

## "Footprints" Episode #252

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

- Claire lashed out at Ryan for telling Stan the truth about the rape, but he countered by claiming a right to resolve his past. He urged Claire not to live the rest of her life as a shell of her former self.
- Jason encouraged Alex to begin dating, though Alex had no idea where to begin.
- Brent visited Molly at work and told her about Sarah finally signing the divorce papers. They wondered if it even makes any difference for their relationship now.

### FISHER HOME

Flakes of the croissant tumble from between Claire's fingers and scatter over the plate. She lifts the soft piece into her mouth and chews it slowly, gaze held down on the shiny pinks and greens of the plate's floral pattern.

"Claire?" comes the voice from across the table.

She lifts her head slowly. The two strands of dark brown hair that are not pulled back and clipped up fall across her face, and she brushes them away with the fingers that a moment ago tore the croissant.

"You've been awfully quiet today," Paula says. The familiar creases of concern are visible in her face and the sight of them makes Claire cringe. At least, knowing that she is presently the cause of them does.

"I'm sorry. You invite me over for lunch and I sit here moping. I'm really sorry."

"Claire," Paula says carefully, testing the waters, "if something's bothering you ..."

"It's hard to explain." Claire pauses and her eyes drop again before she can catch them. She grabs a forkful of the salad Paula prepared and moves it into her mouth, going through the motions of chewing without even really tasting it. Part of her is hoping that Paula will drop it at that.

But another part is remembering what Ryan told 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 ... Until you face that, there's not a hell of a lot anyone can do for you."*

The words replay themselves until Paula's patient silence becomes too much to handle.

"It's Ryan," Claire hears herself saying. "Ryan Moriani. Do you remember how I told you--"

Paula interrupts with an understanding nod. "Yes. I do."

Claire offers a grateful look. "There's a lot more to the story. He--It turns out that he was covering for someone all those years."

"Covering for someone? You mean, someone else ... ?"

"Yeah."

Paula takes a deep breath. "Why would he do that?"

"It was his father."

Claire sees the news rippling through Paula's system, shocking her time and again as the pieces link up in her head. "Nick Moriani?"

"No, no," Claire says emphatically, shaking her head. She's forgotten that there was even more of this that she hasn't yet explained. "Nick is actually Ryan's stepfather. His biological father -- Stan -- it was him."

"So you went along with this?" Paula asks in a deliberately softened voice. Claire can tell how exasperating all of this must be to digest, but she is thankful that Paula is attempting to take it in stride.

"I only found out recently," Claire says. In an instant she is back in the Morianis' cellar, trapped alone with Ryan and the truth. The same sick feeling floods her system.

"Ryan was protecting his father?"

"Yeah. He ... I don't even know why. I guess I can see his justification, but Stan isn't worth it. Never was and never will be."

"It probably seems a little different to Ryan, with it being his father," Paula offers, though she seems to be grappling to understand the logic, too.

"He made *me* believe it," Claire says, a bit incredulously. "He sacrificed our entire relationship to protect Stan." Actually saying that aloud makes her breath catch in her chest. She sits up a little straighter in her chair.

"But Stan is back," she adds hastily, yanking herself away from those thoughts. "He's on some sort of crusade to make amends with Ryan -- although I get the impression that it has more to do with money than anything else."

"So this Stan -- his being around is what has you so troubled now?"

"Pretty much ... and Ryan finally told him the truth."

Paula's gaze narrows and the creases deepen. "Has he come after you, Claire?"

She shakes her head furiously. "No. Not--not like that. He wanted information, that's all. But it'll be fine."

"Can you be sure of that?"

"Yes," Claire answers quickly. The word trips clumsily off her lips.

Paula shoots her a troubled grimace, but they both know that instructing Claire to be careful isn't going to accomplish much.

"Would it be ..." The thought expires on Paula's lips, unready to make an appearance yet.

"What?"

She takes a few moments to compose her thoughts. "Should you go to the police about this? To be sure that this man isn't a threat anymore?"

"No." The answer comes quickly and crisply. "There's no need to drag the police into this now. It's been too long. It's not going to accomplish anything."

Paula doesn't seem so certain of that, but she holds her tongue, for which Claire is thankful.

