

## "Footprints" Episode #302

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

- Alex ran into Trevor, who offered to read some of the novel-in-progress that has Alex so frustrated. Later, Trevor shared with Lauren that he is gay.
- Following the courtroom revelation that Ryan is Paula's son, Bill realized that Sarah assisted Paula in her search.
- The judge ruled that Samantha's custody arrangement should remain as-is: primary custody for Diane, with visitation rights one weekend a month for Claire.
- Claire fled the courthouse, refusing to talk to Ryan, while Sarah chewed out Diane for pulling such a stunt.

### **DYLAN CARRINGTON'S APARTMENT**

Beams of late afternoon sunlight pour in through the large windows on one side of the living room, bathing most of the apartment in their glow and covering the television's screen with a glare that makes the picture nearly impossible to see.

Nevertheless, when Dylan Carrington returns from the kitchen, he sets his bottle of sparkling water on the coffee table and lays himself lengthwise on the couch, his head right on top of Alex Marshall's legs, he turns his attention to the TV.

"These people are retarded," he says after watching for a few seconds. "Does this guy seriously think he's gonna be able to do a triathlon? He can't even do a lap around a track."

Alex just shrugs. It's one of those underdog-becomes-a-superstar shows on MTV, and while it's not the most intellectual thing he's ever seen, it's perfectly fine for lazy afternoon viewing; he doesn't think it's at all necessary to get so upset over it.

He reaches to the coffee table and grabs the remote, which he hands to Dylan.

"You can find something else if you want," Alex says.

Dylan takes the remote from him and holds it, but he clearly has no intention of doing anything with it.

"I don't think we're gonna find anything much more exciting than this," he says. "At least not on TV."

He reaches a hand up behind Alex's neck, and his fingers lazily stroke the neatly clipped

bottom of Alex's hair. Alex knows this routine, and he continues watching the MTV show -- or what he can see of it through the glare -- without really absorbing any of it. Dylan's other hand works its way under Alex's polo shirt.

A few sharp beeps cut through the dull curtain of background sound from the television. Alex recognizes the pseudo-melody as the ring of his cell phone.

He reaches into the right cargo pocket of his shorts and withdraws the phone. The number flashing on the caller ID screen is unfamiliar, but he answers it anyway.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Alex," says the voice, which he vaguely recognizes but can't place. But he doesn't have to wonder about it for too long. "It's Trevor. How've you been?"

"I'm okay," Alex says. "Good. Nothing too exciting, I guess. How about you?"

"Same. Actually, I finished reading through those chapters you gave me."

"Already? Wow. I wasn't expecting to hear from you for a few weeks!"

"What can I say? If something catches my interest, I go at it full-force," Trevor says.

Alex has to grin at that, though it turns into a stifled giggle a moment later as Dylan's fingers graze over his chest.

"So what'd you think?" Alex asks. As much as he's been awaiting the feedback, he's also been dreading it. Knowing that someone else, especially someone other than a professor or a classmate, had his writing in his possession has been nagging at the back of his mind since he handed over the pages to Trevor.

"Well, I was thinking we could get together and talk about it," Trevor says.

"Oh. Uh, yeah. That would be really cool." Alex pauses as he makes eye contact with Dylan, who is busily undoing Alex's belt.

"When's good for you?" he finally manages to ask into the phone.

The response is swift. "What are you doing in, like, half an hour?"

Alex has to think about it for a second. He glances down at Dylan, who has Alex's shorts unbuttoned.

"Nothing, really," Alex says.

"You wanna meet up? How about at Cassie's again?"

"Sure," Alex says. He draws in a sharp breath as the warm wetness of Dylan's tongue dips into his navel.

"Sweet. I'll see you then."

"Yeah. Thanks, Trevor."

Alex pushes the button to end the call -- and then realizes that Dylan has stopped in his tracks and is looking up at him questioningly.

"Who's Trevor?" Dylan asks, pursing his lips in a mock kiss.

"Lauren's brother. He offered to read over some of my book for me, and he wanted to let me know that he finished reading. We're gonna meet in a little while so he can tell me what he thought."

"Sounds like a date," Dylan says teasingly.

"Uh-huh. Sure." Alex starts fastening his pants back up.

"Wait, you're going *now*?" Dylan asks, sounding as if he's received the biggest shock of his lifetime.

"Yeah, he's free this afternoon, so I figured it'd be a good time." Seeing the skeptical look on Dylan's face, Alex adds, "He's sorta doing me a huge favor. I can't be, like, dictating a schedule to him."

"Fine, fine. Poop on our party."

