

## "Footprints" Episode #230

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

*\*Matt told Molly that he hopes Sarah lets the divorce happen, even though her recent actions convinced him that he cannot be with her.*

*\*Sarah exploded at Paula for favoring Molly.*

*\*After a visit with Samantha and a mysterious phone call, Diane seduced her lawyer, Eric.*

### **THE FISHERMAN'S PIER**

The vegetables tumble through the air, falling helplessly until their descent is broken by the warm metal. They hit the pan with an explosive crack and bursts of oil jump up to announce that the symphony of snaps and crackles has commenced.

"Nothing like a nice sizzling pan, is there?" comes the voice from over Matt's shoulder.

"Guess not," Matt says, turning to look at Bill and then looking back down at the pan as he sifts its contents. "Even though I think about 7,000 people have ordered this since I started my shift. I feel like I stir-fried my brain."

"Perhaps I forgot to mention when I offered you this job that the restaurant business can make you insane," Bill says as he comes around to stand beside Matt at the stove. "There are certainly days that could take no better turn than to let me go home and relax."

"I could really use some of that ... but I think going home tonight's gonna be kinda weird."

"Why?"

"I had Victoria with me the last couple nights. Sarah came and picked her up this morning. So it's gonna seem really quiet tonight."

A quiet moment of thought delivers a grin to Bill's face. "She's an amazing little girl, isn't she? She loves to cuddle so much, more than any of my kids ever did. She could just melt in your arms."

"Yeah, she is really something. A real sweet kid." Bill's delight at thinking of his granddaughter sees to be infectious, for it is now manifesting itself on Matt's ruggedly handsome face. "I got a question for you, Bill."

"Go right ahead."

"Does this thing -- being a dad, I mean -- does it ever start to feel normal? Like it's something you're *supposed* to be doing?" Matt asks, casting his gaze back down at the very lively pan.

"I think so," Bill answers with a chuckle. "When your kids are older, when you get to know them as real people -- then it does. Maybe it's just time, who knows? But there are still times when I wonder how I've managed to fool the world into thinking *I* could be a father for 30-plus years."

A grin busts out on Matt's face. "Good to hear."

He turns his attention back to the meal he is cooking, perhaps a bit too intently. Bill can see the change building in him and stands back to watch, knowing that Matt will speak when he is ready.

"Look, Bill, there's something I've been meaning to say for a long time," Matt says quietly. "I--I'm really sorry about this whole thing, how I put Sarah and your whole family in this situation--"

Bill holds up a hand to cut him off. "Don't. I appreciate it, I do, but it's not necessary."

Matt shoots him a puzzled look.

"I was angry about it too, at first," Bill explains. "But I know that things ... happen. Especially where Sarah is concerned. *Especially* where Sarah is concerned."

"Thanks," Matt says, finally risking a glance up at his boss. "I didn't wanna have that hanging between us, if we're working together and with Victoria and everything."

"I know you didn't push her into anything, Matt. She's--honestly, she's kind of an instigator. And she's impulsive. It was the same type of thing when she married Brent. She did the wildest thing that she could think of because it was most likely to get a reaction from everyone."

"At least you know your daughter well. Funny thing is, there are times I think that's *why* I--why we get along so well. When we were back in New York, the way she got me out of that whole mess ... it was incredible."

Bill nods knowingly. "It just so happens that her plans don't always accomplish such positive ends. Nor are her goals always so noble."

"Exactly." Matt moves the pan's contents around as the sizzling continues. "And I think

we finally got to the point where she had to face that and change something, and she couldn't do it, or she wouldn't do it. So besides Victoria, I don't think there's any chance we can ever have much of a future."

## **SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT**

Paula knocks quickly on the unfamiliar door and then drops her hands as she waits for an answer. She glances to her sides, up and down the corridor. She's only been here a handful of times, she realizes, since Brent and Sarah moved in here two years ago. She is far less comfortable here than she is over at Tim and Claire's -- or rather, Claire's -- apartment.

*Maybe that's what Sarah was talking about*, she thinks with a frustrated sigh. She knocks on the door again, her need to see her daughter suddenly even greater.

"Mom," Sarah says, sounding rather surprised, when she finally does open the door. "What are you doing here?"

"Hi, dear," Paula smiles, though her face feels a bit too wooden all of a sudden. "I, um, I picked up a gift for Victoria earlier in the week and I've been meaning to drop it off."

Sarah glances down and for the first time sees the pink gift bag in her mother's hand. "Oh, thanks. I'll grab her so she can dig right in."