"This can't be easy for you to deal with," the older woman offers. "Maybe ... I don't want to suggest anything, but maybe you should go in for some sort of professional help."

The thought is not unfamiliar to Claire, but neither is it one upon which she's spent much time dwelling. At least, not consciously.

"If this man really isn't a threat anymore, then at least that could help you reach some sort of closure," Paula adds.

Claire's head is already shaking. She can't dredge all of that up again. That's where all

the problems began in the first place. It would be better to live with it in the back of her mind for the rest of her life than to have to suffer through the painful intensity of trying to wade through all of that again.

## **CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE**

"Double-tall vanilla soy latte!"

The barista shouts out another in the seemingly endless succession of drinks, pausing only long enough to smile in the direction of the customer moving to pick up the beverage before again becoming engulfed by the whirring machines and frenzy of hands behind the counter.

Alex stands off to the side, one shoulder leaning against a wall, as he waits for his drink. He's come to frequent the coffee house in his search for a place to relax and get some writing done, but this part of it always makes him wonder why anyone would come here for peace and quiet. The counter is always a virtual zoo and all the calamity is a little much for him.

Still, once he gets settled in with a drink in a comfortable chair -- preferably by the fireplace -- he's usually set. If nothing, it's always good time to think and be away from the apartment. Sometimes he gets some journaling done, or if he's lucky, he actually makes a little bit of progress on that damned book.

But the progress comes in fits and starts, and every time he feels as though he's made a run for the finish line, some other concern pops up that makes him step back and reconsider the entire work. Something still isn't flowing or coming together ... or something. He has notebooks full of false starts, revisions, reworkings, everything. Sometimes it looks like it might be able to fall together into a final product, but that has yet to become a reality.

He taps the pen against the cover of the notebook as another pair of drinks are called. It'd be nice to have a laptop to take around and use to work on this thing. He starts typing up parts of it on the computer at home, but it just winds up being an exercise in typing. It'd be nice to be able to retreat with his own computer to a quiet spot and do some of the writing on there.

Of course, that would be a big investment, and right now he'd rather save up the money to pay rent. He and Jason found some decent apartments while they were out hunting the other day, and the idea of being able to share one of those with Jay and not have to deal with his mother all the time is appealing enough to push aside all thoughts of a laptop.

"Tall white chocolate mocha!"

It takes Alex a moment to recognize the name of the drink he ordered, but as it clicks, his body is already taking the first steps over to the counter. He clutches the notebook and pen in his left hand and reaches out his right--

But before he can get a hold of the cup, another hand swoops in effortlessly and snatches it up.

Alex looks up, confused, annoyed, and a little embarrassed, into a smirking face that cuts him right in half.

## **CHARLENE POWERS AGENCY**

Molly slips the latest sheet of paper inside the folder and closes its cover. She turns back to the computer, saves the document one more time just in case, and then leans back in her chair with a heavy sigh.

She just has a couple more things to wrap up and then she can get out of here for the weekend. Not a moment too soon, either. This day has felt particularly long and sluggish -- especially since Brent's visit earlier. She's hardly been able to clear her mind long enough to focus on her work, and the amount of effort it's taken to complete the tasks she knew she had to get done has wiped her out.

As if on cue, a breath of fresh air blows by her desk, in the form of the lavender-wrapped Camille Lemieux.

"Good afternoon," Camille says in a sing-song voice, stretching out the end of the greeting to make it sound even more melodious.

"That was one heck of a lunch meeting," Molly says, glancing at the clock in the corner of her computer screen.

Camille just smiles and shrugs. Lots of executives would be disturbed to hear an assistant questioning their whereabouts, but not Camille. In the few weeks she's worked with the vibrant, older woman, Molly has developed a sense of great comfort around her.

"I decided to put in a little bit of extra work on this one," Camille says. The statement is accompanied by one of those looks that makes no secret of the fact that there's more to the story while making it clear that the rest of the tale is going to remain under wraps.

She disappears into the office and Molly busies herself momentarily with getting things in order. She is opening a new document in Microsoft Word when, out of the corner of her eye, she sees Camille's head poke out of the office.

"Molly, can I see you in here for a moment?"

