

## "Footprints" Episode #300

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

- Paula attempted to tell Ryan the truth about their connection, but he presumed that she wanted to warn him about hurting Claire and stormed off.
- Bill agreed to move back into the Fisher home, but things remained strained between him and Paula.
- While at Sarah's apartment, Diane found something that surprised her.
- Ryan tried to reassure Claire on the eve of Samantha's custody hearing.

### **KING'S BAY DISTRICT COURTHOUSE**

The coolness of the air-conditioned courthouse comes as a welcome relief to Paula Fisher as she steps in from the muggy August day. It's one of the hottest days they've had all summer, but she's dressed formally, a far cry from the short sleeves and shorts she'd be in if she were at home, working in her garden.

Bill walks alongside her in silence as they move down the building's main corridor. The entire day has been like this. He returned from the hotel with his things, ready to move back into the house, early this morning; Paula was already awake. Conversation was awkward then, but it vanished into thin air once they got in the car to come to the courthouse.

The day has been without mention of the situation that precipitated the rift, even though each knows that it's the foremost thing on the other's mind. But today is about Claire and Samantha, and about remaining strong as a family, so Paula has avoided bringing it up. She is sure that Bill is taking the same approach, though she shudders to think what might happen once there are less pressing matters at hand.

They reach the appropriate courtroom, still without words. To Paula's surprise, Bill opens the door and stands aside for her to enter first. She does, trying not to make any more of the gesture than necessary, although it certainly makes her wonder even more what might be going on in Bill's head.

The courtroom is quite small. The front looks like any other, with room for the judge and other officials, and tables for the plaintiff and the defendant; there is, however, no room on either side for a jury. Behind the tables are four rows of pews, upholstered in a fabric that is an exact match for the burgundy carpeting.

Paula spots Claire as soon as she and Bill enter the room. Claire sits at one of the tables, huddled together in conversation with her lawyer. Ryan sits in the pew directly behind them. At the other table, Diane Bishop sits beside her lawyer, who is reviewing some sort

of document.

Both Claire and Ryan turn at the same time. Paula offers a small wave to Claire, and Bill nods gently. Ryan's stare bores into Paula, a stinging reminder of their confrontation last night. She wants desperately to explain to him that she wasn't trying to insinuate that he might hurt Claire, but that she had something very important to tell him ...

Instead, Bill leads the way to the pew behind Ryan. Paula sits down beside her husband, folding her hands in her lap, the thick silence threatening to suffocate her as her husband and her son sit so close to her and yet so many things remain unspoken.

---

Claire sighs heavily as she leans back in the chair. She feels perfectly confident about her lawyer's abilities. After all, Jim Thompson did help her and Tim win custody of Samantha from Diane initially. But she cannot shake the feeling of impending doom. Not even having Paula, Bill, and Ryan here for support is really helping.

She feels Ryan's breath on the back of her neck as he speaks: "Try to relax. Everything is going to be fine."

"I know," she says, not believing an ounce of it. She continues to stare toward the front of the courtroom, at the empty judge's spot.

Ryan's hands settle on her shoulders. His fingertips press into the tough muscles, urging them to release even a little bit of their tension but ultimately doing no good.

Claire's eyes wander around the courtroom and, despite knowing better, linger on the other table long enough to catch Diane's gaze. The pink-lipsticked grin that greets Claire has something absolutely devious about it, and Claire feels her shoulders push back hard against Ryan's fingers.

## **KING'S BAY DISTRICT COURTHOUSE**

Diane Bishop watches as Eric Westin pores over the papers in front of him for what to be the six thousandth time since they sat down at the table.

"I think they probably say the same thing they did fifteen minutes ago," she finally says.

Eric looks up from his reading with a degree of annoyance that Diane can tell he is trying to keep inside. She has to keep herself from smiling at the knowledge that she has Mr. Too-Cool-For-School so out of sorts.

"I'm really not sure this is such a great idea," he says quietly.

"It's a wonderful idea, Eric."

"I told you, it could wind up making you look bad--"

"And I'd still wind up looking better than them." She shoots him a look that challenges him to protest any further. When it doesn't come, she continues: "We're doing it. I want my daughter. This is the key. End of story."

Instead of arguing with her, Eric just huffs and turns his attention back down to the papers.

Diane sits back in her chair. She turns, just in time for a moment of eye contact with Claire -- and then Ryan. He goes pale as a ghost already, but even more so as Diane lifts one eyebrow at him. He knows that she has the upper hand here, and she's not afraid to use it.

