

"Footprints" Episode #276

[Previously ...](#)

- Molly and Eric made plans for a date.
- Sally's death left Alex blaming himself.
- Sarah was contacted by the court intermediary and scheduled a meeting to learn the identity of Paula's son.
- While in the park with Travis, Paula was bowled over by a man running frantically. It turned out to be Stan -- and they recognized each other from their affair years ago!

FISHER HOME

The shock of the afternoon is still buzzing in Sarah's brain as she ascends the steps to her parents' porch. Everything looks familiar here -- it's still the house she grew up in, her parents' cars are still in the driveway -- but something feels very different. Fundamentally different.

Like it did after Tim died.

The whole composition of the family has changed. It felt like this when they lost Tim, for sure, and sometimes when she thinks about it, it still feels odd. It felt like, maybe to a lesser degree, when Tim married Claire and when Sarah herself married Brent, and when Travis, Samantha, and Victoria were born. And now things have changed again.

And she's the only one who knows. That might be the strangest part, that she's going to walk into the house and no one will have any idea how much things have suddenly changed for all of them.

Ryan Moriani is her mother's son. Ryan Moriani is her brother.

When she went to meet with the court intermediary earlier, she expected some sort of big news; she knew the makeup of their family was about to be affected irreversibly. But she hardly expected the name that came out of Joyce Geller's mouth to be one that she recognized, let alone one that she's heard so much about.

She has a moment of hesitation before she rings the doorbell, much like the one she had before she got in the car to come over here. Part of her wants to keep this information to herself, because if no one else knows, does anything have to change?

Yes, it does. It already has changed. Not telling Brent that she was pregnant didn't make it any less true. Not telling anyone about the court's report won't make Ryan not be

Paula's son.

The thought flickers through her mind that she never used to ring the doorbell when she came over, even after she moved out; she would just walk inside. But again, things change.

She rings and, an instant later, the door flies open.

Suddenly, everything is very much the same as it has always been.

"Hi," Molly says, casting her gaze back into the living room.

"Hi." Sarah steps inside the house and sees Claire sitting on the sofa. "Is Mom home?"

"She's in the kitchen, I think."

Sarah doesn't even make an attempt to prolong the conversation longer than that. She has the thought to stop and chat with Claire for a moment, but not now. Not with Molly standing by, and not with the information she's carrying around like a ton of bricks on her back.

She is on her way to the kitchen when the doorbell rings again. Out of instinct, she stops in her tracks and turns around.

Molly answers the door again, and this time the entire room goes dead.

Brent looks first at Molly, then over her shoulder to Sarah, and then to Claire. And eight eyes dart about the room, trying to determine what's about to happen.

ALEX MARSHALL & JASON FISHER'S APARTMENT

"Hey," Dylan says, shifting his weight to his other foot as he stands in the doorway, hands shoved into the pockets of his lightweight black jacket.

"Hey." Alex's hand flies up to the back of his head and scratches where there isn't even an itch. When Dylan called, it seemed like a good idea to have some company, but now that he's here ... Alex isn't sure how he's supposed to act.

The silence just hangs between them, raw and undeniable. The first date was one thing, but what happens next? Especially with how different things suddenly are for Alex.

"I'm really sorry," Dylan finally says.

"Thanks." Alex stands there uncomfortably for a moment, then steps aside. "Come on in."

Dylan accepts the invitation wordlessly.

"This is so weird," Alex mutters, as much for his benefit as for the sake of making conversation. He's still in too much of a stupor to make much attempt at being social, regardless of how awkward silence might be.

"Courtney told me and I had to come see you. I--God, I can't imagine coming home to news like that."

"It still doesn't seem real."

"Yeah, I bet." Dylan sighs, then asks, "Did you, like, get to go see her or anything? Or was she already ... ?"

"She died at the scene," Alex says, but the words sound like they're coming out of some movie or book, not out of his mouth about his own life.

"I'm so sorry," Dylan says after another uncertain pause. His arm reaches out and wraps around Alex's shoulders, drawing them closer together.

But the touch makes Alex flinch and he backs away, almost instinctively.

"What's wrong?" Dylan asks, his face suddenly reflecting a tremendous amount of hurt.

"Nothing." But even as he offers the assurance, Alex pulls himself away from the lingering touch of Dylan's fingers on his arm.

"I know what it is."

"What?"

"It's that other guy, isn't it?" Dylan asks with a teasing smile. "The one from the bar--"

"No." Alex shakes his head emphatically; he wonders if Dylan realizes how completely inappropriate the suggestion is.

