

"Footprints"

Episode #156

[Shortly After #155]

[Previously ...](#)

*Sarah told Matt about her pregnancy but failed to inform Brent. Later, she visited an abortion clinic and was told she's too far along for an abortion..

*Ryan confessed to Nick that he didn't really rape Claire.

*Paula admitted to Tim, Molly, and Jason that she had another child - just as Bill arrived home.

TEASER

POLICE STATION-

Brent lifts his head from the legal pad as he turns the corner. His eyes scan the lobby and return to the pad, but they bounce back up to find the image that is sticking in his mind.

The image is Matt Gray.

Brent flips the folded-over pages of the pad back into their regular position and makes his way over to Matt, who is standing in front of a desk looking lost.

"Matt," Brent says. The other man turns around and Brent asks, "What are you doing here?"

"My car was broken into," Matt says. "I had to come down here and fill out some paperwork."

"Any particular reason you look so confused?"

Matt holds up the clipboard in his hand. "I'm just waiting for the clerk to come back and take these."

"Ah. I see you've discovered how efficient we are around here."

"I'm not complaining. If I had to be here at all, I'd rather be on this side of the desk than handcuffed in some back room. I had my fill of that in New York."

"So I heard," Brent says.

"Yeah, well, I would've been there a lot longer if your wife hadn't come through for me."

Brent nods as the specter of Sarah settles over them.

"How's she doing?" Matt asks as the clerk finally appears. He hands her the papers and turns back to Brent.

"She's fine."

"Good. How's she been feeling?"

"Fine ..." Brent says, now confused. "Why, how'd you think she was feeling?"

WINDMILLS-

"Excuse me for a second, would you?" By the time his lunch companion has nodded in agreement, Ryan has already set his drink down and is out of his seat.

He catches Claire over by the bar. "Fancy running into you here," he says with a smile.

She shoots him a look of annoyance before replying, "Yeah, really."

"So what are you doing here?"

"I just had lunch with an old friend." Her sentence is to-the-point and devoid of any noticeable inflection.

"Well," he says, "it's nice to see you're Miss Cheerful today."

She puts her hands on her hips. "I'm sorry if it doesn't absolutely thrill me to run into you. What are you doing here, anyway?"

Ryan looks over at his business associate - the right-hand man of a very powerful mobster - and then back at Claire, piecing together a response as he does so.

FISHER HOME-

"Child you gave up?" Something cold shoots through Tim's veins and the room suddenly feels as though it is spinning. He tries to make eye contact with his mother, but her attention is fixed somewhere behind him, over his shoulder.

It takes Tim a moment to turn. He is greeted by the sight of an enraged Bill, standing in the doorway

with his arms folded.

"It's nothing," Paula says suddenly, moving instinctively towards Bill. She pushes Molly and Jason out of the way as she does this.

"Nothing?" Molly says. "It hardly sounds-"

"I'm just talking nonsense, that's all," Paula insists, taking Bill's arm. "Welcome home, honey," she says with the most desperate of smiles.

"What's going on here?" Bill finally asks in a voice so stern that Tim's breath catches in his chest.

"It's nothing!" Paula calls out again. "Everything is fine - here, come in the kitchen. I'll get you something to eat-"

"No!" Jason exclaims. "Not until you tell us what in the world is going on!"

Paula looks as though she is going to protest further, but all of a sudden, the energy falls from her being quite visibly. She releases her hold on Bill's arm.

"Don't make me do this," she pleads. "Just go, please ..."

But she can tell by her kids' expressions that they have no intention of doing so.

ACT ONE

POLICE STATION-

Matt quickly catches his slip. "No, just ... last time I saw her, she wasn't feelin' too great."

"Oh, well, she's been fine lately," Brent says, and the question is already forgotten.

Matt is about to say something else when a realization hits him: Sarah mustn't have told Brent about the pregnancy yet. A bizarre curiosity comes over him and he suddenly feels the need to keep Brent around a while longer.

