

## "Footprints" Episode #213

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

*\*Katherine resolved to stay with Nick after he rescued her from the burning mansion.*

*\*Diane Bishop showed up at Claire's apartment and announced her intention to pursue custody of Samantha.*

*\*Molly went to visit Brent in the hospital and had a confrontation with Sarah, who then made a phone call as part of a plan to deal with Molly ...*

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

Molly's footsteps beat a hasty path to the elevator, ticking away in rapid motion the seconds until she is back by Brent's bedside. She left the hospital late last night, having gone back to Brent's room after her talk with Claire only to find Sarah still gone. She sat by his side, holding his hand and offering words of encouragement to the frustratingly silent air, until Sarah returned several hours later.

Molly knows that her sister will probably be in there again, but she's attempting not to worry about it too much. She has been waiting all day to visit Brent, to see if there's been any progress in his recovery. The hours of her work day slithered by with excruciating sluggishness; her boss's casual remark that Molly could leave because the day's work had been wrapped up neatly had come like a gift from above.

She raced out of the Willis Advertising offices as quickly as she could manage and forced her way through the obnoxiously thick downtown traffic to get here. Now she stands helplessly in front of the elevator, waiting for the tinny bell to announce that the car has arrived and is ready to take her to Brent's floor.

Finally it comes and she pushes her way through the still-opening doors, relieved to find that she is the sole passenger. She isn't sure that she could put up with the awkward ritual of having to avoid eye contact and act calm right now. So she pushes the button for the floor she wants and stands, hands clenched tightly, as she waits for the elevator to take her there.

*Maybe he'll be awake.* The thought chomps at her mind for the thousandth time today. She's been holding out hope all day that when she got here, she'd find Brent with his eyes open, joking wryly about his bad luck. She waited for that phone call from Claire telling her that Brent was back.

The hope intensifies inside of her now and she feels as though she's going to burst if she doesn't get to his room right this instant. There's also the persistent fear that she will find he has taken a turn for the worse, and that, too, is burning more fiercely in her now.

*I'm so lucky I didn't lose him in that fire. It can't happen now.*

The thoughts spin off into a distracted jumble. She finds herself wondering about what she will say to him: Should she tell him how glad she is not to have lost him? How much he means to her?

The elevator comes to a halt and its doors part. She hurries out of the car and down the hallway, feeling the first waves of relief as she spots Brent's room.

But there is something standing between her and the door. Namely, a very large man, standing easily at 6'3" or 6'4" and packing what she estimates to be at least 270 pounds. His head is shaved bald and a messy goatee adorns his chin.

"Molly Fisher?" he asks in an authoritative voice that matches his intimidating frame perfectly.

"Yes?" she answers hesitantly.

"I'm afraid that I can't allow you to go in this room."

## **LAW OFFICES OF BURNELL, CARPENTER, & THOMPSON**

Claire's hand rests on the back of the empty chair beside her. She stares straight across the table, never removing her gaze from the private pow-wow Diane is sharing with her lawyer. It isn't that she's trying to listen in on them -- not that it would take much effort, and they're not trying to conceal their conversation anyway. But she doesn't want them to have the satisfaction of even thinking they're intimidating her.

Claire's stomach turns as she watches Diane give her lawyer -- Eric Westin, as Claire moments ago learned is his name -- a sly grin. He is a young guy, probably not a day older than thirty, with striking dark hair and a tan complexion. His face falls somewhere between boyishly cute and sophisticatedly handsome, and Claire has to admit that he is good-looking.

Clearly Diane thinks so, too, as she chuckles a little too boldly at something he says. Claire tries to refrain from rolling her eyes.

Thankfully, her lawyer, Jim Thompson, returns to the small conference room now. He takes a seat beside Claire as Diane and Eric straighten in their chairs and Eric organizes the papers in front of him one last time.

"I don't think there's any need to waste time here," Eric begins. "Ms. Bishop has a right

to raise her daughter and would prefer to avoid a drawn-out custody suit."

