

"Footprints" Episode #217

Previously ...

**Matt reamed out Sarah for her recent behavior.*

**Brent's sister Danielle returned to King's Bay to see him. As the siblings reunited, Molly arrived. She and Brent were happy to see each other. They caught up with Danielle until Sarah showed up.*

**Andy and Katherine argued over his efforts to end her marriage to Nick.*

**Claire told Paula that she has to see the Morianis stopped so that she can finally be free of the past.*

**Jason and Courtney headed out for the evening but he refused to tell her what was on the agenda.*

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A blast of cold seizes the room. It is as though every particle in the air has stopped moving as all eyes turn to Sarah, standing in the doorway.

The room remains frozen as her eyes move slowly from Danielle to Brent and then to Molly. There is an unmistakable tension in the air, the not-so-calm before the storm. Something is ready to blow.

But it doesn't. When Sarah finally speaks, all she says is, "Hey." She moves to the center of the room and Danielle, who is still wondering what exactly has just happened, hugs her.

"It's so good to see you!" Sarah enthuses. "I was so excited after we spoke on the phone."

"I'm happy to be here, too, believe me," Danielle says.

Sarah moves to Brent's bedside and Molly steps back a little bit, flashing Brent a quick look of combined confusion and wariness. Why hasn't Sarah attacked her yet, and when is it coming? Brent sends the look right back, obviously pondering the same questions.

"You're looking better," Sarah says to Brent. "I'm so relieved that you made it through this. The doctor said you're basically out of the woods now."

He nods coolly. "I know. It's nice to hear."

Molly keeps waiting for Sarah to begin tearing into her at any moment, so when Sarah turns, Molly flinches and backs off a little more.

But Sarah shows no signs of aggression. In fact, she hardly even seems to acknowledge her sister's presence. "Would you two mind giving Brent and me a moment to talk?" she asks.

"Sure," Danielle says.

Before she and Molly can even make a move to leave, though, there comes a firm protest from Brent: "No."

All three woman look at him sharply -- Danielle with confusion, Molly in surprise, and Sarah in anguish.

Sarah tilts her head and narrows her eyes, as though she is certain that she misheard him and just needs clarification. "What?"

"I said no," Brent says calmly, though the undercurrent of anger is not difficult to detect. "I don't want to talk to you."

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"I had a feeling I'd find you here," the voice says as a hand on Claire's shoulder causes her to turn around.

She stifles the gasp that starts to emerge. "Oh, hi."

"Hi," Andy says. "I came by to visit Brent and I thought you might be working."

"Indeed I am. So how are you doing?"

"Things could be worse."

"They *always* can," Claire says wryly. "Never doubt that."

"I'll keep that in mind. You sound a little down yourself."

"No, I'm fine," she answers. "There's just tons of stuff going on, as usual." Suddenly she feels the need to change the subject. "Have you had any luck with your mother lately? I've been thinking about the fire ... Do you think it's possible that Nick had something to do with it?"

"I don't know." The frankness of his tone makes it clear that the thought has not only crossed his mind but spent quite a bit of time lingering there. "From what I've heard, nothing has arisen to suggest that, and if I'm even going to mention the possibility to my mother, I need some proof."

"You're not having any luck with her?"

"Oh, I'm having luck -- of the bad variety. She refuses to listen to anything I say when it comes to Nick. It's like she's absolutely unwilling to consider the possibility that staying with him may not be in her best interests."

"I don't understand that. All those months she spent trying to separate you and Danielle -- wasn't the point that she wanted you to herself, that she was scared of losing you?"

Andy sighs heavily at the mention of that time. "As far as I understand, yes. But my mother is very ..."

"Stubborn?"

He cracks a grin. "I was going to say 'proud,' but I suppose it amounts to the same thing. Regardless ... the point is that she's not one to grovel. Even the amount of begging me to forgive her that she did do was surprising."

"So do you think she's just trying to act like she's in control of the situation?"

"I think that the idea of remarrying and finding happiness on her own came at precisely the right time for her to prove to me that she doesn't *need* me," he says. "Just like I made it seem as though I didn't need her when I became involved with Danielle. She's desperate to show that she is capable of living a happy life without me at the center of it, I think."

Claire rolls her hand over as she continues the thought. "And Nick is giving her the perfect opportunity to do that."

"Exactly." His tone shifts now, suddenly infected by the weariness that the last several months have injected into him. "I've tried, Claire. I have nothing concrete to show her, and I'm beginning to think that even if I did, it wouldn't be enough. Maybe I've done all that I can ... Maybe I should just let my mother and Nick be."

WINDMILLS

Courtney grips Jason's hand firmly as he helps her out of the car, but then she breaks

away. "Would you please tell me where we are?"

"You'll get to see in a sec," he says, grinning to himself as he stares into the blindfold that is covering her eyes.

"I could rip this thing off if I wanted to," she announces. "And if it messes up my hair--"

"Your hair looks beautiful."

"Good," she says grumpily, although it is apparent that she is enjoying the surprise.