---

When Sarah Fisher steps into the courtroom, it's the same scene she's been envisioning ever since she decided that she should be at the hearing. Diane on one side, Claire and the family on the other, and the aisle in the middle dividing them like some sort of invisible fence.

Paula and Bill both turn at the sound of the door opening. Sarah waves quickly to them, and before she has to deal with their surprise at seeing her here, hurries over to Diane's side.

Diane spots her before she reaches the front of the room.

"Glad you made it," Diane says with a smile.

"I thought it would be good to be here and support both of you," Sarah says. She waits for Diane to make some crack about choosing sides, but thankfully it never materializes. "How do you feel?"

"I feel good. Confident."

Sarah notices that Diane's lawyer looks up from his reading to give her what appears to be a nonverbal warning.

"I'm Samantha's mother, and that's what counts in the end," Diane says.

Sarah just nods. This whole thing is making her very uncomfortable; she's sure that her parents are staring right at her, wondering how she could possibly be associating with "the enemy" at a time like this.

"I'm gonna go say hi over there and then sit down," she says at last. "But good luck."

"Thanks."

The moment Sarah turns to move across the aisle, she sees Bill and Paula staring off into space, trying to pretend that they weren't watching her and failing miserably at it.

In front of them, Ryan Moriani sits on the edge of his seat, looking very uneasy.

*I hope Diane isn't planning to bring up his little offer to pay her off, Sarah thinks. But that's probably some very wishful thinking.*

## **KING'S BAY DISTRICT COURTHOUSE**

Ryan's body tightens up as Sarah approaches Claire's side of the room. Ryan is sure that he gets a look of warning from the blonde woman, and it sends his mind spinning: *Did Diane say something to her? If she's not keeping this a secret, then ...*

He doesn't really want to think about it. Nevertheless, the thought continues to churn in his brain as he numbly watches Sarah greeting Claire and wishing her good luck.

A moment passes, and Sarah turns her attention toward him. But she goes right past him, to her parents.

Ryan listens to the conversation:

"Honey, what are you doing here?"

"I thought it'd be nice to come show support for both of them. How are you two?"

Ryan thinks he detects a pause before Paula answers, "We're fine."

Her husband gives a gruff-sounding, "Okay," and the three go quiet for a few seconds.

Ryan feels Sarah's eyes on him before she even says anything.

"Hey, Ryan," she says softly, presumably not to attract Claire's attention, "can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Um, yeah," he chokes. He rises from his seat and follows her to the back of the room.

She turns her back to the rest of the courtroom, leaving Ryan to watch Claire and the Fishers -- and Diane -- as Sarah speaks to him in a hushed voice.

"Listen, I know about ... your little offer to Diane."

For an instant, he thinks of denying it, but it's not even worth the trouble. Instead he sighs roughly.

"I really hope she's not planning to bring it up," Sarah continues, "but don't be surprised if she does."

"I was trying to help Claire out."

"And you may have made things worse." As soon as she says it, though, she seems to soften a bit. "Please, just watch your step where Claire is concerned. She's had a lot to deal with. None of us need to be throwing anything else on the pile."

He nods sheepishly, suddenly feeling mortified. How could he have been stupid enough to think that it would be as easy as waltzing into Diane Bishop's office with a checkbook?

Because that's what Nick taught him.

Sarah leaves him standing at the back of the courtroom as she goes to sit with her parents. Ryan waits for the burning to drain from his cheeks before he returns to his seat.

## **KING'S BAY DISTRICT COURTHOUSE**

"And Mrs. Fisher, would you please describe your current living situation?"

Bill sits in the second row of the courtroom and cringes at Jim Thompson's question. There's nothing to get nervous about, he supposes, but the question hits a little too close to home ... so to speak.

"My husband Bill and I live in the house where we raised our children, who live on their own now," Paula answers. "My son Tim's wife, Claire, and their son Travis have been living with us for the last ten months or so."

"Your husband works, while you stay at home, correct?"

"Yes."

"Do you regularly take care of your grandson, then? While his mother is at work, I mean?"

"I do," Paula says. "I'm home with Travis -- and Samantha, when she's staying with Claire -- when Claire works at the hospital."

"And you enjoy this arrangement?"

"I think we all do. Since they don't need to be dropped off and picked up at all hours, the arrangement isn't jarring to the kids, and it gives Bill and me the chance to spend a lot of time with our grandkids."

"Thank you, Mrs. Fisher," Jim says, returning to his table.

Paula's testimony, simple as it has been, raises a feeling of confidence in Bill. There's no way that Diane could combat the fact that, living with Claire, Samantha always has someone to care for her. That has to be a strong point in Claire's favor.

