

"Footprints" Episode #251

[Previously ...](#)

- Brent received a visit from Sarah, who delivered the signed divorce papers.
- Infuriated to learn that Stan was still following Claire, Ryan came clean with his biological father about Stan's long-ago rape of Claire.
- Lauren saw her parents off on a months-long cruise and was then surprised by the return of her brother, Trevor, who promised to stay at least for a few weeks.
- Jason received cheering up from Lauren in the wake of his breakup with Courtney.

CHARLENE POWERS AGENCY

The elevator has arrived countless times throughout the morning, but this time, its *ding* catches Molly's attention. She glances up from her desk, pen still clasped between her fingers, and looks across the floor.

She sees him right away, despite all the activity and all the other faces in the way. A smile breaks on her face as she watches Brent peeking his head out over the crowded floor in search of her. Part of her wants to stand up and wave her arms to get his attention, but instead she sits back and enjoys the sight of him searching for her.

He spots her soon enough and his meandering pace escalates into a quick stride. She turns her attention back down to the form in front of her and tries to finish the few remaining blocks that need to be filled out, but she can't even get that done before Brent arrives in front of her. She forgets the form instantly and happily.

"Hey, you," she greets. "What are you doing here?"

"I was wondering if you had a couple minutes to talk, actually."

The temptation is strong, but she knows that there is a pile of work awaiting her attention. "I don't know ..."

"Go ahead!" comes a voice from behind them.

Molly turns in her chair to see Camille Lemieux blowing out of her office, ensconced in a calf-length lavender wrap.

"Use my office if you want to talk," Camille says. "I've got that lunch meeting, remember? I'll be out for awhile."

She is making the offer to both of them, but Molly sees Brent deferring to her. She glances at the stack of folders and loose documents beside her, then up at Camille. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely! You've been plowing through all of this stuff for hours. Take a break!"

"All right, thanks," Molly says as she rises uncertainly from her chair.

Suddenly Camille extends a hand to Brent. "Camille Lemieux."

Brent shakes. "Brent Taylor. Nice to meet you."

"The pleasure's mine," Camille chimes as she bounces off. Molly shakes her head with a little laugh when, as Brent's back is turned, Camille flashes her a thumbs-up sign before disappearing down the hall.

"That must be the new boss," Brent says.

"Yep, that would be her."

"She's definitely ... peppy."

"Peppy's a good word for it. I'm not complaining, though. She's a hundred times better than the chain-smoking maniac I was working with on the first day." She puts down her pen. "So you wanna go in the office to talk?"

"Sure, yeah."

Molly leads the way, not bothering to look out before closing the door. For some reason, she'd rather not know who watched her and Brent disappearing into the office together.

"So what's up?" she asks as the door clicks into place.

"Actually, something pretty important." He buries his hands in the pockets of his coat, which despite the coming of spring hasn't yet become unnecessary. "Something we've both been waiting for."

CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

This is such a waste of time, Claire tells herself as she settles into the sofa. She pops the photo album open to a random page in the middle.

It's not that looking through the photos or revisiting the memories is a waste of time in and of itself, but it seems like she's been through all of these photo albums so much lately that it's ceasing to be interesting to look through them. She doesn't have long until she's supposed to meet Paula for lunch, though, and TV seems unappealing. She's already finished the book that she started this past weekend and she saw everything she wanted of today's newspaper earlier this morning.

So the photo album it is. There are only about four years of photos that she cares to look at anyway; luckily those are the only ones held in these albums. She'd prefer to think of the time surrounding that period as having not existed.

As she begins to glance through the pictures -- in an order that she's just about memorized -- two solid raps sound on the door.

She stands immediately and replaces the photo album on the shelf before she goes to the door. She is about to undo the lock and open it up when she thinks to peer through the peephole.

"Claire, let me in!" Ryan calls from the other side just as she looks at him through the tiny window. "This is important!"

"It always is," she mumbles, stepping back from the door indecisively.

"Please, let me in! I need to talk to you."

Sighing heavily, she undoes the lock and flings the door open. She doesn't even bother to stand guard in front of it -- she knows that Ryan will maneuver his way inside eventually. Instead she retreats to the sofa.

