

"Footprints" Episode #290

[Previously ...](#)

- When Claire returned Samantha after their weekend together, Diane got on her case about the custody hearing and vowed that Claire would not be a part of Samantha's life any longer.
- Eric ended his affair with Diane. He went on a date with Molly, but it fell apart after Molly realized she needed to be with Brent.
- Brian came to King's Bay in hopes of working things out with Diane. Their conflicts persisted, though, and he returned to Los Angeles.
- Sarah's investigation into Matt's past turned up a statement from a woman named Mia Davich, a close friend of the late Nicole Gray.

WINDMILLS

The restaurant's pristine interior is rather full of patrons for a Monday afternoon, Diane Bishop observes as she slides onto a chair at the bar. From the looks of all the suits, though, it must be a bunch of business lunches.

It takes her only a second to catch the bartender's eye, and she orders a gin-and-tonic. The young man gets right to work and slides the glass in front of her just a moment later. *He's not too bad-looking*, Diane thinks. She samples the drink and, satisfied, raises one corner of her lips in a seductive smile at him.

He returns the smile with a pleasant one of his own, but it's generic enough. She's about to step up the game when she becomes aware of someone settling into the chair beside her.

"Hi there," Eric Westin says as she turns to look at him. "Glad to see you're on time. I'm on a tight schedule this afternoon."

"Yeah, and I've just got tons of time to play around with. You could've just had me drop by your place after work ..."

"I don't usually invite clients to my home." The words are clipped, curt, and carry just the right amount of bite. Diane busies herself with glancing around the room as Eric orders a drink.

They sit in silence as the bartender readies the drink. Diane eyes the young man with renewed vigor as he delivers Eric's drink, but she still only receives a pleasant smile in return.

"So is that all I am? A client?" Diane asks Eric as the bartender leaves.

"You are paying me to handle a case for you, correct? I thought that was the definition of a client."

"Do all your clients spend so much time in your bed? Or, for that matter, on your sofa, and your living room floor ..."

"That hasn't been the case for some time, Diane. Our relationship is strictly professional now."

"Oh, is it?" A tiny laugh escapes her throat and makes its way into the drink she's holding just inches from her mouth. "Well, then. How are things with the woman of your dreams?"

"Hmm?"

"That chick you had a hot date with the last time we saw each other. Apparently she didn't turn out to be so special."

Eric shoots her a stern look and downs a gulp of his drink, grimacing at the sudden rush of alcohol upon his mouth.

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

Sarah Fisher holds the portable phone to her ear and holds her breath as she waits. One ring. Two rings. Three--

"Hello?"

Though she's been expecting it, even awaiting it, the voice on the other end of the line startles Sarah. It takes her a moment to compose herself before she can respond.

"Hi. Could I please speak with Mia Davich?" Sarah asks. Her heart increases its thumping.

"This is her," comes the response. Mia's voice sounds young, much younger than Sarah knows it must actually be.

A wave of relief begins to flood Sarah's system but is interrupted by a stab of further worry. "Oh, hi. Do you have a few minutes?"

"What's this about?"

"My name is Sarah Fisher," Sarah begins, feeling her way through the introduction that she's rehearsed in her head countless times over the last two days. "I'm a private investigator in Washington state. I was hoping you'd be able to answer a few questions for me."

"About?" There is a wariness in Mia's voice that sends a premature rush of disappointment through Sarah.

"About a woman named Nicole Gray. According to the records I obtained--"

"I don't talk about that anymore."

Silence buzzes over the line. Sarah wasn't expecting such a straightforward shutdown. But the click that she's expecting from the phone on the other end doesn't come, either.

"I'm sorry to dredge up the past," Sarah says, "because I know this must be painful for you. But I've been through your statement, Ms. Davich, and there are just a few points I'd like clarification on."

"I told you," the voice says, sounding almost like a teenager trying to imitate an adult, "I don't talk about that situation anymore. That was ten years ago."

"I know. And that's why it's so important that I speak with you. You're one of the few live links that I have to this case--"

"What is the case, exactly? How could Nicole's death be relevant to anything after all these years?"

