

"Footprints"

Episode #180

[Several Days After #179]

[Previously ...](#)

**Molly and Brent spoke for the first time since the revelations regarding Sarah's affair and pregnancy. Things remained uncertain between them.*

**Matt found himself drawn to the idea of fatherhood but was unsure where he stood with regards to his relationship with Sarah.*

**Bill and Paula reconciled after the upheaval regarding her confession to the children about the son she gave up for adoption years ago.*

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

"Ugh," Brent sighs as he lifts his hand to the door. It assumes the knocking position but then falls back to his side. *Do I really want to do this?*

He isn't sure, but he is certain that he cannot simply walk away from the apartment. He didn't come all this way for nothing. He didn't steel himself for this confrontation just to give up now.

So he knocks on the door. He waits, listening as best he can for some sign of life from within. For a few seconds, seconds that seem to stretch far longer than they should and far longer than he can handle, there is nothing. And then all of a sudden, the door flies open.

Sarah stares him in the face. "Brent -- hi ..."

"Hi." He raises a hand weakly in greeting. "How, uh, how are you?"

"Okay ..." The end of the word slithers off, as if knowing that it will have to lead into the next thing Sarah says, the question she wants to ask. "What are you doing here?"

"I was just ... wondering if I could see Victoria."

"Oh, yeah, of course! C--" She hesitates, feeling odd inviting him -- her husband -- into his own home, but aware that it is necessary. "Come on in," she finishes.

Brent follows her inside. His feet feel odd upon the carpet, his hands different as they remove his coat and hang it on one of the hooks beside the door. "How's she doing?" he asks as Sarah begins to lead him back to the bedroom.

"Great," she says. "Amazing, actually. She's so good."

"Good. And how have you been?"

"I thought there would be more to worry about, to be honest. Yeah, it's a lot to keep up with, and my sleep schedule is totally blown now, but I don't mind, and it's not that bad. Gives me something to focus on, too, and that's nice to have."

All Brent can manage is a "Yeah."

Sarah lifts the baby out of the bassinette and holds her close to her own body for a moment. Brent can see something between them -- the bond between mother and child has already become visible. He can see it in the way Sarah lifts the baby, in the way Victoria melts right into Sarah's arms, in the way Sarah looks into her daughter's eyes even as she hands her carefully over to Brent.

"Come here," he says softly, accepting the infant into his arms. Sarah watches his initial anxiety turn to adoration; Victoria has captured his eyes entirely. For a moment a feeling of peace settles over Sarah, but she recognizes immediately -- almost immediately -- that it is false. It can't be true, not like this, not now.

"She's adorable," Brent says, lifting his eyes to Sarah momentarily. She tries to catch them, to try and read them, but they fall back to the baby before she can do so.

"That she is." Sarah clasps her hands together, then quickly unclasps them and folds her arms. Soon the arms fall apart as well. Nothing feels comfortable, no stance feels right. How could it, in this situation?

A pleased sound, part-giggle and part-sigh, comes up from the baby. "This is amazing," Brent says. "What a ... miracle she is."

"She is," Sarah agrees swiftly, though she takes care not to be *too* quick. "A miracle that we may have made together."

FISHER HOME, DOWNSTAIRS

"Hey," Molly says, leaning against the open door.

"Hey." Matt offers an uneasy smile. "What're you up to?"

"Not much," she answers, gesturing at her warmup pants and sweatshirt. "Just vegging."

"Do you, uh, mind if I come in?"

"No, not at all. What's up?" She steps aside, letting him into the house and watching his face to try and follow the angst that she thinks she has seen.

"I don't know," he begins hurriedly. "I was just sitting around--" His voice slows suddenly, bouncing from one uncomfortable extreme to the other. "--and I was thinking ... about everything that's been going on. I didn't wanna sit there and think about it anymore, you know?"

"Yeah, I know how that goes." She leads him over to the sofa, where they have shared probing conversation before. She can tell this is going to be another of those instances. "Make yourself comfortable. My parents are around, but that's it."

Matt just nods.

"So did you want to talk?"

He is silent for a moment. "Yeah, I guess," he says, his shoulders rising and falling with the rhythm of a shrug. "Jeez, I don't even know where to start."

