

"Footprints" Episode #279

[Previously ...](#)

- Sarah contacted some of her business connections in her quest to find out more about Matt's past.
- Paula was stunned when Sarah informed her that Ryan Moriani is Paula's missing son.
- In the wake of Sally's death, Dylan visited Alex. Though Alex resisted his advances at first, he allowed himself to be comforted by Dylan's kisses.
- During her date with Eric, Molly realized she hadn't stopped thinking about Brent. Excusing herself, she hurried to Brent's apartment, where they finally declared their feelings and made love.

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

"You didn't have to do this!" Sarah says, following Matt the short distance from the door to the dining area so that he can put everything on the table.

"Well, I was planning on eating breakfast, and I was planning on coming over here, so it kinda made sense." He sets the grocery bag and the cup holder down on the table. "I'm just glad you're not asleep."

"I can't tell you when the last time I slept past 10:00 was!"

"Then that worked out well for me, huh?" He pries one of the coffees loose from the holder -- trying to conceal the fact that he has to struggle with it a bit, Sarah notes in silent amusement -- and hands it to her.

"Thanks," she says. She takes a sip of the coffee and watches as he pulls items out of the bag. "You really didn't have to do this, Matt!"

He moved a few of the items over to the counter, then pauses right in front of her. "I wanted to."

The declaration brings a smile to her face. "Well, thank you."

"My pleasure." He pauses again, this time to take a drink of his own coffee. "Look, Sarah, I wanna--I don't know--make this a regular sorta thing for us."

"Random drop-by breakfasts?"

"No, no. All meals. Breakfasts, lunches, dinners ... snacks, even. You'll never know when

I might drop by with a six-pack and a box of Ding-Dongs." His demeanor turns more serious as he continues, "Surprises, I mean. Doing stuff together like this. I wanna keep going with ... whatever it is that we keep starting."

"You mean like the other night?" she asks with a laugh, remembering Victoria's happy, unaware intrusion into the private moment they were in the midst of sharing.

"Yeah. Like that." He reaches up and brushes her blondish-brown hair back behind an ear. "I know you're still getting over Brent, and I don't wanna rush you, but--"

"You're not rushing me."

"Good. 'Cuz I want this to be the exact opposite of how you and Brent turned out. I want both of us to be ready for it, you know?"

"Yeah, I do." She swallows, but it sounds insanely loud to her amidst the silence that has overtaken them. She realizes that she is examining his eyes and pondering the potential of what they already have.

And then, as if it's been waiting for just the perfect moment, the phone intervenes.

With a chuckle, Sarah rolls her eyes. "Hold that thought."

The phone rings again before she gets to it. She grabs it before the third ring, though. "Hello?"

Suddenly the mood in the room changes, whether or not Matt is aware of it. She can feel the adoration that filled her gaze a moment ago turning to wariness as Troy Carpenter's voice spills into her ear.

BRENT TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

The sunlight of the winter morning floods Brent's vision as he rolls slowly to life. His eyelids blink closed and he peels them back open, and the fight repeats until the assault on his senses has dulled sufficiently.

"Good morning," comes the whisper from just below his chin. He glances down and is greeted by the vision of Molly smiling up at him.

"Morning." He's hardly able to believe that he's waking up to this. When she showed up at his door last night, finally ready to make something of everything they've been fighting for years, it was a complete whirlwind. She blew into the apartment and they tossed every complication to the wind. It was like a dream, something not of this reality. And

the night--it was surreal. It was every dream he's had for the past five years, all rolled together into a few hours that somehow stretched out forever and still managed to be far too short.

"I can't believe I'm here," Molly says, rousing him from the slide back into dreamland. She really is here. They really were together last night.

"I can. Mol ..." His index finger rubs back and forth across her forearm, savoring every little touch. "This is how it was supposed to end up. We both knew that all along, even if we didn't think it was gonna be possible. But we both knew that we were supposed to wind up together."

"I know." He feels her body rise and fall against his as she lets out a heavy sigh. "But we're not really out of the woods yet."

He finds himself shaking his head. "No, we are. We're together. That's what matters."

"Yeah, but ... now I have to go back to my normal life and the normal routine of Sarah and my mother and Diane and whoever else reminding me that we shouldn't be doing this."

"So?"

"Well, I'm not exactly excited about hearing what they'll have to say when I tell them I'm sick of doing what everyone else thinks is right. It's the kind of thing that sounds a lot better in the heat of the night than at 10 a.m., you know?"

"True. But who says they need to know?"

"What, you want to live the rest of our lives pretending--"

"I didn't say anything about the rest of our lives. Just--just for a little while. Let's give this some more time to blow over." He runs two fingers lazily through her dark hair, all the way down to the tips. "Now that I have you here, I don't think I can go back to acting like we don't both need this. Because we do. Last night proved it."

"I know. It did. I'm just worried ..."

"Don't worry anymore. We've worried for too long. We don't need to say anything about this until everyone is ready. I don't need to say anything as long as I have you."