Sarah's gut tells her to go a different route than she planned, and she follows it before she has a chance to second-guess the decision. "Actually ... it's a personal matter. I'm looking for information on Nicole's brother-in-law."

Silence from the other end.

"Matt Gray," Sarah adds, hoping for some kind of reaction.

"What about him?"

"I'm trying to gather information on Matt's time in Pennsylvania. Shortly after Nicole's death, he moved to New York, and it looks as though he cut all ties to his life in Pennsylvania."

"It sounds like you know what you want to know," Mia says. "You've read the reports."

"Yes, but I'm still not sure how the situation all fits together." Desperation sweeps over Sarah. "Please, Ms. Davich ... I know this has to be unpleasant for you. But it's very important to me -- and to my daughter. Matt's her father, and ... I need to know about his life before I met him."

Sarah waits for the response, whether it's going to be an opening or a brick wall, but she receives neither. Just more quiet.

She's going to have to drag it out of this woman, she realizes. "Please -- could you just answer a few questions for me?"

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Ryan Moriani's eyes scan the cafeteria. It looks the same as always: hospital staffers and visitors are peppered lightly throughout the room; the lighting is dim, in need of new bulbs but probably not bad enough to merit any attention from whoever's in charge of that; the formica counters and tabletops are their usual drab blue.

In the moment before he spots Claire Fisher, Ryan realizes that he's come to loathe this place in the past few months. There's something a little creepy about it. No matter how wild the rest of the hospital is, no matter what chaos is going on outside, the cafeteria is always the same -- dull, half-empty, full of strange smells, daring him to talk in a voice any louder than a whisper. It's like a library with bad food.

He makes his way quickly over to the small table by the window where Claire is seated. She has a sandwich in front of her, one that clearly came from home -- it looks too fresh to have originated anywhere in this cafeteria. Ryan sits down across from her.

"Hey," he says.

"Hey." She pauses, and he can tell that she's studying him. "So, what is it?"

"What's what?"

"Whatever's got you so excited. You sounded on the phone like you had something you wanted to tell me."

"Yeah." But he's already distracted by the tight, closed shape of her lips and the cloudiness in her gaze. "But you first."

"What about me?"

"Something's up. You look ... not happy."

His less-than-poetic word choice gets a smile out of her, but it's fleeting. That only confirms for Ryan that something really is bothering her.

"So, what is it?" he prompts.

She inhales deeply and then sighs heavily, blowing her explanation out on the tail end of it. "I had a meeting with my lawyer this morning."

He gives himself a mental kick in the ass. He should've known what it would be about. "And?"

Claire's shoulders rise and fall in a weak shrug. "Just getting organized for the hearing, basically. Nothing new."

"Oh ..." He struggles for something to say, something--anything--that will lift that expression from her face. He can't find it.

"She's going to win. Diane's going to get full custody," Claire says.

"You don't know that."

Claire leans forward a little bit, her elbows pressing into the table, her body hovering over the hardly touched sandwich. "Why wouldn't she? She's the biological mother, she's had Sam for months and hasn't done anything wrong ..."

The gears in Ryan's head are turning now, picking up steam even as he tries to make them stop. He couldn't. But he could ...

"There really isn't anything I can do about it," Claire says with another sigh, tempting him, almost as if she can read his mind.

Ryan takes both of her hands in his. "Try not to make yourself nuts over this."

"I'll try." Her eyebrows go up a little, as if even they don't believe her.

They sit like that for a moment, Ryan's hands holding Claire's, each of their eyes locked upon the other's. Then Claire drops her hands to the table, pulling Ryan's down with them.

"So what had you so excited?" she asks. "Sorry to be raining all over your parade."

"Don't worry about it. That's what I'm here for." He gives her hands a squeeze and hopes

that she believes that. "But I do have some very good news."

He pauses for dramatic effect, then announces, "I found a place of my own."

Her face lights up, more than he thought it would considering all she has to think about. "That's terrific! Congratulations. Where is it? What is it?"