"Glad to know I'm hanging out with a five-year-old," Alex says. "I'll come over later, okay?"

"You'd better," Dylan says, watching carefully as Alex stands up and starts putting on his shoes.

## **FISHER HOME**

Quiet as she would like to be, the stairs groan under Paula Fisher's steps as she ascends

them slowly. The house sounds as if it's channeling her weariness, as if it understands how all the day's drama has drained the energy from her body and made every movement feel like an act of strenuous labor.

Paula pauses when she reaches the top of the stairs. She can see through the open door directly into what is now Claire's room -- the room that Tim used to sleep in, when he was young. Claire lies on her back on the bed, totally motionless except for the sporadic blinks of her eyelids.

Paula stands in the hallway, watching Claire, for what feels like a very long time. It's maybe a minute, perhaps a little more, but it feels as though it lasts forever. She is greatly tempted to retreat downstairs or into her own room and leave Claire alone, but she knows that avoiding the issue isn't going to make it vanish.

"Claire," she says quietly, stepping up to the doorway of the room. Even the faint sound of her own voice sounds like an abrupt disturbance to the thick quiet of Claire's bedroom.

Claire's head turns slowly, but it is the only part of her that moves.

"I wanted to see how you were doing," Paula says.

"That's a good question," Claire says before releasing a sigh, which goes on for so long that it sounds like a balloon deflating very, very slowly.

Paula steps carefully into the room and is immediately stricken by the feeling that she's somehow intruding. "I'm so sorry. For all of this."

"It's not your fault," Claire says softly.

"Well ... Maybe if Diane hadn't had this bombshell to drop, the judge would have decided differently."

"Maybe." But Claire doesn't sound too convinced. "There was a lot presented for both sides, though. This was just another factor."

That doesn't make Paula feel any better. "Still ... And for it to come out in such a horrible way. I had no idea that anyone else would have the opportunity to spring this on you -- on any of you. I haven't known for very long myself, and I wanted to wait until the time was right and do it in the best possible way ..."

"I know. Paula, this is not your fault. I don't blame you for any of it. You couldn't have known that Ryan would turn out to be your son, and you couldn't have known that Diane would get her hands on that information at such a convenient time."

"Thank you for being so understanding," Paula says. She feels her body relaxing just a bit; she's been terrified that Claire might be cold or hostile toward her. "But that doesn't make things any easier for you. I wish there were something I could do--"

"There is one thing," Claire says, suddenly sitting up.

"What? Whatever it is ..."

Claire looks intently at her for a long moment and seems to be studying her. Finally, when she does speak, her voice is full of confusion -- and perhaps a hint of distrust, Paula notes.

"There's one thing I can't stop wondering about, and it might seem like the most inconsequential part of this whole thing, but I can't help it," Claire says. She pauses, then lets it fly: "How could you have ever been with Stan?"

## **MORIANI HOME**

As he turns his key in the front door's lock, Ryan Moriani again tries to figure out why he's even here. Since the revelation in the courtroom, and Paula's confirmation minutes later, a million thoughts and possible courses of action have come to life in his mind. But this was the one that kept returning to the forefront. He has to see Nick. He has to talk to Nick about this.

Perhaps it's because it's the only definite thing that he *can* do at the moment. He can't talk to Claire, not until she allows him to; he can't face the Fishers, not until he's had more time to absorb the situation; and, truthfully, there isn't anyone else in his life with whom he would even try to discuss this.

Except Nick.

When he enters the house, it is completely silent. The foyer shows no signs of life, nor are there sounds coming from elsewhere that might indicate that anyone is at home. If Ryan hadn't seen the cars outside, he would think that Nick and Katherine were out.

He does a quick tour of the downstairs rooms, but as he suspected, they are empty. The house and its elegant but understated decor -- deep mahogany, gold accents, frequent touches of marble and glass -- lie lazily in the summer sun.

Ryan has never felt entirely comfortable in this house. Despite the resemblance in furnishings, it doesn't feel like either of the houses they lived in when he was younger. When they moved in a few years ago, he felt ridiculous to be sharing living quarters with his father at his age, and that feeling only amplified when Katherine joined them in the

house. But now, given the new information that has jarred his entire perspective on the world, this place feels strangely familiar, almost reassuring.

He takes his time going up the stairs, appreciating the familiarity of his surroundings. When he reaches the upstairs hallway, he finally hears faint sounds of activity. He approaches Nick's study slowly and is somewhat surprised to find the door wide open.

