

## "Footprints" Episode #283

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

- Molly and Brent decided to keep their relationship a secret for the time being, happy just to be together.
- Camille and Molly left the Charlene Powers agency and began preparations for the launch of Camille's new design firm.
- After spending Christmas with the Fishers, Ryan resolved to turn his life around so that he can have a future with Claire.

### **MOLLY FISHER'S APARTMENT**

The rich aroma of French vanilla trails Molly out of the kitchen and back into the living room. She steps through the beams of morning sunlight splayed over the carpet, making her way back to the sofa, where Brent is holding his coffee mug between his palms and staring off into space.

"You look awfully serious," she says as she sits down beside him. The scent of French vanilla rises up from the mug and she breathes it in deeply.

He shakes it off and turns to her with a smile. "Just thinking."

"About what?"

"What do you think?"

She considers it for a moment and then begins shaking her head, even though the idea is immensely appealing. "Don't get any ideas. Camille is gonna be here any minute."

"That's not what I meant," he says through a laugh, "although I *do* like that idea, too."

Placing one hand on her thigh, he leans in and presses his mouth to hers. She accepts it willingly ... but finally, she catches his lower lip between both of hers and brings the kiss to a pause.

"C'mon, finish your coffee. Camille's going to be here soon and we have a lot of work to get done." She sees him beginning to protest and hastens to add, "You knew that was part of the deal and you agreed to sleep over anyway."

"All right, all right." He takes a deep sip of the coffee; Molly watches his lips curl over the edge of the mug and briefly considers throwing work to the wind today.

It's not going to happen, though. She wants to have this meeting with Camille. It'll be the first time she really gets a look at how the new business is going to work, how things are shaping up, that sort of thing. She's been excited about it since they set the meeting time days ago.

She might have even been up thinking about it all night -- if something else hadn't kept her up all night.

She reaches out a hand and brushes it through his thick, dark hair. "So what were you thinking about?" she asks.

"Being here," he says. He keeps his voice low, almost sounding embarrassed to say it.

"What do you mean?"

The next words come tumbling out quickly. "I can't believe how much time we missed out on."

A sigh rises from her chest. "Neither can I. But ... it makes this more meaningful, right?"

"Right," he says, lifting one shoulder in a shrug. "I just wish we didn't have to sneak around like this."

"Like you said, at least we can be together. We're getting someplace. That's a huge change from even a few weeks ago."

Before he has a chance to respond, a knock sounds on the front door. Molly jumps to her feet immediately as her nerves get the best of her.

"It's only Camille," she says, wondering as she moves to the door whether she said it to reassure Brent or herself.

"Good morning!" Camille greets her as she blows into the apartment, despite the stuffed bag hanging from her shoulder and the files held under her arm.

"Morning," Molly says. She's suddenly very nervous about the whole situation.

Camille drops her things onto the dining room table -- and catches sight of Brent when she looks up. "Oh, hello."

"Hi," he says awkwardly, slipping his arms into his jacket.

Molly knows that there is something she should be doing. It takes a moment for it to come to her. "Camille, you remember Brent, don't you?"

"Of course I do! It's nice to see you again, Brent."

"Same to you." He hurries over to the door -- despite what seems to be an attempt to appear relaxed -- and is halfway out the door before he turns back to Molly. "I, uh, I'll give you a call tonight, okay?"

She nods. Their eyes lock together for an instant, long enough to confirm that they're not quite at the point of being able to kiss in front of anyone else yet. A smile busies Molly's lips instead.

"I'll see you later," she says, closing the door as he heads out to the parking lot.

Camille stops sorting through the files as soon as the door is closed. "Well, well, well ... Am I mistaken in assuming that things appear to be going better between the two of you?"

Molly cannot wipe the smile from her face. "Much better."

And suddenly, she's endlessly grateful to have Camille here. At last, someone to confide in.

## **KING'S BAY MALL**

"All right, I do not understand why she gets her own clothing line," Lauren says, pointing up at the sign that announces Jennifer Lopez's "J.Lo" wear.

"Because she's J.Lo," Courtney says mockingly. "She gets movies, she gets CDs, she gets Ben Affleck ... It's only natural to round it out with clothing, right?"

"Yeah, velour sweatsuits. Real classy." Lauren moves over to one of the racks and studies a hot pink sweatsuit. She winds up shaking her head at it.