He does just as she knew he would, letting himself in and then shutting the door. "There's something you need to know, Claire."

She tosses her head onto the back of the sofa and groans. "There's always something I need to know."

"I'm serious."

"You're *a*lways serious! It's not like these are fun little visits you pay me, Ryan. It doesn't make them any less frustrating just because you think they're all necessary."

"Well, I'm sorry," he snaps with an edge that makes Claire take notice. His mood always has been able to turn on a dime, especially when it's his temper that's escalating. The sudden reminder doesn't make her any more comfortable around him.

She decides to get out of this the easy way. "All right, what is it?"

She sees Ryan hesitate. Clearly she offended him with her attitude a moment ago, and now he's deciding whether or not he's going to share whatever this important information is with the ungrateful woman in front of him. That's Ryan Moriani's way of dealing with the world -- he reacts to however he thinks it's reacting to him.

Finally he seems to decide that the news is more important than teaching Claire a lesson. "It's Stan," he says.

She nearly groans again, but his next words put everything sharply into focus.

"He knows the truth. He knows about the rape."

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

"I think I eat here too much," Jason says, eyes wandering around the restaurant while he sips his Sprite.

"You could try to get yourself banned," Alex offers. "Moon a waitress or something. That might work."

"I don't think I really needed to be banned from my dad's business, but thanks." Jason drums his fingers along the edge of the table. "I'm so pumped about this afternoon!"

"Me too! Just looking at apartments is exciting ... Can you imagine how cool it'll be if we actually find one?"

"I'm not counting on it. I have a feeling we may wind up seeing some crappy, crappy places."

"Yeah, probably." Alex pauses just long enough to allow for a shift in the conversation. "Listen, are you sure you're okay with this whole thing?"

Jason rolls his eyes, but it's a gesture of disbelief, not annoyance. "I swear, yes!"

"All right, good ... I know I'm a pain in the ass. I just worry that you're gonna realize all of a sudden that you're making a mistake getting a place with me."

"I'm not making a mistake. I know it could be a weird situation, but we've been so up-front about everything--"

"For a change."

Jason cracks a grin. "Yeah. But seriously, I can't think of someone I'd rather live with. You're one of the best friends I've got."

"Really? Thanks." Alex lifts his Coke to drink but pauses midway. "You, too. I mean, I'm surprised at how good of friends we've gotten to be. Not really how I expected things to wind up."

"Yeah, well ... apparently things don't like to wind up the way you expect."

Alex muses on the dark comment for a moment. "How're you holding up?" he asks finally. "Have you talked to Court?"

"Nope. I keep wondering if I should, but it's like, what the hell am I gonna accomplish if I do? I'll probably just make things worse."

"You don't know that."

"No, but I have a pretty good feeling about it. I don't know, things are just so volatile right now. I don't even know what I could say that would make things any different."

Alex sits on for a minute. "Yeah, I guess not. But ... are you just gonna let it go?"

"I don't know if I have any other choice."

"I know I keep apologizing, but I really am sorry that this whole thing happened because of something I set in motion. If there's anything I can do ..."

"Thanks. I think I would've gone nuts by now without you and Lauren."

"Lauren?"

"Yeah, she's been really good. She's been trying to cheer me up and see the bright side of this whole thing, if there is one." Jason takes a long drink of his Sprite, until there isn't anything left but the ice in the glass. "I'm actually surprised she hasn't turned on me like Court did."

"Yeah, me too. But that's cool, that she's being so supportive."

"It's really helped. Have you talked to her lately?"

Alex shakes his head, looking down. "No. I don't really know what to say to her now."

After everything I put her through, I don't know how much better things could get."

"Don't give up on her," Jason says. "She might surprise you."

The confidence with which Jason speaks those words throws Alex a little bit, but he lets it pass. But when Jason speaks next, Alex wishes he'd done something to direct the conversation elsewhere.

"So ... when are you gonna get back into the dating thing?"

Alex knows that he must look like a deer caught in the headlights. But truthfully, he's made no more progress in considering that question every day than Jason would in five minutes of sitting here. So the only response he can really offer is a shrug.

"No idea?"

"I don't even know where to start," Alex says quietly. "And if I did, I don't think I'd have any clue what to do beyond that."

