

## "Footprints" Episode #212

### Previously ...

*\*Claire called Molly to the hospital and filled her in on Brent's condition. Molly went to Brent's room and ran right into Sarah, who allowed her sister some time with Brent but made a mysterious phone call.*

*\*Ryan came to Claire to inquire about Brent and the two got into another heated argument. He accused her of redirecting her anger towards her late father at him.*

*\*Maggie tried to comfort Andy, who was devastated both by Brent's injuries and Katherine's renewed commitment to Nick.*

*\*Courtney asked Don to have a talk with Alex and find out what's troubling the young man.*

### **KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**

"Can I help you?" Molly asks, opening the door just a crack.

The man standing by the window of Brent's room turns to her with a respectful expression. He looks to be in his early-to-mid thirties, with short brown hair worn slightly mussed. His navy blue t-shirt, worn with pressed khakis, looks crisp and shows off his obviously toned body.

"Are you Mrs. Taylor?" he asks.

"Oh, uh--" Molly shakes her head, though she almost feels as if she has to fight to do so through the muddled feelings that have clouded her mind. "No, I'm, uh, just a friend. Molly Fisher." She extends her hand to him.

*Fisher.* Possibilities flicker across Ryan's brain and he stores the thought away from later consideration. "Ryan Moriani," he says, meeting her hand to shake.

He thinks he sees a glimmer of ... something in her face, but she is clearly trying to cover it. "I came by to see Brent," he says. "I was in the fire with him last night."

Molly isn't really sure how to respond, so she steps out into the hallway and says, "I'll give you a few minutes to visit."

She turns and heads for the elevator, tossing out a quick "Nice to meet you" as she goes.

### **KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**

*What happened in there?* Ryan wonders for the millionth time.

He can hear his father's panicked urgings replaying in his head: *"We need to get out of here."* It was almost as if he knew the fire was going to happen ...

And then the way he sent Ryan to check up on Brent -- why? The disdainful look Nick flashed him as they waited for the firefighters to rescue Brent from the burning mansion had suggested to Ryan that Nick didn't care one bit about Taylor's well-being.

*But Dad's always got a motive,* Ryan's head reminds him.

He sighs and fixes his gaze through the window at the figure lying motionless in the bed. He isn't sure if he should be wishing for a recovery or a disaster.

*Maybe if Dad would tell me something every now and then ... He tells me he trusts me with business, but he never trusts me with the truth--*

"Ryan."

The sound of his name from behind jars Ryan from his thoughts. He whips around instinctively.

"Andy," he says, so calmly that it sounds to his own ears -- and Andy's, he's certain -- as though he is trying too hard.

"How are you feeling?" he adds, wanting to erase that suspicious look from Andy's face and deciding that a punch really isn't going to get him anywhere.

"I'm fine," Andy says. "I was here most of the night, so I'm exhausted, but other than that I really shouldn't complain. How about yourself?"

"Thrilled to have gotten out of there alive. Just a couple of scrapes and bruises, but not bad at all. I--" He glances back into Brent's room. "I read about Brent in the newspaper this morning and I thought I would come by and visit. Is his wife around or anything?"

"I know she was here earlier, but I haven't seen her around lately. Maybe she slipped off to shower and rest a bit."

"I'm so glad that my father and your mother made it out all right," Ryan says. "When my father said that he wouldn't leave without her -- I thought for sure that was it for both of them."

"I'm very grateful that Nick was able to rescue her." Andy softens before Ryan's eyes, and it appears that even the suspicion is receding. "I'm just hoping that Brent makes it through this all right."

"Yeah, I asked Claire about the prognosis--"

Suddenly Andy is on the offensive again, but with much more aggression than before. His face hardens as he growls, "You stay away from Claire!"

## **KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**

Molly scans the area around the nurses' station as she steps off the elevator. No sign of Claire.

