

## "Footprints" Episode #255

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

- Ryan phoned to warn Claire about Stan and asked her to have dinner with him, so they could discuss safety measures. She found herself agreeing to join him.
- Katherine witnessed Nick arguing with Stan and confronted her husband about being involved with the mob. Nick confided in her about Ryan's adoption and Stan's assault of Claire.
- Diane became furious with Eric for telling her to grow up and got even more upset when he suggested that she's still hung up on something that happened back in Los Angeles.

## WINDMILLS

"That really was a fabulous idea," Katherine says, pausing immediately afterward to tilt her wine glass to her lips. "It'd been far too long since I'd had some time away from King's Bay."

"I enjoyed it, too," Nick smiles. He studies his wife, who is practically the model of rejuvenation after the week they spent traveling the East Coast. He hadn't realized just how much tension Katherine had been storing up until she had a chance to escape their home and enjoy a variety of new, refreshing settings.

The trip was a relief for him, too. Being removed from everything -- from Ryan, from business -- for those few days took an enormous burden off his shoulders. Even though he was constantly in touch via cell phone, and during the trip he kept wishing he were back in King's Bay so that he could deal with things hands-on, there was a sense of great relief in having to resign himself to the fact that he was a few thousand miles away and not much could be done about it.

"We really should look into buying some properties elsewhere," Katherine says, still holding the glass in her fingers in a sort of thoughtful pose. "Raymond and I used to have all those homes throughout the country. I suppose I only sold them after he passed because I didn't feel right retreating to them anymore without him. But it'd be a wonderful idea for us to look into making a few purchases, don't you think?"

"Absolutely," he nods, perhaps too readily. He's only been half-listening to what she was saying, his mind clouded by the suggestion of her finances. The last of the money that he borrowed to pay off the debt to Esposito has nearly been paid back, and he anticipates that the full amount will be back in Katherine's account within the next two weeks. She'll never be able to tell whether or not the investment he spoke of when he originally borrowed the money ever panned out.

Home free ... and yet not. Brent Taylor's never going to find anything to link him to that fire, he's sure of that. There's no way to do it, no matter how deep Taylor's suspicions might be.

But none of the investments Nick has made using a little extra of Katherine's money have panned out, either. They've generally fizzled, giving him neither much of a gain nor a loss. And even though one of the reasons he wed Katherine was to have access to her money, he has no intention of mooching off his wife. He has to figure out some way to turn a profit.

He attempts to push the thought aside for now and refocus on what Katherine is saying. Too often, he finds himself listening to her with only half-attention. He knows it isn't fair. And the truth is, he's too intrigued by her to offer so little of his attention to her. But business has a way of intruding and taking over.

"Let's begin looking for properties, then," he offers merrily. "I would love to have a few getaway spots for just the two of us."

She smiles devilishly. "That does sound wonderful, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does." Looking at her now, it's the absolute truth. She looks stunning. Her reddish-blond hair is pulled up in an elegant style, a few loose, youthful curls falling from the back of her head in a way that he never suspected would be so becoming on a mature woman. She is wearing a thick necklace that, instead of looking gaudy, adds that extra note of sophistication that he knows is so important to Katherine. Even the lines in her face enhance her appearance rather than detracting from it; they add an air of experience that younger women must envy and men must admire.

Nick draws an appreciative breath at this image of his wife. She is going on about possible locations for their vacation spots, but all he can think is how lucky he is that this has all worked out. He's found a gorgeous, intelligent, strong-willed wife, the type of woman for whom he has searched most of his life, to no avail. And she practically fell into his lap as the solution to a financial crisis. Things certainly turned out for the best.

That thought is still running through his head when he looks up to the entrance -- and the ribbon of thanks in his mind is snipped right in two.

## **WINDMILLS**

The restaurant's glittering decor captivates Claire as she and Ryan are led to their table. It's been a long time since she spent an evening here, and in that time, the restaurant has been redone in an elegant combination of silvers and whites. The overall effect is a delicate, crystalline one, a sparkling environment that evokes for Claire thoughts of fairy tales and weddings.

Once she and Ryan are seated, she curls her fingers around the edge of her menu, focusing her attention intently upon it. She begins searching immediately for what she will order.

She is aware of Ryan perusing the wine list casually, and when the waiter arrives, she listens distantly as Ryan places an order. She allows him to do so, not particularly caring what they wind up drinking. There are far more important things on her mind.

"Earth to Claire," he says, sounding a little bit annoyed that she is trying so hard to avoid genuine communication.

"I'm right here."

"Coulda fooled me." He unfolds his napkin, winding it through his fingers before laying it down in his lap.

"I'm sorry," she says, unable to take the condemnation of his silence. "I just--"

"You're not comfortable being out with me. You can say it."

She is going to rebuff the accusation, more in the name of politeness than truth, but stops herself.

