

## "Footprints" Episode #267

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

- Sarah returned from New York, having learned that Matt has a brother living in Pennsylvania whom he has never mentioned. Diane encouraged her to continue the investigation until she figures out what Matt is hiding in his past.
- Molly was enraged to realize that Paula was trying to dissuade her from spending time with Brent because it might hurt Sarah.

### **ERIC WESTIN'S APARTMENT**

Eric slings his tie over the back of the leather recliner, then continues on his way to the kitchen, undoing his top button as he goes along. It wasn't a particularly long day at the office, but it wasn't a light one, either; truth be told, he managed to slip out early simply because his head was feeling so battered by the day's work that he knew he wasn't going to get anything more accomplished this evening.

He pauses at the entrance to the kitchen and takes in the granite countertops, the tasteful cream color of the tiled floor, the matching cabinets and trim. His time at the office might seem grueling, but if it'll allow him to continue living like this, he'll gladly slave for as long as it takes to climb the ladder. Especially since he knows that the higher he climbs, the better it will get. Always better, always more. He smiles to himself, appreciating the fine decor of the kitchen once more before he moves to the refrigerator and begins searching for something that might serve as dinner.

Normally he dines out, or at least finds a way to have something prepared before it crosses the threshold of his apartment. Cooking has never been his thing. For as much as he enjoys having such an impressive kitchen -- particularly for an apartment -- he doesn't really care to use it. It's for storage, for show, for anything but actual gruntwork. He does enough of that during the day that it's the last thing he wants to worry about every evening.

He manages to find some leftovers from last night's business schmoozefest and pops them into the microwave. He undoes another button as he wanders back into the living room. This is going to be a relaxing night -- no worrying, no working, no strategizing. He'll eat, take a nice, long shower, enjoy a movie, and get to bed.

A groan slips out of his throat as he realizes that there is one thing he needs to attend to before he can relax. He crosses the room and picks up the phone, dialing quickly the number at the King's Bay Metropolitan Hotel that he has come to know all too well. But four rings sound in his ear and the answering service picks up.

He hangs up without a word. *She could still be at work*, he considers, then begins to dial that number. He halts mid-number, though. He knows that Diane seldom answers the phone in her office; she usually allows the machine to take calls so that she can decide later whether it's someone with whom she wants to speak or not. So instead he punches in the number of her cell phone.

"Hellooo," she coos upon answering, obviously having looked at the number flashing on the screen.

"Hi," he says, not wanting to sound disinterested but also too tired to put much effort into small talk. "Are you still at the office? I just tried the hotel and didn't get an answer."

"I'm actually out taking care of some stuff. What's going on?"

"I received a call today from the court. They've set a date for the final custody hearing."

The news seems to take her by surprise, because a short pause ensues before she gives a response. "Oh... When is it?"

"Two weeks from tomorrow. I have the time written down, I can check it for you."

"Don't worry about it. I'll just forget anyway. So is there anything we need to do to get ready for this?"

"I'd like to sit down for a bit and discuss the main points we want to make, that sort of thing. It shouldn't be a big deal, though. You've done a good job with Samantha since the temporary ruling. I don't see a reason for the judge to reverse that."

"Good! God knows I've been trying really hard not to screw up," she says with a laugh. "Do you think that car accident thing is gonna be a big deal? It wasn't--"

"It was an accident, simple as that," he says confidently. He can't imagine how that could be used against her. "In a snowstorm, no less. It's nothing to worry over."

"Excellent."

"Yeah, you've really got no reason to be concerned." He pauses just a moment, enough so as not to seem that he's calling simply to brush her off, then explains, "I had a rough day today, so I'm going to relax tonight. I hope you don't mind, but we can get together tomorrow if you like. I'm just exhausted tonight."

"No problem. I'm pretty busy anyway." She must be driving, because her voice is becoming obscured by a ridiculous amount of background noise. "Listen, I've gotta go. But I'll give you a call tomorrow night, okay?"

"Wonderful." He says a quick goodbye and then hangs up the phone, just as the microwave calls out that dinner is ready.