She walks over to one of the windows to wait, reflecting back on the encounter she just had. *So that's the infamous Ryan Moriani. Sure didn't seem quite as sleazy as I know he is.*

She ponders the irony of Ryan attempting to sound like a concerned friend, unaware that she knew exactly who he was. But the thinking stops the moment she sees Claire come around the corner.

"Claire," she says loudly enough to get the other woman's attention.

"What are you doing back up here?" Claire asks, raising her eyes from the clipboard. "Is something wrong?"

"No. I mean, not really. Guess who I just ran into downstairs?"

"Who?"

"Ryan Moriani." Molly says the name as if she's delivering important news and seems a little disappointed that Claire hardly reacts at all.

"I know," Claire says. "He came up here to ask about Brent. How'd you know it was him?"

"I was in the room and he was standing outside, so I introduced myself and he did the same."

"Charming, isn't he?" Claire rolls her eyes.

"Not exactly the sociopath with wild hair and gleaming eyes I was expecting," Molly admits, "although he was just oozing that fake charisma."

"It's not fake. That's part of the problem." Claire sighs and then adds, "He gets it from his--from Nick."

"I just figured I would give you a heads-up. But if you've dealt with him already today, then that's one less thing we need to worry about."

"Yeah." Claire pauses. "He came up for his daily dose of harassment. Wouldn't surprise me if that was his sole reason for coming here, actually. Brent just provided a handy excuse."

"He's still bothering you? I thought you said--"

"I keep running into him. It's not like he's creeping around outside my bedroom window."

"But he won't leave you alone?"

"We always find one thing or another to fight over," Claire says. "It's probably my fault as well as his. But I swear, he just makes my blood boil ..."

Molly is silent for a moment, watching Claire's face twist with some very aggressive emotion. "What happened between the two of you?" she finally asks. "What made you hate him so much?"

Claire draws in a deep breath. "Our fathers were friends, like you know. Now it's like he's carrying on his father's twisted legacy and he--it just infuriates me." By the final words she is almost tripping over her tongue.

"Is that it?" Molly hardly allows space for an answer. "I get the impression that there's something deeper going on."

Claire's eyes jump to Molly uncomfortably and then dart away. "What do you mean?"

"The way you talk about Ryan -- the way he's so fixated on you," Molly says. "Were the two of you ever involved romantically?"

## **MARSHALL APARTMENT**

"Don! What a pleasant surprise!" Sally beams as she stands in the open doorway.

"I'm here to see Alex," Don says, trying to ignore her excessive affection. "Is he here?"

"He's in his room." Sally sounds a little wounded. "It really is good to see you, Don. It's been too long."

"I hadn't noticed," he says curtly.

She closes the door. "You don't need to be so--so rude with me."

"You make it difficult not to be, Sally."

She can tell that she's not getting anywhere with this line of conversation. "Why do you need to see Alex?"

"I just need to have a little talk with him," Don says, moving for Alex's bedroom.

Sally springs forward, landing right behind Don, who pauses.

"Is something the matter?" she asks.

"I don't know. Courtney said she and Lauren were a little concerned about him and she asked me to come see if everything's all right."

"Oh. I hope nothing's wrong ..."

"Wouldn't kill you to have a real conversation with your son every once in a while and find out, would it?" he snaps.

The hurt expression returns.

"I'm going in to talk to Alex," he says, cutting her off before she can steer things in a direction more to her liking.

"Fine." She snatches her purse up off the couch, and he notices for the first time that she is dressed up in her special tacky, Sally way. "I'm meeting a friend for brunch," she says as if he should care.

"Oh, a friend?" Don's voice is hard.

"A gentleman," she says with a wink. "Ta-ta."

He doesn't say anything as she opens the door and slips out. *Didn't even say goodbye to Alex*, Don thinks with annoyance as he raises a hand to knock on the young man's door.