"Have you spoken to Molly lately?"

Brent's face is instantly twisted in some way that Matt can't quite recognize, but Brent pulls himself back together quickly. "Yeah, I guess. Why?"

"I haven't seen her in a while. I should probably drop by for a visit - Does she still live at her parents' place?"

"Uh, yeah. Why? Do you ... have some kinda interest in her?"

"No, no," Matt says, holding up his hands. "But she's a good girl and she's a lotta fun to be around. Plus we had a couple of really good conversations - I could use all the friends like that I can get my hands on, you know?"

Brent nods.

Across the lobby, Sarah pushes her way through the glass doors of the entry. She sets her course for the hallway that leads to Brent's office - but the moment she looks in its direction, she sees Matt and Brent standing together.

Oh no, she thinks as she freezes in place.

WINDMILLS-

"Same as you," Ryan says. "Having lunch with a friend."

"Well, don't let me keep you." Claire starts to push past him.

He grabs her arm, though not with great force. "Hang on a second. There's something I need to talk to you about."

"Ryan, I really don't-"

"It's important."

She hesitates a moment and then says, "Fine."

"Great. Lemme just wrap this lunch up. I'll get back to you in a sec."

Claire sits down at the bar as Ryan returns to his table. A few words and a handshake later, the other man is gone and Ryan is back by her side.

"You gonna get anything?" he inquires, setting his own drink down on the bar.

"No, I'm fine." She looks at him coldly. "This'd better be good."

He takes a sip of his drink.

"I don't have all day, Ryan."

"Okay," he says, tapping the rim of his glass for no particular reason. "I just need you to tell me something."

She gestures - albeit somewhat sarcastically - for him to proceed.

"What's with your attitude lately? I thought we were making inroads - you said you'd be willing to work at being friends. So why are you treating me like garbage all of a sudden?"

He realizes immediately that his phrasing was a major mistake.

"Me treating you like garbage? Come on, Ryan! As much as you want it to be as easy as me saying we can be friends, it just isn't. That - it's always going to be in the back of my mind, and whenever I see you it tends to move to the front. It's a little tricky for me to just forgive and forget, you know?"

Ryan immediately recalls the confession he made to his father:

"He just threw me aside and jumped on top of Claire. He started ripping the rest of her clothes off - I tried to get up and help, but he kept hitting me and screaming and ... I guess I just got so dazed that I stopped trying. He made me watch ..."

"Stan raped Claire?"

"Yeah ... and then he screamed at both of us, told us we were worthless, and left again."

As he stares at the simultaneous anger and fright in her expression, he can no longer think of any logical reason to keep the truth from her.

FISHER HOME-

"Mom, come on," Jason urges.

"Don't, Paula," warns Bill. "Don't do it!"

"Why is this such a big deal, Dad?" Tim yells. "Why can't Mom just explain herself already?"

"Because she doesn't have to! There's nothing to explain-"

Tim cuts him off. "We know about the adoption papers."

"You what?"

"I saw them, on Thanksgiving," Tim says. "Please, Mom, tell us what this is all about. You had another kid?"

She nods hesitantly, glancing over at Bill only after she has finished. He shoots piercing spears of disapproval in her direction.

"When? How-why? Why didn't we ever know about it - was it a him or a her?"

"A boy," Paula says. "A baby boy ..." The tears have returned and are streaming down her face.

"When?"

"Before you were born - about two years before."

Bill jumps in. "Paula, there isn't any need to get into this-"

"Yes, there is!" she fires back. "I've wanted to tell the kids for a long time, and now that they're asking, I need to."

Molly pushes all her hair back with one hand. "But why'd you have to give him up for adoption?"

ACT TWO

POLICE STATION-

Sarah lets out the excess of air she inhaled a moment ago and has been holding in her chest. She rushes over to Brent and Matt, though she takes care not to appear too frantic.

"What's up?" she says as she stops in front of them.

