

## "Footprints" Episode #235

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

*\*Brent asked Sarah to sign the divorce papers and then tried to comfort her when she broke down. She surprised him with a kiss.*

*\*Bill encouraged Matt to be patient with Sarah.*

*\*Molly headed somewhere with big news.*

*\*Hoping to understand Ryan's attitude, Stan asked Nick about his son. Nick threw him out.*

### **2482 COURT STREET, APARTMENT BUILDING**

*This better work*, Stan thinks as he makes his way down the corridor, scanning the apartment doors on his right and left for the correct number. This has to work, because it's pretty much his last resort.

He offers up a silent curse against Nick Moriani. If he'd just been more cooperative -- maybe given Stan some insight into Ryan's behavior instead of dropping veiled hints and threats -- then maybe this wouldn't be necessary.

His efforts to speak with Ryan in the last few days have been totally unsuccessful. He hasn't been home at any of times Stan has dropped by, and the handful of phone calls have gone unreturned.

*Time to figure out what the hell's goin' on*, Stan determines as he stops in front of the right apartment. He raises his hand and knocks loudly. After a few seconds of no response, agitation swells within him.

"I know you're in there," he mutters. "I just watched you go in the building." And before that, he followed her all the way from work. She must be here; there's no way she could have gotten out--

The door flies open and severs those thoughts. The woman who appears before him looks frazzled enough as it is, but he recognizes her quite well even across all these years. Her face is the same, with that distinct bone structure, the prominent but not too-large nose, the enticing gray eyes. She has matured, definitely, but it is clearly her. And she is as beautiful as she ever was, he has to note.

"Claire," he says, a little bit short of breath. "You remember me? Ryan's dad -- Stan Lincoln."

He extends a hand for a shake but she makes no move to take it. But everything about her -- the knowledge in her face, the way her body has tensed suddenly, her fingers' tightened grip on the open door -- makes it quite clear that she does recognize him.

"Can I come in?" he asks as he tries to figure out what is going on. "There's somethin' I hope you can help me with."

She is too frozen to answer.

## THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

*"Sarah's a good woman. Right now there are some things that she needs to work through, but when she does open her eyes, the best thing for her would be to have you standing there ... Just hang in there."*

Bill's words have been echoing in Matt's ears almost nonstop as he collected himself, cleaned up, and exited the kitchen, another day of work done. Now he strolls out of the restaurant, letting the heavy back door slam closed behind him. Hands ensconced in the warm pockets of his leather jacket, he pauses and takes a long drag of the night air. Not just cool, but cold. And very sharp, very crisp. Winter is definitely making its presence known.

"He's right," he says out loud. The words are sucked right away into the night air, but he had to say them anyway. He's *thought* them plenty of times, but in his head, their existence was--is--too threatened by all the other complications and doubts for them to last very long at all. Getting them out into the world, even if he's the only one who hears them, seems necessary.

He takes a few undirected steps over the thick planks that make up the pier. He can't see much of anything, save for the dumpster a few feet in front of him, but the world feels wide open right now. For weeks, even months, he has been trapped by the guarded new dynamic of his relationship with Sarah. They've been parents to Victoria and nothing more.

But as much as he has tried, every collected, distant moment around Sarah has been a struggle. His efforts have been walking a precarious tightrope, he realizes now, because with just the slightest change in conditions, he could have been thrown totally of course. His instincts were to talk with Sarah like he used to, to appreciate that beautiful face, maybe even to feel her in his arms as he has done only on the rarest of occasions.

That's what he's been waiting for. That's what he's been fighting all this time. But maybe she really *can* get past her hang-ups -- maybe she really can move on. Maybe he can help her do it. God knows it's what he wants.

And maybe, just maybe, he can make it happen now.

## PIER 22

The familiar feel of Sarah's lips against his own startles Brent. Something comes over him, a spell cast by the winter night, and he is drawn back inside. There was a time when he thought that they could make it work, as the vivid memories show, and right now the hands of time are taking a journey backward.

"Brent," Sarah huffs as she pulls back reluctantly from the kiss, "that was incredible. That was how it should have been. How it should still be."

A response eludes him. He stands motionless, his hands feeling odd now as she continues to hold them in her own. He takes in the almond-shaped eyes, so alive all of the time, and the wisps of dark blonde hair dancing about her head in the night breeze.

"Do you remember when it was like that?" she asks, on the verge of being breathless. "When there was nothing we wanted more than to feel that way all the time, getting totally lost in each other?"

She stares at him expectantly but he remains speechless.