## **KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**

"Where do you get off?" Ryan hisses back at Andy. "You've got some nerve--"

"You're the one with nerve," Andy says, keeping his voice low, "coming back to bother Claire again and again after she's asked you to stay away -- and after New Year's."

"That was *not* my fault!" Ryan responds as though he is tired of repeating it.

"Oh, I'm sorry, it must have been a different son of Nick Moriani who locked Claire in a cellar--"

"We got locked in!" Ryan interjects. Andy is about to come back when Ryan cuts him off. "And no one would care about what happened that night anyway if you hadn't left Tim at the pier."

Andy falls silent. His eyes darken and sag. Ryan takes the opportunity to say smugly: "Just butt out of my relationship with Claire. It's far too complex for anyone else to understand."

"I doubt that you even understand it," Andy shoots back quietly.

Ryan leans against the wall, arrogance twisting his lips, studying Andy. "So what's the deal with you and that chick? Maggie, is it?"

"Yes," Andy replies with disgust.

"How nice that you've found someone to buy into all your crazy propaganda. Especially since you've managed to completely alienate your mother, kill one friend, and leave another one clinging to life."

Andy merely stares back at Ryan coldly.

Ryan takes his weight off of the wall. "I should get going." He strides past Andy, but turns back after a few more steps. "Later, bro," he sneers.

## **KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**

There's no use lying and Claire knows it. "Yes," she says evenly.

"That helps make sense of a lot of this," Molly says. "Tim gave me that impression when he first told me about how Ryan had been hounding you, but I wasn't sure."

"It was a long time ago," Claire cuts in. "Back when we were teenagers. It ended badly, and ... I didn't see him until two years ago when he came to King's Bay."

"Has he been after you all this time to go back to him?"

"That's the strange part. When he first came back, all he wanted was friendship, or at least acceptance. He wanted me to tell him that I'd put the past behind me and think of him as a better person. But then he did kiss me, and I told him he'd gone too far. Now he's sort of back on the friendship thing."

"Is he really that obsessed with you?"

"Yeah," Claire says, but then she realizes the implications of that answer. "I mean, no. He's not obsessed, I don't think. He's just hung up. I think ... I don't know what I think. I know that I'm very important to Ryan, or at least the idea of me is."

Deeper concern washes over Molly's face. "Be careful, Claire. Maybe it's time to take some sort of action. This is ... It's kind of eerie. It almost reminds me of my situation with Craig. At least, Ryan's determination reminds me of the way Craig was determined to be with me."

"Ryan's not like that," Claire finds herself saying.

"You can't be certain of that ... can you?"

"No, I guess not. But I--I just know. Ryan isn't a danger to me." She sees Molly's skepticism. "Really, Molly. The situation is a lot more complicated than you know, probably more than I even know. But it's ... emotional. It's not psychotic."

A static moment passes before Molly seems to accept this. "All right," she says. "But if he tries anything funny -- please, let me know, let someone know."

"It's going to be fine. I can handle Ryan."

"That's what worries me."

Claire raises an eyebrow.

"You're very angry with him," Molly says. "You need to back off. Keep your distance from Ryan. Otherwise you might wind up doing something you regret."

## MARSHALL APARTMENT

"Hey!" Alex springs up from his spot on the bed, where he has been reclining with a book held above his face. "I thought I heard you out there. What are you doing here?"

Don enters the room and comes to stand at the foot of the double bed. "I came by to see you. It's been too long."

"Yeah, it has. Here, sit down." Alex pulls in his feet so that Don can take a seat on the end of the bed.

"Your mother went out," Don says.

"I thought I heard that, too. She's got some hot date, I think." Alex combines a roll of his eyes with an indifferent shake of his head.

"I'm glad she went out, actually. It'll give us a chance to talk in peace." Don draws in a heavy breath and then releases it slowly. "I've been thinking, Alex ... I want you to know how sorry I am for missing so much of your life. When your mother and I split, you were this little boy, and over twenty years later there's this amazing young man suddenly back in my life. I missed so much--too much--of what came in-between."