He takes her by the hands and leads her out of the parking lot and around the front of the restaurant. They pause on the sidewalk.

"Are we there yet?"

"We just might be," he teases.

"I may have to bash you over the head with my purse--"

"Fine, fine," Jason says. He reaches up with delicate fingers and removes the blindfold. "Ta-da!"

It only takes an instant for Courtney to recognize where they are. "Excellent choice," she says, draping one arm over Jason's shoulders and the other across his front. "Although I did kind of guess we might be coming here."

"The whole formal attire thing was probably a tipoff, huh?"

"Maybe," she shrugs. "Or maybe I can just read your mind."

He raises an eyebrow. "Oh yeah? What am I thinking right now?"

She taps a finger against her lips. "Mmm ... probably how blessed you are to be out with such a breathtaking creature as I. Actually, scratch that. Knowing you, you're already trying to figure out what you wanna eat."

"You can read me like a book," he smiles. "Now c'mon, let's get in there. We can't dilly-dally -- we have other places to be tonight!"

She considers asking what those other places are but figures it won't get her anywhere ... and besides, the surprise thing *is* kind of fun. She leans in to kiss him, and

then they link arms and enter the restaurant.

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"Come on," Danielle says as she practically drags Sarah from the room. Once she has enough of Sarah out in the hallway, she pulls the door to Brent's room shut, thankful that she was able to get Sarah out here without too much of a scene. Of course, that doesn't mean that there won't be a scene now.

"Let me back in there," Sarah insists, trying to push her way past Danielle.

"No." Danielle stands her ground and blocks the door, and eventually Sarah relents. "You've got to calm down, Sarah. You looked like you were about to explode when Brent said that he didn't want to talk to you."

"I'm his wife! He should talk to me!"

"You may be his wife," Danielle says, "but as I understand it, that may not be the case much longer. Brent told me weeks ago that he's going through with the divorce."

"That's why I need to talk to him! I need to try to straighten things out!" Sarah seems poised for another try at the door but instead moves to the window. She gazes through the blinds at Brent and Molly, who are talking quietly.

"This is all her fault," she mutters. "This is exactly what she wanted to happen."

Danielle sidles up beside Sarah at the window. "She? Molly?"

"Yeah. She's been out to steal Brent from me for--forever."

Danielle hesitates in responding as the image of Brent and Molly kissing at her wedding to Andy flashes in her mind. She was shocked to see it then and was even more shocked by Brent's insistence that something genuine existed between him and Molly. Now Sarah must know about that ...

"Are you sure Molly's the only one to blame here?" she says, intending it more as a statement than a question.

Sarah drops her shoulders in defeat. "I'm not totally innocent, I will admit that. I'm sure Brent told you all about what happened with the baby ... Yes, I was at fault there. I'm not saying I wasn't. But there was a good reason why I did the things I did."

Danielle completes the thought. "Because of the relationship between Brent and Molly."

"Right," Sarah says, thinking that Danielle seems a little too unphased by the whole situation. Has Brent been telling her about it?

Sarah continues staring into the room, at the tranquil scene of Molly and Brent together. She and Brent were once like that -- and they still would be, if not for Molly.

Danielle places a comforting hand on Sarah's shoulder. "I know this must be hard for you," she says softly. "I can only imagine. But maybe ... maybe this is the end of the road."

"What?" Sarah jerks her head around to face Danielle, as if the very idea of what Danielle is suggesting is horribly offensive.

"A lot has happened," Danielle says. "Maybe it would be best for everyone to move forward from here ... Maybe you should make a clean break and let Brent go."

WINDMILLS

The dining room is alive with the buzz of a Saturday evening. Crystal-clear glasses filled with wine reflect the gleaming lights of the chandeliers overhead; the wait staff bustles around the floor, maintaining a cheerful professionalism despite the activity spinning all around them.

Jason and Courtney have been seated at a small table towards the center of the restaurant. There they sit sipping the wine that neither has quite grown to love yet, working on the elegantly presented plates of food that sit before them.

Courtney finishes swallowing her latest bite and says, "I hope she meets someone. She needs to get over Alex."

"I know," Jason agrees. "There's no reason for her to be so hung up on him. It's not like they were even that serious to begin with."

"That's what I told her. She kind of just went off about how no one's ever interested enough to get into a serious relationship with her."

"It's not like she has much reason to be so insecure."

"I try to tell her that," Courtney says. "I think it just goes in one ear and out the other."

It's 'cause she measures herself against everyone else. Since she spends so much time with us, it's like she thinks she *has* to be in a relationship as serious as ours at this point in her life."

Jason takes another sip of the wine. "It'll happen for her eventually. Meanwhile, she's got this awesome job, but she hardly ever talks about it. She's got lots going for her."

"I just wish she would believe that," Courtney sighs. "Who knows, maybe she'll find someone at the party."

"Maybe." Jason picks up his fork and simply looks at it for a moment. "Okay, not to totally change the subject on you--"

"But you're gonna do it anyway," she smiles.

