

## "Footprints" Episode #297

### [Previously ...](#)

- Alex briefly met Trevor at Lauren's party and recognized him as the guy he kept running into months ago.
- Diane had some big news to share with Sarah but was interrupted before she could spill.
- Matt showed up at Sarah's without notice, wanting to talk. Sarah admitted that she conducted an investigation into his background. Matt was angry at her for going behind his back, but he admitted that he'd come by to tell her everything. He confessed to having had an affair with his sister-in-law, Nicole -- and that Nicole became pregnant.

### **CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE**

His second white chocolate mocha of the night in his hand, Alex Marshall makes his way back over to the armchair by the fireplace where he's been camped out for hours. His things rest on and around the chair, marking his territory, though he always worries that someone will have the audacity to move it all and steal the spot.

He removes the spiral notebook from the chair and sits back down. He sips at his drink and stares off into space -- around the coffee house, actually -- as he holds the closed notebook in his hand. The evening crowd populates the place thickly; Alex recognizes many of the faces from previous visits, though he's never spoken to them. Across the room, a small circle of people has gathered to listen to a young man with an acoustic guitar.

Finally, Alex places the mocha carefully on the floor beside his chair. He flips open the cover of the notebook, and it goes right to the page he'd been writing on before he got up to get another drink. His gaze moves over the same words he's already studied time and time again since writing them just a little while ago:

Bryant's angry hands tear at the paper. Max watches in horror as hours of his carefully extracted thoughts, transformed into shreds and bits, tumble to the floor in some sort of macabre winter storm.

It's never going to change.

*This is completely worthless. I've shown the same exact thing three times, just three different ways,* he thinks, though the only external manifestation of the thought is a barely audible groan.

That's the biggest problem he's having with his novel: not jamming every event and every detail that seems significant into the story. He knows it's an issue, and he knows

they're not all necessary, but ... easier said than done.

Alex glances up from the notebook, a casual move, just to focus on something else for a moment, but his eyes stop in their tracks when they pass by the counter.

Trevor.

Realizing he's been staring, Alex forces his focus back down to the notebook. It's not particularly unlikely that he'd see Trevor here -- especially since it was where they first encountered each other, although each had no idea who the other was at that point -- but it comes as a surprise to Alex nevertheless.

He looks up again, an instinctive move to check whether Trevor is gone yet. Bad timing gets the best of him, though: Trevor is now leaning against the counter, surveying the rest of the large room as he waits for his drink.

Before Alex can divert his own eyes again, Trevor's catch them.

There is a quiet moment of recognition. Alex sees, feels, Trevor studying him, and a moment later becomes aware that he must be reciprocating.

A smile -- more of a grin, really -- turns Trevor's lips upward.

"Grande white chocolate mocha!"

The barista's call momentarily breaks their attention from one another. Trevor takes his drink from the counter and, as Alex suspected he might, comes strolling over.

"Hi, Alex."

"Hey." Alex reaches for his mocha and instantly starts sipping on it.

"Listen," Trevor says, switching topics with far too much ease, "I've gotta apologize."

As much as Alex wants to respond, he can't think of anything that doesn't sound completely idiotic or way too demanding in his head, so instead he waits.

"You probably thought I was a total asshole that first time we bumped into each other here."

"It was understandable. I thought you were grabbing my drink--"

"--and I thought you were grabbing mine. I'm surprised that doesn't happen more often,

come to think of it."

Awkward silence starts to rear its head, and suddenly Alex feels very uncomfortable. Part of him has been hoping they'd have a chance to talk, at least a little, but now that it's here, he has no idea what to say.

"Actually, I'm glad you're here," Trevor says.

"You are?" *Yeah, you idiot, he just said that.*

"Yeah. I've been wanting to talk to you about something."

## **SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT**

"She got pregnant."

Matt Gray's words stun whatever response might have been waiting on Sarah Fisher's lips into absolute oblivion. There was no mention of Nicole having been pregnant -- not in the police report, not in anything her friend Mia said ...