Paula stands in the doorway as Sarah heads back to the bedroom to grab Victoria. She isn't sure if she should move further into the apartment. After what happened during her last conversation with Sarah ... There are some very heavy things hanging in the air, and right now, it is rather overwhelming to Paula. How can she even begin to deal with the accusations Sarah tossed out the other day?

"Hey, sweetie," Sarah is saying as she carries Victoria into the room. "Grandma brought you something ..."

"Here you go, darling." Paula hands Sarah the bag and kisses her granddaughter on the cheek. The little girl's face lights up.

"Oh, wow! Look at this!" Sarah narrates to Victoria. She removes the tissue paper from the gift bag and extracts a stuffed puppy. "It's cute, huh?"

Almost immediately Victoria reaches for the puppy and, with a giggle, holds it up in the air.

"I think it's a hit," Sarah says. She looks up only briefly at Paula.

"I'm glad. I thought she'd like it." Paula finds herself at a loss now; she had expected Sarah to come flying out of the gates with her usual emotional bang. This calmer behavior is even more unsettling. "Sarah--" she begins suddenly, feeling a sudden need to cut to the chase.

"This is about the other day, isn't it? What I said about you and Dad and Molly?"

Paula nods solemnly. "Yes. Hearing what you had to say -- it hurt. Not just because it made me feel, well, awful, but ... it broke my heart, too. Hearing you say things that I've never been able to say, never even been able to think outright -- that really pushed me to thinking."

She can see Sarah becoming more and more receptive to what she is saying, as though she has been trapped inside a giant block of ice and it now thawing around her, letting her touch the outside world again.

"I don't want things to go on like this," Paula continues. "I want to close this--this distance between us."

Sarah purses her lips. "I appreciate that, Mom, I really do. But it's not possible now. Not while I'm still living in Molly's shadow."

## COUNTY COURTHOUSE

"There's nothing to worry about," Eric says, leaning over to Diane and practically whispering. Even so, the low volume of his voice sounds like an affront to the still quiet of the small courtroom.

There are a few official-looking people moving about towards the head of the room, getting things in order for the hearing that is set to begin in a matter of moments, but for the most part the room is dead. Diane and Eric are seated behind one desk, Claire and her lawyer Jim at another. The judge's bench sits before them, empty and yet still so ominous.

"I hope so," Diane whispers back to him. "I feel like I'm locked in a friggin' box. When is this thing gonna start?"

"Give it a few minutes."

"You told me it would be a few minutes a few minutes ago. I'm dying of anxiety here."

Would it kill anyone to be a little more expeditious?"

"Probably," Eric intones, glancing at his watch. "But don't worry too much. We have a very strong case. And besides, it's only a preliminary hearing. All that's being decided today is what happens to Samantha from now until the time of the official proceedings."

"Yeah, but it's not like it isn't important," Diane says. She leans closer to him so that she can keep her voice down, and as she turns her head slightly, she finds her lips just inches from his. The urge to make a move for them is almost overwhelming. "Besides, if we win today, we get to go home and celebrate, right?"

The comment clearly makes Eric uncomfortable in this setting, but he agrees with a quick nod anyway. "Right."

Diane responds with a tiny laugh and a pair of raised eyebrows.

From her seat on the other side of the room, Claire makes a face. "Jeez," she mutters.

Jim leans over to her. "What?"

"She's making eyes at her lawyer. I swear, someone ought to get that woman fixed."

Though he can't help but be amused, Jim manages to maintain a relatively straight face. "Just calm down, Claire. The last thing you need is to look irrational or jealous."

"You're right," Claire agrees, straightening herself in her chair.

In an instant, the quiet of the room is broken and the tension multiplied tenfold. "Please rise for the honorable ..." comes the call from the front of the room.

Diane shoots a glance over at Claire and notices that it is met. *Let the games begin.*

## **THE FISHERMAN'S PIER**

"I'm sorry to hear that," Bill says. "For Victoria's sake, and for Sarah's."

"Yeah." Matt shrugs, making it clear that although he agrees with Bill, he does not intend to cave to those interests anymore. "I warned her, I did, but she just pushed too hard. She took it too far."

His voice sadder now, Bill asks, "What finally happened? Do you think there's any way

you two can get past this?"

The words are nearly out of Matt's mouth before he realizes what is going on. Bill doesn't know about the scheme Sarah arranged at the hospital. How could he not? Did Sarah and Molly actually keep quiet about it? The possibility intrigues him. "She, uh ... It's this whole Brent thing. She refuses to let go, no matter how many times I tell her it's not healthy. She's totally obsessed with him and she's gotten to the point where she hates her sister over it."

