

"Footprints" Episode #265

[Previously ...](#)

- In New York, Sarah visited Matt's ex-fiancee, Andrea Yang, to begin investigating Matt's mysterious past. She didn't learn much -- except that Matt has a living brother whom he has thus far neglected to mention.
- Lauren helped Jason move into the new apartment and finally talked to Alex about their unresolved issues. She was unable to forgive him because of how badly she was hurt.
- Sally accepted Stan's marriage proposal.
- After Bill informed Paula of Sarah's continued anger over Molly's friendship with Brent, the Fishers got into an argument about their daughters. Paula worried that all their years of favoring Molly have permanently damaged Sarah and their relationship with her, while Bill felt that Molly and Brent should not be kept from continuing their friendship.

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

The moment Sarah enters the apartment, a surge of relief washes over her. It feels as though she's reached some sort of safety zone, but she doesn't know why. Just because she got back from New York without anyone finding out why she was there doesn't mean that trouble is over yet, not by a long shot.

She still can't let anyone know why she was there, not yet, especially not Matt. She still needs to take that next step: finding his brother in Pennsylvania. But how? She needs a name, certainly more than the last name "Gray" -- which for all she knows isn't even his real last name. The thought that he might not even be who he says he is sends a chill rattling through her body.

Shaking off her fears, at least for the moment, she sets down her bags by the door. The flight exhausted her; her limbs are weary, and so is her mind. What she needs is a nice, hot shower. But on her way towards the hallway, a blinking light catches her eye. The answering machine. She makes her way across the room, to the kitchen counter where the machine sits close to the edge, and hits the 'play' button.

"Hey, it's Diane. I told you I'd call about getting together, so here's my call. If you want to have dinner or something, let me know. Give me a call ..."

Sarah jots down the number quickly. She'll give her a call later.

No, wait, scratch that. She needs to talk to *someone* about what she learned in New York and, right now, Diane is her best bet. She picks up the phone and punches in the numbers as she reads them off the paper she just wrote them on, even though they're still fresh in her head. One ring passes before she gets an answer.

"Hello?"

"Hey Diane, it's Sarah."

"Hey! Where've you been? I've been trying to get a hold of you."

"Yeah, I just got your message. I actually, um, I've been out of town for a few days."

"What for?"

"I went to New York. I was ... starting out on my part of our bargain."

"Ohhhhh." She can hear Diane's interest level increasing tenfold, as she drops her voice to a conspiratorial volume and spits out two questions practically at once. "Did you find anything out? What'd you do?"

"I went to see Matt's ex-fiancee--that's a long story, but that's how I met him, through her. She didn't really know anything more than I do, except for one thing."

"Which is?"

Without realizing it until she has already done it, Sarah draws in a deep breath, as if preparing for some sort of dramatic reveal. "He has a brother he never told me about."

"*Really?*" Now Diane sounds downright intrigued.

"Yeah. I mean, I kinda figured that -- they were the two little boys in the picture. Andrea--his ex--said that Matt once told her he had a living brother, but he told me he had no living family left."

"That doesn't sound good, Sarah," Diane says, and when she gets no immediate response, she adds, "Think about it. He won't even tell you that he has family left. I may not like my sister, and I may not advertise her to people, but I don't hide her existence!"

With a heavy shrug, Sarah has to admit that much is true. She may not like Molly, but if someone she were interested in -- especially someone she shared a child with -- asked about her family, it wouldn't even cross her mind to deny having a sister.

"I hate to say it, but it sounds like there's something kinda fishy going on here," Diane continues, picking up the silence that Sarah has allowed to hang.

"As much as I don't want to believe that, I have a feeling it's true," Sarah says

reluctantly. "I don't understand how the same man I've known for three years, who I feel so close to -- God, probably the person I feel closest to in the world! -- the father of my daughter ... I don't understand how there could be something so terrible that he has to hide it from me."

"Maybe his family did something he's not proud of. Maybe he doesn't want to be associated with them. Or ... maybe he did something they're not proud of."

"Diane!"

"I'm sorry, I'm just telling it like it is. What are you gonna do, let your daughter go her whole life without knowing who her father really is? That's not fair to either of you!"

"You're right. I--ugh, I don't want to deal with this." Sarah clamps her eyelids closed tightly, briefly wondering if falling asleep might allow her to wake up and realize that this whole burgeoning mystery has been nothing but a dream.

"I can understand that." There is a note of sympathy present in Diane's voice that grabs Sarah's attention. Every now and then, she sees a soft moment like this come from Diane. Of course, the next thing out of her mouth goes right back to that no-holds-barred attitude. "But you can't just not face this. If you're making me deal with Brian, then you have to deal with this thing! And if you have any illusions of winding up with this guy, then you have to know where he comes from, who he is."

