

"Footprints"

Episode #211

<The Morning After #210>

[Previously ...](#)

**Nick and Ryan saved Katherine from the fire at the mansion, but Brent was pinned underneath a chandelier. When he was rescued, he was rushed to the hospital, where he remained unconscious, and was prepared for surgery.*

**Claire tried to get to the bottom of the bad feelings between Molly and Sarah. Molly admitted that she and Brent are close and that Sarah may be jealous of that closeness.*

**Andy gave Sarah's name to a hospital staffer who needed to contact Brent's next of kin. Sarah arrived at the hospital and pleaded with Brent not to die, hoping that they might have a second chance.*

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Morning beams of light are splayed across the linoleum floor of the nurses' station. The slender windows that line one wall of the area frame the morning scene outside: Buildings and greenery and people are lulled into comfort by the summer warmth.

But somehow, the windows also seem like some sort of barrier -- as if they only provide a view into that world, not a means of reaching it. Inside the hospital, the bustle of the previous night has yet to die down. Cases have been pouring in all night with an unnerving steadiness.

Claire is finding that the feeling with which she awoke this morning -- that fresh feeling that comes with summer mornings so full of light and warmth and promise -- is fading quickly now that she has stepped inside the hospital. Especially as she rereads the chart in front of her.

"Jeez," she sighs. Nervousness is stabbing at her insides all over again, the same way it did when she heard the news early this morning when she arrived for her shift. Her worries were dulled somewhat after speaking to one of the doctors, but reading the chart in all its gruesome detail has sharpened the fear.

"Claire," comes the weary voice from across the room. Claire looks up, not sure how to react to Sarah.

"Hi," she says finally, unconsciously sighing again. "How are you holding up?"

Sarah comes closer, hands tucked in the back pockets of her jeans. "I'm all right. Tired, I guess. I've been here since--since they called me last night."

"I'm sorry," Claire offers. "I know how scary this must be ..."

"Of course you do. After what happened to Tim ... This is like my worst nightmare, Claire. Losing my brother was bad enough. And now for Brent to be--" She stops, out of both fear and uncertainty. "How is he, really? Everyone here's been giving me the run-around, I think."

"The big problem right now is that he's not conscious. If he wakes up, that will be major progress."

"Will he? I mean--this sounds really serious."

"I can't give you any definites," Claire says with a little shake of her head. "Between the smoke inhalation and the burns and the head trauma and the other little things -- it added up to a lot of trauma for his body."

Sarah considers all of this silently, adding up the injuries and then calculating some set of odds as though she's doing some type of cosmic gambling. Her front teeth grip her lower lip tightly.

Claire places a sympathetic hand on Sarah's arm. "Maybe you should go get some rest. If there's any news, I'll give you a call--"

"No. I can't. I couldn't rest even if I wanted to, I don't think. I'm gonna--I've got to stay here until Brent wakes up."

"It may not be immediate. And you're exhausted."

"I don't care," Sarah insists. "I want to be here when he wakes up, and I want to be here until he wakes up. I want to be there so I can pray for him and talk to him."

Claire swallows and clutches the file to her chest. "How are things between the two of you, anyway? I was ... honestly, I was a little bit surprised to see that you were even here."

"Things have been rough," Sarah admits. Claire is almost certain that she can see a glimmer of rage pass through Sarah's eyes before she adds, "But we're going to get our act together. This whole thing--it's shown me how important Brent is to me, how horrible it would be to lose him. We're going to make it work."

Memories of last night's dinner party are surging through Claire's mind as she nods.

"I should get back to his room," Sarah says.

"All right. I'll come by later to see you. And I'll be praying."

"Thanks." Sarah turns and heads back to Brent's room.

Claire pauses only a moment before she makes her way over to one of the payphones across the room. She deposits the coins and dials quickly, glancing back over her shoulder just to make sure that Sarah hasn't returned.

I hope I'm doing the right thing, she thinks as the phone begins to ring on the other end.

FISHER HOME

"What do you suppose that was all about?" Paula asks, settling in at the kitchen table with her first cup of morning coffee.

"I wish I knew," Bill says, looking out through the dining room and into the living room, at the front door that just moments ago closed hurriedly in Molly's wake.

Paula pauses reflectively, resting her chin on the heel of her hand and absently gazing into the delicate cream-colored floral pattern that adorns the tablecloth. "I wish I had some idea about what's been going on with her lately."

"After last night, I think we may have some idea."

Sarah's outburst flashes on the screen of Paula's mind all over again, and again she feels that horrifying sensation of having the breath stolen from her lungs. "Do you really think ... Could Molly have feelings for Brent?" Paula asks slowly, discomfort staggering the words.