"Exactly. I've been thinking ... Don't we kinda need to figure out what we're gonna do after this year? With skating, I mean."

Courtney's expression indicates that the matter has been on her mind, as well. "Yeah, we do. I'm just ... I don't know."

"What?"

She shrugs quickly but the words that follow pour out very slowly. "It feels like we've been competing in Junior forever. We were all set to go to Nationals a couple of years ago ..."

"And then all that stuff with Shannon happened." Jason groans inwardly. Shannon Parish is the last person he wanted to think about tonight.

"Yeah. And the thing is, I wanna get to Nationals. I wanna make it that far in Junior before we move up to Senior, otherwise I won't feel confident about competing as a Senior pair, you know?"

"Totally, yeah."

"But what if for some reason we don't make it this year? What do we do then?"

The possibility creases Jason's face with concern. "I dunno. I'd like to think that it'll just happen and things will go according to plan. But I guess we know it doesn't work like that."

"Not so much, no." Courtney wraps both her hands around the body of the wine glass.

"We're getting kinda old to be Juniors."

"I know. This really has to be *the* year. But if it doesn't happen ..."

"Then maybe it's not gonna happen at all."

He nods reluctantly. "Yeah. So I was thinking ... *If* we don't do as well as we'd like in competition this season -- maybe we should just take the Senior test anyway."

"And that would be the end of it?"

"I don't know about that. But at least we'd have the test done. If we wanted to compete as Seniors in a year or two, we could. But I want that test, Court. I don't wanna let this fizzle out and then not have the time or the energy or the skill left to pass it."

"I know. I want it, too. I want us to have it -- we've passed all of our other tests together, and we need to get this last one."

"My thoughts exactly. So it's settled, then? Regardless of how competition goes this year, we take our Senior test at the end of the season?"

Courtney hesitates in agreeing, but the idea sends a tingle of excitement through her, a tingle too great to ignore. "Yep."

"Awesome." Jason's smile finally starts to return, washing over his face like it had been bottled up and just got spilled out. "I can't wait to share this with you, Court."

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Claire's reaction is immediate: "No way."

"Why not?" Andy asks. He sounds as if he is virtually begging he to give him a reason not to stop his quest.

Claire is more than happy to provide it. "I know that I said I didn't want a part of this anymore."

"That's perfectly understandable, after what happened to Tim--"

She lifts a hand to cut him off. "I'm back in."

"What?"

"I have to do this," she says. "Because of the Morianis, Tim wound up dead. The Fishers lost a son and a brother. My kids lost their father. I can't let more people be hurt."

The moment stretches out before Andy wonders, "But how? I really feel like we've hit a brick wall. Without solid proof that Nick was the reason my mother was shot, we have nothing. Short of framing him for something, there isn't much we can do."

"Just give it time. They'll slip up sooner or later," she says with a confidence that Andy finds startling. "The key will be to keep an eye on them until they do. Then, when it happens, we'll be able to grab on and run with it."

"All right," Andy gives in. "I just hope that it doesn't take my mother getting killed for us to find something we can use."

Claire cannot bring herself to tell him not to worry about that grim possibility, so she changes the subject. "Anyway, how are things with Maggie?"

She notices that a puzzled expression overtakes Andy's face. "Fine, I suppose. She went back home the morning after the fire -- she had some business to take care of immediately. I haven't spoken to her since."

"What? Why not?"

"I'm not sure. I could call her. I should. But I'm not really sure where we stand, and I don't want to be too presumptuous."

"Calling to see how she's doing after she nearly got killed in a fire wouldn't really be that presumptuous," Claire offers.

Her grin spreads to Andy. "I suppose not. Still ... It seemed as if something was happening when she showed up at my apartment, but between her being busy with work and the fire, we didn't have a chance to discuss us -- if there is an 'us.' And to tell you the truth ... calling her seems a little scary. What if I'm wrong and she only considers me a friend?"

"No guts, no glory, right?" Claire says, a hint of the previous smile still hanging on her face. "My vote is for you to give her a call." She peeks at her watch. "Hey, I've got to get back to work. Eventually someone might notice all the little breaks I take to chat."

"All right, go on," Andy says. "I should get down to Brent's room. I'll give you a call sometime soon, okay?"

"Sure. Just make sure it's after you call a certain someone else!" Claire says as she heads off down a corridor.

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Sarah seems to take the suggestion as a great affront. "Absolutely not. Not after all we've been through."

"Sarah ..." Danielle begins pleading, but it dies on her lips. Sarah pushes past her and goes back into Brent's room.

Danielle brings her fingers up to her temples and rubs them lightly as she closes her eyes. *Six hours back in this town and I already feel my sanity slipping away.*

She tries to calm the throbbing that has begun to thump on her brain, but it explodes with full force the instant she looks up.

Andy Fitch has just turned the corner.

END OF EPISODE #217

What do you think will come of Andy and Danielle's reunion? Share your thoughts on this story and the rest of the episode over at the Message Forum!

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