That half-joking, half-accusatory look stays on Dylan's face. "Yeah, yeah. You've got all your other boys -- you don't need me ..."

"Shut up!" The rejoinder comes flying out of Alex's mouth, propelled by a sudden burst of

fury, and his hands fly out, shoving Dylan backward.

ERIC WESTIN'S APARTMENT

Diane practically explodes into the apartment the instant that the door opens, and Eric has to step aside to avoid being mowed down.

"Have you seen this?" she asks frantically, waving a newspaper in his face.

"No, I haven't." He shoots her a perplexed look, then takes the newspaper from her. "What does it say?"

"Look--" She takes the paper back and tears it open, jabbing an exquisitely manicured finger at the second page. "Read this."

She allows him to take the paper in his hands. Eric scans the article quickly, trying to figure out what relevance this has to his life ... and how Diane could have expected to burst in here as though last night never happened.

Then he sees the name in the article.

"Oh my God," he says under his breath, but apparently it's enough to get Diane going again.

"Yeah! Can you *believe* how much trouble Claire gets herself into?! This has to help us in the custody case."

"It definitely could be helpful, yes."

She squints her eyes at him. "Wait -- don't tell me you're going to turn into Mr. Ethical Attorney all of a sudden and say we shouldn't use this. There was a gun fight in her living room, for God's sake!"

"I'm not saying that," Eric says. He can hear the annoyance creeping into his voice at her overreaction. "It's more than relevant to the case."

"Good. I'm glad we're on the same page."

He hands the newspaper back to her. "Thanks for showing me that. It certainly affects how I plan your case. But I'm going to have to ask you to leave now."

"What?" Suspicion seeps into her expression. "Why?"

"I have some things to take care of ... and then I have a date."

The revelation obviously throws her off-kilter, and Eric can't help but take delight in that.

"A date? With who?"

"A nice woman I met last night -- after you unceremoniously booted me from your apartment in favor of that Brian character."

"I had to talk to him. It was important," she says. He detects a note of pleading in her voice, but as soon as it appears, it is gone. She straightens and folds her arms. "That had nothing to do with you."

"Gee, how kind of you."

"I didn't mean--"

"I don't care what you meant, Diane. Frankly, I'm tired of trying to figure out *what* you mean. Let's be honest and admit that this isn't going anywhere."

"Why isn't it going anywhere?"

"How long have we been seeing each other? More than a year now. There's been no progression. I can't help feeling as though I'm a way for you to pass the time, something that any number of men could do, I'm sure."

Her eyes narrow again. "So this is all my fault, huh?"

"I'm not saying that. I know I haven't put as much effort into this relationship as I would into one I genuinely wanted to progress to the next level. So take responsibility for the fact that you've treated me as little more than a plaything to keep you amused--"

He nearly chokes on his words as her hand cracks across his cheek.

"Shut up," she says, turning on her heels. "Have fun on your little date tonight. I have bigger and better things to worry about."

She stomps out of the apartment, no doubt making sure that he catches every tick of her annoyance. But it all bothers him surprisingly little.

"I have bigger and better things to worry about."

That was the problem all along, Diane, he thinks as he closes the door behind her.

FISHER HOME

The moment Molly and Sarah lock eyes, something caves. The tension breaks, and Molly watches her sister head wordlessly to the kitchen.

"I suppose that could have been much worse," Molly says when neither Brent nor Claire speaks up.

Brent echoes the sentiment with a nod. Then his eyes fix upon Molly; she catches the gaze and can tell that he's pondering how to deal with the unexpected encounter.

But before either of them can act, Claire takes the initiative: "Molly, I'm going to go check on Travis."

"That's not necessary," Molly says, but she's simultaneously hoping that Claire doesn't take the statement too seriously. She does want to talk to Brent; she just doesn't want to do it at Claire's expense, and God knows Claire needs the care and consideration far more than Brent must right now.

"No, it is," Claire says, adding quickly, "I feel like I need to keep checking up on him. I'm just ... jumpy."

"All right," Molly consents, and Claire rises from the sofa.

Brent speaks as Claire heads for the stairs. "I actually came by to see you, Claire. We can talk when you come back down ..."

Claire nods, making it clear that she'll give them as much time as they need, and then ascends the stairs.

"So ..." Brent claps his hands, then folds them together and turns the knot inside-out. "How have you been?"

"Fine--good. Busy, I guess."