"I know." Bill lets out a heavy sigh. It sounds like a sign of defeat, like he is finally being forced to give in to a reality that he would really prefer not to acknowledge. "And it worries me even more to think that she's just about going it alone right now."

"Yeah," Matt says again, and then he turns his attention back to the almost-forgotten vegetables. He gives them another flip and then moves them out of the pan and onto a plate.

"I wanna be there for her, I really do," he says, his focus down on the plate. "I just don't think I can take much more of this whole thing with her and Brent and Molly. She has to let go -- if she can't do that, then there isn't much anyone can do for her."

"You're absolutely right."

Matt picks up a dishtowel and winds it up with his hands, his gaze fixed forward and very contemplative. "I wish she could understand how bad she needs to get over this thing. She could be so much more than this clingy almost-ex-wife who's angry with the world ... I know she can. I've seen it before."

Bill folds his arms and stands back, observing as Matt speaks. It hardly seems as though Matt is addressing Bill now: He is talking more to himself, vocalizing ideas that Bill is sure have been dormant -- or perhaps very alive -- inside him for quite some time.

"Hang in there," Bill offers knowingly, with a pat on the shoulder. "She's going to come out of this. I know this has to be hard on you. But if you're patient ... Well, just don't do something you'll regret."

He gives Matt's shoulder a squeeze and then walks off to attend to other business. Matt puts down the dishtowel and leans against the counter, his gaze unwavering.

*"Don't do something you'll regret ..."*

But right now, none of his options seem to be without that possibility.

## SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

"You're not living in Molly's shadow," Paula says.

In an instant Sarah's usual accusatory sarcasm is back, the overworked calm of a minute ago forgotten. "Oh, really? How do you figure that?"

"You are your own woman, Sarah. You have your own career, you have a daughter--"

--which just makes it worse that I even *care* anymore!" Sarah narrows her eyes. "Do you really not see it?"

"See what?" When she receives no response -- at least not verbally -- Paula continues, hardly a drop of doubt in her mind about what the answer was. "Your father and I never favored Molly over you."

"Please! At least own up to it now! You owe me that much."

"We never intended to 'favor' any of you," Paula repeats more quietly.

"But you did!"

"We love each and every one of you equally!" Paula shoots back, her voice leaping back up.

Her tone, or maybe the statement itself, gives Sarah pause. She sets Victoria down on the floor with the new toy. And then she responds with force to equal or outdo her mother's: "It's not just a matter of love! Don't you remember all the times that you told me to do things the way Molly did? I should have studied like she did, I should have done activities the way she did. Maybe then I wouldn't have been such a screw-up."

"You are not a screw-up, Sarah! You never were. We never said that."

"No, I'll give you that. But you may as well have. Nothing I did was ever good enough. Molly always did it better. I always had to try and be more like her."

"We wanted the best for you--"

"And obviously I couldn't get that by being myself, right?" Sarah spits. She shakes her head furiously, dismissively. "Whatever. You're never gonna get it because you don't want to. And we can't be the happy little mother-daughter team you want until you do. So we're really stuck, huh?"

A thick, frustrating silence engulfs them. They stand there, only a few feet apart but suddenly more separated than ever -- or at least more aware of it than ever.

"What would you like me to do?" Paula says. "Admit that I'm a terrible mother?"

"No! You're not a terrible mother. But you *hurt me*, you and Dad both. It's just the way our family is. I got the short end of the stick or something. Molly's the shining star. It's always going to be that way."

"That's not how I ever wanted it to be!"

"Then maybe you should've tried a little harder!" Sarah turns away, suddenly unable to look at her own mother. "And Molly doesn't make things any better. She's always rubbing it in and showing me up. God, look at how she's got Brent wrapped around her finger--"

"She's out of line."

"Yeah, and she acts like--" Suddenly Sarah's tirade comes screeching to a halt, as what Paula said registers. "What?"

"Molly is out of line as far as you and Brent are concerned. I absolutely agree with you."

"Really?" Sarah asks cautiously.

"Yes," Paula says. "Molly is far too involved in that situation."

"Wow," is all Sarah can muster. For an instant that makes everything much better.

But then she is swept back into the argument that was just raging between them, back into the years that built whatever this is inside of her.

"I need to be alone," she says abruptly. She moves for the door and opens it quickly.

"What?" Paula flashes her a confused look, hoping for some explanation.

All Sarah offers is, "Just go. I--I need to think. We were getting so worked up, and ..."

"All right," Paula says. She makes her own move for the door but pauses before she exits the apartment. "I am sorry, Sarah. I don't want to leave things like this between us."

