

"Footprints" Episode #303

[Previously ...](#)

- Alex met up with Trevor, who gave Alex feedback on the portion of Alex's novel that he read. Trevor asked about the book's other main character, "Bryant."
- Ryan shared with Nick the news that Paula is his mother. Nick swore that he never looked into the identity of Ryan's biological mother and worried about his son slipping even further away.
- Paula explained to Claire how, long ago, she fell into an affair with Stan that led to Ryan's conception.
- Sarah urged Bill not to be angry with her and Paula for keeping their investigation from him, but he remained unable to suppress the feeling of betrayal. Molly and Jason arrived at the Fishers', wanting to know why they had been called to come over.

FISHER HOME

"I'm sorry that I didn't tell you sooner," Paula says. Her voice sounds thin, tired, and somehow unconvincing even to her own ears. "I wish that you didn't have to hear about this so suddenly."

She draws in more breath, but it stays inside; she can think of nothing else to say. She watches them all, spread around the living room, as they react in silence: Molly, her features held tightly together, as if any movement too severe might disrupt her ability to absorb the news; Jason, the exact opposite, shock and confusion blatantly visible in his expression; and Bill and Sarah, standing quietly to the side, dealing less with the initial shock than the uncertainty of the future.

"Are you sure?" Molly asks after an uncomfortably long silence. "You haven't had it confirmed with a test--"

"I guess I should," Paula says. Still, there is no doubt in her mind that it's true, that Ryan is her son. All of the pieces fit together.

"But we need to deal with this," she adds. "There's no reason to believe that it isn't the truth."

The quiet begins to settle over them again, but Jason tears through it, his voice loud and insistent.

"What are we gonna do?" he asks, though there's something about it that makes Paula hear it as more of a warning. "We're not just gonna be like, 'Oh, you're our brother now,

welcome to the family,' are we?"

Paula casts a glance sideways at Bill, who she is sure must be taking some kind of comfort from Jason's questioning.

Slowly, trying to be as firm as possible, she says, "I don't see why not. He is a member of the family ..."

Jason's rejection of the idea is so ready to go that it nearly cuts her off. "Yeah, but it's all screwed up! Didn't he and his dad, like, have something to do with--what happened to Tim?"

"We've gotten past that," Paula says. "You've been fine with Claire seeing Ryan and with him being here for Christmas. I don't see why this needs to be any different, except that he's now your brother, too."

She can tell that Jason has another impassioned argument on the tip of his tongue, but the doorbell's ring brings the conversation to a halt. They all look around at each other for a moment, as if agreeing to pretend that all is well, before Sarah takes the few steps over to the door and opens it.

There's no need to pretend about anything, though. Ryan stands in the open doorway, and Paula knows that everyone else's eyes are on him, just as hers are. The quiet takes control for a very long, uncomfortable moment.

Finally Paula crosses the room, but she doesn't speak until she is close to Ryan. Keeping her voice low, almost conspiratorially so, for reasons of which she's not quite sure, she says to him, "I've just told Molly and Jason. Everyone knows now."

He clearly has no idea how to respond to that. He looks past her again, at the other faces that Paula is sure must be burning a million different emotions into her back right now. She takes one of Ryan's hands in hers.

"Come inside," she says.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE

"I'm pretty sure that you're 'Max,'" Trevor says, his gaze burning a hole right through Alex. "So who's 'Bryant,' and what ever happened to him?"

Alex's hands go instinctively to his coffee. He's been hoping that he could pass the whole thing off as fiction, but he's pretty sure that he won't get away with that now, at least not with Trevor.

He feels the clamminess and the churning in the pit of his stomach that he expected would come with someone asking him about the story's background, but he's surprised to find that it isn't entirely driven by an urge to shut down and keep the tale to himself.

"I don't know," Alex says.

Trevor wrinkles his face. "Huh? I'm feeling like, since you're writing a book about the guy, you might have some idea who he is."

