

"Footprints" Episode #275

[Previously ...](#)

- Claire brought Ryan to the Fishers' to inform them of the fiasco involving Stan and Sally. Bill and Paula invited her to move in with them and she readily agreed.
- Matt professed his feelings to Sarah and they shared a kiss, but were interrupted by Victoria. Sarah continued to be troubled by his lack of explanation about his past.

GRAYSON COVE

The sharp autumn sunlight assaults Stan's eyes as he does his best to peel them open. The lids are heavy and in pain, somehow, from weariness alone.

He lifts his head with the intention of checking the time and is immediately reminded of how much he drank last night. The alcohol's vice grip on his brain begins to recede as he lays his head back down in the sand and closes his eyes.

Finally he works up the nerve to open his eyes again and, trying to hold off the sun's attack with one arm, brings the other wrist just in front of his face so that he can look at his watch.

Shit.

How he's managed to sleep almost until the afternoon, he has no idea. He didn't even want to fall asleep last night, but he was so tired -- from the drinking, from Claire, from the struggle, from running and running -- that he finally allowed himself to crash under some rocks on the beach, on the condition that he'd probably wake up early anyway.

It's a miracle he hasn't been found down here by now.

Then again, maybe he has been -- found and overlooked. For all anyone knows, he's just another bum passed out on the beach. No reason to do anything but keep walking, maybe pick up the pace a little to hurry past with disturbing him.

Just another bum. This is all goddamn Ryan's fault. Goddamn Ryan and Claire. They had to keep pushing. They had to make him the scapegoat for all their problems.

If only he'd had the chance to teach Claire a lesson. *Really* teach her a lesson. Too bad Ryan had to come barging in -- and Sally. Why Sally? She must have followed him. Damn nosy bitch.

He's lucky he got out of there when he did. Even blocks away, he heard the sirens headed for the apartment. No doubt they called the police the minute he was gone.

"Lucky I didn't get found down here," he mutters to himself. His voice sounds scraggly, and all he wants to do is close his eyes and go back to sleep.

But not now. Definitely not here. He knows what he has to do.

He tries to ignore the rockiness in his head as he struggles to his feet.

CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

"You don't need to pack *everything*," Ryan says, standing by as Claire shoves what seems to be every item in her bedroom into a suitcase. "It's not like you're officially moving out. You can come back for stuff."

"I don't exactly have a great urge to come back here at all," she says, nevertheless pausing to contemplate whether she needs both pairs of pants in her hands.

She decides that she just might, so both go into the suitcase.

"I'm really glad Paula and Bill offered to let me stay with them," she says as she returns to the dresser to gather more things. "I was really dreading the idea of having to spend another night here."

"You could have come to stay with me."

She freezes mid-action and hovers over the suitcase for a moment.

Apparently her thoughts are more conspicuous than she hoped. "I know you don't trust my father," he says. "I guess I can't blame you. But I'm--"

"Let's not get into this right now." A ragged sigh escapes her chest.

He accepts the request without a fight and moves over to the closet, examining its contents idly. "I hope they have something to tell us about Stan soon."

"I know. Just the idea of him running around out there ..."

"They're going to catch him."

She suddenly increases her pace, half-folding and shoving clothing into the suitcase as

quickly as she can. "I hope so."

"He's not smart enough to get very far, Claire."

"Which means he's probably lurking around King's Bay somewhere, waiting to pounce. Great."

"He's not going to hurt you," Ryan says, crossing back to the side of the bed and placing his hand on her shoulder. "He's not even going to get near you. The police are on top of this. And besides -- I'm here."

She allows herself to be folded into his embrace, his arms wrapping around her shoulders and pulling her in to him. He hunches down rests his chin on her shoulder.

"Stan is not causing any more problems," he says with a cold determination that sends her mind rushing back to thoughts of Nick and even of her father.

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

Sarah sets her coffee down next to the computer, types a few words, and then picks up the coffee again. She drains a long sip of it, letting it warm her insides and cancel out the chill that she just can't seem to eliminate entirely from the apartment.

