

"Footprints" Episode #274

[Previously ...](#)

- While sulking at 322 over her situation with Brent, Molly was surprised to meet Eric, who struck up a conversation with her. She complied with his request for her phone number.
- Claire and Ryan called 911 after Sally was shot and Stan escaped, but they knew it was too late as they waited for the sound of sirens.
- Alex returned home from his date with Dylan to receive a visit from police officers bearing the news of Sally's death.

FISHER HOME

Ryan turns the key and pulls it from the ignition, and the car goes quiet with a sigh. In the passenger seat, Claire does the same; all the tension of last night and the anxiety of what's to come are swirling within her, refusing to grant her even a moment's peace.

Her night was almost entirely without sleep, and when she finally dragged herself out of bed this morning, she'd have crawled right back in if there were any hope at all of actually getting some sleep. But there's no way she could have gotten any rest in that apartment, knowing what had happened just hours before in the living room -- knowing that Sally's blood was still all over the carpet.

Ryan invited her to spend the night with him, but she would have felt even less comfortable spending the night under the same roof as Nick Moriani, so she declined.

Now the bright autumn sun is burning her eyes, making the lids even wearier. The November chill sweeps over her the moment she opens the door, pummeling her with reminders that winter is coming nearer with every day that passes.

"You didn't call them or anything?" Ryan asks as he walks around the front of the car to meet her on the sidewalk.

"No--I just thought it'd be easier to come over and explain. If I called and said I had to come over and tell them something, they would be in a total panic."

"Point taken."

They walk to the foot of the steps that lead up to the Fishers' porch, then pause in unison.

Claire doesn't know why Ryan stops -- probably uncertainty, waiting for her to lead the way -- but she can't help her own hesitation. Bringing Ryan into Bill and Paula's home

seems very strange, even though she needs him beside her right now. She hopes they'll understand and not make an issue of it; she really can't deal with that right now.

She lifts a hesitant foot onto the first step and makes the ascent, with Ryan trailing close behind her. The ring of the doorbell brings footsteps in an instant, and a moment later the door opens to reveal Paula.

"Hi," she says, very apprehensively, obviously confused by the sight of Claire on her doorstep when she is supposed to be away for the weekend. Her eyes stray over Claire's shoulder and her reaction to the sight of Ryan is reserved: obviously uncomfortable, perhaps a little upset, but doing its best not to reveal any of that.

"Bill, Paula, this is Ryan," she says, her voice crackling as she adds, "Ryan Moriani." The explosion that she's half-expecting from the Fishers doesn't come. "Ryan, these are Tim's parents, Bill and Paula Fisher."

Handshakes and "nice to meet you's" are exchanged, but Claire isn't sure if the awkwardness is within her or if the other three feel it, too.

"Why aren't you at the concert?" Paula asks as she moves aside to let them inside the house.

Answers begins to trip off Claire's lips, but finally she gets enough of a handle on some words to begin explaining. "Have you seen the newspaper yet?"

"Yes," Bill says. His brow wrinkles with confusion as he attempts to figure out how the newspaper connects to Claire. "Why?"

"What's going on?" Paula jumps in.

Claire takes a deep breath, then nods toward the living room. "Let's go sit down first."

CHASE HOME

The whole neighborhood looks strange to Alex as his feet carry him up the Chases' driveway. There's nothing different about it, but ... the whole world seems different now, somehow. It's as if his entire reality has been turned on its head.

Which it has, in a way. How can his mother just be gone? Forever?

He fell asleep in a daze last night, still in his clothes, on top of his bedding. When he woke up this morning, the sun had begun to poke through the blinds, his room looked as it usually does, and there was a moment while his head was still clearing in which there

didn't seem to be anything out of the ordinary about his world.

And then it came crashing down on him. Last night's events enveloped him and suddenly he was back in that alien world from which he somehow managed to escape into sleep hours before.

He rings the Chases' doorbell, then has an immediate urge to bolt. He doesn't want to have to explain this to them--

Too late. Courtney opens the door and concern is already written all over her face.

"Hey. What's wrong?" she asks.