"I didn't expect this to be some happy little picnic," he says. "But I wanted to meet with you and discuss Stan, so at least you and the kids can be safe. Why not at least enjoy ourselves while we do it?"

"No reason, I guess." Mercifully the waiter's return interrupts her. They wait quietly for the wine to be delivered and poured.

"I'm not trying to be bad company," she says when the waiter has departed. "But you've got to understand ... I'm still not completely comfortable with this whole revision of the past that we've got going on. To throw away all those years of being afraid of *you*--"

"Must be difficult, I know. I can only imagine. And I don't want to rush you." He pauses in what looks to Claire like a very deliberate attempt at self-control. "But I want to make sure you're safe ... and possibly salvage something of that connection we had."

"It's not that easy."

"I know. But--come on, at least admit that it feels good to get dressed up and go out like this. It's been too long since you've done this, hasn't it?"

She has to admit that much is true with a slightly embarrassed nod.

"I just want to show you a good time," he adds.

"I appreciate it," she says, in spite of that very powerful instinct that is warning her not to trust him or anything he does.

"I'm glad."

"But," she adds, right on the heels of his words, "I-I don't want to give you the wrong idea, either. I know that when you came back to King's Bay, you had this vision of you and I getting back together. I was with Tim and you still hadn't told me about Stan, so the chances of that happening were nonexistent. But now, just because you told me the truth and--" She freezes for an instant, horrified that she is filing Tim's death under the heading of 'just.' "--and I'm not married, that doesn't change the chances of that. Too much has happened."

She's certain that Ryan's very first reaction is one of utter disappointment, but if that's the case and she's not just seeing things, he recovers very quickly. "I can understand that. And I'm not going to push you. All I want is healing ... I want to try and smooth over the scars of the past, for both of us."

She isn't sure how to respond to that. For so long, the idea of Ryan being able to be part of any type of healing for her was so foreign and ridiculous that it's even hard for her to consider it now. But ultimately, that's all she wants, too.

"Excuse me," he says suddenly. She realizes that his focus is now somewhere behind her. "My father--Nick--is here," he explains as he shuffles out of his seat and away from the table.

Claire doesn't dare turn to watch father and son connecting. Whatever kind of bridge is being constructed between her and Ryan, there is no way that she can ever consider Nick Moriani anything other than an enemy.

## **WINDMILLS**

Across the expansive dining room, Diane Bishop sets her fork delicately on the edge of her plate. "You know, I love Samantha to death, but it's damn nice to get out and act like an adult for a night."

"It must be," Eric Westin replies, watching her eat. "I'm glad to be the one who gets to accompany you for your little excursion."

"I'm glad you're here." Her fiery eyes are all life and sparkle, a far cry from the fury he remembers in them from that day he brought her home from the hospital.

He was sure that was going to be the last he saw of her, certainly on a personal basis and likely on a professional one as well. Whichever of his words had struck the wrong note inside her had done quite a number, transforming her into a spitting, rage-filled creature right before his eyes. So the call asking him to join her for dinner came as quite a surprise.

Now, not even a whole dinner into their renewed relationship, things are back to normal. Diane barely did more in the way of apologizing than acknowledge in passing that she was in a bad mood that day and had "probably" overreacted. This being Diane, though, that had been enough for him. He knew that acknowledgement was akin to a full-blown apology for her.

"So as of Monday, I go back to work at Vision," she says proudly.

"Excited?"

"Very. It's been too long since I had some work to do!"

"That's a good attitude," he comments, knowing that the fulfillment for her is more in one-upping competitors and maneuvering seemingly impossible moves rather than the simple joy of bringing quality literature to the public.

"I'm ready to go in there and kick some ass," she says with that twinkling, suggestive smile of hers.

"The publishing world better watch out."

"Damn right!" She lifts the fork back to her mouth and draws another piece of the ahi tuna in with her full lips. "I figure, I've gotta come up with something good for my first big deal, you know? Gotta announce that I'm back."

His mouth spreads in a very genuine grin. Her corporate ambition might not be so appealing to others, but to a man who clawed his way to the comfortable position of being able to pick and choose his clients and cases, it's something to appreciate.

"Whoa!" Diane exclaims, her attention suddenly drawn away from him. He turns his head over his shoulder to follow her gaze across the restaurant.

Ah-ha. Claire Fisher.

"'scuse me for a sec, okay?" Diane tells him rather than asks as she rises out of her seat.

She cuts a determined path across the dining room.

Eric knows there would have been no use in trying to stop her, but now he offers up a silent little prayer: *Please don't make too much of a scene.*

## WINDMILLS

"Well, hello there," Diane coos, wiggling the tips of her fingers in a faux wave as she approaches Claire.

"Hi, Diane," Claire answers dryly.

"Dining out alone, are we?"