She's been trying to finish up this report for a client for several hours now -- in fact, she woke up early to work on it so that it would be out of the way. But some force seems determined not to allow her to focus on it right now.

Okay, so maybe it's a little less mysterious than that. She's been preoccupied with Matt for days now, but she's been too busy taking care of this case to be distracted. Until now.

"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."

There was an energy, a potential, in the air that night. Of course, they never got to realize it; Victoria got grumpy after dinner, both of them were tired, and they couldn't even finish watching an entire movie. But there was that kiss ... that kiss that made her believe things would turn out fine. That almost made her not even care what Molly and Brent might be doing.

That made her believe Matt's history doesn't matter.

But it does, she knows that. Reality set in once he left for the night and it's been haunting her ever since.

She knows she should get this report done before lunch, but she needs to do something else first. So she gets up and goes to the kitchen to grab her appointment book out of her purse.

She walks back to the desk in her bedroom as she flips through the pages to find the number. She's been meaning to make this call for weeks, but she's been finding excuses to stall. Not anymore. This has to get done.

Only one ring passes before she receives an answer from the other end.

"Hi, Troy? This is Sarah Fisher. I've got a favor to ask you."

MORIANI HOME

The moment Ryan opens the front door, Nick is headed for him like a heat-seeking missile.

"What the hell is going on?" Nick demands as his feet pound a furious path across the foyer.

Ryan's lips fumble for a response.

"How could this happen? And I have to read about it in the newspaper, no less! What, you thought I wouldn't find out?" Nick holds up a rolled-up newspaper and then slaps it against the bannister.

"I was going to tell you last night," Ryan says, "but I came in after you went to sleep--"

"Our names are going to be all over the news!" Nick fumes. "I opened up the newspaper this morning, and Stan and Claire's names were staring at me from the middle of some sordid story about an attempted rape and a gun fight!"

"He just snapped. He absolutely lost it. He went after Claire, and I just happened--"

"A woman was killed, Ryan! Killed! Being associated with that is the last thing we need!"

"Stan was the one who went out of control," Ryan argues. "For God's sake, I stopped him! Who knows what he'd have done to Claire--"

"A woman was shot and killed! It doesn't get much worse than that." Nick pauses, drops his eyes, and then smacks the newspaper against the bannister again. "Dammit! I do not want this kind of exposure."

"It's not going to be a big deal. The story is about Stan and his fiancée, not us."

Nick's mouth tightens into a thin line beneath his silver mustache. "I don't want it in the press. I don't want our names anywhere near that. Brent Taylor and those damned police are going to have a field day with this, do you realize that?"

"This isn't--" This time Ryan stops himself. "It'll die down. It's just an interesting story from the police blotter, nothing more." But even as he speaks the words, he's not entirely convinced.

"I hope so. I cannot believe this! We have to do some damage control."

"Wouldn't the best damage control be to act like it never--"

Nick cuts him off again. "It never should have gotten this far."

"We didn't really have any control over that. Or over him."

"But we could have." Now Nick sets the newspaper down beside a vase of elaborately arranged flowers. "And that's what we need to do: Take back control. We need to make Stan disappear. For good."

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

Sarah's shoulders drop with a sigh of relief as she hits 'save' for the final time. The report has managed to get done, somehow. She gives the computer screen a quick scan, then

sets it to print.

"Thank God," she mutters as the printer whirs to life.

How she finally finished this thing, she has no idea. She's glad that she made the phone call, but she's been even jumpier during the last hour, waiting for Troy to call back. He must have found something ...

What he tells her could be the beginning of a lot of answers. And a lot of happiness -- or misery. Troy's search through public records could unearth any number of things ... things that she might or might not want to know.

She grabs the report from the printer tray and begins giving it another look. Happy as she is to have it finished, she doesn't want to hand a client a report riddled with errors.