He lingers in the doorway and, unsure of how to present himself, waits for Nick to notice his presence. It takes several seconds -- though it feels like much longer to Ryan -- before Nick looks up from the papers spread out before him.

"Ryan," he says, clearly appraising him. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Ryan catches the nasty undercurrent in Nick's voice, subtle though it is; it's clearly a jab at his recent change of living situation and refusal to be at Nick's beck-and-call for business matters. He decides not to pursue the string of argument that's being dangled in front of him, though. What he has to say is much more important than any of that.

"There's something I need to discuss with you," Ryan says. He pictured himself rushing in here urgently and blowing Nick away with the news, but now that he's here, he feels much less certain of how to approach this.

Nick folds his hands on top of his desk. "What is it?"

Ryan tries to shake off the distinct sense that he's merely being indulged, but it makes him even less certain of how to broach the topic, or whether he wants to deal with all that will come afterward.

"Claire had the custody hearing for her daughter -- Tim's daughter -- today, and something ... unexpected happened," he says. It sounds ridiculous to him, but "unexpected" is the best word he can come up with. Shocking? Life-altering? They all sound just as ludicrous, even moreso in the context of the story.

"Diane Bishop, Samantha's mother -- her lawyer was really out to show what a terrible family the Fishers were and how being around them would be so detrimental to Samantha ... and, I don't know, I presume they really went digging for information -- but they brought out something in court that I don't think anyone saw coming."

Nick brings his folded hands up to his face, right up to his mouth, so that his knuckles brush against his mustache.

"What does this have to do with me?" Nick asks. "I've warned you more times than I can remember about Claire. If you're asking me to bail you -- or her -- out of some sort of mess now--"

"It's not that. It's not anything like that."

"Then what is it? I don't have time to play games, Ryan."

Ryan wants to cut him off, but he still can't think of a way to say it without sounding utterly ridiculous.

"Out with it," Nick coaxes, sounding thoroughly interested despite his professed indifference.

"Paula Fisher," Ryan says, finding that even the name feels strange on his lips now, "is my mother."

## **CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE**

Stepping into the coffee house is like stepping into an alternate dimension for Alex: The smooth, jazzy sounds of Norah Jones take over from the activity of traffic and shoppers outside, and the air conditioning provides almost instantaneous relief from the August heat.

Alex scans the room as soon as he enters, and sure enough, Trevor is already there. He's seated in an armchair by one of the large windows, casually leafing through a stack of papers that Alex is sure must be his manuscript.

Alex walks quickly over to where Trevor is seated. He's about to speak when Trevor looks up from the pages.

"Hey," Trevor says.

"Hey. I'm gonna go grab something to drink."

"Cool. I'll just be hanging out here ..."

With what feels like a very awkward smile, Alex slips away and heads to the counter across the large room. He orders his usual drink and waits for what seems like an excessively long time, although he's pretty sure that's just because he knows that Trevor is waiting for him.

He casts a glance back toward the windows every now and then; Trevor is staring outside, watching the people pass by. But once, he is idly studying the counter area, and Alex's eye catches his.

His drink finally in hand, Alex makes his way back over to the window and sinks down into an armchair beside Trevor's.

"Lemme guess," Trevor says, nodding at the cup in Alex's hand. "White chocolate mocha?"

"I'm that predictable, huh?"

"Well ... yeah. But so am I." Trevor picks up a clear cup off the floor next to him and holds it up for Alex to see. "I got mine iced, but yeah -- not so original, either."

Alex grins and takes a sip of his drink, but suddenly, he has nothing to say: That line of conversation has run its course. After what feels like an uncomfortably long pause, he says, "So, let me have it. What did you think of the book? Horrible?"

Trevor's expression tells Alex that he finds the idea ridiculous. "No way! You're a really good writer. I don't know why you'd question that."

"It's one thing to be a good writer as a student. It's completely another to be good enough to get a novel published, let alone have it be successful."

"True." Trevor pauses, as if he hadn't really considered that before, then adds, "But I really like it. The story so far is awesome."

"But ...?"

"I can definitely see what you mean about wanting to tighten it up. I mean, I don't have any idea how it ends or what else is coming, but it does seem like you're getting really caught up in some of the little episodes."

"Yeah," Alex says. "That's exactly where I feel like I'm getting stuck. It's taking forever to get the actual story going--"

"Maybe you're just too close to it," Trevor says.

Alex doesn't know what to say. "What do you mean?" he asks, though he is fairly certain that he knows the answer -- that Trevor has put together the pieces that Alex was hoping would remain unlinked.

