

# "Footprints"

## Episode #241

### Previously ...

- Molly was excited to begin her new job in the fashion industry.
- Ryan warned Stan to stay away from Claire and then blew off Stan's efforts at bonding.
- Jason continued to hope for a reconciliation with Courtney.

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"Man, it is frickin' *cold* outside!" Jason shivers as he and Alex step into the restaurant and the warmth envelops them.

"Yeah," Alex agrees, casting a glance back out at the grim outdoors. He raises a hand to his wind-tousled hair in an attempt to pat it back into place, but the effort really doesn't accomplish anything. "You think it might actually snow?"

"I hope so. If we have to put up with this nasty weather, we better at least get some snow out of it." Jason finishes the statement quickly as the hostess greets them. She grabs two menus and leads them to a booth.

Jason begins scanning the menu immediately. "You have no idea how hungry I am."

"Yeah, me too." Alex gives the menu a quick perusal but it's no use, since he already knows what he is going to order, anyway.

Jason seems to make his decision quickly as well, because he puts the menu down after only a few seconds and pays no more attention to it. "So'd you make any New Year's resolutions?"

Alex shrugs. "I dunno. Just get myself in order, I think. There are so many loose ends I've gotta tie up now--"

"It's about new beginnings, too. Y'know, starting over."

"That is my starting over. I have to get past everything that's happened with you and Lauren before I can even try to look to the future."

"True, yeah." Jason clasps his hands together in front of his mouth and huffs into them. "Guess I'm in the same position. Mine is to get this whole thing with Court straightened out and just start fresh with her. We need to put all this stuff behind us if we're gonna do

that."

"It'll come together," Alex says reassuringly, though he knows he's trying to convince himself of it, as well.

"I hope so. I need it all to just get back to normal." Jason glances around, a scowl developing on his face. "Where is this clown? I'm ready to order and I need to eat!" He pounds his fists down on the table and makes a barbaric face.

Alex laughs. "You could just gnaw off your own arm."

"I may have to if we don't get--" But the exaggeration comes screeching to a halt on his lips and his color turns ashen.

Alex has to turn around to see why. Their waitress is coming over to help them -- only thing is, their waitress is Courtney.

## CHARLENE POWERS AGENCY

"Run these back down to Brad," barks the raspy voice. The hand that is connected to it drops two file folders on Molly's desk but the rest of the body is blowing out of sight before Molly even raises her eyes. "I'm going outside," the voice adds from somewhere in the distance.

Molly rolls her eyes. Her fingers begin to grasp the folders but then she decides to finish typing up one of the other million tasks that she's been assigned today.

Somehow this isn't how she pictured her dream job. Liza Dennison has been floating in and out all day, assigning Molly things to do in between cigarette breaks. Her aroma, a distinct blend of smoke and expensive but over-applied perfume, seems to be clinging to everything that she hands Molly now.

No, this isn't exactly the image she had of working for one of the top executives in a well-known fashion agency.

She finishes pecking away the rest of the text on the computer and rises from the chair. She starts walking away and then realizes that she doesn't even have the files she is supposed to deliver. Backtracking, she grabs them and then starts back down the hall.

*It's my first day! I shouldn't even know who Brad is or where his office is!* she thinks. But she has gotten a crash course in the geography of the office today, since this is at least the sixth stroll she has made to Brad's, among many other journeys.

She delivers the folders, feeling a little ridiculous having to greet Brad yet again, and then trots back to the desk. No sign of Liza. She must still be out smoking.

She tosses herself back into the pile of assignments, but only a few seconds pass before she is aware of a presence standing above her. She looks up cautiously, half-expecting Liza to be standing over her with something else to do.

Instead she finds a woman who reminds her of her own mother, only more extravagantly put-together. Her lightly-shaded red lips are curled up in a warm smile.

"Having fun?" the woman asks.

Molly is unsure how to answer but something tells her to trust this woman. "Oh yeah, tons. The first day on the job is completely not stressful, of course."

"Uh-huh." The woman laughs quietly. Her light brown hair bobs lightly around her shoulders. "Come with me."

The offer is tempting, if for no reason other than to step away from the desk for a bit, but Molly knows that she shouldn't. "I can't, I'm sorry. I have all this stuff to get finished--"

"That's what I mean. I have a solution to that ... so come on."

The materials spread all over the desk give Molly pause, but she finds herself nodding. "Okay, sure."

## KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

"Hey, Claire!" comes the call from down the hall.

Claire looks up from the chart in her hands and sees Brent coming towards her.

"Hey," she says, making the unexpected shift from nursing duty to social life. "What are you doing here?"

"One of the guys on the force was in here for an appendectomy, so I was visiting. I thought I'd come down and see you while I was at it." A little apologetically, he adds, "Got a minute?" There is a business-like ring to his tone that suggests that she should make time.