Molly rises from her seat instantly, but she pauses before leaving the desk. She has a feeling this has to do with Brent's visit before, since it overlapped with Camille's exit for her meeting. Slowly she moves towards the office, not quite looking up at Camille.

She hears the door close behind her once she is inside and braces herself.

"So that man who came by earlier ..."

"Brent," Molly finishes, not even sure why she does it.

"Yes. He ... well, it's not that I want to be nosy, but--" A broad smile suddenly cracks across her face. "Actually, yes, I'm being nosy. I thought you said you weren't seeing anyone--"

"I'm not," Molly cuts in. To her ears the rebuttal sounds harsher than she intended.

"Oh." Camille seems to deflate for an instant, then fills back up, albeit apologetically. "It just seemed as if--well, you know."

"Yeah." Molly folds her arms in front of her. "Sorry I snapped at you. It's just ... it's more complicated than that."

Camille's face lights up again. "So if you were seeing someone, that would be the man?"

"Absolutely," Molly says. The quickness of the admission sounds so strange to her ears, but it also feels unbelievably good to say it. "But it's never going to happen. Dwelling on it isn't getting me anywhere."

"Why won't it happen? Molly, if you think he's not interested -- well, from the way he looked at you--"

"He is interested. That makes it a million times harder."

"If he's interested, and you're obviously interested, then what's the problem?"

"The fact that we are interested! It's ... ahh!" Molly buries her face in her palms. "The whole thing is far too complicated."

Camille's face crinkles up with intrigue. "Why do you say that?"

"Because ... he's in the process of getting divorced."

"That's not that bad, Molly. It will blow over, and then--"

"From my sister."

That brings the conversation's momentum to a halt.

"Exactly," Molly says. "See the problem now?"

"Yes, I suppose I do." Camille is a touch calmer now, though Molly recognizes that it is only a result of being thrown for such a loop. "Well, how did this come about? Have you always been interested in him, or--"

"Do you really want to hear the whole story?"

"I'd love to," comes the response, although it is tinged with a sense of caution and the awareness that she is involving herself in something far more complex than she ever suspected.

"Then have a seat and buckle up."

## **KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL**

Sarah drinks in the upscale decor of the suite as she strolls through the door. "Nice little setup you've got here."

"Wanna swap? I'm getting a little sick of looking at it," Diane says.

"Getting antsy for your own place?"

"Ohhh yeah. I think I'm gonna start searching around this week." Diane's full lips curl up in a grin. "And I have a good reason to stick around now."

"Oh yeah?"

"I got the job at Vision. I'm back in business, baby!"

Sarah expects some sort of dramatic flourish to accompany the announcement, but there is none. The drama is that there doesn't need to be any -- Diane never doubted that this job would be hers, so she doesn't need to celebrate. It's just another task to cross off the list.

"Congrats," Sarah says. She closes the door to the suite and looks Diane up and down. "You're certainly looking better than you were the last time I saw you."

"You meaning lying in that hospital bed?"

"Yeah. Definite improvement here."

"Well, it's good to know that all the time I spent showering and getting dressed -- and waking up! -- didn't go to waste," Diane smirks.

"Yeah, you don't clean up too bad. But hey, congratulations again on the job. I'm glad you'll be sticking around."

"Me, too," Diane says. "Maybe we can find some time to hang out. Eric told me you were at the hospital ... I really appreciate you being there."

"I was worried. I wanted to make sure you'd be okay."

"Hey, I always come out on top, right? Now I can get back to business."

"Exactly," Sarah says, clasping her hands together. "And on that note ..."

"What?"

"Well, I was talking to Eric while you were unconscious, and it gave me this idea."

Diane tilts her head. "Should I be worried?"

"No, no! I just made a little call to try and push things along for you."

Suddenly a strange, different energy buzzes in the air. "What do you mean?"

"I called Brian," Sarah says. "I found his number in L.A. and I told him about the accident. I was hoping he'd come to his senses and--"

"That was *you*? You're the one who started all of that?"

"All of what?"

"All of--Brian calling! I knew it had to be him!"

"He called? That's great!"



"No, it's not!" Diane's voice soars suddenly, taking on a new edge that sends a chill vibrating through Sarah. "What the hell made you think I *wanted* him to call? Or have anything to do with him, for that matter?"