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Diane stuffs her cell phone back into her purse just in time to make the final right turn. She pulls the rental car into the parking lot and drives straight across to her usual spot, the spot to which she was once so accustomed.

Steeling herself for what is to come, she steps out of the car. She looks up at the building with a touch of wonder, almost having to remind herself that it's been well over a year since she laid eyes upon this place. It feels like she never left.

Well, based on appearances, anyway. She knows that once she steps inside, that feeling is likely to change enormously. She can hardly even believe that she's back here.

*But I am*, she thinks, adjusting her purse on her shoulder. Back in Los Angeles. Back at Brian's apartment.

Here goes nothing.

## **MATT GRAY'S APARTMENT**

"Dammit," Sarah mutters, backing away from the stove.

"What's wrong?" Matt asks from his post at the kitchen table, where he's reading a story to Victoria -- which mainly entails turning the page, beginning to read, and then getting interrupted and letting her give her interpretation of the story based upon the pictures.

"I just touched the burner by accident. No biggie."

"I can help you out--"

She holds up a palm to stop him from even standing. "No! You've been at work all day, cooking. I'm making dinner tonight."

He shrugs and throws up his hands. "Can't argue with that. We'll just finish reading our book over here while you finish cooking." He turns back to the book and begins to read where he left off, but Victoria takes the book out of his hands and closes it.

"That's the end," she says matter-of-factly.

He chuckles, then opens the book up again. "No it's not. Look, there are still some pages we haven't looked at."

"Daddy, it's the end."

Sarah laughs as she continues stirring the sauce. "Hey 'Daddy,' I think you lose."

"Guess so," Matt says, standing up. "Ya know, she's been getting pretty bossy lately."

"She's two. It happens. I think."

"That sounds reassuring. But hey -- you get to be the one who's wrong about everything now. Daddy did his time the last couple days."

"Matt, we're gonna be 'wrong' for the next, what, sixteen years? We should probably get used to it."

"Yeah, you're right." He sticks the tip of a finger in the sauce and then tastes it. "That's just about done."

"Hey, thanks, Galloping Gourmet." Still, she takes his advice and turns off the burner. "Oh, God, I didn't tell you about the food on the plane. It was awful." She describes the horrid airline offerings while she removes the pasta from the stove and drains it.

"Sorry I missed it," he deadpans. "So are you done with that case now?"

"What case?"

"The one you went to New York for. Is it over now?"

She almost chokes on her own air and has to make a conscious effort not to let the now-empty pot go clattering to the floor. She thought she'd said everything she would have to say about the actual visit to New York when they spoke on the phone earlier and she offered a few "fine" and "good"-type responses.

"Not yet," she says, setting the pot next to the sink. "I, uh, I've got some loose ends that still need to be tied up. But with any luck, it should all come together pretty easily." *Or a lot of luck, whichever,* her mind adds.

She pulls some dishes out of the cupboard, groaning inwardly at the sight of them. For such a phenomenal cook, she'd expect his kitchen to be stocked more ... nicely. But his dishes, cutlery, and the like are typical bachelor pad fare.

"You can set the table if you want," she says, piling on the fake sweetness with a laugh.

"Yeah, fine," he grumps. He takes the dishes from her and waits for her to dig out some cutlery.

She hands it to him, then begins moving the food into serving dishes. Suddenly a thought hits her and she has to voice it. "You know, I really love these nights. There's something about them ..."

"What do you mean?"

"These nights when the three of us have dinner together and we cook and watch movies and all that stuff. It feels like ... family. It kind of reminds me of when I was growing up. At least the times when I didn't want to strangle somebody."

He pauses to consider the thought. "I guess we are family, the three of us. Even though we're not--ya know--"

"Yeah. It's weird." And just like that, another idea strikes her and she has to place aside the warm sentiments to pursue it. "Is this what it was like when you were growing up? Mom making dinner, Dad getting home from work, you playing, the whole American dream sorta thing? Sometimes we were sickeningly like that, I think."