"Yeah, same here." He pauses for the briefest of moments. "But that's no excuse for not being in touch. I--Molly, I'm really sorry, I've just been ... trying to figure out how to approach all of this, I guess."

She nods, understanding fully. Every day she has the urge to pick up the phone or send him a quick e-mail, but she never has any idea what to say or write. *"I miss you, but we're both going to be miserable regardless of whether we or not we see each other?"*

"I can't believe what Claire is going through," she says, at a loss for any other topic.

"Me neither. We both tried to warn her that this is the sort of thing that happens when you associate with people like the Morianis."

"Hindsight is 20-20, right?" And suddenly the weight of those words settles upon her.

"Guess so." He draws a deep breath and exhales loudly. "I've missed you, Mol. I--I guess I haven't even wanted to face this whole thing because every time we see each other it just gets more and more frustrating."

"I know ..."

"But maybe enough time has passed now. Maybe--maybe we just need to step up and make something of this. Because if we wait for everyone else to come around ..." The idea flies out of his mouth and takes hold of her immediately.

But she can't. That look Sarah gave them before said it all. How can she disregard the fact that he was married to her sister, and that her mother completely disapproves of the entire situation?

She can't.

"I really should go," she says suddenly, blowing past him as she grabs her jacket from the side of the sofa.

"Wait--"

"I can't do this anymore." She moves for the door before he can reach her to hold her back; his touch might just be enough to make her stay, and she doesn't need that.

"Molly!"

"Brent," she says, pausing with her hand on the doorknob. "I can't keep doing this. I can't keep putting myself in this position."

Before he can protest, she yanks the door open and rushes out into the cold autumn day. She knows that a part of her is hoping he'll come chasing after her and give her reason to stay, but an even greater part of her doesn't want that -- because she *can't* keep doing this anymore. She can't keep feeling like such a slave to fate or destiny or whatever is jerking them around.

"No more," she resolves as she makes a beeline for her car. The words show for a moment as a puff of breath in the air. She watches the tiny cloud swirl in front of her and then blow away, lost forever.

ALEX MARSHALL & JASON FISHER'S APARTMENT

Alex's hands suddenly run numb, flashing from hot to cold to nearly nothing. He stares at them, both baffled and shocked, as though they are covered in the residue of what he just did.

But something inside won't let him apologize. He shouldn't have shoved Dylan -- he knew that the moment he did it -- but Dylan never should've made such an inappropriate comment, either.

He awaits a reaction and finally sees sorrow washing over Dylan's face.

"I was just teasing ..." The words drip out lazily, thick as honey, as if Dylan isn't quite sure that he means them yet, or how they solicited such a dramatic reaction.

"I know," Alex says, caving despite himself. "I'm sorry. I--I'm really not in the mood right now."

"I was just joking," Dylan says. Obviously he can tell that that's not nearly enough of an explanation, because he hastens to add, "Sorry. I was just trying to lighten the mood a little ... Sorry."

Alex turns around and takes a few steps toward the bookshelf that stands against the opposite wall. His focus locks on its contents -- videos and DVDs, mainly -- and he scans the titles idly.

"I don't wanna deal with any of this," he says for some reason that he can't quite discern.

"You shouldn't have to. This is hard, Alex. This is, like, probably one of the hardest things you'll ever face. That's why you need people here for you."

More thoughts come spilling out before Alex can muster a direct response. "I was out on a date when she died. I was out on a date and she had no idea, because I was too chicken to open my mouth and just *tell her*. I kept thinking that I'd do it in a few years, or when I found a guy I really wanted to get serious with ... I don't think I ever really considered that I might never have the chance to talk to her about it."

"You didn't expect this to happen."

"No ... but it's not like I didn't know she was getting older. Or that anything can happen, for that matter. I was doing it on my own schedule. And now I'm never gonna have the chance to talk to my own mother about this!"

"Maybe she knew," Dylan says.

"She didn't know. She had no idea. She was too--she was my mom."

"Moms know."

"Not mine. She was too caught up in her own little world to think that much about it, I think." He pauses, swallowing hard and wondering if the fact that she's dead somehow strips him of the right to criticize her parenting.

"You didn't know this was gonna happen," he hears Dylan saying as the accompanying breath blows across the back of his neck. Alex turns his head the slightest bit to see Dylan hovering just over his shoulder, and Dylan reacts by wrapping his arms around him.

"I'm so sorry you have to go through this," Dylan says, resting his cheek against Alex's. The touch makes Alex flinch, but he holds still, remembering what his jumpiness caused just minutes ago.