"No, I'm waiting for someone. He spotted someone else and got up to go say hi."

"He, huh?" Diane asks. "Is this a date you're on?"

Claire tosses back her head. "What rock did you crawl out from under?"

"One with a damn nice walk-in closet, apparently," Diane says, sweeping a hand up and down her form-fitting red dress, a spaghetti-strapped number that comes together in a plunging V in the middle of her chest.

"How are you feeling?" Claire asks.

Diane smiles, amused at the attempt at civility. Obviously Claire has realized that her faint attempts at hostility aren't going to deter Diane. "What is that, the 'kill-em-with-kindness' approach?"

Claire doesn't respond for a long moment while she tries to focus on her wine. When Diane doesn't walk away, Claire turns back to her sharply. "Look, Diane, is there a point to this?"

"Just checkin' in with an old buddy, that's all," Diane says with a wink. "So who's the dude, huh?"

"A friend," Claire says sternly.

"You mean 'friend' like ... the kinda guy you get all gussied up for? Seems like you're overstepping the bounds of regular friendship here, don't you think?"

"I forgot, friendship's your area of expertise. I hear the Diane Bishop Fan Club is just thriving these days."

"Ooooh," Diane says in a mocking tone. "Am I gonna get to meet this guy?"

"No."

"Gee, you're a real bundle of fun tonight, you know that?"

"I try." Claire lowers her wine glass to the table, keeping a fingertip on its stem as she looks back up at Diane. "Who are you here with? Is Brian back?"

Diane feels her cheeks suddenly growing very hot. "What?"

"That's who called for you at the hospital that day ... right?"

"I don't know," Diane manages, though her words fumble a bit too much for her liking. "I never heard anything else about that call."

She is trying to think of a way to divert Claire away from this string of conversation when the solution falls right into her line of vision.

"Well, well, look at that," she mutters, folding her arms in front of her and tapping her foot for a little bit of dramatic effect.

Claire does just that, looking to the entrance to see what has Diane so intrigued.

"Talk about poor taste," Diane says with a disapproving shake of her head. Her eyes narrow as she watches Molly and Brent stroll into the dining room together.

## **WINDMILLS**

"I didn't expect to see the two of you," Ryan says as he approaches Nick and Katherine's table, folding his hands in front of him.

"Ryan," Nick responds in that all-too-familiar tone that warns Ryan that he is about to receive some sort of reprimand. Katherine must sense it, too, because she is silent, offering merely a nod in greeting her stepson.

"Having a good night?" Ryan asks, as if making small talk will prevent the inevitable.

In a flash, Nick is out of his seat and has Ryan by the elbow. "Excuse us," the elder

Moriani says to his wife over his shoulder.

Ryan allows himself to be led out into the lobby. The clicking of his and Nick's shoes over the marble floor has a particularly ominous ring to it now.

"What do you think you're doing?" Nick demands, pulling him over to a sufficiently unpopulated spot and spinning him around.

"I *was* having dinner. I thought I'd come over and say hello to my father, but apparently--"

"Apparently you don't understand when to stop," Nick says. "I thought you were over this ridiculous obsession with Claire Robbins."

"I'm having dinner with her!"

"This is not just a dinner. You know that just as well as I do." Ryan opens his mouth to interrupt, but Nick stops him simply by holding up his index finger. "I saw the way you were looking at her, Ryan."

Ryan's eyes drop with the shame of a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar. "Well, she just made it abundantly clear that nothing's going to happen."

"Good. At least someone at that table has some semblance of common sense about them."

"I had another confrontation with Stan. I just wanted to make sure--"

"You didn't need to take her out to dinner for that." Nick glances through the large doorway, right in Katherine's direction. "Don't lose focus here. Claire wants nothing more than to see the two of us punished for everything that her father did -- nevermind that he was acting in her best interests."

"She's beyond that," Ryan says with an emphatic shake of his head. "She's not still out for blood like that. This is about Stan, and keeping her safe."

"That'd better be it."

Ryan turns away, staring at the restaurant's entrance. "You have no idea how badly Stan ruined things. I just want to make that right -- we both do. We're just trying to clean up the past, find some sort of resolution--"

Now it is Nick's turn to shake his head, but for him the gesture is a condescending one. "You still haven't learned, have you? That's not possible, Ryan. It never will be."

Before Ryan can argue any further, Nick seals his point by heading back into the dining room. Ryan stands in the spot where his father left him, not quite sure what to think. Is every force in the universe against him making some sort of peace with the mess that is his life?

No. It has to be possible.

It has to, he vows as he begins walking back to his and Claire's table.

### **END OF EPISODE #255**

*Is Nick right -- would it be impossible for Ryan and Claire to find closure over the past? What did you think of Diane's prodding of Claire? Take a few moments to join us in the Footprints Forum to engage in the latest conversation!*

[Next Episode](#)