She falls quiet for a moment and then begins running her fingertips over his bare chest. Her touch sends a current through Brent's body.

"I love you," he says.

"I love you, too."

"Then just keep that in mind and everything else will fall into place." As he turns onto his side and his lips meet hers, he hopes that it will be that simple.

ALEX MARSHALL & JASON FISHER'S APARTMENT

Dylan extends the red-and-gold gift bag to Alex as soon as the door is opened. "Merry Christmas."

"Hey," Alex says. The gift comes as a complete surprise to him, both because buying gifts has been the furthest thing from his mind and because Christmas is still several days away.

"It's not a bomb or anything," Dylan says, and Alex realizes that he's been staring at the bag, trying to figure out what to make of it.

Alex takes it tentatively. He can feel crimson embarrassment swelling in his cheeks. "I haven't done any shopping yet--"

"You have kinda had a lot to think about! But you don't have to get me anything, really. I just wanted to bring you something to try and cheer you up a little bit." Dylan comes inside the apartment and removes his coat. It's a brown suede coat that Alex remembers seeing in a store a few weeks ago; he also remembers how expensive it was.

"C'mon, open it up!" Dylan urges as he drapes his coat over the back of the couch.

"You really didn't have to ..."

"I *wanted* to, Alex. Just open it, okay?"

Alex pulls out the sheets of white tissue paper that are concealing the present. Something brown and fuzzy makes itself visible, and a second later, he realizes that it's a teddy bear. He pulls it out of the bag.

"It's cute, isn't it?" Dylan asks.

"Yeah, it's really cute. Thanks, Dylan." Alex spends a moment trying to figure out what to do and then opens his arms for a hug. Dylan moves right into it.

"I just figured something cute might help raise your spirits a little. And I know that we just met, but ... I wanted you to know that I'll be here for you, too. I want to help you get through this."

"Thanks." Alex holds up the bear to look it over. It *is* cute, he has to admit, and so is the gesture itself.

"I was gonna throw a card in there, too, but I figured there were better ways to show you how I feel," Dylan says as his hand reaches up behind Alex's neck. His long fingers brush the back of Alex's hair for a few seconds before gently pulling Alex to him.

Their lips meet and trade back and forth for what feels to Alex like forever. When they part, Dylan is grinning at him.

"I really have to thank Courtney again for setting us up," he says. "Having you is gonna make Christmas so much better."

The statement -- and Dylan's tone, so full of hope, so uncomplicated -- sends a signal of panic through Alex. He wavers between changing the subject and actually saying something for what he knows must be too long, but he can't help it. Finally he forces himself to open his mouth.

"Dylan, I--I had fun the other night, and I really appreciate you wanting to be here for me," he says through shortened breaths. "But ... I don't know if I'm ready for something like this yet. There's just so much going on, with my mom and me still getting used to being out--"

Dylan holds up his hands. "Hey, I understand. We can go as slow as you want, okay?"

Alex just nods, amazed at how easy that was.

"I know it'll take some getting used to," Dylan says. "I keep forgetting that you just came out and you're still getting used to this. But I really like you, Alex, and I want to be here whenever you really feel like you're ready."

He wraps an arm around Alex, folding him into another embrace. Alex moves up against Dylan's body, relishing the heat and the contact, and wondering how he's going to know when he's ready.

CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

Claire is wrestling her way into a sweatshirt when the knock that she knew was coming sounds on the door. Clumsily she pulls herself inside the sleeves and through the neck as

she hurries from the bedroom.

"Hey," she says to Ryan when she opens the door, still trying to straighten herself out inside the sweatshirt.

"Hey. How're you feeling today?"

"Better. The shock is definitely wearing off, that's for sure." She accepts the brief kiss he plants on her lips. "You ready to get this move over and done with?"

The answer doesn't come as readily as she expects, and a moment later, Ryan says, "Almost. Do you, uh, you mind if we talk for a minute?"

"No, not at all." But she's already beginning to dread whatever it might be that he wants to discuss. His tone doesn't sound the least bit positive.

"The night Stan was here," he begins, "I didn't just wind up here out of blind luck."

"What do you mean?"

"I came over here for a reason. It wasn't--well, I guess it was lucky that I happened to be coming over then, but I was actually coming here for a reason."

Something must be going on -- something serious. She can tell that much from the way he's looking all over the room, never settling on her for more than a fraction of a second.

"I got a phone call that morning," he continues. "It was a woman from the courts."

Claire's heart sinks. She senses some sort of awful confession coming on. Maybe she should be glad that he's telling her--or maybe he's only telling her because he has no other choice--

"My biological mother is looking for me, apparently."

"Oh." Relief washes through Claire's system. It's not anything like what she was expecting, thank God.

"They have to contact the child to ask if it's okay to give the parent any information," he says. "So ... I said yes."

"Good!"

"No, not good. All I think is, what if this turns out to be another nightmare like with

Stan?"