His breath is growing heavier and suddenly the thought of speaking is a lot more daunting than it should be. He called before driving over, partly to be sure they were home and partly because that would force them to ask what's going on -- and right now, he seems to need that prompting.

"Did something go wrong last night?" she adds, sounding more panicked.

He begins to nod, then stops himself. She means with the date, not with his mom. She has no idea ...

"Not with Dylan," he says. "Your mom and dad are here, right?"

"Yeah." She turns back toward the living room and kitchen. "Mom! Dad! Can you come here?"

Don and Helen come rushing to the foyer. Obviously Courtney didn't alert them to the phone call. Why would she, if she thought it had to do with the date?

"Alex," Don says upon catching sight of him. "What's the matter?"

"It's my mom," he says, having to force out every word. Their eyes are burning into him, waiting for what he has to say, but he so badly doesn't want to say it.

"My mom. There was a--a shooting."

MOLLY FISHER'S APARTMENT

"Whew," Molly says to herself as she tosses her sweatshirt over the side of the couch. Getting up early on a Saturday to go to the gym wasn't such an appealing idea two hours ago, when she was trying to coax herself to get out of bed, but now that she's gone,

she's thrilled that she went.

Rex has been at her heels since the moment she walked in the door, his little pug face looking expectantly up at her.

"I suppose you think you deserve a treat for greeting me at the door, huh?" she asks, reaching down to scoop him up in her arms. Suddenly she notices how heavy he feels; his first birthday is approaching rapidly, she realizes. He won't be her little puppy anymore.

It's almost been a year since Brent gave Rex to her for Christmas, too. Even though it wasn't spoken at the time, the puppy was a sort of symbol of a new beginning: Brent and Sarah were finally divorcing, and Rex was a chance for him and Molly to share something -- something unofficial, maybe not the thing they both wanted, but something nonetheless.

Now it's almost a year later, and what do they have to show for all that promise? Not much. Even then she knew that things would have to move slowly, but ... not this slowly. Or at least with this little progress. It seems as though every time there's an opportunity to move forward, all they do is ram into a brick wall. And to make the next step, Molly would basically have to disregard the wishes of her entire family ...

The shrill cry of the phone intrudes -- somewhat mercifully -- upon her thoughts. It also sends Rex into a frenzy, so she sets him down. The phone rings again and she makes a move for it, but the dog gets in the way, as though he's trying to protect her from it.

Another ring calls out before she is able to push Rex back far enough so that she can reach the receiver.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Molly?"

The voice is instantly recognizable to her. Maybe not the voice itself, but something about the inflection. And the fact that she's been expecting -- or, rather, hoping for -- this call.

"Eric? Hi!" she answers. "How are you?"

"I'm fine. And you?"

"I'm doing well," she says, trying to shoo Rex away from her feet. He's circling them with the familiar determination to get in a few bites at any cost.

"I hope it's not too early to be calling--"

"No, no, it's fine. I've been up for a while."

"Good, I was afraid I'd wake you. I was just hoping to catch you before you went out for the day."

A laugh slips out before she even notices it. "Not much danger of that, don't worry. I think I'm staying in and catching up on some work today."

"Ah-ha ... Well, would you be interested in a break for dinner this evening?"

She was fairly certain that he'd be calling when she gave him her number, but there was still an undeniable fear that he'd go home and wonder what ever possessed to ask for her number in the first place. Even if part of her might have been hoping he wouldn't call so she wouldn't have to make this decision ...

"Yeah, I would," she says, unable to keep a grin off her lips. What is she doing? Actually agreeing to go out with him?

Yes. Actually making plans to go on a real date -- one that she doesn't have to justify to anyone.

FISHER HOME

"My goodness," Paula says, the words thin as they slide from her lips in a troubled breath. The weight of Claire's story has begun to settle over all of them in the form of a thick, confusing silence.

"Have you been to the hospital yet?" Bill asks, suddenly, in the middle of it.

Claire shakes her head.

"I tried to convince her that getting checked out might be a good idea, but she didn't want to go," Ryan says.

Bill's expression wavers between frustration and compassion as he addresses her. "You really should go, Claire."

"I'm fine," she insists, pulling back just enough so that they all know they should drop it. It's not the time to keep pushing.