Sarah's tongue trips over itself in several false starts before she actually gets any words out. "The way you talked about L.A.-- I knew something must've happened. I could see you wanted to do something about it--"

"Well, obviously you saw wrong!" Diane blasts back. She spins around, turning her back to Sarah, and stomps over to the window. "I cannot believe you would do something like this! And I thought you might be the one person who actually understood!"

"I do understand!"

"You don't understand a damn thing! Jesus, Sarah, why the hell would you do something so stupid?"

"I--"

"Get out!" Diane fires before Sarah can turn her stammering into anything. "I sure as hell don't need you causing any more problems for me!"

Sarah backs towards the door, unable to remove her gaze from Diane and from what has just happened. She thought she was doing something good for a friend, showing her concern by trying to help her get things in order.

Apparently not. She glances at Diane's cold stare again and then whips around in disgust, yanks the door open, and storms out.

## **FISHER HOME**

Paula turns off the water and grabs a dishtowel from a few feet away on the counter. She gives the plate a once-over and then sets it in the rack to dry.

"Claire," she says carefully, "I know you probably don't want to dwell upon it, but I wanted you to know that if you want to discuss anymore of this anytime, I am here for you."

"Thanks," comes the awkward reply. At least it's not a protest that she is fine and surely won't be needing any help. That's a start, as far as Claire is concerned lately.

"I'm so glad that you felt you could open to me about all of that," Paula continues as she returns to the table. "I miss the talks we used to have."

"So do I. Paula, I--it's been hard for me since ... since Tim died. But I never want you to think that I'm ungrateful for your friendship or for everything you've done for me. I do appreciate every little bit of it."

"I know that. And I value that bond just as much -- you know I consider you to be another one of my children, practically. That's why I feel like I should share something with you, the same way you felt you could share something that personal with me."

Claire stares questioningly while Paula seats herself in the same spot she sat at while they ate.

"This isn't something I've been able to share with anyone yet," Paula begins. "Well, Sarah knows, but she's a part of it." Discussing this at all, especially in the house, brings a certain tightness to her breathing. The thought of Bill walking in at any moment, even though she's knows it's completely unlikely, is almost too much to bear.

"Is this about ...?" Claire's expression reveals that she knows where this is going.

Paula nods. "I'm having Sarah search for him -- for the son I gave up for adoption."

"Bill doesn't know?"

"No, not ... not yet. I want to see what happens, if she can even locate him. It has to be done through the courts anyway, so this could take forever. I don't want to give Bill any more reason to be alarmed or get upset than is necessary, so if it turns out that he can't be found or--or he's deceased ... then it shouldn't have to be an issue."

"You're doing the right thing," Claire says, not missing a beat. The reassurance is an enormous comfort to Paula. She's needed to hear someone say that for a long time, especially amidst all these weeks of waiting for news from the court.

Claire's entire being seems to soften as she places her hand over one of Paula's. "If Tim were here ... I'm sure he'd think this was the right thing for you to be doing, too."

"You think so?"

"Absolutely, yes."

Paula pauses, somehow relishing this quiet moment with the close friend and daughter-in-law from whom she's felt so distanced for so long. And the thought that the son she misses so badly would be supportive of this mission that's caused her so much guilt and worry is an added comfort.

"Thank you," she says at last. "Somehow I think you're right."

She leaves the rest of the thought unspoken, though: If and when Bill does find out about this search, if this son becomes a part of their lives ... then Tim's presence and support would be invaluable to her.

## **CHARLENE POWERS AGENCY**

"Hmmm." The sound sprawls off Camille's lips, a long, contemplative sound that allows her some time to process everything she has just heard.

Molly waits patiently for whatever response is to come. Her tense limbs are awaiting the worst, but some part of her is offering assurance that Camille won't come down too hard on her for her role in the whole mess. Hopefully.

"That is certainly a ... unique story," Camille says as she offers a smile that Molly realizes is a reaction to the uncomfortable peculiarity of the situation.

"I'm fully aware of how unique it is," Molly says, exasperated. "I--I don't even know what to do now."