Jim sees the flare of rage cross over Claire's face and he sends what he hopes will be a calming look her way. It works, at least for the moment.

"If you're asking Mrs. Fisher simply to turn over custody of Samantha--"

"She can have some visitation time," Eric says, as if it is the most generous gesture in the history of humankind.

Claire feels a sudden urge to reach across the oak table and smack the conceited grin off of his face. "You can't expect me to give up my daughter that easily--"

"She is *my* daughter," Diane cuts in.

"Biologically. But four weekends a year don't make a mother, Diane."

"I would spend more time with her if I were allowed to!"

"Ladies, please," Jim interrupts.

Eric props up his right elbow on the conference table and uses his hand to gesture as he speaks: "Ms. Bishop wants--deserves--full custody of her daughter, plain and simple. She is the biological mother and the weekends she has spent with Samantha have been absolutely free of incident. Mr. Fisher's passing was a tragedy, but it doesn't entitle his wife to maintain custody of his child with another woman, a woman who is more than willing to be a full-time parent."

"No!" Claire bursts out. Jim shoots her a warning glance but she ignores it. "Even the visitation time that Diane has now is pushing it! She may love Samantha, but she doesn't think with her head and she isn't capable of thinking of what's best for herself and for a child."

Diane narrows her eyes at Claire and the women lock angry gazes.

"Those are the kinds of things you have to prove, Mrs. Fisher," Eric says coolly. "Just because you consider yourself a good mother doesn't mean that my client is a bad or an undeserving one."

Claire smacks a hand down on the table. "She is undeserving! And I'm not going to allow my daughter to be raised by a person like that!"

## FITCH MANSION

With the arrival of evening, the July sun has weakened from its afternoon fury, but the air still carries traces of today's 80 degree-plus weather. And as Katherine approaches the dusty shell of her longtime home, heat is the last thing of which she wants to be reminded.

She shudders as she stops mere inches before the yellow tape that is blocking off the remains of the house. Just days ago, the mansion was beautiful, practically a museum of her adult life. Sometimes she would spend afternoons just wandering from room to room, taking in the carefully arranged art and furniture and photographs that had accumulated over three decades. The house seemed almost without boundaries on those days, as she would find thing after thing to pluck a string of pride inside of her or draw her into a bittersweet memory.

It seems even bigger now, if that's possible. Its skeleton is splayed out over the land, sullied by ash and the offensive remains of the decor. Katherine is most horrified by the glimpses of the mansion's former glory: Paintings and chairs and doorways not ravaged completely by the blaze, resting among walls that she was never intended to view from this perspective.

"My goodness," she says in a heavy breath, raising a hand to her cheek.

"Do you want to go?" Nick asks from behind her. "I was worried this might be too much for you--"

"No, no," she says, her back still to him as she stares into the destruction. "I--I need to do this. I needed to see it."

"Thirty-three years," she mutters. "Thirty-three years of life wiped out in one night." She feels a warm hand come to rest on her shoulder and she reaches up to hold it.

"I can hardly imagine how devastating this must be," Nick offers.

Katherine nods weakly. "It's unbelievable. It's ... surreal." She continues to take in the devastation, but the sights are growing no less painful to her eyes. "I want to know how this happened. I hope they're able to find out what caused this."

Suddenly Nick is grateful they are not facing one another, because he is certain that a flicker of terror just danced over his face.

## KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

"What?" Molly asks, a hint of aggression seeping into her voice.

"I can't let you go in there," the bulky man repeats.

"Why not?" Molly moves to peer in the window and the man turns as if expecting her to attempt some daring maneuver.

"I've been asked to keep you out of the room."

Molly tries to gaze through the window, but the shades have been pulled tightly. "What? Is Brent okay?"

"Mr. Taylor's fine," the man says.

"Then what is going on? Who told you not to let me in?" But she already knows the answer.

"Mrs. Taylor did."

Molly's eyes go wide. "What? She can't--"

"I can," Sarah says, stepping out of the room. She slides the door closed behind her. "I think it's in my husband's best interests for you to keep away from him."