"Do they have any idea where this Stan has gone?" Paula asks.

Claire shakes her head again. "We haven't heard anything."

"You shouldn't stay in that apartment," Bill hastens to add.

"It's not as if I have much choice."

"Move in here," Paula says almost immediately.

Claire seems somewhat taken aback by the proposal, and she looks to Ryan for his reaction. He shrugs, as if to say, "It's your call."

"We'd love to have you," Paula adds.

Bill seconds the sentiment with an emphatic nod.

"I think I might have to take you up on that," Claire says after a lengthy pause. "It would be much safer ..."

"That's what matters right now," Ryan jumps in from the fringes of the family conversation. But it's a smart enough comment, and Paula and Bill both agree readily.

"Thanks, both of you. I--This will be good," Claire says. And then, without warning, she leaps to her feet. "Is Travis awake? I need to see him."

"He's upstairs playing," Paula says, beginning to rise, then pausing midway. It strikes her that Claire and Ryan might want to go see Travis by themselves.

Bill must be having the same thought, because he meets Paula's glance with one that suggests she stay seated. They sit in silence as Ryan follows Claire's lead up the stairs.

"Moriani," Bill says, leaning conspiratorially closer to Paula once Claire and Ryan are gone. "Isn't that ... ?"

"Yes. Claire told me they were seeing each other, but she asked me to try to be understanding--"

"Understanding? Aren't those the same people she thought were responsible for Tim being killed? The ones she was determined to have arrested at any cost?"

The straightening of Paula's lips into a thin line indicates that Bill is correct, but she adds quickly, "She believes that his father--his adoptive father, not that Stan--could be the one responsible. Ryan claims not to know anything and she's chosen to trust him."

"We need to keep an eye out for her," Bill says after a thoughtful pause. "With as much as she's had to go through ... I hope that she's actually making wise decisions, not just easy ones."

A shrug moves Paula's shoulders. "If he can help her make it through a time like this ... then who knows? Maybe he really is good for her."

CHASE HOME

"I should have stopped her," Alex says, dropping his head as he concludes his story. What other way is there to end it? There's a reason that this happened.

"You couldn't have," Don says insistently. "Your mother--she was determined to go through with this marriage. She wanted to prove that things could turn out well for her, too."

"No, she wanted me to stop her from marrying him! I knew that the minute she told me they were engaged. But I refused. I didn't want to play that game. And now ..."

"You shouldn't have had to play any games. I reacted the same way, Alex. I wished her happiness but told her that her decisions were her decisions and it didn't matter what I thought."

"But it did matter!" Alex says. It feels strangely relieving to say these things that have been eating him from the inside since he received the news. "I knew what horrible decisions she made. I was supposed to be the one who balanced her out and made her look at things differently."

Courtney begins stroking his arm slowly, her touch light and comforting. "You didn't know things would turn out this way, Alex. There's no way anybody could have."

"This is not your fault," Helen adds. "That man--he's the one who caused this. He's to blame, not you."

Alex has to choke back a hard lump before he can speak. "He is to blame. But I knew he was trouble from the beginning--"

"You knew he was a loser," Courtney says. "You didn't know he could be dangerous."

"So? I should have followed my instinct and gotten her away from him a long time ago. But I was too worried about my own crap ..."

"You were living your life," Don says firmly. "That is not a bad thing. It doesn't make you

responsible for something that happened to your mother."

Alex hears the words, but they move right through him. "I was on a date! She was bleeding to death and I was out on a date."

"You just as easily could have been sitting at home," Courtney says. "Or hanging out here. There was no way for you to know what was going on."

All Alex can do is shake his head. Tears are clouding his vision again, the same tears that dried on his face while he was trying desperately to fall into sleep last night.

"I'm so sorry you have to go through this," Don says, reaching out an arm to pull Alex into a hug. "But we're here for you."

He moves numbly into Don's arms, but the only thing he can think is that the Chases aren't his real family. That was his mother, and she's gone now.

And now there really is nothing he can do about it.

END OF EPISODE #274

How should Alex deal with his grief? Should Bill and Paula accept Ryan as a part of Claire's life? What are your predictions for the Molly/Eric date? Come on over to the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts!

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