"She did?" Sarah asks.

Matt stares blankly at her. His cheeks are damp with tears; the softness they evoke stands in stark contrast to the hardness in his eyes.

"I don't know how we let it happen," he says. "We had sex once, we just--we made a mistake. And it went from there. We said it'd never happen again, but it did, and it was a little easier that time. It kept getting easier."

"Did Jake find out?"

"Not 'til after Nicole died."

"God." Sarah draws a sharp breath. "There wasn't anything about Nicole having been pregnant in any of the records."

"She wasn't pregnant when she died."

His blank stare continues, drilling a hole right through Sarah. But she can't look away from it. She's about to ask what happened when Matt surprises her by volunteering the rest of the story.

"She had an abortion," he says. It sounds like the first time he's ever spoken the words. There's something gravelly about them, as if they're new and uncomfortable for him.

"Still, that would've ..."

"It was months before she died. Over half a year."

*He could have had another child ...*

"Did you know she was going to?" she asks, finally.

He nods grimly. "We knew she had to. The baby wasn't Jake's. If she'd had it--there's no way we could've kept that a secret."

"Were you still ... having an affair with her?"

He turns away, moving his focus somewhere over by the door. Sarah thinks she can see a coating of tears standing out from his eyes again.

"Not by then," he says. "But it was still there. We could stop the actual action, but there was something else there."

Sarah's hand reaches out to touch his shoulder before she realizes what it's doing. "Were you in love with her?"

There is a delay before Matt's answer. She can see him adjusting to her touch, contemplating it -- probably whether to shrug it off or not. But he lets it rest on him as he says, "I don't know. Maybe. But I couldn't be. I knew that from the get-go."

"I'm so sorry," she says. The statement catches in her throat, and she feels the sudden onset of her own tears. "I wish I'd known."

"I wish you didn't have to. I wish no one had to."

He still doesn't face her. Her hand falls from his shoulder, uncertain of what to do besides rest there.

"I had to tell him," Matt says suddenly. "After she died, I had to tell my brother everything. He had no idea. I had to tell him that I slept with his wife--got her pregnant--and turned her into such a wreck that she *killed herself*."

"You didn't make her commit suicide, Matt. That was her choice."

"She couldn't think about anything but the baby. And I couldn't even do anything about that. And then Jake started thinking that a kid would make them closer. She couldn't handle it."

"That wasn't your fault."

"I ruined their lives," he says sternly, with a harshness that rattles Sarah. "And I thought that if I forgot about it--if I started a whole new life on my own, somewhere else--then it'd go away, and it would just be like some bad dream I'd had that no one else had to know about."

He turns suddenly to face her. "But I couldn't even do that. I came here and I got you wrapped up in this whole mess, and Victoria, too."

He goes quiet for a moment, looking utterly drained, totally defeated.

Finally his lips move, but the sound that comes out sounds less like speech than a croak: "I'm sorry. You deserved to know about this a lot sooner. I never should've gotten both our hopes up about having a clear future."

Sarah's hand reaches out to him again, but it's no use. He grabs the doorknob hard and yanks it, pulling the door open and granting him a path to escape.

## **DIANE BISHOP'S CONDOMINIUM**

"No!"

Diane Bishop rises to her feet. She softens her voice as she says, "You have to take your bath."

"I don't want to," Samantha whines.

"You don't have a choice."

Samantha plants her hands on her hips and glares at her mother. "I don't want to," she repeats through gritted teeth.

Diane grabs her by the wrist. "You're taking a bath."

She starts walking toward the bathroom, pulling Samantha along with her. The little girl follows grudgingly for a few steps but then drops to her knees in the middle of the hallway.

"Samantha. Come on."

"I - don't - want - a - bath!" Samantha shrieks. She pulls hard on Diane's hand.