She is almost done proofing it when the phone rings. Her nerves leap to attention and her hand scrambles to answer.

"Hello?"

"Hi, may I speak with Sarah Taylor?"

"This is her." She thinks of correcting the use of Brent's last name but hesitates too long, and the woman on the other end speaks again.

"Hi, Sarah. This is Joyce Geller--"

"Oh, hi!" She recognizes the name of the court intermediary assigned to conduct the search for Paula's son; she's been awaiting this call for weeks. "How can I help you?"

"Actually, I'm the one who can help you, I believe. I have some information regarding your inquiry."

"Excellent," Sarah says as numbness washes over her.

"I'd like to meet with you as soon as possible," Joyce says. "Whenever is convenient for you, that is."

"What are you doing this afternoon?" Sarah asks, finding it difficult to believe that the answers her mother has been desiring for so long are now just on the other end of the telephone line.

KING'S BAY PARK

"I'm hot," Travis says as he dismounts from the tire swing.

"It's cold out," Paula counters.

"Can I take my jacket off?"

"No, mister, you may not." She smiles, trying to soften the impact of the denial. He just stands there, hands at his sides, looking miserable in his winter coat.

"It's too chilly to take it off," she adds, as much for her benefit as for his. He's been sniffing a little too much in the past 24 hours for her to feel comfortable letting him run around in a t-shirt in this weather.

"Pleeeeeeease?"

"You don't want to get sick, do you?"

He has to think about that for a moment, and the hesitation steals a laugh from Paula.

"I'll tell you what," she says. "How about we walk back to the car now and go visit Grandpa for lunch?"

Travis's lips fold into each other and one eye crunches up as he contemplates the idea. Finally he nods.

"Perfect. Let's go." She takes his hand in hers and begins walking back toward the path that leads from the playground to the parking lot.

The path takes them up an incline, and as they ascend it, Paula wonders what genius had the idea to force grandparents and young children to trek up and down the slope every time they want to visit the playground.

"Is Mommy coming to lunch?" Travis asks.

"I don't think so." Paula knows quite well that Claire won't be meeting them. Despite the impracticality of her somehow figuring out the split-second decision that Paula and Travis just made, Claire is busy getting her things together so that she and Travis can move in with Paula and Bill.

Paula has spent much of the day so far trying to grasp the severity of everything that happened to Claire last night. She was threatened, assaulted, and had to watch a woman

die. Considering the awful circumstances behind the entire situation with Ryan and his natural father, on top of everything that Claire has had to endure in the last two years ... it's amazing that she's still standing.

Her thoughts are cut short by the sudden ruckus that explodes into her. Before she even realizes what is happening, a body comes flying out of the bushes and slams into her.

She falls hard to the ground, losing her grip on Travis's hand. The impact rattles her body, and it takes her a moment to gather her bearings enough to check that Travis is okay. And he is -- standing right there beside her, looking absolutely puzzled.

The pair of feet blazing past them suddenly come to a halt, no doubt just as surprised by the sudden collision.

"Sorry," the rough voice barks, about to fly off into the distance again without even offering any assistance.

But in the moment before he can take off, their eyes meet. A glimmer of recognition hits Paula, and clearly it hits him, as well.

"Stanley," she says, having to force out the name from her breathless lungs.

But he doesn't respond, just drinks in the sight of her for another instant before bolting. She watches him darting across the park until he disappears down a side street and out of her sight.

She struggles to her feet, fighting the soreness from the fall as she attempts to reassure Travis that everything is fine. She shuffles him off to the car and scrambles inside, only taking the time to acknowledge the whirlwind of thoughts in her mind once she is in the driver's seat and the door is locked.

What was he doing here? After all these years ... Did that even happen? Did she really just see him -- the man she almost threw away a life with Bill for?

She's not sure what to think as she starts the car and points it in the direction of Bill's restaurant.

END OF EPISODE #275

What do you think of that ending? What does this all mean? Join us in the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts and compare with others!

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