"I remember. I remember how I couldn't even try to focus on anything else when I caught a glimpse of you," she continues. "I remember how much more exciting work became when we got to work on things together. I remember wanting nothing more than to go home at night so I could lie there with your arms around me and my head on your chest."

He remembers, too. There was a time -- such an exciting time -- when he could get lost in her, too. The sight of her would light up the room. Looking over cases became so much more interesting when he was collaborating with her. And the feel of her in his arms ... Sometimes he felt as though he'd found what he had always been looking for -- a home of his own.

"You do remember," she says. Her smile widens and her face brightens. He feels the tips of her fingers caressing his palms. "What we had was beautiful, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, it was," he gulps, unable to believe that he is living this moment.

## THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

"Guess who?" rings the jolly voice from behind.

Bill stares into the darkness of the hands clasped over his eyes. A smile curls his lips as he says without any hesitation, "Hi, Mol."

"I'm that obvious?" she asks as he turns around.

"I'd know that happy voice a mile away," he says with a laugh. "What are you doing here?"

"I had something to tell you and it could *not* wait 'til you came home later."

"Yeah?" he asks, returning a small portion of his attention to the plate that he was preparing when she snuck up on him.

"Yeah ..." A bubble of excitement wells up in her expression and then bursts as she announces, "I got a new job!"

"What? Really? A promotion?"

"Um, not quite."

"Someplace else, then?"

"Yeah," she says. "Do you remember that job I had for way too short a time when I was engaged to Craig ... ?"

He nods.

"There was another position open at the same firm, so I went for it and I got it!"

"Wow! Congratulations!" Bill pulls his daughter into a tight, sincere hug. "You've really been wanting to work in fashion again, haven't you?"

"Yeah. It's what I always wanted. Doing what I do at Willis doesn't make for a bad job by any means, but this is what I really want to do."

"I'm proud of you for going after it like this."

Her grin flares up again as she thinks back on the conversation she had with Brent not too long ago about the direction of her career and life. "Well, it took some nudging, but I

knew I had to give it another shot."

"I'm glad you did. If this is what makes you happy, then you deserve to be doing it."

"I'm glad, too," she says definitively. "I've sat around waiting for too long. It's time for me to decide what I really want and go after it for good."

## **CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT**

For Claire, the very sight of Stan has sucked all air out of the room. Her chest tightens and a suddenly weak hand reaches for the doorframe.

"Look," Stan says, eyes diving to the carpet. He is clearly very uncomfortable having to do this. "I know you probably believe I'm some terrible guy, especially if you've been talkin' to Ryan. But I just--I need some help." He speaks with the tone of one who has probably asked more than his share of favors in his time.

"W-what? What favor?" The words stagger out of Claire's mouth, her only defense now. Hopefully he doesn't want anything important -- but then why the hell is he here?

"It's about Ryan. He's been weird lately. Since--I just moved to town, so I've been tryin' to see him--but he's not lettin' me. Do you have any idea why?"

In a blinding flash, last New Year's Eve is playing out right in front of her eyes all over again. Ryan's tortured cries ... his sobs ... the shaking confession. That was the first time she really remembered what Stan had done -- until then, it was always a distorted image of Ryan blurred in with the rest of those sickening memories. But ever since then, it's this face that has filled her nightmares, clear as day and more sickening than anything else she has ever known.

"Claire!" His voice escalates just slightly, but it is enough to rock her entire body with terror. She has no idea how long she has been lost in thought but almost wishes she could go back there, away from this reality.

"No," she stammers, not really sure what she is saying it to -- maybe the whole situation. She feels Travis by her side, half-hiding behind her as he looks at the strange man outside their home. She wants to scoop him up and hold him as safely as she can in her arms.

"Wait," Stan says, but it is too late. She slams the door.

Her trembling fingers somehow manage to get the locks done. She chokes back a sob as

the encounter already begins to replay itself in her head.

She waits for the pounding on the door that she knows should be coming. By some miracle, it never starts. Tempted though she is to look out the peephole to see if he is still there, she can't. She can't risk seeing that face again.

She leads Travis into the bedroom, willing herself not to cry. She has to play a game with him, or something. Anything to bring her back into the world she knows, away from the nightmares she has tried so long to banish.

\* \* \*

Stan swallows the lump in his throat. "What the hell was that all about?" he mutters to himself, casting another glance at the closed door.

Something tells him not to pursue it any further, at least not right now. That girl always has been bad news. He can remember what a mess she made of Ryan's life that one summer Ryan was living with him.