The men are both surprised to see her. Matt's gaze immediately falls to her midsection, where a bulge has become slightly visible. He wonders how Brent can be totally clueless about his wife's pregnancy.

"Hi." The men speak at nearly the same time, but there is enough difference to create disharmony.

"What are you doing here?" Sarah asks, turning to Matt.

"Oh, uh, my car was broken into, actually," he says. "I had some papers to fill out - Brent and I just ran into each other."

"Which reminds me - if you two don't mind, I've gotta get back to work," Brent says.

"Quick question: Mind if we go out for dinner tonight?"

"Whatever you want."

"Good. Now go on, get some work done!" Sarah smiles pleasantly. None of her internal relief shows as he gives her a peck on the lips and takes off, spouting quick goodbyes to both her and Matt.

Sarah waits until Brent is gone to say anything else. "So, is everything okay with the car?"

"Yeah, it's fine," Matt says. "But my car being broken into isn't the reason you look so stressed, is it?"

She puffs up her cheeks and then lets them deflate. "You got me."

"Does it have something to do with ..." He lowers his voice as he leans in closer. "... the baby?"

She nods and a deeper explanation waits, poised on the edge of her tongue.

WINDMILLS-

"Claire-" But Ryan catches himself. He's kept this secret for a reason; is it worth tossing that away on an impulse?

"I'd just like you to try. I'm trying so hard," he finishes.

"Of course you are! You feel guilty!"

"It's more than that," he says, working hard to maintain his cool. "It's the fact that - I don't know, I just want to be around you. Having you in my life ... it makes such a difference in the person I am."

She throws her head back. "And having you in my life keeps that memory playing over and over in my

mind!"

The urge to tell her is burning badly within him, but he knows he cannot tell right now. Not like this.

"Please, Claire. I wish you'd just try to give me a second chance."

"What kind of second chance are we talking about here?"

Ryan knows that his face is giving him away, so he points it at the floor. "A second chance at - closeness."

"Closeness?"

"Yeah ... like friends. I want to be able to talk to you the way I used to, to have fun like we did." He keeps the rest of his wishes inside.

"People change, Ryan! It's been fifteen years since we were that close!"

Her voice returns to a normal level as she says, "I just don't see why this is so important to you."

FISHER HOME-

"It's so complicated, Molly! More than you can imagine ..."

Bill cuts in again. "It's really not important. It was just a difficult time - it wasn't the right time for us to have kids-"

"That's because we weren't married!" Paula cries.

The revelation obviously catches Tim, Molly, and Jason off-guard. They do nothing in response except look to each other, for at this moment their parents are no longer the pillars of stability they are supposed to be.

"Your father and I were engaged when I got pregnant," Paula explains in a ragged voice.

"We weren't ready to get married yet, so we decided to put the baby up for adoption," Bill adds.

Paula shoots him a piercing gaze that makes it clear his version of the truth is incomplete.

"Even if we had gotten married," she says, "things never would have been right. Not with that child in our lives."

Jason finally works up the courage to speak up. "Why?"

"Because the problem," Paula says, "wasn't the fact that we had the baby. It was in the way he was conceived."

ACT THREE

POLICE STATION-

"I'm assuming you haven't told Brent yet," Matt says when he realizes that Sarah isn't sure what to say.

She shakes her head. "I can't - or I feel like I can't. I'm just so worried about how he'll react ..."

"You can't keep it a secret forever!" Matt takes a step back and examines her figure. "I cannot believe he hasn't figured it out yet. You're definitely showing, at least a little."

"The, uh-my doctor was actually really surprised. She said she wouldn't have guessed I was this far along." Even as she says this, Sarah is working to keep the numbers straight in her mind, aware of how easy it would be to slip in front of Matt and have the whole thing ruined.

"So you finally got yourself to a doctor?"

"Well ..." She recalls her earlier visit to the clinic. "Yeah."

"Everything's okay?"

"Everything's fine."