Molly sputters for a moment as she tries to gather words. "How--what are you talking about?"

Sarah shrugs, as though this were a routine business decision. "It's not good to have you moping around, weeping all over him. It'll help his recovery if you're not in there all the time dragging him down."

"This is insane, Sarah!"

"No, it's very practical," Sarah says matter-of-factly.

"You can't do this!"

"Actually, I can. I am his wife, Molly, remember? I know you hate to be reminded of that, but it's true."

Molly grits her teeth. "I have more right than you to be in there--"

"Oh, no, you don't!" Sarah shakes her head. "Nope, Mol, you have no right at all to be in there if I feel that your presence will hinder my husband's recovery."

"Have you completely lost it?"

"On the contrary, I'm finally seeing clearly. I see what I have to do to make my marriage work. And that's keep you away from Brent."

Molly lets out a heavy breath, equal parts outrage and frustration. "This isn't what Brent would want!"

"Brent doesn't know what he wants right now. You've had him too confused. But once he wakes up, he won't have to worry about you, and he'll be able to focus on repairing our marriage."

"That's not going to happen."

"Just you watch. Brent and I will be together again." Sarah opens the door just a touch, preparing to slip back inside. She looks at the guard. "Don't let her in."

"I won't."

With that, Sarah disappears back into the room. Molly lingers by the door, but her eye meets the guard's and she knows that it is a lost cause for now. With a final sigh she heads back to the elevator.

Inside the room, Sarah leans her back against the door. Her lips tighten in a satisfied arc.

"Oh, Brent," she says softly, taking slow steps towards the bed, "come back to me. Please be okay so that we can finally have our second chance."

## **FITCH MANSION**

"So much loss," Katherine says, leaning back against Nick. "So much, all in one night. If only I could have prevented it ..."

"That would have been impossible," Nick says evenly.

"I suppose so." She sighs wearily. "I don't know that I can handle this, Nick. I don't know that I can--that I can even live without this house. It's so much a part of who I am--"

"You're much more than a house, Katherine."

"I know that." She steps forward, holding onto the yellow tape and still staring out at the rubble. "But there were memories in there, memories I can never retrieve. My husband breathed his last breaths in there. Andrew grew up in this house."

Nick places a firm hand on her shoulder. "And Andrew also drifted away from you in this house."

Now she turns sharply to him. "What?"

"I'm just saying," Nick says, coming forward and drawing her back into his arms, "that the past is powerful. And maybe this isn't the most pleasant way to do it -- and maybe it's happening at the expense of a lot of other things -- but this might be a chance for you to escape from the past."

"What are you talking about?"

"The situation with Andrew, for instance. It's still eating away at you and it isn't getting any better. Maybe being separated from such intense memories will be healthy for you."

Katherine stares at him silently and then turns back to face the house. "Maybe."

"I know that this hurts. But it can be good for us," Nick says. "It will be. We can build a new life together, a new life with new memories."

Katherine sighs again. She takes in the scene all over, eyes sweeping over the burned carcass of the mansion. Nick's hopeful proposal continues to swirl through her mind.

But Brent Taylor's warnings from the night of the fire sting her ears, as well: ... *Your husband's business dealings may have led to your shooting.*

Despite the summer heat and the warmth of Nick's hand on her arm, a shiver courses through Katherine's body.

## **LAW OFFICES OF BURNELL, CARPENTER, & THOMPSON**

Claire blazes a quick trail across the parking lot to her car. *Damn Diane. Damn her for being so selfish ...*

"Claire, wait!"

The call stops Claire in her tracks, but she is hesitant to turn around. She isn't sure that she has the energy to deal with Diane one-on-one right now.

"Claire!" Diane calls again. The sounds of a rapid pattern of footsteps tell Claire that Diane is hurrying to catch up with her. She remains facing in the other direction, although she does not try to get away.

"There's something I wanted to ask you," Diane says, her voice missing a layer of the usual confidence.