Diane contemplates dragging her the rest of the way to the bathroom and physically placing her in the tub, but she doesn't want to deal with all the kicking and screaming that are sure to come from that. She doesn't need a brawl with a four-year-old right now.

"Fine," Diane says. She holds up both of her hands. "Do whatever you want for now. But you're taking a bath before bed."

Samantha sits on her knees and stares up at her mother, looking relieved, even though Diane knows there's a hint of victory in there somewhere. Then, without warning, Sam scrambles to her feet and rushes down the hallway to her room.

Diane isn't quite ready to give up, but she forces herself to do it. A bath isn't worth the battle. Still, she hates the idea of Samantha getting her way by being bratty.

She goes to the kitchen, thinking about what she can pull together for their dinner. Before she even makes it to the refrigerator, though, another thought seizes her.

She's been meaning to do it all day, but she's had to wait until it was late enough. It should be now ...

Her next stop is the phone, with a brief detour to grab something from her briefcase. But as she dials, she realizes that the piece of paper wasn't really necessary: She's seen the number enough to be able to dial it off the top of her head.

Two rings and she gets an answer: "Hello?"

"Brian. It's Diane." She waits for his response and, hopefully, some kind of clue. Or is it too soon?

"Hi," he says. "I, uh, I got a call from Winston today."

And?

"Thank you," he adds quickly. "It's--it's a great offer."

"It's Tim's old position," Diane says. "That's a huge step up for you."

"I know. But why?"

She's been awaiting this chance ever since she cooked up the idea. "You deserve it. And I've been thinking about what you said when you were up here -- about not just wanting to be a lackey. So I pulled some strings."

"Some pretty significant strings, I'd say. I really didn't think--"

"Are you gonna take it?"

"What?"

"The job. You're going to accept it, right?" There's no way he wouldn't. It's way too good an offer to pass up.

"I have to think about it," he says.

"What's there to think about? It's a higher-ranking position, more responsibility, more *money*--"

"I know. Believe me, I know." She hears a heavy breath on the other end of the line, but she's not sure if it's a sigh or just the connection. "But it also means going back to King's Bay."

"It's the opportunity of a lifetime, Brian."

"Maybe. But I've got a lot going on in L.A. Picking up and leaving--"

--would absolutely be worth it."

"Listen," he says, sounding more removed, suddenly. "I've got to go."

"You have to make up your mind soon."

"I know." His voice fills with an extra bit of something as he adds, "But thank you."

"You're welcome."

They hang up quietly, Brian first and then Diane. After she sets the wireless phone down on the counter, she just stands there, caught up in thought.

*He'll take the job. He has to.*

## **CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE**

Alex feels his hands go clammy at Trevor's announcement.

Trevor must notice, because the next words he speaks are, "I just don't want you to think I, like, hate you because of what happened between you and my sister."

"You'd have every right to," Alex says, uncomfortable at the thought of Lauren discussing him with Trevor, even though it's not at all surprising that it would have happened. "I pulled her way too deep into something that really wasn't even about her."

"Yeah, but ... I understand how it could've happened."

*Is he trying to tell me something?* Alex wonders.

He's ready for the confession that should be the next thing out of Trevor's mouth, but instead, Trevor points to the notebook.

"What are you working on?" he asks.

The question catches Alex off-guard. "Uh, I'm writing a novel, actually. Or trying to."

"You're a writer?" Before Alex can answer, Trevor adds, "Well, obviously, but I mean, like, a professional writer?"

"I'm trying to be. I'd like to be. But this--" He holds up the notebook momentarily and then slaps it back down against the arm of the chair. "It's a mess right now."

"What's it about?" Trevor asks as he leans against the back of another chair.

"It's a college drama, I guess," Alex says, although the explanation is unconvincing even to his own ears. What the hell is it, anyway -- besides a glorified diary?

"You don't sound too thrilled with it."

It's the easiest answer Alex has given all day, maybe all week. "I'm not. It's this big, bloated mess of a story. I've introduced all this stuff, half of which I don't think is even necessary ..."