"We can work on that," Jason says, undaunted.

"We?"

"Yeah! I'm always up for an adventure."

CHASE HOME

A gust of lingering winter chill rushes into the house as Courtney opens the door.

"Ah, good, I see you brought some miserable weather with you," she says to Lauren.

"Not my fault! It was here when I got here, I swear." Lauren steps quickly into the house and takes off her coat. "It's good to see you!"

"You, too! We haven't hung out in forever!"

"It hasn't exactly been 'forever' ..."

"Feels like it." Courtney takes Lauren's coat from her and hangs it up, then begins leading the way towards the kitchen. "I'm making some popcorn."

"Ooh, I could go for some of that." Lauren seats herself on one of the stools beside the

island. "So how are you?"

Courtney knows exactly what Lauren means. "I'm ... good. Really. I miss Jason, but I'm getting used to it. And if I think about it, I really can't see myself being able to forgive him, or being able to put everything that happened out of my mind. So I guess that makes the decision for me, right?"

"I guess so," Lauren agrees uncertainly. She remembers what Trevor said about Courtney seeming upset and is about to mention it when she realizes that she hasn't even mentioned her brother's visit. "Hey, guess who showed up at my door the other day?"

Courtney turns around with a wicked smile. "Couldn't be your brother, could it?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. He said he ran into you at 322."

"Yeah, I was working and all of a sudden this guy knew my name and I had no idea who he was. It was kinda freaky, at first."

"Anyway, yeah, he mentioned that you didn't seem too happy."

"He didn't help matters much." She's about to continue down that line when the microwave beeps, and she busies herself with removing the popcorn. "So did he come back to see your parents off on their cruise or what?"

"Actually, he timed it so he didn't have to see them at all."

"Really? Why?"

"I'm not really sure. He hasn't wanted to talk about it very much, so ... I've kinda let it go. I'm just happy to see him. I was beginning to think he wasn't ever gonna show his face around here again."

Courtney rips open the bag and a cloud of steam hurries up to meet her face. She turns away slightly as she dumps the popped corn into a bowl. "So do you have any idea what he's been up to?"

"Nope. It seems like he's been having fun, but apparently he's still not ready to graduate, which is weird ... I mean, college was fun, but I was definitely ready to be done."

"You think he's ever gonna finish?"

"I'm beginning to doubt it, although I don't know what else he'd do with himself."

"I'm sure he's got something else in mind, especially if he's that unconcerned with school," Court offers, picking up a piece of popcorn and blowing on it before tossing it into her mouth.

She extends the bowl to Lauren, who takes a piece herself and blows on it to cool it. "I have a feeling he'll land on his feet. I'm just wondering how he's gonna manage it. But I'm just glad he's home ... it'll be nice to have some time with him."

"I'm happy for you," Courtney says as she scoops up a handful of the popcorn and winces a little at its temperature.

"Thanks. And things are gonna get better for you. Just hang in there."

"I'm trying."

"You can tough this out, I have faith in that," Lauren says, juggling a few pieces of popcorn in her palm. "Just carry on and do whatever it takes to get to that point where you're happy again."

CHARLENE POWERS AGENCY

"Yeah?" Molly asks as Brent fishes inside his coat.

"I think this will explain it," he says, removing his hand -- and a document that Molly recognizes before she sees anything besides its blank white back.

"She signed the divorce papers?"

"Yeah. She brought them over the other day."

"Wow." Molly takes the papers from his hand and flips through, looking at Sarah's signature. "So it's really over, huh?"

"Well, hopefully. I've learned pretty damn well not to count my chickens before they've hatched." He raises half of his mouth in an attempt at a smile, but Molly knows that the lesson has been too serious for him to find much about it humorous.

There are a lot of things perched on Molly's lips but none seem ready to come to life. She crosses the elegantly decorated office and stops in front of the broad window, looking out onto the bleak Northwest day.

A thick silence hovers between them. She stares out the window and she can feel his

eyes on her, watching her, waiting for her to give some indication of where they go next.

She has her own ideas about that, but far too many of those aren't fit to see the light of day.

"I'm happy for you," she says finally. "It must be a relief to be able to move on."