---

Jim Thompson steps out from behind the table. "Ms. Bishop, would you explain, for the judge's benefit, how your daughter Samantha was conceived?"

Claire clasps her hands together on the table and awaits Diane's answer. There was a time when she never thought that any of this would be remotely funny -- Diane's seduction of Tim, her schemes to drive Tim and Claire apart, all the anguish they endured during the first months of Samantha's life. But now, seeing Diane squirm and knowing that her interference was such a small blip on the radar compared to some of the other things life can deal out, Claire finds herself finding a strange sense of enjoyment in reliving this part of the past.

"It's all in the records," Diane says curtly.

James offers a smile, cordial, professional, but with an undercurrent that makes it clear he's not letting Diane off the hook. "That may be true, but Judge Curlin has not personally heard this case yet."

Claire watches the evolution of Diane's reaction: first, she shoots Jim a nasty look; then she glances over to her lawyer, as if commanding him to stop this; finally, she huffs loudly and straightens in her seat.

"Tim Fisher and I slept together while he was in the hospital, recovering from an assault," she says.

"What did that assault do to him, exactly?"

"It placed him in a coma for a few weeks."

"And when he woke up from that coma?"

Diane freezes and gives Jim another look of death. He waits patiently and stays silent so long that Diane has to answer.

"He had amnesia," she says.

"Tim Fisher couldn't remember the details of his life, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Is that a 'yes, he could remember them,' or a 'no, that's correct,' Ms. Bishop?"

Diane hesitates again, but this time, Eric Westin intercedes. "Your Honor, this is not supposed to be a forum for taunting Ms. Bishop."

Judge Curlin, a big-haired woman in her forties, nods quickly. "I agree. Move along, Mr. Thompson."

Jim pauses a moment and then continues as if there were never a break in his line of questioning. "Ms. Bishop, who initiated the encounter between you and Mr. Fisher?"

"It was actually pretty mutual--"

"Let me rephrase the question," Jim interrupts. "What made the encounter so 'mutual'? Why was Mr. Fisher so willing to have sex with you?"

Claire waits for the answer, wondering what spin Diane is going to be able to put on it.

Surprisingly, there's none. She stares directly at Jim and says, "I told him that I was his wife."

And Jim moves right in for the kill. "So you lied to an amnesiac man that you were his wife so that he'd sleep with you, and you this encounter resulted in your pregnancy with Samantha?"

Though there's a slight moment of hesitation, Diane answers with a simple, "Yes." No twisting around of the question, no distorting the facts. Just a confirmation.

*Maybe she's trying to show that she's matured*, Claire wonders, but Diane's uncharacteristic lack of resistance to these admissions still has her very curious.

## **KING'S BAY DISTRICT COURTHOUSE**

Eric Westin's smile is all cocky excitement as he paces the front of the courtroom, hands held behind his back.

"Mrs. Fisher," he says finally, pausing in his tracks and turning to look at Claire, "in the preliminary hearing for this case that was held some time ago, we established for the court how your husband died. Would you please reiterate the details for the judge?"

In his seat, Ryan grimaces. They knew that this would be brought up, but having had the opportunity to prepare for it doesn't make it any less painful. He listens in agony as Claire recounts the whole tale: she was suspicious of Nick and Ryan; Tim didn't want her to be harmed; his blood was found on the pier where Nick's meeting was allegedly being held.

It's enough to make Ryan want to scramble out of the courtroom. All he's tried to do for months and months is banish all this from the Fishers' minds, and Claire's especially. Now it's being dragged out in a way that not only makes him sound like some sort of criminal, but could possibly hurt Claire, as well.

"And yet, after all that, aren't you romantically involved with Ryan Moriani?" Eric asks.

Ryan watches Claire intently, and she looks to him for one brief, desperate moment before she answers.

"We're dating, yes."

"So, essentially, you're allowing your in-laws, your son, and your stepdaughter to be exposed to a man who, two years ago, you were not only convinced was involved in illegal activities, but whom you also blamed for your husband's death?"

"Things have changed," Claire says after a stinging silence. The rebuttal is music to Ryan's ears. At least she still believes that.

"But the fact remains," Eric says, "that you never produced concrete proof that Mr. Moriani was *not* involved in or responsible for any of the things you believed him to be, correct?"

Ryan winces again. It's as though they've managed to bandage these gaping holes, and now those bandages are being brutally ripped away. The wounds are open and fresh, just like they were two years ago, even last summer.

"I trust Ryan," Claire says. But she stays focused on Eric while she speaks and for a long time afterward. Not even a glance at Ryan.