"I assume that the beginning would be too easy."

"There is no beginning. That's the problem. It's just this big, huge, jumbled-up mess of crap all thrown together. I don't even know *how* to start looking at it and trying to figure it all out."

Immediately possibilities spring to Molly's mind, but she knows it is best not to lead him too much. She offers a sympathetic look.

"I'm not used to this," he says. "I'm not really a talker ... I never really try to talk about stuff like this. But I feel like I need to, now."

"That makes sense," she says. "There's been a lot going on with everything."

Silence falls over them, but after they sit in it for a minute, Matt breaks it suddenly. "It's the baby. I already don't know how to deal with it, I mean, even if everything was clear ... but now with all this stuff up in the air, it's like a hundred times worse."

"Do you like the idea of being a father?"

"I have no idea. I think so, but ... How the hell am I supposed to know?" He looks at her

with a face full of something that she thinks is desperation.

"Have you visited the baby?"

"Yeah, once. And there was this time in the hospital -- right after I found out she could be mine -- when I went to see her. For those couple minutes, it felt ... good. And when I got to hold her -- that was amazing. But then I think about it and I know that being a father is a lot more than having a couple of moments with a cute baby. And I don't know if I can handle all of that, or any of it, or if I want to make the effort."

"Yeah," Molly says, not sure what to say. But nothing is really necessary.

Matt's cheeks inflate with air and then he releases it all in one big gust. "Dammit! I wish everything could just go back to being how it was. I miss that."

"Miss what? Normalcy?"

"Yeah. Not having to worry about all of this all the time. Not being able to talk to Sarah like we used to ..."

His lament dies off as his voice gives way to his thoughts. Molly hangs on his words, and suddenly things begin fitting themselves together in her mind.

"Matt?"

"Yeah?"

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

She turns to face him and sits up a little straighter, preparing herself to ask the question. She has no idea how to phrase it or if it is going to sound wrong, but she has to ask.

"Do you--" She gets caught in the depth of the situation and struggles. Yet something pushes her onward and she manages to pull herself out of it.

She looks Matt straight in the eye. "Do you have feelings for Sarah?"

FISHER HOME, UPSTAIRS

"Was that the doorbell?" Paula asks as she emerges from the master bathroom and finds Bill, freshly returned from work, standing in front of the armoire.

"I think so," Bill says. "Molly'll get it, don't worry."

Paula nods and then sits down on the bed. "How were things at the restaurant today?"

"The usual, thank goodness. It's been such a hectic week over there. Today was the first normal day in quite a while."

"Well, that's good." She sounds disconnected somehow, something that Bill picks up on immediately.

"Is something the matter?" he asks.

"Not especially. Nothing out of the ordinary."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know," she sighs, burying her face in her hands.

Bill closes the armoire and goes to sit down beside her on the bed. He pauses while halfway down, though, seeing the genuine melancholy that has overtaken her features. Did it just show up? Or has it been there the whole time, and he somehow failed to see it?

"Tell me what it is."

"What *isn't* it? Bill, I keep thinking about this mess Sarah has gotten herself into and the divide between her and Molly and everything that Tim and Claire have been through, and even Jason--"

"There's no reason to let the past overwhelm you," he says. "And as for Sarah and Molly, things will work out. Sarah seems to be doing okay."

"For now! But this isn't a good situation and she's not going to be able to be this strong forever--"

"Paula, calm down! You're getting yourself worked up over nothing."

"*Nothing?*" She shoots to her feet, flashing him a wounded look, as if to say, *How can you not understand this?* "This isn't nothing! Our kids are out there getting hurt and

fighting through all of this--this madness every day and there's nothing we can do to protect them."

Bill places a hand on her elbow, trying to ease her. "We've done all that we can. We brought them up so that they'd be able to fend for themselves. That's the protection we gave them, and hopefully it will last forever. And even if it doesn't, we can still be here for them and--" He cuts himself off as he realizes what is really going on. "This is about your son, isn't it?"

She looks down at him, defeated, suddenly deflated. "Yes."

"Paula ..." He helps her ease back down onto the bed and cradles her in his arms. "You can't keep doing this to yourself."

"I can't stop doing this to myself. He's out there somewhere, and he's fending for himself--"

"He's not by himself. He does have a family."