"Thanks." He can't keep a happy little smirk off his face -- he's been trying all day, to no avail. "It's a loft in a building downtown. It's actually pretty cool. A little funky."

She makes a face. "Funky? You?"

"Don't worry. Nothing too crazy. But it's definitely got a feel of its own -- much different than my father's house, at any rate."

"Good!" she says. He wonders if it's a cheer of support or one of relief that he's out from under Nick's roof.

"I have the keys already," he says. "I can take you to see it tonight, if you want."

"I'd love to see it." Their handhold, which has gone limp, gets another squeeze, this time from Claire. And they fall back into the thoughtful quiet of a few moments ago -- only it's more peaceful now, and more hopeful.

WINDMILLS

"That didn't work out," Eric says slowly. He sets his drink back down on the bar but keeps his hands wrapped protectively around the glass.

Diane fixes her eyes right on his and speaks very deliberately, every word crawling purposefully off her lips. "Why not? She try to hire you, too?"

"No," he says, making little effort to conceal his annoyance. "And, for the record, the nature of *our* professional relationship was not why I ended--whatever else we had."

"Oh, then, why did you? Please enlighten me."

Eric pauses -- some kind of grimace or twitch or something, no doubt brought on by her badgering -- before saying, "Not that it's actually any of your business, but she happened to be interested in someone else."

"So you got the ol' dumperooski, huh?" Diane stops herself short of actually laughing, but

she's sure her grin does the trick, anyway. "Lemme guess. She was a perfect angel."

"You're being a little--"

"I mean, she was one of those 'good girls,' right?"

"She was a very nice woman, yes," Eric says curtly.

"There you go. That's your problem. They drag you around, get you all caught up in their emotional turmoil or whatever ... and then they kick you to the curb. They're so sorry, and they wish it didn't have to be this way, and they can turn on the tears if they really need to. But in the end, all you're getting is dumped."

Eric's staring at her, no doubt sending her telepathetic messages to shut up or something like that. "What's the point of this, Diane?"

"I'm just saying, at least with someone ... well, someone like me," she says, "at least we'll give it to you straight. None of that bullshit. And we wouldn't string you along just to keep ourselves busy while we wait for the real knight in shining armor to show up."

"We didn't come here to discuss our personal lives," Eric says after a static moment. Diane is sure that she got her point across, so she quiets down now and lets him move along to business. She listens to him outlining the hearing for her and going over how they'll present their case and what they can expect from Claire, and she throws in her two cents wherever it's necessary -- alternating between that and making eyes at the bartender, anyway. But Eric's got this hearing under control.

Somewhere in the middle of it, though, she finds herself growing awfully bored. He's obviously intelligent, and he's good at what he does, and he's a very handsome man, and he dresses impeccably, and he's got money, yes. All of those things. But ... he doesn't get it. *It.*

Not like Brian did, her mind fills in before she has the chance to censor the thought.

Eric's strategizing becomes a little more distant as she mulls over Brian. He said he wanted things to be different; he doesn't want to wreck his life because of a "scheme" or "plot" or whatever he called it. But he always said that before -- just less assertively -- and then still went along with it.

She's still trying to sort out how Eric and Brian are different, exactly -- and how she can be starting to loathe one so much and feel such affection for the other, even though they've both played the same morality routine with her -- when Eric stands, his drink finished, the meeting over. Diane stands, too, and they say a very restrained goodbye, but it barely registers with her, because she's still trying to make heads or tails of where

these guys fit in her world.

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

Sarah has the sense that she's won Mia over even before the response comes.

"Just a few questions," Mia says. She still sounds very guarded, as if she knows that agreeing to this might mean that she has to fight off a thousand questions she doesn't like.

Sarah makes a mental promise not to push too hard or ask too many questions. "Thank you. I'll try to keep this as quick as possible."

"I'm not sure how helpful I can be," Mia adds. Sarah's not sure if it's a disclaimer born of genuine concern or the other woman's way of saying that she'll supply whatever information she wants to supply and nothing more.