"It was normal," he shrugs. She can tell that he's trying to brush away the topic and it fills her with a sudden rush of anger. How can he just completely keep things from her?

"You've never told me much about your family or your childhood or any of that stuff."

"There's not much to tell. It was just ... normal."

Her anger swells again, making her even more determined. How can they be this close and yet he's so willing to keep such a large part of his life from her? "Well, I wanna know about it. There's so much I *don't* know ... Do you even have any brothers or sisters?"

He focuses on setting the table, much more meticulously than he normally would. "I told you, Sarah. I don't have family left."

"What does that mean? What happened?" she asks as casually as she can, anxiously awaiting the moment of truth.

**CHARLENE POWERS AGENCY**

"Are you almost finished with that?" Camille asks as she breezes by Molly's desk and back inside her office.

"I'm close," Molly calls out, trying not to let her attention break from the task at hand even a little bit. She's been working on this all day and now her fingers are slipping all over the keyboard in a sort of determined daze. She'd like nothing more than to throw in the towel and finish it up tomorrow, but she knows that it will be better to have it done tonight.

"Whenever you're finished, come in here. I need to talk to you about something." Camille's somewhat ambiguous request sets Molly's heart racing a touch faster, making it even more difficult for her to focus on the remainder of this behemoth job.

With a groan she pushes herself to continue typing, now thankful that she all she has to do is copy figures -- albeit a ridiculously large number of them -- and organize them into all these tables. Anything requiring creativity or insightful input probably wouldn't work too well right now.

In just a matter of minutes, she is done. She saves this latest file, leans back in her chair, and exhales heavily. Even in her frenzy, she was right: Finishing this tonight was a much better idea than leaving the rest for morning. At least now the burden is completely off her shoulders. And yet ... her stomach has been winding tighter and tighter over these last few minutes. Camille's request to speak with her in private has proven rather unsettling.

With a bit of resistance, she rises from her desk and begins the short stroll to Camille's office. The floor is nearly entirely empty. Though she was aware of the advancing hour, she was too consumed finishing that project to notice that almost everyone was clearing out. Now the buzz of the workday has been replaced by a calm quiet that is almost eerie.

"I'm finished," Molly announces at the door of Camille's office, though what she really means is, "What did you want to see me about?"

"Could you shut the door?" Camille asks politely enough as she continues straightening up the things on her desk. She doesn't sound angry, but still ...

Molly closes the door, then moves over to linger in front of the desk awkwardly. After a few seconds, Camille looks up.

"Have a seat."

Wordlessly Molly plants herself in one of the chairs across the desk from Camille and waits, hands in her lap and fingers fumbling nervously, for whatever it is that her boss has to say.

"You really didn't have to stay so late to finish that," Camille says after a painfully long spell of quiet.

"I wanted to get it done."

Camille finishes placing a few items in a drawer, then focuses her full attention on Molly. "That's actually what I wanted to talk to you about, in a way."

The only response Molly can manage is to furrow her brow. Her throat is too dry to ask for more of an explanation. Did she do something wrong?

"As you've seen, I've been working on some rather interesting designs," Camille begins. "Designs which, like you said, probably don't fit the Charlene Powers image too well."

Molly nods, awaiting the opportunity to see where this is going.

"The truth is, Molly ... they're not for Charlene Powers." She pauses, heightening the drama just as one would expect from a bigwig in the fashion industry. "I'm leaving the firm."

"Oh." The single word is all that Molly can squeeze out. Too many questions are suddenly unraveling and soaring around her head.

"And I want you to come with me."

"Ohhh," Molly repeats, but with far more relief this time. She's not fired. Whew.

"You've been an incredible assistant. I don't want to search for another one and, frankly, I'd miss working with you. So I'm making you an offer. If you choose not to accept it, I would be endlessly grateful if you'd not speak of any of this -- at least for now -- to other people in this office. But I hope that you will accept ... So Molly, would you like to join me at my new firm? You'd be my assistant at first, but I see so much potential for growth in you, and I'd be able to offer you the opportunities for it."