Camille uncrosses her legs delicately and leans forward, elbows on her knees. "What is it that you *want* to do?"

The frankness of the question catches Molly off-guard. It's not often that she's had to deal with such direct inquiries about her intentions regarding Brent, even from her own mind, and even less often has it even been possible for her to respond with a shred of honesty.

"I don't know. I ... It's all so mixed up. I thought the divorce would be a new beginning -- now that I think about it, I don't know why I thought that. It's just another end, a more definite end."

"Are you sure of that?"

Molly hesitates, but then says, "Yes. I have to be."

"But that's not how you want it to be?"

"Of course not," she admits with a heavy sigh. "I wanted to believe that once they were divorced, none of it would matter anymore. Sarah wouldn't care what he did or what I did, and we wouldn't have to feel guilty about it. But obviously that's ridiculous. It was just a fantasy."

Camille sits up straighter and gazes off into the corner of the ceiling. "Yes, I suppose there's no side-stepping any of that."

"Unfortunately, no. I've looked at it from every possible angle, believe me."

"But what do you owe her, really?" comes the response, quick as lightning and completely separate from Molly's last statement. "How long can you put your own happiness on hold entirely on account of someone who happens to be your sister, even though you'd never know it based on the way you both act?"

The rationale stuns Molly. The one constant throughout all of this, even the blowouts with Sarah and the moments of painful longing, has been that Sarah is and always will be her sister. Nothing can change that. But now a new question has forced its way into her mind, thanks to Camille: How thick is blood?

Apparently thick enough, she realizes. There's no way she can simply turn around and take up with her sister's soon-to-be ex-husband.

"I wish it were that simple," she says quietly.

"I know it's not," Camille says, softening. "I didn't mean to suggest that your relationship with your sister doesn't matter, or that you should destroy it entirely in the name of being with Brent."

Molly shakes her head. "I can't."

"I know. But--" Camille stands, but motions for Molly to remain seated. "How long can you put off your own happiness on account of other people? How much is that worth?"

Molly looks up at her hopelessly.

"Just think about it," Camille adds. She exits the office and shuts the door, boxing Molly in there with only her thoughts.

How much longer *can* she do this?

## **CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE**

"Hey! What do you think you're doing?"

The reprimand sends Alex's eyes spinning back to the cup that both their hands are reaching for, checking to make sure it's what he ordered. It is.

"That's mine," the other young man says, his initial aggressiveness now replaced by a distinct smugness. He snatches the cup off the counter before Alex's hand can get back to it.

Alex's throat thinks it is responding, but no result emerges. There is something about the other guy's look -- his unruly brown hair speckled with masterfully placed touches of blonde, the sparkle in his smile despite the obnoxiousness of -- something that has commanded his attention.

*Dammit*, he curses himself as he begins to turn away. It's the same stupid thing he always does, getting distracted by totally inappropriate feelings in totally inappropriate situations.

"Tall white chocolate mocha!"

The duplicate call goes unnoticed by both young men for a moment. Then, at once, both jerk their attention back to the counter, where the same drink has just been deposited again.

*So we ordered the same thing*, Alex realizes. He reaches tentatively for the drink and, once there is no move on the part of the other guy, takes it.

He moves to grab a napkin, still watching the other young man out of the corner of his eye despite his scolding mind. He moves towards a chair by the fireplace, watching as the long, lean body moves towards the exit.

And then it happens. The guy glances backward, a quick, casual scan before he leaves. But in the split-second when his eyes pass over the spot where Alex is settling, their eyes meet.

He feels himself freezing, overcome by the same awkwardness that never seems to stray too far from his body. The other guy's gaze pauses to examine him -- he's sure of it -- and then turns to that same cocky grin from before.

Alex rips his focus away and plants it back down on his coffee and notebook. He opens the cover and flips to an empty page.

He looks up again when he hears the bells that signify the opening of the door. He watches the tall, tan figure moving away from the building, out into the parking lot.

*What a jerk*, he thinks with a sigh, attempting to refocus on the work that he came here to do.

## END OF EPISODE #252

***What kind of guy should Alex be looking for in a romantic match? Did Diane's reaction to Sarah's confession surprise you? Join us at the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts with the producer and other readers!***

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