Sarah sighs. "You're right."

"Well, then, there ya go. You can do this," Diane says encouragingly. She pauses just long enough not to make the shift totally abrupt, then speaks again: "So anyway, how about those dinner plans?"

FISHER HOME

"It's a beautiful day, isn't it?" Paula asks as she leads the way across the deck, to the patio table where she has set up the makings of a perfect summer lunch.

"Yeah, it is," Molly agrees. "I just wish it weren't so hot!"

Paula laughs as they settle into chairs at the table. "We only have about a week's worth of days this warm every year. Enjoy them while they're here."

"I guess so," Molly says, not entirely convinced that its rarity should be enough to make her embrace the sweltering heat. She surveys the plates and baskets filled with rolls, lunchmeats, cheeses, and the like, and then looks at Paula seriously. "Mom, you didn't

have to go to all this trouble. I agreed to meet you during my lunchbreak -- I thought that meant some iced tea and sandwiches, not a full-out feast."

A sly smile works Paula's lips. "We do have sandwiches."

"Yeah, nice ones with fancy rolls! Well, I won't complain. Better than the Cup of Noodles I could be eating at my desk."

"There you go," Paula says, satisfied. "Besides, I'm glad you could join me. It's been a while since we had a chance to sit down and talk, just the two of us."

"It really has. I've just been so busy ... I need to make a point of stopping in more often."

Paula takes one of the onion rolls and begins slicing it, prompting Molly to do the same. These are her favorite rolls, a fact her mother knows quite well. Why all the trouble for a simple lunch? Molly feels a momentary twinge of guilt for moving into her own place, then stifles it: She's an adult. She's supposed to build her own life. But it probably wouldn't hurt to come by and visit her parents a bit more frequently.

As they build their sandwiches, Paula asks, "So what's new in your life, dear? How is work?"

"Work's going incredibly well, actually. It makes such a difference to be enjoying what I'm doing."

"Good! I'm so glad that you're happy at your job now. I know you didn't exactly have much passion for what you were doing when you were with Willis."

"That was exactly the problem -- passion. I just didn't feel anything for the work I was doing there. Even though I'm still doing assistant's work now, it's so much different. Just being a part of the fashion world is so exciting."

"I'm really glad to hear that you're enjoying it so much, Molly," Paula says. Her sandwich now prepared, she sets it down on her plate. "And what about ... outside of work? Do you have anything going on?"

Molly doesn't like the tone of the question one bit. It sets her pulse racing; she can picture the way the needle would be jumping if she were attached to a polygraph right now. "Not really," she admits truthfully. "Everything's been pretty routine."

"Oh." There seems to be a moment of calculation before Paula's next question, a moment that unnerves Molly greatly. "You haven't met anyone recently?"

"Um, no, not really. I'm sort of a wash-up in the dating department, I think."

Uncomfortably she finishes putting together her sandwich and takes a quick bite.

"That's nonsense, Molly. You're a beautiful girl. I know you've had some difficult experiences, with Craig and with Brian, but ... Don't you think it's time to try and meet someone?"

One of Molly's shoulders jerks upward in an awkward shrug. "No. I mean--well, yeah, it's not that I don't want to get settled, but you can't force it."

"I just don't want to see you wind up alone. Not that you can't be independent, of course, but I know that you'd like to have a family. I don't want to turn around one day and feel like you've run out of time--"

"I won't, Mom." Even to her own ears, Molly's response sounds a little harsh, but she can't help it. Why does her mother have to push this?

"All I'm saying is that it might be good for you to get out and put a bit more effort into meeting someone."

Molly doesn't even know how to answer that. Is Paula getting at something here? That's the impression that she gets, but then again, maybe she's just hypersensitive about the entire situation with Brent.

"Molly," Paula says, her tone now shifted to one that reeks of admonition, "I don't want to see you waste your time, not when there could be so much happiness out there for you. I know that you and Brent are close, but--"

"Is that what this is about? Mom, please, I know what I'm doing."

"You might think you do, but I'm not so sure," comes the stern reply. "You can't wait forever for something to happen."

"I'm not going to wait forever--"

"Then you actually think that you're going to have a chance with him? Molly ... he was married to your sister. Their divorce is barely final, for goodness' sake!"

Molly clams up now, surprised that she even admitted to waiting for Brent. She knows that's what she is doing, but she has continued to tell herself that if something "better" were to come along -- whatever that might mean -- she would have no problem pursuing it. But now she realizes that, for some time, she has been believing that there is nothing, or no one, better for her.