His complaints linger in the air, and he realizes how completely vast they sound. Maybe he should just start over. With a new story, even.

"Have you had anyone take a look at it?" Trevor asks.



Alex shakes his head.

"If you want, I can give it a look. English *was* my major for a semester ..."

"I've actually got the first few chapters right here," Alex says, reaching down to grab them from his bag. Only when he comes up with the thick stack of papers does his enthusiasm get snagged on reality. "You don't have to. I mean, it's a lot--"

"I'd love to have a look at it. Besides, I'm sitting at home, trying to figure out what to do with my life, and my parents are back from their trip, so I could use something to keep me busy."

Alex extends the stack of papers to Trevor but pauses halfway. "Really?"

"Yeah, really." Trevor takes the pages before Alex has the chance to retract them. "Why don't you jot down your number and I'll give you a call when I'm done with 'em?"

Alex tears a scrap of paper from the notebook and scribbles down his number.

"Thanks," he says as he hands the scrap to Trevor.

Trevor tucks the number into his pocket. "No problem. Hey, I should get going, but I'll give you a call so we can talk about this."

"Great. I really appreciate it."

Trevor just nods and stands up, his coffee in one hand and Alex's pages in the other. "I'll see you later."

"Yeah. Later," Alex says, watching as Trevor's tall, lean form exits the coffee house.

Across the room, the guy with the guitar stops playing, and the small circle of listeners breaks into applause.

## **SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT**

Sarah's hand catches only thin air as Matt moves out of the bedroom and away from her. She hurries after him.

"You don't have to leave," she says. It doesn't stop him.

She stops in the middle of the hallway, watching his broad back and strong legs through

the t-shirt and jeans as they move to the front door.

"Matt!" she calls out, at once conscious of both the possibility of waking Victoria and the need to keep him from going.

"You don't want me to stay," he says, his back still to her as he reaches the door.

"Why not? Because you made a mistake?" She walks quickly through the apartment to catch up with him. "That is the stupidest thing I've ever heard. How many mistakes have you forgiven me?"

"Nothing you did ever left anyone *dead*." The word pours off his tongue like some vile slime.

"You didn't kill Nicole. You didn't make the decision for her."

Matt looks hard at her, staring right into her, as if he's somehow going to will what he's saying to sound valid to her. "She was my brother's wife."

Sarah takes a deep breath. "Brent was in love with my sister."

"Yeah, but--" He gets caught on the connection. "It's different, Sarah."

"The specifics are different, yeah. But what it comes down to is that we both made mistakes."

He doesn't respond.

"Matt, you pulled me through the most difficult period of my life. If you hadn't been here-- God, do you think I'd have been able to sign those divorce papers without you?"

"This whole thing has been a lie," he says. "You've built me up to be this rock you can always lean on--"

Her hands grasp his. "So let me be your rock now."

This isn't how she ever expected this conversation to turn out. She was sure it would end with her kicking Matt out, or him walking out in anger. But hearing him tell his story, seeing the pain in him, has suddenly drawn her closer to him than she ever thought she could be. It's so much more powerful than anything she ever felt for Brent, and it's more powerful than any attraction she's ever imagined.

As her lips reach up to touch his, she realizes that she's completely and utterly in love

with this man.

His lips are stiff against hers, uncertain of how to react to the kiss.

"I'm sorry," he says as their faces part.

She has no idea how to respond to that except to kiss him again. This time, his lips move into hers, finally accepting -- she hopes -- that what she's just learned doesn't make her despise him.

She reaches around his back, pulling him closer to her, and there's something strangely comforting about feeling his strong form wrapped in her arms.

### **END OF EPISODE #297**

*Can Sarah and Matt be happy now? What did you think of the meeting between Alex and Trevor? And how about that offer Diane set up for Brian? Please join us in the Footprints Forum to discuss this episode!*

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