"Moving right along ...," comes the prompt from Courtney. She starts walking and Lauren catches up with her before they hit a more agreeable section.

Without having to say a word, they know that this is a spot they'd like to spend some time looking. They spread out among the racks, weaving around other shoppers and browsing through the clothing.

When Lauren comes to something that might have purchase potential, she pulls it off the

rack and glances around. She catches a glimpse of Courtney's dark hair just a few racks away and negotiates her way over to her.

"What do you think of this?" Lauren asks, holding it up in front of her.

Courtney studies the subject -- a sleeveless maroon top with shadowy marking of a floral print and a low V for a neckline -- with the intensity befitting such a decision.

"I like it," she says, though the proclamation doesn't sound entirely confident.

"Do you really?"

"Yeah ... yeah, it's cute."

"But ..." Lauren holds the top out in front of her to examine it again.

"I dunno. There's nothing wrong with it."

Finally Lauren shakes her head. "Yeah, I'm not feeling it either." She returns the shirt to where she found it and hurries back over to Courtney.

"I'm looking for something like that, though," she says. "I feel like I need to get rid of some of my tank tops and party shirts and stuff."

"Nothing wrong with a little post-holidays cleanout," Courtney says, flipping casually through the contents of a sale rack.

"Hey! Speaking of parties--" The thought has just blown into Lauren's mind for the first time today, though she's been reminding herself to tell Courtney about it. "Trevor and I are gonna throw one before our parents get home."

"Like a party-party?"

"A big one, yeah. We've gotta get 'em in before we get too old for it!"

Courtney's face crinkles up skeptically, though she keeps her focus on the clothing. "I don't know. We don't have such a hot track record with throwing parties, Lauren." She pauses to think about that for a second. "Or attending them, for that matter."

"It'll be fun!"

"Do I need to go over the list?"

"Don't, please," Lauren says with a shudder. "This will be drama-free, Court. Just some fun times and kicking back."

That appeal seems to be getting through to Courtney, until she whips around and asks, "Is Jason gonna come?"

Lauren tries to answer as casually as possible. "Probably, yeah. Come on, that's not a big deal. There'll probably be a ton of people there, anyway."

"Still ..."

"Still *nothing*! You have to come! My parents have been on this cruise for months. I think that house deserves to be graced by at least one party in that time, don't you?"

"Yeah, probably."

"Besides ... I was kinda thinking it might be a good time for a little hooking-up."

Now Courtney's focus darkens. "For who?"

## MORIANI HOME

Despite his attempts at a stealthy dart to his study, the stairs creak under Ryan's feet. He grits his teeth in annoyance. Nick wasn't anywhere to be found downstairs, which means that he must be in his own study upstairs -- within perfect range for monitoring all trips up and down the stairs, of course.

As expected, Nick emerges from his study just before Ryan reaches the top of the staircase. The older man folds his arms together and silently watches Ryan trudge toward him.

"I suppose I don't need to ask where you've been," Nick says, his lips thick with disdain.

Ryan glowers at him for a fraction of a second before continuing on his way down the hallway.

"I need to speak with you about something," Nick announces. "It's important."

*Of course it's important*, Ryan thinks. *It's always "important"*. Of course, Nick couldn't have just said that to begin with -- or just come out and said what he needs to talk to Ryan about. Only after his snide comment about Ryan's whereabouts went unacknowledged did he fall back on whatever this "pressing" business is.

Ryan's eyes make a quick roll upward before he turns around.

"Come into the study," Nick says. "Katherine is only supposed to be out for a little while."

Ryan begins to comply but stops in his tracks. "What's this about?"

"I told you, it's important."

"What's important?"

The muscles in Nick's face tighten, tension pulling the features together, but the explosion that Ryan is anticipating doesn't follow. Must be a good morning.

"It's financial," comes the terse explanation.

Despite himself, Ryan finds himself asking, "What's going on?"

"I'm getting a little nervous about this Van Nies situation. Things are moving very slowly."

Ryan has an idea what he's talking about, but he's been trying to distance him from the details for months, so the specifics are lost on him. He finds a strange kind of pride in that.

"Don't talk to me about any of that stuff," he says, though he thinks he's going to choke on the words.

"What?"

"I've already told you, I'm not--"

"I know, I know. You aren't interested." The scorn in Nick's voice is unmistakable; it's as if he finds the notion not only stupid, but completely unbelievable.