"How close were you with Nicole Gray?" Sarah asks. She knew she'd start with this question anyway, so she's scanning over her list, picking out what points she absolutely needs to get to and which she can skim over.

"We were pretty close friends. We got together a couple of times each week. We had lunch, shopped, cooked -- we spent a lot of time in the kitchen. Nicole was crazy for cooking. She was always experimenting with new ideas, researching all sorts of obscure cookbooks ..."

"Really," Sarah says. She has to say something to mask the alarms that are going off in her head. Cooking. Matt.

"But you didn't see much of her in the weeks before her death?" she asks, forcing herself not to get caught up in the coincidence -- if that's what it is.

"No. She got very withdrawn. I'd call and ask her to do something, and she'd have some kind of excuse." Mia sighs, goes quiet for a few seconds, and then adds, "I wrote about that in my statement, right?"

"Yes, you did ... But do you have any idea what caused her to become so withdrawn? Was there something going on in her life?"

"Not that I know of. I'm sure there had to be something, I just have no idea what it was." Another pause. "I'm not sure if I can tell you anything that's not in my statement."

"That's okay. Like I said, this is more for clarification purposes. And something may come

up that neither of us anticipated being important." Like the cooking. "What about her marriage? How were things between Nicole and her husband--Jake?"

"Fine, as far as I know. I mean, they had arguments like any other couple, but she never told me about anything out of the ordinary."

"Okay ..." Sarah tries to figure out which angle to hit next. "You were the one who discovered her body, correct?"

"Yeah," Mia says. Her voice is suddenly a lot quieter and sounds a lot older.

"You found her at her home?"

"In her bedroom. Yeah."

"Why were you there?" Sarah tries to keep her voice non-accusatory. She's read all the statements and the official rulings on the matter. There's no reason to suspect this woman of anything, and she doesn't want to give the impression that she's really out to turn this on Mia.

"I had been out shopping the day before and I found a book--a cookbook--that Nicole had been looking for, so I told her I'd drop by and give it to her."

"But she wasn't expecting you at any specific time?"

"No. Not really."

"Not really?"

"Well, I told her I might drop by during the day sometime. We didn't make a plan or anything." Mia's tone is suddenly more defensive, and Sarah has to remind herself to hold back. This isn't about Nicole or Mia; it's about Matt.

They talk about Mia finding the body, but Sarah tries to keep that as brief as possible. It was a pills-and-booze overdose, which Sarah already knew. Mia just found the body, called 911, and then called Jake at work.

"Were Nicole and Matt close?" Sarah asks, deliberately steering the subject away from Mia's gruesome discovery.

"They got along. Matt spent a lot of time at the house. He and Jake were pretty close -- before Nicole died, I mean. But I don't think that Matt was so close to Nicole that her killing herself was enough to drive him away forever, if that's what you mean."

That's another thing Sarah hates: interview subjects making assumptions about the reasons behind the questions. She always worries that she's getting a tainted answer, losing information that might never be recovered because the person answering is making a guess about what she is looking for.

Nevertheless, she moves on. "Did things noticeably change between Matt and Jake after Nicole's death?"

"I think so. Yeah. During the funeral, it looked like they were having some kind of fight. They hardly went near each other, and they were giving each other dirty looks the whole time."

Pieces are starting to move together in Sarah's mind, but she's not sure if she should trust the movements or not.

"Did you have any contact with Matt after Nicole's death? At the funeral or anything?" Sarah asks.

"Not really. Nothing significant. He was a total wreck. They both were -- him and Jake. I sort of kept my contact with them to offering my condolences. I spent more time with Nicole's family, because I knew them pretty well."

There are alarms firing off in Sarah's head now, but she tries to finish the conversation in as calm a manner as she can. But things are finally starting to fit together -- at least, she thinks they are. Now it's only a matter of who she goes to next: Jake ... or Matt himself.

END OF EPISODE #290

How do you think this Sarah and Matt situation will pan out? What did you think about the Diane/Eric and Claire/Ryan scenes? What's in store at the custody hearing? Come over to the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts and see what others are saying!

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