"She's just ... not coming back," Alex says, allowing himself to lean back into Dylan just a bit. "How can that be?"

"I wish I knew." The soft swells of Dylan's lips and the rough beginnings of his stubble brush against Alex's cheek, practically asking him to give in and let Dylan comfort him.

Alex realizes that he has no reason to resist. His mother is gone. The Chases are--they're so generous, but they're not his family. Neither is Jason. He'll wind up with Courtney or someone eventually, and who is Alex going to have when it comes down to it?

No one, he thinks with a chill as he turns his head and tilts it to meet Dylan's lips with his own.

FISHER HOME

Most days, a cup of coffee in the afternoon would be unheard of for Paula. She and Bill have a routine: a cup in the morning to get the day started, and a cup of decaf at night to wind down. But today, driving home shakily from the lunch that she barely touched, all she could think of was a cup of coffee.

She was hoping it would soothe her nerves, maybe offer some security, but now that

she's drained more than half of it, she realizes that she was wrong. Nothing is going to do that.

And she's not sure whether to be grateful for or disturbed by the fact that Bill decided to take off a few hours between the lunch and dinner rushes and come home with her and Travis, because she has no idea what to say to him.

"Claire needs to see Samantha," Bill says as he seats himself beside Paula.

She manages a nod and then gives herself a mental jumpstart, hoping it'll be enough to spark some real conversation that might distract her from replaying that encounter with Stanley on an endless loop in her head.

"I think she's worried about letting Diane in on what happened," Paula says.

"She's going to find out eventually. At least it might be comforting for Claire to be with both Travis and Samantha right now ..."

"I agree. We should convince her to give Diane a call." Just like that, whatever energy Paula was trying to tell herself she'd mustered fades to nothingness. The only thing that exists for her right now is what happened at the park earlier -- the past springing to life after so many years of lying dormant, as close to the edge of forgotten as possible.

"Bill," she says, perhaps hoping to garner some scant reassurance that she still has him and the life they've built. "I--something happened when I was at the park with Travis earlier."

Alertness floods Bill's being. "What?"

"I wanted to tell you when we went to the restaurant, but I was worried ... I didn't want to bring it up, I suppose." The disclaimer feels necessary; somehow she needs him to know that she's not hurling this at him to be cruel, but because she needs him if she's going to have any chance of not going mad. "I ran into someone."

"Who?" No doubt possibilities are running rampant through Bill's mind, which makes the need to tell him even more urgent now.

"Stanley." It strikes her that she hasn't spoken his name aloud in years -- not until she was face-to-face with him today. Somehow saying it, especially to Bill, solidifies the encounter even further, makes it less of a hazy dream.

Bill's face goes white as chalk.

"It was just for a moment," she says. She feels an incredible need to let him know that

she didn't mean to see him or even want to see him. It was an accident and nothing happened. "This man came flying out of the bushes, like a--like a bat out of hell, and he knocked me over and paused just long enough for us to recognize each other. Then he ran off again."

Stanley.

Like a bat out of hell.

Right outside the kitchen, Sarah's blood runs cold. How can Ryan's father be back? What kind of timing is that?

She listens to her mother's explanation -- and her father's terse reaction. The tension keeps her from even considering going in the kitchen.

But she can't just turn around and leave, either. Brent and Molly are in the living room, and there's no way she's going to walk through *that*.

She walks over to the dining room table as quietly as she can. This morning's newspaper is sitting atop it, barely touched. Her eyes scan the headlines and fly over the blocks of text.

She opens the main section, still trying to find something to keep her occupied. And for some reason, she is drawn right to it. Claire's name.

She blazes through the article in no time, then goes back frantically and sorts her way through it.

No way.

There is no way this all fits together so ... conveniently. Things like this don't actually happen, do they?

Stanley.

Stan Lincoln. That's how the article identifies the attacker.

And this "Stanley" was running ... and Stan Lincoln is Ryan's father ... the man who assaulted Claire ...

All the pieces have been there, but only now do they all fit together for her. Ryan's father

attacked Claire.

Paula had an affair with the man who attacked Claire.

Suddenly Sarah realizes that she can't say anything, not now. So she listens for an opening in the conversation and enters the kitchen, acting as unaware as possible of everything she has learned in the past few hours.

Acting as though everything is the same as it's always been, even though things have changed forever for their family ... and she's the only one who knows it.

END OF EPISODE #276

Will Sarah tell anyone what she's learned? Who should she confide in first? Should Molly give Eric a chance? Visit the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts!

[Next Episode](#)