

"Footprints" Episode #256

[Previously ...](#)

- Diane impressed Eric by discussing her ambitions for her new job at Vision Publishing. When she spotted Claire also dining at Windmills, Diane confronted her rival and got in a few jabs before Claire turned the tables and mentioned Brian.
- Molly and Brent arrived at Windmills together, much to Diane's chagrin.
- Ryan got Claire to admit that it feels good to go out for a special evening, but she was quick to downplay any romantic ideas he might have.
- Nick pulled Ryan aside and expressed his displeasure at seeing his son out with Claire.

WINDMILLS

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

Claire takes the statement literally, following Diane's eyes over to the entrance.

"Talk about poor taste," Diane says with a disapproving shake of her head.

"Molly and Brent are none of your business," Claire says. She is obviously confused by how their presence is even relevant to Diane, a power that Diane relishes holding.

"They're kinda making it everyone's business by showing their faces in public like that, don't you think?"

She sees the uncertain gaze that Claire is giving her. It's the look of one who is ready to spring into action at any moment.

"You've been talking to Sarah, haven't you?"

"Sarah and I understand each other. At least," she pauses, recalling Sarah's confession that she was the one who phoned Brian, "I thought we did."

"Leave Molly and Brent alone."

"Anyone who makes a play for his barely ex-wife's sister doesn't deserve to be left alone," Diane announces, striding away from the table before Claire can do a thing about it.

She cuts a determined path over to the small table in the center of the room, where Molly and Brent have just been seated.

"You two really should be ashamed of yourselves," Diane scolds as she sidles up to the table.

Both heads turn, startled, at the sound of her voice. "Diane," Molly says, looking to Brent for some explanation of Diane's sudden presence. He has none to offer.

"You know, it's bad enough that the two of you are still fooling around after you managed to wreck a marriage. But going out on big, fancy dates in public? Not too smooth."

"We're having dinner," Brent says with a curt professionalism. "I didn't realize that was forbidden."

"Pretty much everything is forbidden when you're in the process of getting divorced from your date's sister." Diane refolds her arms and tosses back her head, letting out a tiny laugh. "Apparently you two missed that chapter of the 'Illicit Affairs' manual."

"Diane, please," Molly says. Her voice is strained with an element of pleading that gives Diane great amusement.

She continues, undeterred. "You'd think someone in a high-profile position like Police Commander--"

"Diane," Brent says tersely. His tone is enough to stop Diane. "Where and with whom either of us chooses to eat is none of your business. Molly and I are good friends. Now go back to your table and leave us alone."

Diane allows uncertainty to linger for what she knows must be a painfully long moment for the two of them. "Friends," she says with a little laugh. "Right."

Brent tightens his jaw and widens his eyes menacingly.

"Fine, fine, I'm outta here," she says, throwing up her palms in defeat. "Just keep in mind what I said."

With a final wink, she returns to her table.

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Nick slides smoothly back into his seat, offering Katherine an apologetic expression. "I'm sorry."

"It's no worry," she says cheerfully, gesturing towards the plate of food that arrived in his absence.

"Oh, it's some worry," he says, his frustration evident as he glares across the restaurant at Ryan and Claire. "I wish he would just give up on that damn woman."

"We seem to have a problem keeping our sons away from troublesome women, don't we?" Katherine muses ruefully. It is painfully clear to Nick how heavily the weight of all that happened with Andy and Danielle is still resting upon his wife.

"Claire Robbins--Fisher, whatever--is not worth all the heartache Ryan is putting himself through. He keeps saying that he simply wants to keep her safe from that maniac Stan, but I know it runs deeper than that. He couldn't even deny it."

"This girl was the daughter of one of your best friends, no? And the Fishers are a good family, from what I've seen. Can she really be that horrid?"

"Yes! Claire was more or less responsible for her father's death. She holds some sort of sick grudge against Ryan and me because of all the grief she had over her father ... which makes it even more curious that she's suddenly dining out with Ryan."

"That does seem strange," Katherine agrees, dabbing at her food with her fork but not actually bringing any of it to her mouth. "Do you think this is part of some sort of plot?"

He shrugs. "Possibly. I have no idea what to expect from that woman. But I certainly don't trust her, and I think it's an enormous mistake for Ryan to."

"Nick ..." she begins softly, as if still questioning herself even as she introduces the idea. "If there's anything I can do to help you or Ryan, please don't hesitate to ask."

"I don't want to drag you into this any more than necessary. You've already been through so much with Andrew--"

"Which means that I know what mistakes not to make. I can help you keep those two apart if you think it's genuinely in Ryan's best interest."

"It is," Nick answers swiftly, allowing no room for hesitation or doubt. "And thank you. I'm just worried that all of this is going to be too much for him in the end."

"What do you mean?"

"Ryan's ... fragile. So much of his focus is locked on what Stan did to Claire and everything that happened in the aftermath. I'm afraid that the longer this goes on -- well, the less capable he will be of dealing with it."

"You think that keeping him away from Claire will help diffuse the situation?"