"You can't do this to Sarah," Paula warns, with a very real concern that momentarily

morphs Molly's outrage into guilt. "She made mistakes, yes, but the fact of the matter is that their marriage didn't work out and it hurt her very badly. For you to pursue Brent would be like pouring salt in her wounds."

"I know." Molly takes a deep breath, expelling a second "I know" with the heavy air. "And I wish it were that simple, Mom."

"It is that simple!" There is not a moment of hesitation before Paula's frenzied response. "You can't take up with your sister's ex-husband, especially considering the circumstances that ended their marriage. It isn't right."

Her teeth clenched tightly, Molly recalls Sarah bursting into her office, blasting her for even daring to share a meal with Brent. A tidal wave of anger rages over her and she slams her hands down hard against the table.

"That's why you invited me over for lunch, isn't it? You wanted to make sure I was keeping my distance from Brent?" She shoves back her chair and stands, unable to control the sudden burst of rage. "Did Sarah come to you and throw a tantrum? I'm sorry, but I'm not playing that game!"

"Molly, wait!" Paula calls out, rising to her feet as Molly stalks back to the house.

"Forget it! I am not wasting any more energy defending feelings that I have no control over!"

"Don't you think that's a little--"

"No! I don't need this, Mom." Before Paula can say anything else, Molly ducks into the house. She beats a furious path through the kitchen, dining room, and living room, straight to the front door.

How has she suddenly become the bad guy in all of this? Doesn't anyone realize how difficult it has been not to act on her feelings for Brent -- and for him not to act on his feelings for her? She's being respectful of Sarah's feelings, but she isn't going to give up something that important to her because her sister couldn't be mature enough to recognize that her marriage to Brent was a mistake from the very beginning and instead decided to manipulate all of them to hang onto some pipe dream.

Furiously, she yanks the door open and storms to her car. Once inside, she allows herself a few seconds to sit, breathe, and clear her head before driving. How can her own mother be against her in this now?

Is she really that horrible for even entertaining thoughts of being with Brent?

JASON FISHER & ALEX MARSHALL'S APARTMENT

"I got it!" Alex calls out, though it's probably not even necessary. The last he saw, Jason and Lauren were sprawled out on the floor of Jason's room with several newspapers, in the midst of some mad hunt. He doubts that either of them would very willingly make a dash all the way from the back bedroom just because of the doorbell, but he doesn't mind.

Yet when he opens the door, he suddenly wishes that one of them had answered it.

"Hey," he says, his tone not at all betraying his annoyance at the sight of Sally.

"Hi, hon!" she exclaims as she bursts into the apartment. Her eyes roam over the apartment freely, excitedly, and then her head nods approvingly. "Nice place you've got here. I'm glad I got a chance to come over and see it."

"Yeah, we, uh, we're pretty much all settled now." He forces out the stock reply, then falls quiet. Sally doesn't seem to notice as she takes a few more seconds to inspect the apartment.

"What brings you by?" he asks, having finally figured out what seems like a tasteful way to ask.

She draws in a giant breath, as if to build up the suspense, and then releases it all in a gush: "I have wonderful news!"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Alex, I ... I'm getting married."

"You're *what*?" He didn't think that what she had to say could possibly be of interest to him, but she proved him wrong. Getting married? He thought that she and King's Bay's answer to Al Bundy were settled into a happy little rut.

"Stan proposed, and I said yes," she says, savoring every moment of the dramatic reveal. "We're getting married in October."

"Wow. What, uh, what brought this on? I thought you were kind of down on the idea of getting married again after, you know, the whole thing with Don."

"I was. But Stan made so much sense ... Neither of us are young anymore and it will be nice to have someone to grow old with."

"It'll be 'nice'? Mom, that's ridiculous! This is a marriage, not some sort of--God, I don't even know."

"That's not the only reason," she says. "I care about him, Alex, I really do. And I don't want to live alone. This way, it'll be much easier to pay for the apartment, and I'll know that someone is there if I need anything--"

"Do you love him?" Alex asks, as a disgusted groan escapes his throat. "Do you really want to spend the rest of your life with him?"

"I need to spend it with someone!"

"Why? What is so bad about trying to be independent for once in your life?" He can feel the blood beginning to boil as it surges through his veins.

"You don't understand, Alex." She turns her back to him and draws her hands to her face. "Independence may seem like a terrific idea when you're in your mid-20s, but when you get to be my age--well, it feels more like loneliness."