Claire turns around slowly. "What is it?"

"There are some things I need you to tell me. Things I just ... need to know."

Claire urges her on with a roll of the hand.

Diane draws in a deep breath and then releases it with her words: "It's about Tim."

Even the mention of his name jars Claire, and it is a moment before she responds. "What?"

"The night he died," Diane says. "What happened? I mean, I know what you had your lawyer tell me--" She doesn't miss the opportunity to slip in a look reprimanding Claire for not passing on the information herself. "--but I don't know what ... really happened."

"He was on the pier. He was shot -- his body must have fallen into the bay." Claire's sentences are clipped, as though she is offering the minimum amount of information necessary.

"I know that." Diane sighs and it is apparent that she is trying to curb her frustration and the urge to demand more information. "But how did it happen? Why in the world was he out on the pier alone on New Year's Eve?"

Claire contemplates the inquiry and then says, "It's a long story, Diane. Dredging it up one more time isn't going to do any good." She makes a move to go, but Diane stops her with a touch on the arm.

"I do deserve to know how he died, Claire! I'm the mother of his child, for God's sake!"

The blow clearly hits Claire hard. The effect is not lost on Diane. She adds, in a softer tone, "I loved him. Tim was important to me. Now I know that maybe I didn't go about showing it in the best way and that you don't really appreciate the fact that I felt so

strongly about him, but I did. And I need to know what happened to him, for my own peace of mind."

Claire's eyes drop to the pavement. "He was trying to help me out. There was--there was something going on at the pier that night, something I needed to see. But Tim wouldn't let me go. He insisted on doing it himself." She glances up at Diane ever so briefly and then lowers her gaze again. "He was a hero right to the end."

"Of course. He never would have let you be in danger. But what was so important that you had to send him out there on New Year's Eve?"

"It was personal."

"Personal how? I don't know too many women who have personal business out on a pier at midnight. What'd you get into this time?"

Claire grits her teeth, as if a response is lurking behind them, but then she tosses up a hand and flips around. "I'm not going to have this conversation with you, Diane." She moves quickly to the car without so much as a glance backward.

Diane stands where Claire left her, in the middle of the parking lot, with her arms crossed in front of her. "You did this," she mutters in disgusted amazement. "You did this to Tim."

## FISHER HOME

The front door closes with a rough *bang* in Molly's wake. She plows ahead into the living room and up the staircase.

She is about to whip around the corner at the top when she finds Jason mere inches in front of her.

"Whoa there," he says with a smile. "Would ya mind not running me over?"

A quick look at her face is all he needs to realize that joking isn't too appropriate right now.

"What's wrong, Mol? You look like--"

"Like I'm extremely pissed off?"

He hesitates, a little taken aback by the bite in her voice. "Uh, yeah, you could say that."

"Good, because I am." She begins forcing her way past him towards her room, but he stops her.

"Wait. What's the matter? Did something happen at work?"

"Work was fine."

"Then what is it?" It takes him just a moment more to complete the thought. "Did something happen with Brent?"

"Bingo. Or more accurately, something happened with his lovely wife."

"Sarah? What'd she do?"

"She may have topped herself this time," Molly says, practically spitting. "Listen to this: She hired a guard to keep me out of Brent's room. I'm not allowed to visit him anymore."

"*What?*"

"Yeah. Apparently she thinks that if I'm not around Brent has a better chance of recovering. I take that to mean not having me around will give her a better chance to manipulate him into giving her a second chance."

Jason lifts an eyebrow. "I got the impression they were beyond second chances."

"They were. They are. But I wouldn't put anything past Sarah right now. She's in fine form." Molly shakes her head angrily. "This is it."

"What?"

"This is the last straw. If it's a war she wants, she's got one."

## **END OF EPISODE #213**

*What did you think of Sarah's stunt and Molly's reaction to it? How about the conversation with Nick and Katherine? Where do you think this situation with Claire and Diane is headed? Come and share your thoughts at the Message Forum!*

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