"Absolutely. His anger towards Stan ... so much of it is because of the feelings he had for Claire all those years ago. As far as he can tell, Stan ruined his relationship with her. Something external tore apart what they had before it saw it as something other than perfect teenage romance. So he's spent years clinging to that, thinking that if he could find it again, his life would be complete."

"Isn't there anything that can be done about this Stan? Maybe if he were out of the picture, Ryan would have much less of a connection to Claire."

"I'm thinking the same thing," Nick says, nodding slowly. "We just need to come up with something before the two of them drive Ryan over the edge." *And turn him into even more of a liability*, his mind adds as they lapse into silence.

WINDMILLS

"Sorry about that," Ryan says as he seats himself across from Claire once again. "My dad--he wanted to talk to me about something."

"That's fine." Claire tears off a small piece of the bread that has been brought to the table and places it in her mouth, chewing slowly.

"I know what you're thinking."

That catches her by surprise enough to make her look up at him, and he hooks her eyes with his. "That wasn't some sleazy secret Mafia meeting. We weren't out there planning to knock someone off and fit 'em with a pair of cement shoes--"

"Claire," comes the interruption from a few feet away. Both she and Ryan turn to see Molly and Brent approaching their table.

"Hey!" Molly greets, hurrying over. She takes one of Claire's hands and gives it a joyful squeeze. "It's so good to see you!"

"You, too!" Claire enthuses. "And Brent -- hi!"

"Hi," Brent says coolly. Claire doesn't miss the shifting of his eyes to the side ... at Ryan.

Suddenly the air feels a little thinner to Claire. "I saw the two of you come in," she says, fumbling for something to say. "I was going to come over and say hi."

"Ah, yes, but the lovely Diane got to us first," Molly sighs.

"She had me right before you," Claire says. "I think she's making the rounds tonight."

"I'm amazed we were able to get rid of her." Even as he speaks, Brent never removes his eyes from Ryan, never losing that distrust that is clouding his gaze.

Claire plants an elbow on the table and rests her cheek against her hand. "She got really, really angry when she saw the two of you walk in. I have the feeling that she and Sarah have been spending time together ... When Diane and Samantha had that car accident, Sarah came to the hospital with Paula, and she seemed awfully concerned about Diane."

Molly lifts her eyebrows and puffs out her cheeks. "That's one heck of a match."

"Yeah, I'm not sure that's what either of them needs," Claire agrees. "So, uh, how have you two been?"

"Good, I guess," Brent answers after a momentary hesitation, clearly very distracted by Ryan's presence. "You?"

"I'm fine." Claire knows that her answer is clipped and not at all convincing, but she brushes it aside in the hope that Molly and Brent will do the same. "How's the new job going, Mol?"

"Well. Really well." A genuine smile edges its way onto Molly's face, momentarily displacing the concern that she seems to have acquired from Brent about Ryan.

"You two should get back to your table," Claire says suddenly.

"Yeah, we should probably be there when the waiter shows up, considering how hard it was to even get reservations," Brent says.

"We should get together and catch up soon, Molly."

"Yeah, totally. Why don't I give you a call in the next few days?"

"Sounds good." Claire sees Brent and Molly beginning to move away from her and Ryan's table, and in the hope of pushing them away entirely, she adds, "It was good to see you two."

"You, too," Brent says, giving a little wave as he takes Molly back to their table.

A gigantic sigh of relief rises from Claire's chest. Brent and Molly's displeasure at seeing

her with Ryan was painfully obvious, and if she'd had to pretend not to notice it any longer, she might have gone insane.

Ryan breaks her from her thoughts. "All right," he says. "Something's becoming pretty obvious to me and there's no point ignoring it anymore."

WINDMILLS

"That was fun," Diane says, her full lips spreading into a broad grin as she settles back into her seat.

"What was that all about?" Eric inquires. He nods his head out in the direction of Claire's table.

"Well, I saw Claire over there, and I couldn't pass up an opportunity to catch up with my old pal." She picks up the napkin that she left crumpled on the table and lays it over her lap again. "And then those other two -- well, you met Sarah at the hospital, right? That's her ex-husband and her sister."

"Are they on a date?"

"They say no, but they're not fooling anyone. They've been making eyes at each other for years. It's a huge part of the reason Sarah and Brent split up."

"Sounds like quite the little family affair."

"Molly and Brent seem to think it's some sorta joke," Diane says, a harsh little laugh brushing the back of her throat. "I thought I'd remind them that a divorce doesn't mean all of that never happened. Please ... do they think Sarah's just gonna forget all about it 'cause they're not officially married anymore?"

"Apparently they're not too concerned about it." Eric returns his attention to his meal, keeping his head bowed as he moves a forkful of stuffed pork chop to his mouth.

"I mean, don't you think that's pretty trashy? If they don't watch it, they're gonna wind up on *Jerry Springer*."

He silently finishes chewing, takes a swig of wine, and then looks her directly in the eye. "Maybe it's their business."

"Not when they're out gallavantiing in public like they're Luke and Laura or something!"

"Does the fact that you're a friend of Sarah give you the right to interfere in these

people's lives?"

Diane sits up straighter, pulling back her shoulders and moving her head backward in not-so-pleasant surprise. "When they're making her look like a fool by being out in public like this together, yeah! Besides," her voice gets lower and more serious, "Sarah and I had a little ... falling-out. So I'm not *just* doing this because of her."