"I think it's possible," Bill admits with a bit less hesitation than his wife. "I think Sarah would have to have some reason for accusing Molly of something like that, don't you?" He waits for the signal of Paula's agreement and then continues: "But I also think that the situation is probably more complicated than we could really know."

"I spoke to Molly last night," Paula says, "after everyone left. I was cleaning up and she came in and--it was impossible to ignore what had happened at dinner. God knows part of me would have liked to, but ... it was there."

"And what did Molly have to say?"

"Not very much. She practically ran back upstairs after a few minutes. But at least we got

the issue out on the table, which I suppose is a good thing."

"Did she have anything to say about what Sarah said?"

"She was defensive," Paula replies quickly. "Very defensive. She seems to think that Sarah is overreacting to her friendship with Brent because of the way their marriage is going."

"That seems reasonable enough, doesn't it?"

"Maybe. But there was something about the way she said it, Bill. Like she was trying to convince both of us -- herself as well as me." Paula lets out a deep breath through her nose and folds her hands on the table. "I really think that something is going on between Molly and Brent."

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"Molly," Claire says breathlessly, already rushing towards the elevator.

"Thanks for calling me," Molly says as the two women meet. "I rushed right out of the house--"

"I didn't mean to startle you. I just thought you should know what's going on."

"I'm glad you called, really. If I'd known last night I would have been here by his side." Molly adjusts her purse, which is drooping off of her shoulder. "So what happened? How is he now?"

"Did you see the paper this morning?"

"No. I got out of the shower and I'd just come downstairs when you called--"

"There was a fire," Claire says. "At the Fitch mansion." She watches alarm warp Molly's face and adds, "Brent was there with Andy. Everyone else got out all right, but Brent was caught under a chandelier that fell."

"Oh my God."

"They got him out in enough time, thank goodness. The house was completely gutted. If he'd been in there too much longer, he might've gone with it."

A gasp, so high-pitched and terrified that it is barely audible, sounds from Molly.

"But they got him out in time and rushed him here," Claire says. "He suffered some pretty bad burns on his hands, but his face isn't too bad. They had to do some minor surgery when they got him in here, but he made it through that just fine."

"And? How is he now?"

"He's ..." Claire pauses, bringing two fingers up to the bridge of her nose. "He's still unconscious. We're waiting for him to wake up."

Molly waits, trying to read Claire's face, and then blurts out: "He's going to wake up, isn't he?" When there is no immediate answer, she adds even more frantically, "Is he that bad?"

"He's not out of the woods yet," Claire says solemnly. She perks up her tone and continues, "We just have to keep praying, Molly."

Molly nods, not looking too convinced that that will be enough. "I need to go see him."

"All right." Claire takes a deep breath. "But be on-guard."

"What?"

"Sarah's here. They had to call her last night to authorize certain things -- because she is his wife."

"Of course." Claire isn't sure if she detects a hint of bitterness in the words.

"Just don't get her going," Claire says. "And can I ask you a favor?"

"Sure."

"Would you not tell her that I called you to let you know about Brent? I don't want it to look like I'm ... taking sides."

"No problem. I'll just say I saw it in the paper this morning. Where's his room?"

"Floor below this one. Get off the elevator and take a left. Number 220."

Molly presses the button to summon the elevator again and the doors open with a *ding* almost instantaneously. She steps inside and then looks up at Claire. "Thanks, Claire."

This means a lot."

Claire just nods as the doors close between them. She waits in place, watching the numbers above the elevator so that she can see when Molly has reached the next floor. *I'm sure it does mean a lot, she thinks. That's why I called you.*

Meanwhile, on the floor below, the doors part and Molly steps out of the elevator. She looks around just long enough to get her bearings and takes a left as Claire instructed. Room number 220 is just a few doors down on her right.

She approaches the door slowly, not sure what she will find inside -- in terms of both Brent and Sarah. As she nears the room, bits of the scene inside begin to appear to her through the small window next to the door.

She can see Brent lying in the bed, motionless, bandages covering his hands and splotched around his face and neck. There are a few tubes going into him and she traces them back to the ominous-looking machines.

And when she looks to the foot of the bed, something even more ominous is staring back at her. Sarah is standing there, arms folded, offering her an expression of absolute outrage.

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Back upstairs, Claire is still watching the elevator, consumed by a vision of Molly and Sarah getting into it again in Brent's room. *Am I an idiot? I thought Molly should know, but ... maybe all I'm doing is setting up trouble.*

She is about to turn and try to forget it for now when she hears her name once again -- in an entirely different but all-too-familiar voice. She freezes.

"Claire!" Ryan calls out again, a little louder this time.