"It's just such a dense setup. I figured it had to be based in real life," Trevor says, somewhat apologetically. "And if it is ... I'm pretty sure that you're 'Max.' So who's 'Bryant,' and what ever happened to him?"



## FISHER HOME

Paula falls quiet, trying to determine how best to explain something that has been so internal for so many years. She sees the look of horror spreading over Claire's face, and she is about to glance behind her to see if something horrific has appeared in the doorway when the explanation comes tumbling out of Claire's mouth.

"Oh God," Claire says. "He didn't--did he rape you?"

"No, no. I ..." Paula's eyes clench tightly closed as she shakes her head. "I had an affair with Stanley--Stan."

Claire is a strange shade of gray now.

Paula has no idea what to say. She stares past Claire, suddenly unable to make eye contact. To think that they're talking about the same man ... The Stanley she knew might have been a lot of things, but she never considered him to be a monster. But knowing what she does now about what he did to Claire, she has trouble justifying even to herself how she was once so intimate with him.

"He was the superintendent of the apartment building I lived in," Paula explains. Sharing even that broad detail sweeps her back to another time, a time when she was too young to have any idea that her decisions might be able to haunt her life so vividly some thirty-odd years later.

She comes closer to the bed.

"Bill and I had just finished college and gotten engaged, but we didn't have any immediate plans for marriage. I was living on my own for the first time ... There was something freeing about it that I hadn't expected."

Claire is watching her with rapt attention. Her eyes are wide and unblinking, and her fingers grip the bed's down comforter heavily.

"And, as happens with a lot of young couples, Bill and I began having some issues," Paula continues. "The apartment was in less-than-perfect condition, so I began seeing more and more of Stanley when he would come to fix things, and ..." The evolution of the whole thing sounds so absurd to her now, but she remembers how consumed she was by it once upon a time, how it often seemed to be all that mattered in life.

"I suppose I was fascinated by him," she says. "Here were Bill and I, making all sorts of thorough plans, working hard to save money for a wedding and to start a family -- and arguing over it all. And then there was Stanley. He did as he pleased, he lived entirely in the present ... That sort of freedom was appealing to me at the time."

Claire's mouth opens abruptly, and the words rush out just as quickly: "Did you ever consider leaving Bill for him? After you got pregnant, I mean?"

"Of course I considered it, but Stanley didn't want to have a family, and Bill and I had worked out our problems by then," Paula says. "We decided that I would have the child and give it up for adoption, so that's what we did. We got married, we moved on with our lives--" She pauses unintentionally, wondering how true that statement could ever be. "--and I never had contact with Stanley again."

"How did he find Ryan, then? If Ryan's known Stan was his father since he was a teenager, how could he have not known who his mother was?"

"I don't know. I suppose we'll have to search for those pieces of the puzzle."

They lapse into silence again. A raw ache has been awakened in Paula, and there's nothing she can do to quiet the voice that's berating her mentally for having been so foolish. There is only one thing she can think of to say now, and although she's already said it once, she has to do it again.

"I'm so sorry, Claire."

"I wouldn't dream of blaming you for any of this," Claire says. "I--I'm just in shock, that's all."

Paula sighs. "I think we all are."

"This is something for the whole family to deal with. I don't want everyone feeling sorry for me."

Paula has to stop and rethink what she is about to say. Finally, reaching a hand out to touch Claire's arm, she says softly, "We won't. But that doesn't mean that you don't have our support. You're right that this is a *family* issue, and that means we will all deal with it together."

Claire nods. She looks very, very tired, and Paula suddenly feels the same way.

But there is more to deal with right now, so she begins backing out of the room.

"Get some rest," she says.

Claire manages another weary nod and lies back down as Paula exits.

## FISHER HOME

The walk from her Jeep Liberty to the front porch of the Fisher house seems strangely ominous to Sarah Fisher. She's always associated coming home with a certain stability, perhaps even dullness, even during times when she's felt like less than a fully accepted member of her own family. After the courtroom debacle earlier this afternoon, however, she doesn't know what to expect.

She takes a deep breath as she enters the house, pleasantly surprised that the rush of the cool, air conditioned entryway creates enough relief from the mugginess of late summer to momentarily derail her train of thought. That is, until she sees her father standing in front of her, arms crossed over his chest. Their eyes lock, and Sarah finds herself at a loss for words. Back at the courthouse, she tried her best to mediate her parents' discussion and its wavering degrees of intensity. But Paula isn't anywhere in sight now.

"Where's mom?"

"Upstairs," he replies tersely, "with Claire."

"Oh." Sarah feels slightly more relaxed. She half-expected one of her parents to have either left or simply not returned home, at least for a while.