"Does that make it better?"

"I'm just having a little fun, jeez!" She tries to dismiss his worries with a wave of the hand.

He's not going to let it be that easy. "You might consider it fun, Diane, but it's ... it's obnoxious. And going over to bother Claire just for the hell of it? Behavior like that isn't going to help you look better in court."

The validity of what he is saying is obvious to her. Suddenly she doesn't want to be a part of this argument anymore. "Fine. I'm sorry."

"Just watch it," he says, softening. "You don't need to be doing anything that might jeopardize your chances of winning permanent custody."

She knows that he is right, but does he have to be such a killjoy about it? It'd be nice to have someone who could understand why she had to approach Molly, Brent, and Claire ... like she thought Sarah was, until she turned around and made that ridiculous call to L.A.

Like Brian was, until ...

Like Brian was.

WINDMILLS

"I'm really sorry you had to deal with Diane," Brent says once the waitress is out of earshot. "I wanted this to be a chance for us to relax and just talk--"

"It's okay," Molly says assuringly. "She's Diane."

"Sounds like she got to Claire, too."

"Yeah." Molly folds her hands together on the table and leans forward. "What do you think's going on with her and Ryan Moriani?"

"I have no idea ... hopefully not much."

"I didn't recognize him at first. I knew he looked familiar, and then I saw the way you were looking at him--"

"I didn't realize you'd seen him before." Brent is unable to keep the note of alarm out of his voice. The thought of Molly being exposed to the Morianis is a highly unsettling one.

"Only once. At the hospital last summer, after the fire. I guess he was there checking on your condition."

This new piece of information captures Brent's attention. "Really?"

"Yeah, it was a really brief meeting. But he introduced himself. I was kind of shocked because I'd heard so much about him, it was weird to be running into him like that."

"Interesting ..." Brent's fingers drum along the side of the table as he is swept away by a new train of thought, but he restrains the distraction. "I hope Claire isn't getting suckered by him."

"She's smarter than that."

"I hope so," he sighs.

"It is good to see her out like this," Molly offers.

He has to grin at her perpetual optimism. Always looking for the upside. "She has been really withdrawn for too long."

"Yeah. Since Tim died, she's been totally different. So if something can get her out and socializing again ..."

"It'd be nice if it weren't Ryan Moriani," Brent says, disgust spilling off his lips along with the name. "I don't trust those people one bit."

"It doesn't sound like you've had much reason to. But maybe Claire knows a different side of him? She has known him for a really long time."

"That doesn't change the fact that he and his father are involved in some ugly stuff."

"No, of course not."

"Besides, it would be in pretty poor taste for her to choose Ryan to move on with,

considering the circumstances of Tim's death ..."

"I don't think we're really ones to be talking about poor taste," Molly says, her voice much quieter.

Her point strikes him right in the gut. "I told you not to worry about what Diane said," he manages. He doesn't need Molly feeling awful about the two of them having dinner together, too.

"I can't help it. Because she's right."

"She's not right! We haven't done anything wrong."

"Why, because we're not calling it a date?" She unfolds her hands and lowers them to her lap. "Brent, whether we like it or not, every moment we spend together is an insult to Sarah."

"We're friends. That isn't gonna change," he argues back weakly.

"No, it's not." She pauses, as if to solidify that truth. "But sometimes I wonder if even that is too much."

WINDMILLS

"This is never going to work," Ryan says, his shoulders slumping along with his spirits.

"What isn't?"

"This. Trying to act like anything is normal -- or that it ever can be." He shakes his head, a mournful, dejected gesture.

He watches Claire carefully, trying to gauge her feelings. He is stricken by the sudden fear that he's said too much, that he's given her the out for which she's been searching.

"You want to put this all behind us, don't you?" he asks. "Finally have it all be over, not have it hanging over everything you do every day of your life. Right?"

"Yes. Absolutely, yes." Her answer comes in a heavy breath and she blinks her eyes closed. Ryan cannot help noticing how tired she seems. He's tired, too, tired of Stan, tired of worrying about her safety, tired of agonizing over an act and a decision that he can never do anything to change.

"We can make that happen," he urges. "Together. We've been trying to deal with this by ourselves for all these years. It hasn't worked. So let's give it a shot together--"

"I can't."

Her interruption is direct and cutting, a hint of the Claire he hasn't seen all that much of in recent months.

"I can't handle it," she says. "I can't ... I can't go back and keep reliving that. I moved on -- I don't want to be dragged back into that now."

"You didn't move on, not really. You just found something strong enough to distract you--"

"And maybe that's as good as it's ever going to get!" she snaps. She glances around quickly, as if conscious that she is making a scene, and then lifts her napkin from her lap and sets it on the table. "I can't handle this."

Ryan watches as she rises from her seat and stalks out of the dining room, trying to decide if it's even worth giving chase.

END OF EPISODE #256

What did you think of having the whole episode occur in one setting, with all the characters bumping into each other? What do you think is in store for all of these couples -- or what do you think should be? Join us in the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts!

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