She hears him filling his lungs with the stuffy air. He releases it in a loud gush. "In a way."

Her hand reaches out to the window. She taps each fingernail on it once and then pulls her hand down before she leaves marks on the glass. "I'd always pictured this being such incredible news, but now it's like ... What difference does it make?"

"I know." She knows that he's thinking the exact same thing that she is: It would be a relief that the barrier between them has been destroyed, except that barrier may have been the only thing physically keeping them apart. Now it's up to them, and that burden is a million times heavier.

Then he surprises her. She hears his footsteps, feels him coming closer. His arm reaches around hers and his hand winds down to hers, holding it lightly. She can feel his chest brushing against her back, and the heat moving from his hand to hers is what she has been dying to feel since that night on the pier, and long before.

"Let's not rule anything out," he says. The breath from his words dances on her neck and, in this moment, all she wants is to melt right into him.

But she can't. Reality is right outside that door. Actually, it's in here with them -- that's her sister's signature on the divorce papers. The fact that he was married to Sarah is never going to change, nor is the fact that so much pain came from the union, on all sides.

"We have to," Molly forces herself to say. She breaks away and rolls around him, leaving him by the window. "We have to, Brent."

His gaze meets hers, and she can see the torture in his eyes that she knows must be visible in hers, too. "I know," he chokes.

CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

"He *what*?" Claire springs to her feet. "How does he know? Did he remember? Has he remembered this whole time?"

"No. I--I told him." The admission seems to twist the knife a little deeper into Ryan's heart.

"You told him? Why?"

"He needed to know. That's why he was hounding you. He couldn't understand why I was so angry with him--"

"Well, maybe if you'd told the truth all those years ago, there would be a little less confusion!" she blasts.

"I am *sorry!*" Ryan shoots right back. "I know I made a mistake, Claire. I didn't want to see my father go back to jail. I know I screwed up our relationship and I probably ruined my life forever, but I'm trying to do what I can to make that right now!"

"Why?" A terrifying tension is swirling through her body now, the type that makes her want to reach out and break or destroy something. "Why do we have to stir this up again? Why does Stan even care anymore? He's been a horrible father for over twenty years. What's the difference now?"

Ryan's stare locks on her and she's certain that something vicious is coming even before it hits.

"Aren't you the one who's always going on and on about facing the past and resolving demons and all that stuff?" he challenges. "Why is it so different when you try to do it?"

She is speechless. He moves in closer and his voice softens. He moves to take her hands in his, but she pulls away. He makes another move for them, gently, and this time she doesn't fight.

"I'm just trying to make some sense of all this crap," he says, almost pleading with her for understanding. "I've been trying for so long to keep it all balanced in my head, and now it's like--it's like it's gonna blow up if I don't do something about it. I can't do it anymore."

His fingers are trembling against hers, and suddenly she pulls back. She turns her back to him. "I'm tired of being in the middle of this. Every time you try to deal with something, it completely turns my life upside-down!"

"And every time *you* try to deal with something, it turns *my* life upside-down! What do you think your little crusade to land my father and me in jail was like?"

This time she has no response to offer him. The thought that their paths are tied so inexorably -- it's suffocating. Suddenly it's clear to her that escaping the torment of the

past, the torment that's seeping into her present and her future, means escaping everything Ryan Moriani represents.

Still she doesn't speak.

"You can't keep doing this," he says, not coming any closer to her. "You can't live the rest of your life like some empty shell. I'm sorry you lost Tim -- I'm sorry you have to live with the things you have to live with. But it's not an excuse to stop feeling and it's not an excuse to stop living."

She keeps her back to him.

"Until you face that, there's not a hell of a lot anyone can do for you," he says. He doesn't even wait for a reaction; instead, he turns himself and heads for the door. He opens it and steps out without so much as a move from Claire, and as he's pulling it closed behind him, she still hasn't done anything.

She doesn't turn around for a long time after he leaves. Even though he is gone, the truth is not, and she knows it'll be there staring her down no matter where she turns.

END OF EPISODE #251

What do you think it will take for both Claire and Ryan to find closure? Can they? And how will Brent and Molly deal with the divorce? Join us in the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts with others!

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