"No, I'm not. Actually, I--I had some resumes sent out yesterday."

Nick's eyes widen in mock excitement. "How thrilling. Ryan--"

Ryan throws up his hands. "This is not some sort of joke!"

For a moment, Nick appears ready to continue the argument, but then he stops himself. In the same contemptuously calm tone he's been using the whole time, he says, "All right. Go ahead and indulge your little midlife crisis."

Though he wants nothing more than to fight back until some of what he's saying actually penetrates Nick, Ryan forces himself to clam up. A fight is exactly what Nick wants. There's no need for Ryan to play into that and prove he's nothing more than an overgrown child acting out -- which, he knows, is exactly how Nick is looking at this.

He is about to retreat to his study when Nick throws in one more jab: "I'm sure our fair Claire will be thrilled at this little turnaround you're doing, eh?"

"Claire doesn't need to know about this," Ryan says, his eyes fixed squarely upon Nick's. It's more than just a statement -- it's a threat. "I have a chance at something good here, Dad. Something genuinely good. I'm not going to let it slip through my fingers by being stupid enough to try some sort of juggling act."

He can see that he has managed a jab right back at Nick. Fury clouds the older Moriani's eyes as Ryan makes his escape to his own room -- but it's fury born of fear, Ryan knows that. Fear that the balls in Nick's own juggling act could go tumbling to the floor at any moment.

For what must be the millionth time in the past several weeks, Ryan resolves not to keep the most important thing in his life up in the air like that anymore.

## **MOLLY FISHER'S APARTMENT**

"What are these, Molly?"

The question stretches from the living room to the kitchen, where Molly is rinsing out the coffee cups. She shuts the sink, waiting for Camille to give some sort of further hint; she has no idea what 'these' might refer to, considering that they're in different rooms.

"What are what?" Molly asks, finally giving up and going to the doorway of the kitchen.

"These," Camille says, holding up what Molly recognizes with horror as a sketchpad she's been keeping around. She must have left it on the coffee table when Brent came over last night.

Molly makes a quick dash for the sofa. "It's nothing. Just some, uh, doodles I've done."

Camille pulls the pad away before Molly can snatch it from her. "They look a bit elaborate for doodles," the older woman says, leafing through the pages. Most contain black-and-white sketches of clothing ideas, in various states of development and completion, but Molly recognizes the splashes of color that she has added to a select few.

Rocking her weight back and forth between her feet, Molly waits for Camille to tire of the

sketches.

"I didn't realize you were working on designs," Camille says.

Molly makes another grab for the pad, to no avail. "I'm not, really. They were just some ideas I had, and--"

"They're very good."

That brings Molly's racing adrenaline to a halt -- momentarily, anyway. Then it starts up again, though for different reasons. "Really?"

"Yes! Molly, these are--they're very impressive, actually."

"Thanks," Molly manages, surprised she can even get that much out. She never intended for anyone to see these sketches; she regards them as ideas, incomplete and imperfect. The sketchpad is simply an outlet for trying her hand at seeing how some of her ideas look outside her head.

"Actually," Camille begins slowly, finally closing the pad's cover, "I'm glad I found that."

Unsure of what to say, Molly just waits with her hands folded. Camille makes no move to hand the pad back to her, and for the first time, she's not completely uncomfortable with the idea of it being in someone else's hands.

"There's a lot of potential in these sketches. And I have a position I'm looking to fill, actually," Camille says.

Molly's breathing stops in its tracks. No way ...

"Would you be interested in doing design work?"

"Would I be interested?" Molly can't imagine how ridiculous her face must look right now; it has to be exploding with excitement. "Of course!"

"There'd be a bit of a learning curve, of course, but I'm sure you could handle it." Camille reopens the pad and examines some of the sketches again. "I should've recognized the possibility before. Some of the suggestions you've made on things that I've been working on have been incredibly helpful."

"Thank you," Molly says, trying to calm her breathing. She can't think of anything else to say.



A troubled look suddenly begins to cloud Camille's expression, though, and a shiver of panic runs through Molly. Uh-oh.

"There is just one thing," Camille announces.

Of course. This is too good to be true.

"I'm going to have to find a new assistant. I'll be hard-pressed to find someone as reliable as you! I may need your help with that first," Camille says with a smile, and Molly's body begins to calm down as much as it possibly can right now.

## **KING'S BAY MALL**

"You. And Trevor."