"Good." He pauses a moment, noting the strain in her eyes. "This'll all work out, Sarah. You've gotta believe that. It'll be fine ... God wants everything to work out for you. Otherwise this baby wouldn't be Brent's."

Sarah grimaces inside as she nods.

WINDMILLS-

Ryan looks Claire straight in the eye. "Do you know how horrible it feels to know I've got a connection like this with somebody and I can't put it to use? God ... You were the best friend I ever had! I just feel some ... link with you that I've never felt with anybody else!"

He brings himself down a few notches. "Can you imagine knowing there's someone out there you feel that way about, but they just won't let you in? It's terrible!"

"I do have a connection like that," Claire says. "With Tim. I love him, Ryan! There's nothing you can do to change that!"

"Maybe not. But I'll take you any way I can get you, which includes as a friend. So if you're only treating me like this because Tim doesn't like me-"

"I'm capable of making my own decisions!" she shoots back. "But Tim was right: Being around you isn't good for me. Not after what you did-not with how that makes me feel ..."

"Claire-" But he makes himself stop. Not now, he reminds himself.

But soon.

FISHER HOME-

"What is going on?" Tim asks desperately after an extended moment of silence. "Why did you two think it was so necessary to hide this from us all these years?"

"Like I said," Paula explains. "It was the way the baby was conceived-"

"Paula, stop!" Bill shouts, his tone colder than any of them - save Paula - have ever heard.

"Why are you acting like this, Dad?" Molly asks. "You've never gotten this upset over anything-"

"I'm just trying to stop your mother from making things worse for herself!"

"This isn't about me!" Paula cries. "It's about you! You're trying to keep me quiet so no one will think less of you! Well, you know what, Bill? You're making yourself look a lot worse to the kids now by acting like this - far worse than you'd look if they just knew I had cheated on you, what, thirty-five years ago!"

Just like that, silence caps the room. Eyes move around, catching onto those of others for split-second

exchanges before darting away.

Bill finally speaks up. "Kids, you'd better leave. Your mother is acting crazy-

"Shut up!"

All heads snap around towards Paula.

"I want them to hear the truth," she says to Bill. "I am so tired of covering up and thinking about this to myself - it's time to get it out in the open. I don't want any more secrets or questions or anything else."

She turns to the kids, who are hanging on her every syllable.

"When your father and I were engaged, we had some ... problems." She makes eye contact with Bill that brings out the deepest-seated shame from within him.

"What kinds of problems?" Tim asks.

"We were ..." Paula trails off. In truth, she never intended for this part of the story to come out, but she knows they've come too far to leave it untouched. "Your father was going through some rough times. He was having some ... physical problems."

The full explanation hangs in the air, unspoken but understood.

"And that caused some tension between us," Paula continues. "I didn't break the engagement, but I ... did some things I'm not proud of."

"You ... cheated?" Molly says in a barely audible voice.

Paula nods. "It was a terrible mistake. When your father found out - it almost ripped us apart. He was so forgiving, though, so understanding ... We fixed things between us."

"But you were pregnant," Tim interjects.

"Yes. So when the baby was born, we made the decision to put him up for adoption."

"So that's it? That's the story you've been hiding from us for all these years?" Tim asks.

Again, Paula nods. "We thought it would complicate things too much to tell you. And then I decided I wanted to, but your father ..."

She looks over at Bill, who fires an icy stare before storming out of the room.

"I think you'd better go," she says to the kids. "We can finish this later ... I need to speak with your father alone now."

Tim, Molly, and Jason respond with understanding and are soon gone, though their entire exit is a blur to Paula. Only when she locks the door behind them does the room begin to stop spinning.

She drops her head into her hands, trying in vain to ease the tension that has piled itself up inside her head. When she raises her eyes, she sees Bill all the way across the living room, stabbing her with that same disgusted stare.

Never before has she seen such a look from him - not even when the actual event happened, nearly thirty-five years ago.

END OF EPISODE #156

[Next Episode](#)