"Neither do I," Sarah says as she shuts the door.

"Neither do I," she repeats as she returns to Victoria in the middle of the floor. *She does realize that Molly is the one to blame here, she thinks with an odd tingle of excitement.*

She scoops Victoria back into her arms and holds her close. "Maybe there is hope after all," she murmurs, wanting so badly to believe her own words.

## COUNTY COURTHOUSE

"Your Honor," Eric begins, his deep voice resonating in the still courtroom. "My client, Diane Bishop, has been forced to play a secondary role in her child's life ever since her daughter was a few months old. While Samantha's father and his wife raised Ms. Bishop's daughter every day of the year, my client's interaction with her daughter was restricted to four particular weekends per year."

All attention is fixed on the tanned young lawyer as he paces the floor. His hands rest comfortably in the trouser pockets of his finely cut suit, itself a deep charcoal color that does him an incredible amount of justice.

"As you are aware," he continues, "earlier this year, Tim Fisher -- Samantha's biological father -- passed away. What the court might not be quite so aware of are the circumstances under which Mr. Fisher met his unfortunate demise."

Claire's gaze cuts from Eric to the judge to the table in front of her, then to Jim, and then back up at Eric. And she finds Eric's gaze locked on her as he recounts the details of Tim's death.

Something burns a bright, fiery red inside of her. She breaks eye contact with Eric as soon as he continues speaking.

"Tim Fisher was presumed dead," he says, "on New Year's Eve of this past year. His last known whereabouts were by the King's Bay waterfront, lurking around on a pier. Signs of his presence were later found there and indicated that he had been shot and likely fallen into the bay."

*And here comes the good part, Diane thinks with relish. She casts a glance over at Claire, who looks white as a ghost. Serves her right. She put Tim in danger and she lost him. She should be suffering.*

Eric stops his pacing, clasps his hands together in front of him, and faces the judge. "Why would Mr. Fisher, a man with a loving family, a wife, two children, and a promising career, be hiding in the shadows on a pier in the middle of the night on New Year's Eve?"

Wasn't it clear that he was jeopardizing everything he had?"

He drops his hands to his sides, emits a light sigh for dramatic effect, and continues wearing a path back and forth across the floor. "He was jeopardizing all that, of course. Then why was he out there? What was he doing?"

"Mr. Fisher was on that pier that night trying to *protect* those very things that were so important to him. He was there because his wife, Claire, had decided to conduct a little investigative work of her own. Her husband was forced to spend the night on the pier, waiting to listen in on a conversation that never even occurred, because Claire Fisher felt that a personal revenge mission should take priority over their marriage and their children."

Diane cannot resist taking another look at Claire. Indeed, the other woman looks shaken, battered, by what is going on in the courtroom. There is nothing she can do, of course; Eric is up there telling her life story, no lies, no erroneous presumptions.

"Now, no one except Claire Fisher -- and perhaps not even she -- can tell us for certain what happens in Claire Fisher's head," Eric announces. "But from what can be determined, Mrs. Fisher's interest in the pier that night stemmed from a pair of men she has known for many years, men with whom she first came into contact via her late father.

"Mrs. Fisher's father, James Robbins, had a detailed criminal record. Perhaps his greatest crime occurred a few years ago when, in the chain of events that would lead to his death, Mr. Robbins kidnapped his daughter's firstborn son and whisked him off to a secret hideaway in South America. When Tim and Claire Fisher followed, they were held prisoner as well, and their release came only after Mrs. Fisher was forced to kill her own father to save her husband and child."

Claire becomes aware that her nails are digging into Jim's arm. She tries to loosen her grip but succeeds only minimally. Right now, she needs it, she needs to hold onto something, because her own life is being laid out on display and it is sounding even worse than usual.

"I know that this may be difficult to swallow," Eric says. "Clearly Mrs. Fisher has been the victim of some unfortunate circumstances. But that does not excuse the fact that her own husband's life was lost because she insisted upon the reckless pursuit of revenge, nor does it erase the fact that Mrs. Fisher's life is an extremely volatile one, rife with complications and consequences that would not only be felt by, but have a profound impact upon any child she raises."

Every last particle of available air has been drained from the room, as far as Claire can tell. She sits there beside Jim, still gripping onto him, not even moving, and holding her

breath -- because she knows that the next time she has to inhale or exhale, time will have passed and Eric's statements will have registered with the judge, and her whole world will be destroyed.

## **END OF EPISODE #230**

*Will Claire retain custody of Samantha? Should she? Voice your thoughts on this episode and participate in a new reader poll over at the [Message Forum!](#)*

[Next Episode](#)