*Still a damn good-looking gal, he thinks with a shake of the head. Too bad she's such a damn headcase.*

## **THE FISHERMAN'S PIER**

The heavy door swings outward as Molly pushes through it and out of the restaurant. The night assaults her senses: the chilled air; the sounds of traffic out across the parking lot; the lingering scent of the restaurant's kitchen swirling about. Tonight, the invasion is a welcome one. The world seems so much more open, so much more available -- a different place than it has been for a very long time.

She does a double-take at the figure striding out into the parking lot from behind the restaurant. Then, hesitation gone, she calls out, "Hey! Wait up!"

"Molly!" Matt grins as she breaks into a light jog to catch up to him. "How're ya doing?"

"Pretty well. Very well, actually."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I, uh, I just got an offer for a job I've really been wanting. So I'm riding pretty high right now."

"Nice. Congratulations." Matt fidgets a little and glances back at the restaurant. "I'm finally off for the night."

"How's it going, working here?"

"Good. I'm loving it."

"Good!" She offers a warm smile as she pulls her coat a little bit tighter. "You know, I haven't seen you in forever. We really need to make a point of getting together more often."

"Yeah, I know," he says, nodding. He looks off past the restaurant, down the pier. "What a night, huh? Finally feels like winter."

"You can say that again. I'm still waiting for that Christmas feeling to kick in, though. It doesn't seem like it's as close as it is."

Matt rolls his eyes. "Try spending some time in toy stores and then get back to me on that."

Molly laughs. "Good point."

But Matt's response has nothing to do with that line of conversation. His gaze is fixed somewhere in the distance, down by the water.

"What is it?" she asks as she tries to focus herself on whatever has captured his attention.

"Down there," he says, pointing. "Is that ... ?"

Molly completes the thought, her heart already threatening to sink. "Yeah. Sarah -- and Brent."

## **PIER 22**

"It was beautiful," Brent says, his voice growing stronger. "There was something really special between us. But it's over now."

Sarah goes pale, a change made even more noticeable by the dark navy canvas of the night that sits behind her. "If it was beautiful -- if it was special -- then why does it have to be over?"

He fights an internal battle with his words and they get the best of him. "This is getting ridiculous, Sarah. Accept that this marriage is done. I am *sorry* -- I didn't go into this with the intention of hurting you. If I could change the past, I would. But I can't, and neither can you. This is how it has to be."

"Do you think it'll be even better with Molly? That's what this is about! You don't think I'm as good as her. You don't think I deserve--"

"Sarah, stop!" He grabs her wrists tightly as her flailing hands take aim at him. "Stop it," he says through gritted teeth, doing his best not to make a scene.

Unfortunately, Sarah seems to want exactly that. "Let me go!"

He releases her wrists, but his eyes stay locked on hers. "Cut it out. You are acting like a complete child."

"Well, maybe if you'd stop treating me like some kid you can just cast aside because you found someone better to play with--"

"Sarah."

"Shut up! I don't want to hear whatever the hell it is you have to say! I don't want to hear another word about how Molly is so much better than me or I'm not good enough or whatever else!"

"Hey, hey," comes the familiar voice. Brent watches as Matt rushes up and wraps his arms around Sarah. "You're out of control," he says quietly as she struggles to get away from him.

Brent watches as Matt tries to subdue her. Out of the corner of his eye, he becomes aware of a presence -- a presence that, even though he knows he should, he cannot ignore.

He turns to Molly. "What are you doing here?"

"Matt and I were out front. We saw you guys down here, and then--he thought he should come down and try to calm her down."

"How the hell do you always manage to turn up where you're least wanted?" Sarah snips at her sister.

Matt strengthens his hold on her momentarily. "Sarah ..."



She doesn't even pay attention to him. "You bitch," she mutters to Molly. "You won. Happy?" She shakes her head in disgust and then settles on Brent. "And you ... what a paragon of virtue you are. Just jump from one sister to the next, right? The two of you make me sick."

"You know what, Molly?" she hisses. "You can have him. Or you can try. But I'm damn sure not gonna make it easy for you."

Molly lowers her eyelids, knowing that she can't lash out in return.

And in that brief moment of darkness, she hears the scuffle begin anew. Before Molly has any idea what is happening, Sarah's hands are on her, pushing her backward.

A cry escapes her lips as she tumbles off the pier and into the freezing waters.

## **END OF EPISODE #235**

***What do you think about the latest twists in the Molly/Brent/Sarah/Matt quadrangle? Is the end in sight? And what will Stan's return mean for Claire? Your thoughts are welcomed over at the [Message Forum!](#)***

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