Bill turns and begins walking towards the kitchen, and Sarah follows him quickly.

"Are you dealing with this any better?"

"Good as can be expected, Sarah. Just great." There's a coldness to her father's tone that he clearly worked very hard at concealing back at the courthouse; in a way, Sarah can understand why he feels so betrayed. Even she didn't begin to totally understand the sheer scope of this secret and all it affects until it was publicly revealed just a few hours ago.

Nevertheless, her mother's previously unanswered question slowly returns to the forefront of her mind, and before she fully realizes what she's doing, she's said it:

"Would you really rather not know?"

"What?" Her father stops in his tracks, still not facing her.

"Would you really prefer that Mom lived out the rest of her life knowing nothing about her other son? Honestly, Dad?"

"I would've liked to have been told the truth by you and your mother. Instead, I got

blindsided *after* I thought both of us had already made a decision. And now, a lot of people are in a huge mess." He turned and faced his daughter. "I understand that your mother felt like she needed to know this, but I can't help feeling this way. I can't help it, Sarah."

"Can't help what?" Jason's voice calls from the other end of the hallway. Sarah looks over her shoulder just in time to see her brother and Molly heading towards them. Bill is silent.

"We both just got here," Molly says quietly, briefly making what Sarah could only describe as an uncomfortable moment of eye contact with her sister.

"Yeah," Jason echoes. "So, what's up?"

## MORIANI HOME

"It's not possible," Nick says, his gaze glassy, as soon as Ryan concludes his hasty and fragmented play-by-play of the events that took place at the courthouse earlier.

The truth has sunken in much more thoroughly for Ryan after having had the chance to recap the circumstances of the revelation. He shakes his head. "It's not only possible, it's true."

Nick looks sharply up at him. "How do you know?"

"Mrs. Fisher--Paula--she admitted that she did a search through the courts, and she found out that I was her son."

"She already knew?"

"Apparently, yeah," Ryan says. His mind drifts off again, trying to pinpoint any times when he might not have realized the depth of Paula's interactions with him.

The talk she tried to have with him last night after Claire went to bed. She must have been trying to tell him--

An incredulous little laugh emerges from Nick's throat. "Paula Fisher and *Stan*? How in the world could that have happened?"

"I have no idea," Ryan says, but in the same instant, a horrible thought strikes him. What if Stan did to Paula what he did to Claire ... ?

"This is far too bizarre to be true," Nick says.

Ryan doesn't even think that he needs to voice his agreement. Besides, there's something else that he's been wondering.

"I was sure that you were going to say you'd known all along," he says.

That puts a very surprised expression on Nick's normally subtle, difficult-to-read face.

"Have you?" Ryan asks. "It's hard for me to believe that this is something you never would have looked into, especially after Stan tracked me down."

Nick leans back in his chair and folds his hands together again, and Ryan braces for another horrid admission. But, to his surprise, Nick's statement seems quite genuine.

"I didn't care to know," Nick says. "I didn't *want* to know. You are my son. I suppose I preferred to continue believing that rather than know the identity of yet another person who might have tried to take you away."

Ryan isn't sure whether to believe that, but he can't imagine that Nick wouldn't have acted against the Fishers already if he had known about the link. And he certainly would have used the information to keep Ryan away from Claire.

"What do you plan to do about this?" Nick asks, finally rising from his leather chair.

"I really have no idea. But I do need to get going -- I told them I'd go over there, and I really feel like I should."

Nick steps out from behind the desk. "You're going to the Fishers'?"

"Yeah. There are a lot of things I need to talk about with them. Obviously. And Claire should be there, too."

Ryan ignores the blaze of annoyance in Nick's expression at the mention of Claire.

"We need to discuss this further," Nick says.

Ryan nods in agreement. "We will. I'll come by later tonight. I'm sure it will be helpful to get some answers out of the Fishers now."

"That's true," Nick grumbles, seeming reluctant to concede that there might be any good reason for Ryan to go over there.

"I'll see you later," Ryan says as he exits the study.

He knew that the news would shock Nick -- presuming he didn't already know, which Ryan feels fairly confident that he didn't -- but he's surprised by how greatly Nick tried to resist the truth.

A frightening thought surges through his mind as he leaves the house: *I hope he doesn't do anything too hasty -- or too dangerous.*

## **END OF EPISODE #302**

*How will Nick handle the revelation that his son is really a Fisher? How will the Fishers themselves cope with the situation? And what's going on between Trevor, Alex, and Dylan? Visit the Footprints Forum to see what others are saying and make your voice heard!*

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