that strange balance of orderly business and unwelcome spontaneity. Andy and Maggie are at the center of the storm as they stand in the middle of the waiting area. When they arrived, Maggie tried to get Andy to sit, but that only lasted a matter of seconds before he was on his feet and pacing.

"This isn't good," Andy says, his gaze fixed firmly on the swinging doors that conceal the behind-the-scenes action of the hospital. "If he was all right, someone would have come out and told us by now."

"It hasn't been that long. Besides, they have to ... they have to get him all patched up, right? I doubt he got out without a single scrape." Maggie almost sounds as if she's forcing herself to counter Andy's pessimism.

Andy considers the idea for a moment but then lets out a heavy sigh. His hands, which have been knotted together and held up by his mouth, drop to his sides like a pair of anvils suddenly cut free from whatever restraints were holding them up.

"He's gonna be fine," Maggie says, taking one of Andy's hands in her own. "You just have to believe that, Andy. Brent's gonna pull through."

Andy doesn't say anything. He doesn't even look at her, and Maggie fears that he isn't even acknowledging the possibility of a happy ending to this situation.

And then suddenly, after almost a full minute of silence, he rolls his head back slightly. His eyelids slide closed and his lips begin to move, faint words running along them. Maggie listens harder and realizes that he's praying.

She bows her head, echoing the sentiments mentally, and gives Andy's hand an extra squeeze.

"Mr. Fitch?"

The nurse's voice interrupts the prayer, but the intrusion is all too welcome as far as Andy is concerned.

"Yes?" he asks, hope flooding into his voice.

"I have a question about Mr. Taylor," the nurse says, using a tone that makes it clear all she has for them is a question.

"Yes?"

"Are there any family members who need to be notified? It's especially necessary if we need someone to authorize certain procedures--"

"What procedures? What's wrong?"

"I'm not saying that anything's wrong," the nurse answers calmly. "We just need to know if there's anyone we can contact. A spouse, a parent ..."

"His wife," Andy blurts out, as if just remembering now that she exists. "Sarah Taylor."

As he dictates the phone number to the nurse, Maggie is turning something over in her mind. And even though this feels like an inappropriate time to inquire, she springs the question on Andy the moment the nurse disappears.

"Sarah Taylor," she says. "Is that ..."

"Sarah that we had dinner with the other night," Andy confirms. "Yes."

Maggie wrinkles her brow, angling her head to give him a bit of a sideways glance. "But I thought she was ... with Matt. That was their daughter, right?"

"Mm-hmm." Andy offers a prolonged nod and Maggie can tell that he is thinking. "It's a little bit of a messy situation," he says finally. "Sarah and Brent are married, but Victoria is her daughter by Matt. I'll have to explain the whole thing to you sometime ..." He trails off a little raggedly.

Maggie is still digesting the information when Andy brings up a hand to slap his forehead.

"What?" she asks with sharp concern.

"I wonder if I made a mistake," he says. "Telling the nurse to phone Sarah, I mean ... I have no idea how things are between them. I don't even know if Brent would want her here."

## KING'S BAY PARK

"Court," Jason says softly, moreso than he intended.

She seems to be struggling to find words as she approaches him. "I'm glad you decided to come," she finally says, leaning against one of the swing set's support beams.

She can tell that Jason doesn't seem sure -- or even have an idea -- of what to say, either. She drops her hands and, unintentionally staring off into space, says, "I'm tired of this."

A prick of panic wails within Jason, but Courtney looks back at him reassuringly.

"I'm tired of having this--this distance between us," she continues. "I'm tired of feeling like we're tiptoeing around each other, and not being able to talk to you ..."

"I'm tired of it, too," he nods. "I ... I'm sorry for getting so weird on you that night when you came by to apologize."

"It's okay. It was dumb of me to expect that everything would be cool just because I

decided it was time. You had every right to still be upset with me -- I don't blame you for being mad that night."

Jason accepts the sentiment with silence, not wanting to do anything more active to confirm it.

Courtney comes off the support beam and sits down in the swing beside Jason's. She starts swinging lightly, like he was doing earlier.

"Why is this so hard?" she asks suddenly, again gazing up at the bright pinpricks in the sky.

"Why's what so hard?"

"This whole relationship thing. It's ... ugh ... I never expected it to be so full of weird little things and chances for misunderstandings and all that, you know?"

"Yeah." Lips held tightly together, he nods. "I wonder if it gets easier as you go along."

"I dunno. That'd be nice."

Silence hovers over them. Jason kicks at the bark, scattering the chips and digging a tiny hole.

"Can we just put this behind us?" Courtney says suddenly.

Jason looks up at her quickly. "Really?"

"Yeah." She grasps his hand firmly, brushing her fingers over his familiar skin. "I just-- Jason, I want us to be together. I wanna be with you."

"That's all I needed to hear," he says, leaning in to meet her lips.

## KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Maggie peers over Andy's shoulder and out the window. The night, now black, is lit by the windows of the hospital and the city beyond it. Neon signs and streetlights stand out against the dark canvas, portraying a city in which life goes on as usual, nothing out of the ordinary.