"I know, but ... / don't know what they gave him. I can't be sure that they gave him what he needs to make it."

"You have to let this go."

"That's not enough!" Her voice rises suddenly, striking out at him from the soft, crumbled pile of her emotions.

"What?"

"I can't just 'let it go'! Don't you understand that?"

"Paula, we've been through this. We've gotten it all out and we've talked about it and -- there really isn't anything else you can do. So there's no need making yourself sick over it."

"I don't just want to have this acknowledged and pushed back into some corner," she says, her voice beginning to break but still forceful. "I want to face it and come to terms with it--"

"What does that mean?"

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

"Yeah," Brent says, still focused down on Victoria. Sarah's heartbeat grows more deliberate against the inside of her chest. This is progress: If he will acknowledge this--

"And she may be a miracle that you and Matt made together." Brent's words fall with all the grace of an anvil, crashing down in the midst of Sarah's hopeful musings. She cannot help but look sharply at him, as if to confirm that he is serious. But she knows that he definitely is.

"If that's the case," Brent begins, returning the infant to Sarah's arms, "that you and Matt are the ones who brought her into this world, then--I don't know, what does that mean? If Victoria being here is such a wonderful, special thing" -- Sarah can't help but notice the skepticism with which he speaks these words, as if he is not sure of the truth they hold -- "then what does it say about you and us and--and *him* if you two are responsible for her?"

"It doesn't mean anything!" Sarah cries, though she immediately becomes aware that this was a poor choice of phrasing.

"It doesn't--"

"That's not what I meant! What I meant, what I mean, is that ... all it means is that I made a mistake. *I screwed up*. I'm admitting that. I've never denied it. But it doesn't mean that what we have has to be any less real or has to stop existing."

"What *do* we have? That's what I have to question now! If you didn't have the respect for this marriage to keep yourself from sleeping with Matt--" He stops mid-sentence, impacted by the power of what he is saying. Not just in terms of Sarah, but with regard to himself as well.

"It's not that I didn't have respect, Brent! I value this marriage more than ... more than anything I've ever had, I swear. I value *you* that much. I would never choose to throw it away! But the way my mind was going that night -- I wasn't in control. Something else took control, something inside that just wanted to make it through the night and make what I saw between you and Molly go away!"

At last, Brent is forced into silence. He wants to turn away from her, so he will not have to risk making eye contact anymore, but he knows that to do so would be some sort of admission of guilt, and that is not something that he is ready to relinquish.

"I don't want to blame you," Sarah says, taking hold of his hands as he continues to stare down at the floor. "The one at fault is -- it's me. But I'm asking that you try to understand why I did what I did, why I felt like I was pushed to that by you and Molly."

He still does not speak.

"You can't just give up like this!" she pleads. "I *need* you! I *love* you! And I know that you love me--" But even now, catching the glimpses of his eyes that she can in between the flickers of his eyelids, she can see something new. It's something she didn't see before -- maybe something she didn't *want* to see before?

"Oh God. Oh God. Brent ... no. No! You haven't stopped loving me, have you?"

FISHER HOME, UPSTAIRS

"I honestly don't know," Paula answers. "I know that I need to face this. I can't go on with this eating away at me. It's been too long -- almost thirty-six years! Do you realize how long that is?"

"Of course I do!" Bill fires back, perhaps a bit more forcefully than he intended. "That's exactly how long it's been eating away at me, too, remember?"

She throws up her hands. "Yes! Of course! How many times have we been over this, that it affects you as much as it does me?"

"Apparently we need to keep going over it, because you say it like you don't believe it!"

"I do," Paula interjects, infusing the words with some warmth, some calm, as she sits back down beside him. "I do realize that. But it feels like you sometimes *only* consider that and forget what it all means for me. *I'm* the one who gave up a child."

"And I had to be with you through the entire pregnancy, and when you held that baby for the only time, and as you watched him be taken away. We both knew you'd never see him again. I was glad, in a way -- that reminder of everything that had gone on would be out of sight, at least, so we could move on."

He can see the burning in Paula's eyes at hearing what he has tried to refrain from mentioning for the better part of the last three-and-a-half decades. Yet something urges him onward.