"I can understand wanting to be with someone, for the security and everything," he says as his feet begin to pace over the carpet. "But Stan can't really be good for you in the long run, can he? Look at him ..."

"No one is perfect. You're going to learn that eventually. Sometimes we just have to take what we can get, not what we'd have in a perfect world." Her voice breaks slightly and he wonders how much of it is for sympathetic effect.

"Do whatever you want, Mom. But I refuse to believe that Stan is what's best for you in this world."

She turns back around slowly. "I know what I'm doing."

"Fine. Good. That's all that matters, right?"

She nods confidently, then asks, almost at the point of terror: "You're not going to do something stupid and try to stop me from marrying him, are you?"

"No! You heard what I said. You can do whatever you want." It's hard for him to be that nonchalant about it, but he doesn't want to fall into her trap and play the game like she wants him to, either. Yet he cannot help adding, "But I don't have to be happy about it, and I can't help being happy that I moved out before this whole commotion really gets in gear."

"I just don't want any trouble," she says almost desperately, as if she didn't even hear

what he said.

"You're not gonna get any from me," he says coolly. "Because no matter what I say or what I do, you're gonna keep making mistakes. Until you realize that you're just continuing the same destructive pattern, there's not a hell of a lot I can do."

JASON FISHER & ALEX MARSHALL'S APARTMENT

"These all suck!" Jason cries out, smacking his palm down into the center of the newspaper that is spread out before him. It crinkles, corners leaping up in a panic and then floating back down to the carpet.

"Calm down," Lauren says, her head popping up from the newspaper she has sprawled out over the bed.

"I am calm!" he shouts, serious despite the smile that breaks across his face.

"These can't *all* suck. There has to be at least one job in here that you want to do and could do."

He gives the paper in front of him a quick, dismissive once-over. "Nope, none."

"Gee, how optimistic of you." She pulls herself up to a sitting position and folds her legs together.

"I try. God, all I want is a *job*. Is that so hard?"

"Apparently. Look, there has to be something you can do ..."

"Damned if I know what it is," he mutters, rolling over to lie on his back. "This is what I get for putting off ever really getting a job for all these years so that I could skate."

"Come on, it's not like you weren't doing anything with yourself."

"Yeah, but it didn't exactly get me anyplace, did it?"

"Hey Jason," she says after a pause, in a non-revealing tone that piques his interest.

"What? You find something?"

"Not quite. Can I get you a lifejacket, though?"

He pulls his head far up off the floor so that he can see over the edge of the bed. "Huh?"

"Do ya need a lifejacket? Because it looks like you're gonna *drown in self-pity* pretty soon here," she says, the sarcasm that he finds so amusing now quite prominent in her voice.

He drags himself back up so that he is sitting with his legs straight out in front of him. "Okay, sorry, I'm being a huge ... poop."

"Yeah, you are. Come on, we can find something for you."

"I have a business major. I thought there was tons of stuff you could do with that," he groans, aware that the self-pity is lingering.

"There are a ton of things you can do!" She folds up the newspaper and tosses it to the floor. "But we're going about this the wrong way, I think."

"What do you mean?"

"We're trying to find, like, the perfect job for you. That makes it a lot harder than it needs to be."

A disappointed moan pops out of his throat. "You found a perfect job."

She tips her head to the left and widens her eyes. "I got lucky! I interned at Willis for two summers. It's not like it just fell into my lap. I sure as hell didn't find it in the newspaper."

"I wanna find something good, too--"

"And you can. But you're still skating now, and you need to build up some work experience, anyway. So let's look for something easier. Did you think about asking your dad for something? You could wait tables or whatever for a little while."

"No way!" he says emphatically. "I just moved out of my parents' house. I'm not gonna depend on them for work now."

"Okay, good point." She stops to think and he waits for her to produce another idea. He feels bad for sitting there and spacing out while depending on Lauren to come up with something, but right now he is tired of thinking about it and doesn't plan on giving it much more effort for today.

The idea doesn't materialize. Instead she says, "You'll find something, Jay. You're totally marketable. And don't feel like you've been wasting time all these years. You've accomplished so much with skating -- don't negate that."

"You're right," he sighs. "And I am being a major pain in the ass, I know. But I really appreciate your help. Thanks."

"My pleasure." Their gazes link in appreciation: his for her help, and hers for him trusting her to help him. It lingers that way for perhaps a second too long, until Jason suddenly scrambles to his feet.

"I think we need a time-out snack," he announces, already on his way out to the kitchen.

"Agreed!" Lauren jumps off the bed to follow him. "I call one of those chocolate muffins!"