The thought hadn't occurred to Claire, but now that he mentions it, her immediate reaction is to go into panic mode. But she knows that she has to be the solid one right now. "The odds of both your biological parents being that crazy are pretty slim, don't you think?"

"I don't know. I stopped worrying about who she was or where she was years ago. After I went to live with Stan for that little while and it was such a disaster, I didn't want to know her. And I sort of expected something to happen once I turned eighteen, but it never did, so I figured she really didn't have any interest in locating me."

"Well, it does say something that she went through the courts," Claire reasons aloud. "Didn't you say that Stan went around the system to track you down?"

"Yeah. He was looking for money, I think. God, even then, all he wanted was the damn money."

She takes one of his hands in hers. "For what it's worth, I don't think you made a mistake agreeing to let her have your information."

"Really?"

"Not at all. She can't possibly be as insane as Stan--"

"She *did* have a child with him!"

"True. But she also seems to have left him behind completely. Didn't Stan ever tell you anything about your mother?"

"He refused to tell me her name. The little he did say about her--it wasn't good. I guess they had an affair while she was engaged to another guy ... I don't know, he wasn't exactly forthcoming with information. He told me it wasn't important because she gave me up, so obviously she didn't want anything to do with me."

"It's not usually that cut-and-dry."

"Ah, but it is. At least when you're a deranged loser trying to convince a teenage boy that you're the only parent who really cares about him," Ryan says.

There's suddenly a rawness about Ryan that takes Claire by surprise. Talking about Stan usually makes him angry, remarkably so, and she sees glimpses of vulnerability in that. But it's rare that she sees him this open. He was like this the night that they first slept together, the night they went out to dinner and she broke down. Now she remembers

how drawn she was to him that night, and why she continues to be drawn to him. He might be the only person she's ever met who can really, truly understand how much the past still troubles her, because it's the exact same for him.

She pulls him close to her, wrapping her arms around him. "This isn't going to turn out like it did with Stan. It won't."

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

"So what'd you find out?" Sarah asks as soon as the bedroom door is closed behind her.

"There's definitely a brother out in Pennsylvania," Troy explains through the phone. "Name's Jake Gray."

So at least he hasn't changed his last name, Sarah thinks. That's something.

"You're sure that's his brother?" she asks.

"Positive. Didn't take much digging to figure out any of the family info. Parents died in a car accident years ago, like you suspected."

Another wave of relief presents itself. So Matt didn't lie about his parents, and he just didn't mention his brother. Maybe they had a falling-out or something and he likes to pretend he doesn't exist. It's not as though the thought of pretending Molly didn't exist hasn't ever crossed Sarah's mind.

"I found something else pretty interesting," Troy says before Sarah can thank him for his report.

"What?"

"His name's all over a police file from nine years ago."

Now the alarms that have been waiting for weeks begin sounding full-blast inside her head. "What kind of file?"

"Investigation into a death. It was ruled a suicide, and it doesn't look like there was much reason to doubt that it was."

"Whose suicide?"

"Name's Nicole Gray. It looks like she was married to the brother."

"So what's Matt involved as? A witness?"

"Yeah, there's a statement from him and he's mentioned in some of the other crap in the file. Basically he just establishes that she was emotionally fragile at the time of her death, yada yada. I'm not sure how relevant it is to anything, but I figured it was worth telling you about."

"Absolutely, yeah." She tries to get her head straight long enough to ask anything else that she might need to know right now. "There's no police record on Matt, though?"

"Nope. Looks clean aside from that little brush. That and two speeding tickets."

"I think we can presume there's not much dirt behind a couple of traffic violations," she says, and she realizes that she's trying to find whatever good she can in this. She thanks Troy and hangs up the phone, all the while attempting to piece together a story that she can't possibly assemble without a lot more information.

Information that Matt won't give her even if she tries to beat it out of him, she's pretty sure.

Taking a deep breath, she opens the door and returns to the kitchen, where Matt is busily getting breakfast ready.

She feels an undeniable urge to explain away the phone call. "Sorry, work," she says as she sets the phone back on the receiver.

He just shrugs, obviously not making anything of it. She watches him preparing the food for a moment, and her skin is practically crawling its way off her body by the time she speaks up.

"I've got to run out for a few minutes," she says. She's moving for her keys before Matt can even respond.

"Work?"

"Yeah. I just need to go pick something up. You can, uh, hang around and finish cooking, and I'm sure Victoria will be up soon, anyway."

"Sounds good. Be careful."

"Thanks." She makes a hasty exit from the apartment, only breathing once she's outside and on the way to her car.

She has no idea where she's going to go. She'll probably just drive around for a little while. It'll get her out of the apartment, and that's the objective here. She just can't be in there with him right now, especially not in the type of situation they were in before the phone rang, until she figures out what's going on.

END OF EPISODE #279

How can Sarah resolve her worries about Matt's history? Will Brent and Molly be able to keep their relationship secret for long? Come share your thoughts on this episode in the Footprints Forum!

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