As Lauren expected -- perhaps not hoped, but expected -- Courtney's expression morphs instantly to one of disbelief. "What?"

"I think it's a good idea," Lauren says with a shrug. She searches for a response. "Come on, it is not *that* bad an idea!"

"Maybe," Courtney says noncommittally. Lauren wonders if it's the first time she's entertained the thought.

"He may be my brother, but even I will admit that he's a cute guy. He's modeled, for God's sake. And you guys seem to see eye-to-eye on a lot of stuff."

"Like what?"

"Like ... dealing with bad situations."

Courtney raises an eyebrow. "You mean like the time he called me on acting like a bitch and made me apologize to you?"

"That would be one example, yes," Lauren grins. "I don't know, I just think you guys might get along well."

"I guess I could maybe see that," Courtney admits after a moment of consideration.

"There ya go. Now you have to come to this party, huh?"

Courtney looks as though she's going to protest, but instead she asks, "So when are you having this little shindig?"

"Probably the Friday before our parents get home. The weekend after next."

"All right, all right, I'll go," Courtney says. "Now c'mon. This gives our shopping new purpose."

## **MORIANI HOME**

Nick's elbows sit atop the mahogany desk, holding his idle hands aloft. His gaze is fixed somewhere on the patterned wallpaper staring at him from the opposite wall: a dark blend of maroons and golds, with some blue and green thrown in. As much as he'd like to be accomplishing something worthwhile right now, he can't.

Ryan's declaration of independence is bothering him more than he'd like, and certainly more than he plans on allowing Ryan to see. He resents the implication that he lives some sort of unacceptable lifestyle; all he's attempted to do all these years is provide for himself and his son.

He's not particularly comfortable with the idea of Ryan being so out of reach, either. Business has always been a means of keeping Ryan in check -- to make sure that he's adequately taken care of, for one, and also to monitor his decisions. Nick has always worried about Ryan's willingness to be swept into whatever seems to be the "right thing." That was why it was so easy to convince him to be a part of the business when he was younger.

And that's why he's so taken with the idea of living some kind of "honest life" with Claire now. Being a husband and father with a steady job and a comfortable home must seem like the perfect route.

But Ryan's not giving proper weight to any of the variables. Claire is unstable, Nick knows that. That family would never accept the kind of life Ryan has had up until this point -- especially considering what happened to Tim Fisher. And to top it all off, that bloodthirsty Brent Taylor would never leave Ryan alone.

God knows, Ryan knows far too much for Nick to risk him being in that kind of precarious situation for the rest of his life.

The phone's ringing saves him from his thoughts, at least temporarily.

"Nick Moriani," he answers.

"Nick! It's good to hear your voice! It's been far too long."

"It has," he says, fairly certain that he means it. They don't maintain much contact anymore, but this is one relationship that Nick doesn't mind keeping up -- even if she can sometimes drive him mad.

"How are things? How's your wife? It's hard to believe that I haven't seen you since the wedding!"

"Things are going well. And Katherine's doing wonderfully. How have you been?"

"Splendid," she answers in the breathless sort of way that Nick remembers so well. "That's why I'm calling, I suppose."

"What do you mean?" He also recalls that her taste for the dramatic doesn't always lend itself to perfectly clear conversation.

"I have an offer for you, Nick."

His interest is suddenly piqued, and as he listens, what she is saying makes quite a bit of sense. It sounds like a worthwhile investment, if nothing else.

"I'll definitely consider it," he says when she has finished with her explanation.

"Wonderful! You have my number, don't you?"

"I do, indeed."

"Perfect. Give me a call when you make up your mind." She pauses, then adds, "I do hope you'll be a part of this, Nick."

They exchange goodbyes, and Nick returns to musing as he sets the phone back on the receiver. It's been a long time since they were involved -- years and years, more than he cares to count -- but there's something about her that still fascinates him. He could never live with the woman; God, he probably couldn't spend more than a few hours in her presence. But there's still something very alluring about her.

And this does sound like a wise investment, he has to admit. He knows her reputation, so it's likely that the venture will be successful. Besides ... the way she described the operating of the whole thing, it sounds like he might be able to use the setup to his advantage.

"Well, Camille," he says aloud, "you just might have found an investor."

**END OF EPISODE #283**

*What do you make of the sudden connection between Nick and Camille? Would you like to see Courtney and Trevor get together? Join the discussion in the Footprints Forum!*

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