"*I* was the one who had to stand there and watch my first child be born, knowing the whole time that he wasn't *your* first and that what was supposed to be a magical experience for the two of us together was tainted by everything that had already happened! Do you understand how hard all of that was for me?"

Paula hesitates a moment, then stammers, "Yes, yes. It's not that I haven't ever considered how this affected you, Bill! You know that. We've gone over this so many times through the years -- of course I know how badly this hurt you. I hate myself every day of my life for that!" Her voice breaks and grows thin, and she falls silent momentarily.

"I'm just thankful that I didn't lose you," she continues, "that my one mistake didn't ruin everything that we've built before we had a chance to do it. But I still feel like I can't just put the whole thing in the past and forget it. I need to--"

He places a finger over her lips. "No, it didn't destroy everything. I wouldn't have let it. Even in the middle of all that, I knew I didn't want to lose you. I knew it was worth fighting through." He sighs, and Paula can see him reliving all the pain of so many years ago. "That's why I don't want to risk it any more than we already have. Your secret's out -- the kids know, which is what you wanted. There isn't any need to push it any further."

He leans in and kisses her on the forehead. "Please."

With that, he stands up and exits the bedroom. Paula looks after him for a moment and then turns her eyes down to the floor. *Why are you making this more difficult than it has to be, Bill?* she wonders, fighting back tears.

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

"It's not that simple, Sarah," Brent says. It seems that there is no air left in his lungs, or anywhere inside of him, for that matter, and he is just waiting for the moment when he will pass out to arrive. But it doesn't.

"Brent--" She comes at him with some kind of hybrid between desperation and aggression, but before she can really launch into it, the telephone rings.

"Ugh!" she groans as she instinctively shoots out a hand to grab it. As her finger taps the *on* button, the thought strikes her that perhaps she should have just ignored it, but it is too late.

"Hello?"

Brent begins pacing over a small section of the carpet, too distracted to be interested in the phone conversation. From someplace far away, he hears Sarah say, "Speaking."

Then there is silence. Brent gets lost in it, consumed by too many thoughts to realize what is going on. But he does hear Sarah gasp and he turns.

She says into the phone, "Thanks. I, uh, we--we'll be there as soon as we can."

"What was that?" Brent asks.

"We've gotta go," she announces. "Now."

FISHER HOME, DOWNSTAIRS

Matt doesn't think that he can answer, but he cannot bring himself to deny it. He simply continues to look at Molly. His eyes tell the tale for him.

"Oh my gosh ..." Molly says in a near-whisper, as a hand settles over her mouth lightly. "Whoa."

"Yeah," Matt agrees, his shoulders slumping.

"This must make everything a lot harder for you -- this whole thing with the baby, I mean."

"Yeah. And it's like, after--after something like *that* happens--" His eyes indicate what the *that* refers to. "--it's weird to just sit back and try to be friends. I promised Sarah I wouldn't let anyone find out, so that was kinda how it kept it to myself, but now that everything *but* the way I feel is pretty much public knowledge ... that makes it a hell of a lot harder."

"I can imagine," Molly echoes, lost in her own thoughts.

"She must have wanted me at some point, right? I mean, enough to get into bed with me, at least. So how is it that she can do that with me and then just go back to being friends? It makes me wonder sometimes -- but then I get myself frustrated because I realize how in love with Brent she is and ..."

Something about Molly's spacy gaze causes him to trail off.

"Molly? You there?"

"Uh, yeah, yeah," she answers, visibly clearing her head enough to focus on the conversation.

"Hey," Matt says. "Since I'm spilling my guts out here, would you mind answering something for me?"

Already Molly wants to resist with every fiber in her body, but she knows she can't. She just waits for the attack.

"This thing between you and Sarah," Matt begins. "This rift -- do you have any idea where it *really* comes from? I've--"

The cry of his cell phone cuts him off. He quickly pulls it out and flips it on. "Matt Gray."

Molly watches as he listens to the voice on the other end and his face contorts into some mixture of reactions that she cannot identify. She waits for the call to end and then asks, "What was that all about?"

"I have to get to the hospital."

"Why?"

"That was Sarah," Matt explains, already on his way to the front door. "The results of the paternity test are in."

END OF EPISODE #180

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