"Very well. I suppose that's your prerogative." Eric resumes the pacing, and Ryan stifles the urge to jump out of his seat and knock the bastard out.

The urge just intensifies as Eric whips around, looking back at Claire, and fires: "And what about Stan Lincoln?"

---

Paula tries to sit up straighter in the hope that it will help her feel more comfortable, but the effort is in vain. She wasn't expecting to be brought back up to the witness stand, and being at Eric Westin's mercy is a lot more intimidating than being walked through an explanation by Jim Thompson.

"Mrs. Fisher, we've heard a lot of testimony today regarding your family," Eric says, doing his usual routine of pacing slowly and looking thoughtful.

He doesn't speak again until he stops pacing.

"I take it you care greatly for Claire, given the way you've welcomed her into your home even though your son is no longer living."

"Of course," Paula answers. Even the simple response feels stiff to her; she's being set up for something, she can tell.

"And yet you've allowed her to continue her relationship with Ryan Moriani -- you've allowed him into your family's home, you've let him interact with your grandchildren. None of that worries you?"

"Claire is a grown woman. I worry about her, yes, but I also trust her to make wise decisions. If she feels safe with Ryan, then I see no reason to interfere."

She can't help glancing, just for a second, at Ryan. Clearly what happened last night -- a misunderstanding, that's all it was, although it seemed so difficult to resolve at the time -- is fresh in his mind, judging from the way he glares back at her. But he also looks very nervous.

"Very well," Eric says. He returns to the table where Diane is seated, picks up a few papers, and leafs through them.

Paula watches anxiously, folding her hands together so hard that the knuckles go white.

Finally Eric sets down the papers and returns his attention to Paula. "We'll move along, then. Mrs. Fisher, how many children do you have?"

*Oh God*, she thinks. Her head starts to spin. *They must have researched this.*

"Five," she croaks.

"Five? We've only heard about four, if I recall correctly. Tim had two sisters and a brother, correct?"

"Yes." She freezes, trying to figure out some way out of this. She doesn't want to be talking about this, not even in a room of people who mainly know about it anyway. Not with Bill here. She makes desperate eye contact with Sarah. "And a half-brother. I gave a son up for adoption before I married my husband."

She sees the beginnings of that obnoxiously cocky grin on Eric's face and feels a surge of strength.

"I don't see how that's relevant to my granddaughter's custody," she says. "Surely that can't be held against my family."

"I don't recall asking whether it was relevant," Eric says.

"Is it?" Jim interrupts. "Your Honor--"

Eric halts the objection with a hand held up. "It is, I assure you."

He paces again, a few steps to the left, a few to the right, enough to make Paula even dizzier than she already is. When he stops to face her, the only thing she can do is focus on his face; she can't look anywhere else in the room.

"And is it true, Mrs. Fisher, that you recently conducted a search for that son you gave up so many years ago?"

"Yes," she admits, trying to sound as curt as possible. This is none of his business--

"And what did you find?"

"I found my son's contact information. I haven't contacted him yet, though." She turns to the judge, looking for some sympathy. "Please, I don't understand how this is--"

"Did the findings surprise you?" Eric asks.

Her mind gets swept into a whirlwind. *He knows. Oh God, he knows. He must know. But how?*

"Mrs. Fisher?"

"Yes," she chokes out. "Of course it would surprise me. Anything would have surprised me. I knew nothing about my son."

"But it was far more surprising than you'd expected, wasn't it?" He's taunting her now. She can tell.

She can't answer.

"Mrs. Fisher, why were the findings so surprising?"

"This is unnecessary," Jim calls out, but Paula can tell from the way he eases back into his seat defeatedly that the judge has motioned for the questioning to go on.

"Mrs. Fisher, is it true that the son you gave up for adoption decades ago has actually been right under your nose for some time? That he's the same man you once thought to be responsible for your other son's death? The same man who's now dating your daughter-in-law?"

Paula feels the air coming into her lungs heavier and slower with each breath she attempts to draw.

"Your son," Eric declares, abandoning all pretense of questioning now so that he can twist the knife a final time, "is Ryan Moriani, isn't he?"

Paula's eyes fly to Sarah, desperate for help, but it's too late. They search for Bill, for the reaction that's been so long in coming, but she never gets to see it. The courtroom spins faster and faster until it's just a blur of colors and noises. But Eric Westin's satisfied sneer lingers in the forefront of her mind, even as everything else fades to blackness.

### **END OF EPISODE #300**

*Is there any way to salvage the situation now? What does this mean for the Fisher family? Are Diane and Eric going to get away with this? Join us in the Footprints Forum to make your thoughts heard!*

[Next Episode](#)