"Yeah, sure. I'm not up to anything especially urgent. What's up?"

He shoots his gaze around to make sure that the hall is clear. "I just thought I'd give you a heads-up on this ... You know the fire at the Fitch mansion this summer?"

"Yeah." She has a feeling that she knows where this is going. She can only hope she's right.

"I've been wanting to look deeper into it for a while -- things have just been a little nuts lately, but it's been on my priority list. So I finally got all the reports together ..."

"... and?"

"There was something funny going on there, I'm sure of it." He drops his voice and does another quick glance around. "That fire was not an accident."

She raises both eyebrows. "Big surprise there."

"I know, I know. But at least there's some proof now. If I can link Moriani to this ..."

"Do you think you can?"

"I don't know. There's a lot more digging to be done, I'm sure. And I doubt he'd have left his tracks uncovered, so this could be quite an adventure."

"But well-worth it." Suddenly panic strikes sharply in Claire's stomach, and she lets out a gasp before she can catch it.

"What? What's wrong?"

"Uh--" She can't even look at Brent, because she's so focused on what she sees over his shoulder. "Let's go talk somewhere else, okay?"

"Yeah, fine." He squints in confusion. "Claire, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," she says hurriedly, pulling him away.

Brent casts a quick glance backward, where Claire seems to have been focused, but doesn't see anything out of the ordinary.

But the image is all too clear in Claire's head, even as she leads Brent down another hallway and into a room. *What the hell is he doing here?*

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"Ten billion other places we could've gone to eat, and we come here on the day she's working," Jason mutters as he rips his stare off of Courtney.

"Maybe it'll give you guys a chance to talk," Alex offers. "I'll get lost."

"No, stay. Maybe she'll be nicer with a third party around."

Alex's face does a pained half-shrug. "I'm not so sure that her, you, me, and parties are the best topic for you to start off on."

Jason catches the humor in the quip and the glint of a smile flashes on his lips before he straightens his expression. Courtney comes up beside the table.

"Hi," Jason says uncertainly.

"Hi," she says coolly. "Can I start you off with some drinks?"

"Courtney, please. Let's at least be civil."

"I am being civil. I didn't dump a drink over your head, did I?"

"Ya haven't brought the drinks yet, so I'll reserve judgement." He is disappointed to see that she doesn't even crack in the face of a little joke. "Look, can we please talk? It's been a long time."

She shoots him a nasty look, but the hurt not far below the surface is evident to Jason and it twists the knife a little deeper into his heart. "So what, a couple days and everything's fixed?" she asks.

"No. I just mean, we've gotta work on this. We've gotta start somewhere, right?"

"Do we? Is there even anything to work on?"

"I'd like to think so!" Jason says, a little offended. "Otherwise I'll be damned if I knew what the last, what, four years were all about."

He sees that she is ready to snap back but instead she holds it back and her face softens a touch. Maybe there is some getting through to her, after all.

"At the very least we've gotta talk about skating, I think," he says, trying to make the most of this opening and gain a foothold. "We haven't practiced in forever, and we had to drop out of Sectionals. I think we owe Sandy that much, if not ourselves."

She brushes a hand over her mouth and exhales lightly. "Yeah, we do."

"All right, good. So, uh, what do you say we go skating tomorrow? At least show up at the rink to figure that part of it out."

There is a blip of hesitation before she says, "Fine, yeah."

"Cool. I'll be there at the same time we'd usually have our lesson ..."

"I'll be there, too." She turns to walk away and then spins back. "Lemme take your drink orders."

He and Alex order their drinks quickly, doing their best to minimize the awkwardness.

"Well, that's progress," Alex says once Courtney is well out of earshot.

"Yeah, what an operator I am. I even convinced my own girlfriend to be in the same building as me at the same time!" Jason groans and drops his head into his hands. "This is such a damn mess."

"Jay, I am so sorry ..."

"It's not your fault! This is about Courtney and me. Obviously there are some things there that need some work, if she can't even see my point of view on this."

"Yeah ... Well, I hope this gets cleared up."

"So do I. And for the first time since this started, I have some real hope that it will."

The boys fall quiet as their drinks arrive -- courtesy of a different waitress -- and they give their orders.

## CHARLENE POWERS AGENCY

"Camille Lemieux," the woman offers, extending a hand to Molly as they slip inside her office.

"Molly Fisher."

Camille closes the door. "I've seen you darting around all day. Keeping up with Liza is ... fun, isn't it?"

"A real blast," Molly manages with an awkward smile.

"It's all right, don't be afraid of me." Camille presents that warm, endearing smile again. "I know it must be a little overwhelming to be thrown right into the lion's den."

"To tell the truth, yeah, it is." Molly's answer comes carefully and then she says, with some difficulty, "I'm sorry, Ms. Lemieux--"

"Camille, please."