Alex's response comes quickly. "It's not like you were obligated to be there. You were married to my mother for what, the first year of my life? You had every right to leave when you found out I wasn't yours."

Don isn't sure if he detects something of a sting behind the words.

"I really got blinded by how angry I was with your mother," Don says. "I should have made an effort to stay in touch with you. But I wanted nothing to do with her, and then I had a new life with Helen and Courtney ... I just want you to understand that it wasn't because of *you* that I wasn't around."

"I do understand. Like I said, it wasn't, like, your job or anything to raise me. My real dad knew I existed and he didn't really care. I'm just happy that I got to get to know you now."

"The feeling's mutual, kid." Don slaps a hand down lightly on the young man's knee. "And

I want to be here for you. So if there are things you want to discuss--"

"What?" A note of alarm now sounds sharply in Alex's voice.

"Courtney mentioned that things have been rough with you and Lauren. And I know you probably haven't had the chance to discuss these things with your mother, let alone a guy, so I wanted to let you know that I'm here to talk."

Alex's deep blue eyes, which have settled on the bedspread, glance up at Don. "Thanks."

Don allows a moment before he realizes that he's going to have to direct the conversation here. "So ... are you and Lauren still seeing one another?"

"Not really," Alex says. "I mean, I don't think so. We--things got kind of weird one night and we haven't really talked since then. I think it's pretty much over."

"Well, what went wrong?"

Alex feels as if time has frozen and trapped him as he attempts to work out an answer. "It just wasn't ... we weren't clicking right, you know? Like -- we can be good friends and stuff, but it didn't really feel like a relationship."

"That happens."

"Yeah. And like, I feel like I'm just at this point where--I don't know, it's like I don't know what I want."

"What do you mean?"

"Like ..." Something catches in Alex's throat. "Like, I graduated almost a year ago and I'm still not really doing anything. I've been writing a lot and I want to really push to get published, but it's going so slowly and I feel like I need to really be working right now, doing something to earn some money and get out on my own."

Don nods. "I can understand that."

Alex continues full-force. "So it's just like everything is so up in the air right now that the idea of getting into anything serious or solid seems kinda weird. Maybe this time just needs to be about me and figuring out what I'm gonna do, what kinda life I'm gonna live, you know?"

"Absolutely." Don softens his tone a bit as he asks, "Are you sure that's it?"

"Yeah." Alex nods rapidly. "Yeah. It's just that there's so much to think about ..."

"All right." It's pretty clear to Don that Alex isn't going to offer anything else, and he isn't sure what questions to ask to go deeper. "Look, Alex. I can relate to everything you're saying about this being a confusing time. I've been there. You're trying to choose a path for your life and it seems like you need to get it all right in one shot. Just take it easy, okay? You're a smart kid, and from what I've read of your work, you're also very talented. Things will come together."

"Thanks," Alex manages, a little awkwardly. Don wonders if he's even accustomed to fielding simple compliments. Probably not, knowing Sally.

"I just want you to know that I'm here for you, okay?" Don adds. "Any time you want to talk or run something by me or have me read something of yours -- I'm only a phone call away. And I think you know where I live." He smiles.

Alex returns the smile, though not with total comfort. "Thanks, Don."

"It's my pleasure." Don rises from the bed. "Give me a call if you need anything, okay? And good luck with the writing."

Alex reclines back on the bed, holding his hands behind his head. He listens to Don exiting the apartment, leaving Alex alone with the ghost of his words.

They haunt Alex's mind hours after Don has left, through a quiet day and deep into the night.

## **END OF EPISODE #212**

*What did you think of Ryan's attitude towards Andy? Do you think you have an insight into the muddled relationship between Claire and Ryan? How was Don's exchange with Sally and his talk with Alex? Visit the Message Forum to leave your thoughts and suggestions!*

[Next Episode](#)