Her back still to him, she grimaces a little. "What are you doing here?" she asks as she turns around.

"I've been looking for you," he says. "I was wondering if you knew how Brent Taylor is doing."

She draws in a heavy breath, and then expels it in a rush with the shortened version of the report: "He's still unconscious. He had to have some minor surgery when he was brought in, but he made it through that just fine. He's got some bad burns, especially on

his hands."

"How's the prognosis looking?"

"If--when he wakes up -- he should pretty much be out of the woods then." She stops, folds her arms, and brings a hand up to her face momentarily. "I understand you and your father were in the fire, too."

"Yeah." He catches the accusatory tone invading her expression and says, "My father lives -- lived -- at the Fitch mansion. It's not exactly strange that we would be there."

"No." Bitterness curls the ends of her lips. "But it's funny how so many people around the two of you seem to wind up getting hurt."

"This fire had nothing to do with my father and me!" Ryan comes back immediately. "We were just as trapped in that house as anyone else, for God's sake!"

"So maybe something went wrong. I don't know -- I'm just saying, I really see a pattern here. First Katherine is shot--"

"You're pulling this out of nowhere! Neither of us had anything to do with Katherine's shooting!"

She narrows her eyes, as if to make it clear that both of them know he's lying. "And you two are the reason my husband is dead."

"No one told Tim to be standing out on a pier in the middle of the night," Ryan says. "Neither my father nor I were even there."

"Yeah, because you were too busy keeping me locked up in the cellar and he was too busy marrying Katherine so that he could snake his way into her bank account! There was a change of plans that night, Ryan. Nick was supposed to be on that pier meeting someone -- and I mean, come on, who the hell has a meeting on a pier on a night that happens to be both New Year's Eve and his wedding night? Someone who's up to no good, that's who!"

"Look, Claire, I'm sorry about what happened to Tim, I am. But it's not my fault that you sent him out there on some ridiculous wild goose chase and it's not my fault that he wound up dead."

The coldness of his tone knocks open something deep inside of her, releasing a flood of pain that she's managed to lock away lately. He can see the effect he's had and softens with his next words.

"I am sorry for everything you've had to go through," he says. "I know how difficult it must be ... and I wish you'd let me be there for you instead of shoving me away and tossing all the blame on me. I understand that you're angry--"

"I am angry," she hisses, conscious of where they are and the need to keep her voice down. She nearly jabs her index finger into his face as she speaks, her intensity edging up a notch with every word. "I'm furious, Ryan! Furious that the entire life Tim and I had planned was shot to hell in one night. Furious that my kids are going to grow up without their father. And furious that you and your father keep hurting more people and keep getting away with it!"

They stand frozen for a moment, her finger right up in his face. Finally Ryan takes a step backward, severing the tension a little bit. "No, this goes much deeper than that. Much deeper. What you're angry about is that your father did all those awful things for all those years right under your nose and you didn't have a clue, and once you did there wasn't a damn thing you could do to stop him. You're angry that you killed him before you ever got him to realize how horrible he was and how much he'd hurt you. That's why you're on this insane quest to pin things on my father and me that have nothing to do with us."

He pushes his way past her and sticks a rigid finger out to strike the elevator button. He doesn't look back at Claire as he waits for the elevator to arrive. When it does, he steps through the doors as they are still opening.

And then he turns back to Claire. He looks her straight in the eye. "I've got news for you, Claire: I'm not your father. And until you get past this obsession, you're the one who's just going to keep on hurting people."

The doors close, taking Ryan away. Claire stares into the cold silver doors, at the fuzzy reflection of herself.

"Damn you," she mutters before pulling together the strength to turn around and walk away.

FISHER HOME

"You may be right," Bill says, caught in a mental bout of tug-of-war. "They've been close for a long time."

"I can't believe Molly would do this." Paula allows her hand to fall and slap the table. "I can't believe she would intrude on another couple's wedding vows like this -- and to do it to her own sister, of all people!"

Bill finishes the last gulp of coffee in his cup. "I don't think it's that simple. Sarah and Brent haven't had the most rock-solid marriage."

"No, but maybe that's because Molly has been involved!"

"That's an oversimplification," Bill counters. "Look at the way Sarah and Brent got married. They just up and eloped one night! That's a pretty good setup for problems, don't you think?"

"They did rush into it," Paula admits. "But then they renewed their vows. If either of them had been doubting the marriage, why would they have gone ahead with a second ceremony?"

Bill sighs heavily, thinking again that it just isn't that simple. "Maybe they didn't even realize there were problems yet. Or maybe they didn't want to recognize them. I'm just saying, their marriage never was that stable or conventional to begin with. They were practically separated during that whole period Sarah was in New York anyway--"

"She was working."