"Camille ... I'm sorry, I don't mean to be rude, but ... can you tell me what this is all about?"

"Me pulling you away from your desk? Sure." The older woman's expression tells Molly that there is nothing to worry about, but her instincts are keeping her on guard -- though she can feel them relaxing a bit.

"Honestly, I feel a little sorry for you. Liza's like a shark, we all know that. She's gone through a barrel of assistants in the last year -- she drives them all away eventually."

"So are you telling me to quit while I'm ahead?"

"No, no! Well, sort of."

Molly's expression turns quizzical again.

""I've been impressed with everything that you've accomplished today, from what I can see," Camille says. "And I'm in search of a new assistant. So I have a little offer to make you."

Molly just listens to what is unfolding in front of her, unsure of whether she should believe it or not.

"Molly, would you consider coming to work for me? My position is different from Liza's, so you'd be doing more hands-on work, but I'm willing to up your pay, whatever it is."

Unsure of how to respond, Molly sorts through the growing roster of questions in her brain. "What is it that you do here, exactly?" she asks finally.

"I'm one of the in-house designers," Camille answers.

Molly is sure that her face lights up a little bit. Working with one of the designers, already? The opportunity sounds incredible. Only ...

"I really appreciate the offer," she says, having to force herself to say it a little bit. The thought of Liza coming after her serves as additional incentive. "But I was hired to be Ms. Dennison's assistant, and--"

"Don't worry about that, really. I can take care of it with no problems. And Liza won't be hurt, I promise." There is a slight smirk present on her face that inspires a similar one for Molly. She's been guiltily formulating cracks about her boss all day in her head, and hearing them voiced even just a little is a great relief.

"At least tell me that you're interested."

"I am," Molly says with some reluctance. "I really am, and I'm flattered. I just don't know that a move like this would be the best thing to pull, especially on my first day, you know?"

"I do understand, and I'm sorry for putting you in this sort of awkward position. But ... if I can work out the details and get the okay from Liza, would you be willing to accept my offer?"

It is hard for Molly to give the answer, but if Camille will really deal with Liza herself ...  
"Yes. I would."

Camille flashes that compassionate smile again. "All right. Have you had your lunch break yet?"

"No, actually, I haven't."

"Okay. You go ahead and do that -- do you know where the lunch room is?"

"Uh, yeah, I've passed it a few times today."

"Perfect. So you go eat and I will go speak with Liza." Camille moves to the door and opens it.

"Okay." Molly takes a step out of the office and then turns back. "Thank you. This sounds

like a terrific opportunity."

Camille accepts the thanks and the women head back to Molly's post to take care of business. *I hope I'm not digging my own grave here*, Molly thinks desperately as they walk. But something tells her to have faith in Camille Lemieux.

## KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

"What the hell was that all about?" Brent asks as Claire yanks him inside a room at the end of the corridor that she has dragged him down.

"Privacy, that's all," she says. She can feel her body fidgeting even though she is willing it not to, and she peeks nervously over his shoulder to look through the slender portal of glass in the door.

Something has rattled her, that much is clear to Brent, but he has no idea what it might have been or why she was so spooked by it.

"So the fire," Claire says, interrupting his thoughts even as she seems to be trying to catch her own, "are you sure it was arson? How strong is the evidence?"

The abrupt switch back to that topic jars Brent but he does his best to stay on track, in the hope that this whole thing will make sense at some point. "Uh, pretty damn strong. There is absolutely nothing to suggest that this was an accident -- not the way it started, not the way it spread, nothing. Someone set this up."

"Why would Nick burn down his wife's house? If I can say one thing for him, it's that he looks out for himself. This would kind of be like shooting himself in the foot, no?"

"Yeah, that part doesn't make sense yet, but I'm sure there's some way to explain it." He turns around and looks through the small window in the door, following Claire's cue. "Claire, listen, is something the matter?"

"No, no, everything's fine."

He's not buying it. "Is that why you freaked out back there?"

"I ... didn't freak out."

"Oh, you didn't? Then why'd you drag me into here like some ax-wielding maniac was coming after us?"

"It's fine, I swear." Everything but her mouth is saying the exact opposite.

"Claire ..."

"Brent, it's nothing, I swear." She moves cautiously over to the door and opens it up. "I should let you go. And I've got to get back to work."

"All right," he says with some reluctance. "If there's anything I can do--"

"Don't worry about me, really. Thanks for coming by to tell me about the fire."

"No problem."

She leads him out and manages her way through the goodbyes without setting off any more alarms, but the minute Brent is gone, they are ringing in her head again. He was here -- Stan was here. She made eye contact with him for a moment.

*Is he following me? What is he up to?*

She tries to refocus herself on work, but she cannot keep her gaze from wandering back over her shoulder to double-check that he's not there, nor can she keep her mind from snapping into all sorts of gruesome thoughts.

**END OF EPISODE #241**

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