KING'S BAY ICE ARENA

Courtney's breaths are shallow as she steps off the ice, covers her blades with her skate guards, and walks to the area full of benches where the skaters leave their equipment while on the ice. She drops the sweatshirt she's been carrying on top of her equipment bag, then unscrews the cap of her water bottle and downs a long, refreshing sip of the cold water.

"Some workout, huh?" Dylan remarks as he approaches the bench and sits down beside her. Courtney nods but manages a smile, too. In the few short weeks since their first tryout, she's grown much more comfortable around him. At first, she wasn't sure if she'd be invading his space if she sat by him while they put on and took off their skates, or talked to him while they weren't practicing, but they've fallen into an easy rhythm of chatting lately.

"At least we have a program finished," she says, "even though that means we have to run through all four minutes of it now ..."

"Just wait til she starts making us do double run-throughs of it. That's the part I hate most about getting ready for regionals. When I was skating with Alexa, our coach *loved* to just, like, run us into the ground with programs. Sandy doesn't seem so ... cruel."

"She's totally not! God, I've been with her so long, it's like she's a second mother sometimes."

"That's really cool," Dylan says, suddenly a little quieter, a little more reflective. "I've never really had a base like that with skating. I started at one rink, then we left it 'cuz my mom wanted to me to train someplace nicer with better coaches, then I left there to go to Anchorage and skate with Alexa ... I've been all over the place."

The admission takes Courtney by surprise, just by virtue of its sudden emergence and Dylan's obvious sincerity. The only reply she can muster is, "I guess I've been pretty

lucky that I've stayed grounded here pretty much my whole life."

"Yeah, it seems like a nice rink so far ..." Obviously something else is hanging on the tip of his tongue and it takes only a moment more for it to reveal itself. "So do you know if Jason is gonna keep skating or what?"

"To tell the truth, I have no idea. He was really upset that we weren't going to take our senior test together because we'd been planning it for so long, but I made it clear that I wanted to get my test and I wasn't letting our breakup get in the way of that. I don't know what he's planning to do now."

"It'd kind of be a shame for him to just quit and not, like, finish the one test he has left, especially since he's been skating for so long."

"Well, he's the one who screwed up. I'm not stopping him from skating, I'm just not doing it with him." She leans over and begin to loosen up the laces on her right skate.

Dylan leans down beside her and begins to untie his own skate. "Yeah, it's not your problem that he messed up. Do you mind my asking what happened?"

"Long story," she says with a groan. "The bottom line is, I thought I could trust him and he kept something from me that he thought I didn't need to know, even though it wound up making me look like a huge moron and my best friend got hurt in the process."

"Ouch. You're right, that doesn't sound like something you should forgive too quickly."

"It's not. And I don't plan to." She pulls off one skate, then quickly undoes the laces of the other. "I told him, it's not that I stopped caring about him, but I can't look at him the same way anymore. It was too big of a deal."

"I totally understand. So basically if he comes back full-time and skates at the same times we do ... we just don't care?"

"Pretty much, yeah." A familiar heaviness settles over her as she says it, but that's the way it has to be. She and Dylan have the beginnings of what could be a very successful partnership and she's not going to risk that because of awkwardness with an ex. "I'm not used to dealing with stuff like this, really. Jason was my first really serious relationship. But that seems like the right way to go about it, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, it is. One of my exes skated at the same rink as me in Anchorage, and I thought it was gonna be really awkward and stuff, but I just kind of tried to pretend like it didn't matter and that made it a lot easier. I just didn't let him get to me and that totally made me feel like I had the upper hand."

Courtney can't resist sidestepping his main point and diving into the more interesting portion of what he said. "He?"

Dylan cracks a tiny smile, but there's nothing sheepish or embarrassed about it. "Yeah, *he*. You didn't ... know?"

"Well, you didn't tell me!"

"It's not that hard to figure out," he grins, pulling off his remaining skate. "C'mon, Courtney, we're not exactly in the most macho sport there is."

"I know, I know. I just didn't ... you know ... know for sure." She pauses to pull out her towel, dries one blade lazily, and then abruptly puts down the towel. "So are you dating anyone right now?"

He shakes his head. "Nope. I'm still kind of getting settled in here, anyway. I haven't really met many people yet."

"Oh yeah? You're giving me an idea here ..."

END OF EPISODE #265

What kind of idea has gotten into Courtney's head? What did you think of Alex's reaction to Sally's news? And was Molly right to lash out at Paula for admonishing her about Brent? Join us in the Footprints Forum and make your feelings heard!

[Next Episode](#)