"True, but she was working with Matt. And then she slept with him, Paula. Don't forget that."

"But why would she put her marriage in jeopardy like that? Sarah wouldn't do something like that without a good reason."

"My point exactly! Things never were perfect between Sarah and Brent--"

"And I think it's because of Molly!" Paula interjects. "It certainly makes sense. Look at how close Molly and Brent were after the Craig fiasco -- especially while Sarah was in New York. We don't know how close they got, Bill. Maybe they gave Sarah a reason to-- to do what she did."

"No." Bill shakes his head. "If Sarah had found out that something was going on between Molly and Brent, we would have heard about it. Would it even be possible for Sarah to keep something like that a secret?"

"I suppose not," Paula concedes, her intensity level dipping momentarily. "But Bill -- I saw the way Molly reacted when Sarah made that crack about Brent. There is *something* there. I'm sure of it."

"Paula ..." The name drifts off into a deep sigh. "There's always been this animosity

between Sarah and Molly. They've always been at each other over one thing or another. Doesn't it make sense that when things got bad between Brent and Sarah and he leaned on his friendship with Molly, Sarah would get angry?"

"Yes! And she has every right to!" Paula shoots back. "Molly has no place interfering like this, even if it's as innocent as you claim. I don't care what you say ... There is absolutely no justification for Molly intruding in Sarah's marriage like this. It's--it's absolutely inexcusable!"

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Molly holds Sarah's cold stare for a moment and then moves to the door, turning the handle with trembling fingers.

"Look who couldn't stay away," Sarah is saying as she meets Molly in the doorway.

"I read about the fire," Molly says. "I just--I wanted to come and visit."

"Of course you did. Nothing exciting happens without you being in on it, right?" Sarah flashes her sister a dirty scowl and then turns back to Brent.

"I--I bumped into Claire," Molly continues, brushing off Sarah's taunt. "She explained how he's doing. I'm praying that he wakes up soon."

"Well, yeah. Then you can get on with your little game. That's all you really want, isn't it?"

Molly fights her instinctive reaction for only a split-second and then lets it fly. "Will you just get over it? Brent is my friend and he almost died last night! Don't you think I should be here?"

"Whatever you say," Sarah says with a flip of the head and a roll of the eyes. "You can hang around all you want, it doesn't matter. He's coming back to me, Molly."

Molly narrows her eyes, both in confusion and anger.

"He's coming back to me," Sarah repeats. "He's going to come out of this and be fine, and we'll have our second chance. This is just--it's like God's way of showing both of us that we can't take each other for granted."

Now it is Molly's turn to be flippant. "This isn't going to erase everything that's happened, Sarah. He's not going to wake up and magically not remember all the crap you've pulled.

Get a grip."

Sarah looks a little stunned and Molly takes advantage of the moment. She pushes her way past Sarah and into the room.

"I'm going to visit with Brent for a little while, okay?" she says, clearly more of a declaration than a request.

Sarah pauses, not responding, but then moves back towards the door. "Fine. Have fun. I'll be outside, okay? Just watch it and try to keep your paws to yourself, if you can manage that for a few minutes."

She blows out into the hallway, pulling the door closed loudly behind her.

"You shouldn't even be allowed in there," she mutters as she leans against the wall. And the moment the words have passed through her lips, a lightbulb flashes on inside her head.

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The door closes loudly and it snaps Molly into a different world -- cold, antiseptic, frightening. Brent lies motionless in the bed, bandages covering significant portions of his hands, face, and neck. Machines hum and buzz and beep routinely, offering no indication that much of anything is wrong but still managing to sound terrifying.

"Oh my God," she says, simply wanting to hear a voice. But her voice sounds strange, remote, unnatural, and it isn't at all comforting.

But she speaks again. "Brent," she says quietly, reaching out to brush his arm with the tips of her fingers.

She stands in shock, trying to comprehend how the Brent she knows can be the same man as the one in this bed. He looks so fragile now.

And I could have lost him without even knowing it.

The thought sends a surge of terror through her body.

Down the hallway, Sarah's fingers curl around the handle of the payphone. She listens to

the ringing. One, two, three times ...

And then the click. Thank goodness. She doesn't think she could have taken it if there were no answer.

"Hello?" asks the voice on the other end.

"Hi," she says. "It's Sarah Taylor." She pauses, unable to keep a grin from curling the corners of her lips. "I've got a job for you."

END OF EPISODE #211

What is Sarah up to? What did you think of the Claire/Ryan confrontation? And how about Bill and Paula's disagreement over their daughters? Come share your thoughts and predictions over at the Message Forum!

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