But she can see Andy's reflection in the glass, too. His face betrays the shock of the

night, the terror that has turned his world upside-down. Something appears different about him to Maggie ... it's the way he looked on New Year's Eve, multiplied by ten. He is all pain and utter desperation, hardly showing any trace of the man to whom she returned a few days ago.

She spies another reflection appear behind them in the window. Andy sees it, too.

"Mother," he calls out in a ragged breath, turning and rushing for Katherine.

"Are you all right?" he asks, looking her up and down.

"I'm absolutely fine," she says. "How is your friend?"

"We're still waiting to hear."

She lowers her head. "I'm sorry, Andrew. I'll be praying for him."

"Thank you." Andy brings his hands to his hips and they fiddle with his belt for a moment as he gazes off at the wall. "Have you had a chance to think about what we discussed earlier?" he asks at last.

"That's what I was doing in the guest bedroom when I noticed the fire. I was trying to sort through everything ... Those were some rather serious accusations you tossed out."

"We weren't making them up! They're not excuses, Mother -- they're the reasons I want to get you away from Nick."

She casts her eyes downward. "I can understand that. But tonight -- that fire happened for a reason, Andrew. We may have lost our home, I know that. But perhaps it was a test of sorts."

"A test?"

"Of Nick. Of our marriage. I was trapped in that room. I was shouting to him, begging him to save himself and Ryan, and not worry about me. But he came for me! He risked his life to get me out of there."

The point of what she is saying moves in on Andy slowly, but when it finally hits, it punches him right in the gut. His eyes widen with horror. "No, Mother--"

"He loves me," Katherine says with a calmness, a control, that Andy finds a little strange. "And that is why I married him. I know I need to discuss what you told me tonight with

him, but it sounds as though it is in the past."

"No! He's dangerous! He's a threat to you, don't you see that?"

"Honestly," she says, taking in a deep breath and then releasing it, "no. Not after the way he saved me tonight."

"I'm not necessarily questioning the fact that he cares for you," Andy shoots back, unable to use the word 'love' in this context. "I'm saying that his lifestyle is dangerous! And his interest in your money should show you what kind of man he is."

Her response comes back so quickly that it's apparent she has been mulling over the point all night. "If my money were so important to him, why did he save me? I had my will changed to include him and he knows that. If he had let me die tonight -- as he could have, perhaps without a touch of suspicion -- he would have inherited more money than he'd be able to bilk out of me as you allege he's trying to do."

She can see that Andy was unprepared for that point. He is still struggling to produce a counter-argument when Nick enters the waiting area.

"Now if you'll excuse me," Katherine says, "I'm going to be leaving with my husband now. I'll phone you in the morning to ask about Mr. Taylor. And I will be praying for him."

She moves off to Nick, taking his arm and exiting without allowing herself another glance back at her son.

Andy looks immediately back to Maggie, who has been standing by the window as the scene unfolded. To her, he looks as though his insides have been ripped open by this final blow of the night.

## KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Sarah's steps fall evenly on the lobby's linoleum floor, determined thuds striking out their path. She waits with arms folded for the elevator and then taps her foot nervously as it carries her upstairs.

When the *ding* sounds and the doors part with their characteristic slowness, her last shreds of patience vanish. She forces her way out of the elevator, fairly certain that she cut someone off but not really caring.

She makes a beeline for Andy and Maggie.

"Andy," she says loudly to catch his attention.

He turns immediately. "Hi--"

"Hi." She pauses, frazzled, for a second, brushing back a few loose strands of hair. "Hi, Maggie."

Maggie raises a hand slightly in greeting, offering a grimly sympathetic expression.

"Any word?" Sarah asks.

Andy shakes his head and his eyelids droop with exhaustion. "Not yet. We've been waiting ... Sarah, I'm so sorry about this."

"Things happen. You can't prevent every accident." She glances around, absently hoping for some sign of Brent's progress. "What happened? The call I got -- they said something about a fire, and about you being here ..."

"Brent was at my mother's house with us. There was a fire there."

Sarah's eyes widen. "Oh my God. Do you know what caused it?"

"No idea. Brent was trying to clear a path for Maggie and me to get out ... A chandelier fell and hit him. We tried to get him out, but ... the house was burning too quickly. We got out and called 911 and they were able to rescue him, thankfully."

"Has he been unconscious the whole time?"

"I think so," Andy says with a somber tip of the head.

"We can't see him yet?"

"They're prepping him for surgery, I think," Maggie says. "One of the doctors came out a little while ago and told us that much."

"Oh my God." Sarah closes her eyes briefly as the weight of the situation strikes her again. "Do you know what's wrong with him? What the surgery's for, I mean?"

Maggie and Andy exchange a quick look that confirms that neither of them knows, and Maggie says, "I'm not sure. I bet you could ask someone--"

"I will," Sarah says, already moving off to find that someone. "Thanks, both of you."

She moves across the waiting area in search of a staffer, but she pauses in front of the swinging doors. He's back there somewhere.

*Don't leave me, Brent, her mind pleads. Come back, please. Just be okay. Come back so that we can have our second chance.*

## **END OF EPISODE #210**

*What did you think of this episode? Where would you like to see Brent's story go now? Come on over to the Message Forum to share your opinions and predictions!*

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