Molly is still trying to digest this turn of events as her brain scrambles to produce an answer. She'd miss working with Camille if she stayed, but will she even have a job left here when Camille goes? Does the new firm have a shot at success, or is it going to fall apart and leave her no further along in the world than she was when she got this job?

"Wow," she finally says breathlessly. "Thank you for even thinking of inviting me to join you, Camille. But I have a lot of questions ..."

"Just as I expected you would. You're far too intelligent to make a decision of this

magnitude without exploring the specifics first. And I'm prepared to answer whatever questions you might have."

And so Molly begins to untangle the threads of curiosity and concern that have wound themselves around each other in mind, pouring each one out and then taking in Camille's answers before allowing the next to spill out. Amazingly, her optimism never cracks, never has reason to shatter and send her back into the reality of everyday living. This opportunity sounds amazing and she has trouble believing that anything could be wrong with it -- at least, anything that wouldn't be worth working through. And by the time she leaves the office, she has just as much trouble believing that she would ever turn down the offer.

## **MATT GRAY'S APARTMENT**

"It's not some big story," Matt says, lifting one shoulder practically into his ear as he pauses in the midst of setting out the dishes and cutlery.

Sarah's not giving up that easily. "What happened to your parents? Did they ... I mean, are they dead?"

He nods, though he doesn't lift his eyes from the table even though everything is now laid out. "Car crash. It was icy, they spun out and flew off the road."

"Wow." She takes a moment to soak up the information, then offers gently, "I'm really sorry, Matt."

"I'm over it," he says quickly, almost unfeelingly, but then he softens, obviously realizing that it didn't come out as he intended. "There's nothing I can do to reverse it. It was twelve years ago. So I try not to worry about it anymore."

"I guess that makes sense," she says, still very soft. She's not sure how to handle this news, although she has been expecting for some time to learn that Matt's parents had passed away. "I'm glad you told me," she adds.

"It's not something I like to talk much about." With that, she can tell that he's once again brushed aside the conversation. She's not going to get anything more out of him, not right now. There's no use asking about his brother ... She should probably just be grateful that she got him to open up about his parents.

"What you said before," he says abruptly, jerking her from her thoughts, "about us being like a family. I've thought of it that way before, too."

"You have?"



"Yeah. Remember what I told you on the pier that night?"

"Of course." Her answer comes swiftly. That night may have been one of her lowest points: Brent tried to get her to sign the divorce papers; her anger towards Molly got so wild that she pushed her sister right into the bay. And there was Matt, waiting in the wings to calm her and console her, to make her realize that even though she could have lost everything that night, she still had him.

"I didn't just forget about all that stuff, Sarah. I've been waiting for the right time 'cuz I didn't wanna push you into anything. But now the divorce is official and we've gotten to spend some normal time together ..."

She gets the impression that he needs some sign that it's okay to continue, so she nods. It's all she can do right now.

"I still wanna be with you," he says. "More than ever. You, me, and Victoria -- we are a family and I want it to stay that way."

Ever since he made his feelings so clear that night all those months ago, Sarah has been holding tight the hope that one day everything might fall into place between them. But then she still had to deal with actually signing the divorce papers, and seeing Brent and Molly's continued closeness, and then all this mystery about Matt's background. It's never quite seemed like the right time and she's frequently wondered if Matt lost interest in being that close and simply wanted to be friends and raise Victoria. So now that he's once again announcing that he wants to be with her ... she can hardly keep herself from screaming with excitement -- and breathing a deep sigh of relief.

"I want it to be that way, too," she says finally. He has already drawn closer to her and now he lifts a hand to cup her cheek gently. She waits, not wanting to ruin the moment, and watches as he moves even closer. Their faces are just inches apart; she can smell his scent, strong and masculine; and her mind keeps jumping back to how it felt to be with him that night that they conceived Victoria nearly three years ago.

Her eyelids fall closed as she leans in just a hair and, finally, their lips meet. His mouth is warm and comfortable, and the moment's intensity erases everything in the world except the two of them.

When they part, she holds her eyes closed for a moment longer, wanting to savor everything about the kiss. But reality quickly intervenes as she hears Victoria's hurried running steps and her little voice.

Matt picks up their little girl and sets her in the high-chair, and Sarah begins moving the food over to the table. They eat dinner as normal, spending most of the time chatting with Victoria instead of engaging in any sort of real conversation. But at one point, Matt

catches her eye with a look that says, "We'll get back to that later."

The only response she can conjure is to smile giddily.

## **BRIAN HAMILTON'S APARTMENT**

The familiar hallway now looks foreign to Diane as she strides down it. She's been to this building so many times, spent so many hours at Brian's apartment -- hell, she even helped him pick the place -- and yet, at this moment, it feels as though she is visiting someplace she has never been before.

*Don't worry so much*, she scolds herself as she comes up to his door. *You're just here to see if he's cooled down yet.*

She forces herself to knock before the act becomes too intimidating. Almost instantaneously she hears the bustling inside that indicates Brian is at home and is about to answer the door. Her breath tightens in her chest and she tries her best to adopt a calmer, smoother breathing pattern.

The door flies open casually enough, but then the first thing Diane really sees is the shock on Brian's face. She can almost picture how time must have practically just stopped for him: One minute he's watching TV or eating dinner or whatever, and the next, he's face-to-face with something so serious and important -- and so unexpected.

"What are you doing here?" he asks, caution already creeping into his voice.

"I came to see you," she declares.

"So you just up and flew down the West Coast? God, nothing stops you, does it?"

"Nope, not really." She glances past him, over his shoulder, into the apartment; it looks much the same as she remembers it. "Mind if I come in?"

He hesitates, then says, "Yeah, actually, I do."

"Huh?"

"I'm not playing this game anymore, Diane."

"Game? What game?" She strikes an offended pose, hands on her hips and mouth frozen just a little bit open. "I came to see if we could get back to normal."

"That's exactly what I'm talking about! 'Normal' *is* a game with you. Did you think I would've just gotten over everything that happened?"

"I thought you might've calmed down! Jeez, I don't remember you having such a stick up your butt."

"I think you're just mistaking my common sense," he says harshly, "which is probably about right, considering that you have absolutely none and wouldn't recognize it if it smacked you in the face."

"Down, boy! What's with the attitude?"

He sighs, a tense intake of air followed by an equally unrelaxed release. "Do you really not get it? Do you not see that I'm not just going to 'get over' what happened and let things go back to the way they were? I learned my lesson, Diane."

He moves to shut the door, but she blocks it with her arm. "Let me get this straight. You're gonna be in my face and never think about any of this again? You'll never want things to be at all the way they used to be?"

"I do want things to be the way they were," he admits after another hesitation. "I wish they could be. But you went out of control. I don't think you understand how badly you screwed up!"

"I get it," she says triumphantly, not allowing him to sweep her up into the mad rhythm of the confrontation. "This is about Serena, isn't it? As long as you're with her, you can't let things be okay between us or she'll get upset, right?"

"We're not together anymore, actually," he admits in a much quieter tone. "But that doesn't change things. I'm not just going to forget ... and I think you'd better go."

She's not going to protest -- she did *not* come all the way here to grovel -- but she doesn't quite believe that's going to be the definite end of it, either. Brian doesn't even seem convinced of that. Yet he doesn't make any move to keep her from going and she's sure as hell not going to be the one to crack.

Wordlessly she retraces her steps down the hallway, into the elevator, and back out to the car. She doesn't feel like this should be the end of things, or that it really is, but there seems to be no other way to deal with it. So maybe this is it ... But what happened to her best friend? What happened to the way they used to work together, the way they could have taken on the world if they so chose?

Serena Scott, that's what.

Cursing under her breath, Diane tries to figure out her next step. It's not ending like this -- it can't.

## **END OF EPISODE #267**

*Can Diane and Brian mend fences? How will this new turn in Sarah and Matt's relationship affect her investigation? And what about Molly's latest professional move? Come voice your thoughts in the Footprints Forum!*

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