Alex hadn't noticed the ambiguity in his answer, but Trevor's statement shakes him from the fog of his thoughts.

"I know who he is," he explains, "just not what happened to him."

Trevor leans forward, looking very interested. Alex takes it as a prompt to continue, but it takes him a few seconds to gather himself enough to do that.

"He was my roommate my freshman year of college," he says.

"And this stuff all happened?"

"Well ... I've changed a lot of it to make the story work better."

Alex catches the questioning look that Trevor is throwing him, as if to challenge him on that pseudo-denial.

"But yeah," Alex adds with a sigh, "it did happen, more or less."

A feeling of discomfort creeps over Alex as they sit there quietly, Trevor hunched forward with his elbows on his knees, apparently studying Alex. Finally Trevor sits back in his chair and clasps his hands together.

"It's like one of those stories you see in a movie," he says. "The jock roommate and everything."

Trevor seems to be waiting for Alex to say something, but Alex has no idea what that might be. Finally Trevor speaks up again.

"So where does the book end, then? Do we get a happy ending?" he asks.

Alex's immediate response is to shake his head, but he stops in mid-motion. "Well, kind of. It ends with Max on his own, but content with himself."

Trevor considers that for a while, clasped hands held close to his chin.

"So he is content?" he asks after a long pause -- long enough that the question jars Alex.

"What?"

"Max -- or, should I say, Alex. Is he content?"

"I guess so," Alex says, his shoulders rising and falling in a weak shrug.

"Or maybe I should ask," Trevor says, "is he content without 'Bryant'?"

FISHER HOME

The awkwardness in the Fishers' living room is so thick that Ryan can't figure out how it hasn't choked all of them already. His entire being feels weighted down and sluggish, and the looks of appraisal from the entire family aren't making things any more comfortable.

Paula leads him by the hand toward the middle of the room. He is sure that she is about to say something, make some kind of announcement or introduction, but before she can get it out, Molly steps closer to them.

"At the risk of sounding completely cheesy," she says, looking directly at Ryan, "welcome to the family."

He isn't sure how to respond. His most vivid memories of her, the pictures inside his head that have come to represent Molly Fisher, are snapshots of her reacting to his presence: at Windmills, with Brent Taylor beside her; at Christmas here; at Camille Lemieux's investor meeting. In each one, her face bears a look of surprise -- and, even more than that, distrust.

Seeing her react so much more cordially to him now is a shock, and it takes him what feels like a very long time to come up with a response.

"Thanks," he finally manages, meeting her slightly off-kilter smile with one of his own.

Over her shoulder, he can see Bill giving him a strange look, of which Ryan can't quite determine the intent. Hostility? Warning?

Before he can think about it any further, the doorbell rings. Looking flustered, Paula rushes back to the door.

Ryan turns to observe the scene and nearly does a cartoon-style double take when he sees who it is.

"Good evening," Nick says, tipping his head politely yet giving no indication of actual goodwill in his expression. Katherine stands by his side, looking just as threatening as her husband.

Nick extends his hand to Paula. "Nick Moriani. This is my wife, Katherine."

"It's nice to meet you," Paula says. She accepts Nick's handshake, but Ryan can tell that she has her guard up. "Paula Fisher."

Bill steps up quickly behind his wife.

"Bill Fisher," he interjects, thrusting his hand in front of Nick. "What can we do for you?"

Ryan watches Nick stretching out the moment, gathering himself before he speaks, making the Fishers wait.

Nick opens his mouth, but before any sound comes out, he casts a strange look past the Fishers, directly toward Ryan.

"Could we step outside for a minute?" Nick asks, leaning in toward Paula and Bill just enough to indicate that this is between the two couples and not for any of the other ears present.

To Ryan's surprise -- though he isn't quite sure why -- Paula and Bill both nod quickly. They follow Nick and Katherine out the front door.

It takes Ryan what feels like an eternity to turn around and face his newfound siblings.

"Is Claire upstairs?" he asks no one in particular. It's all he can think of to say.

"I think so, yeah," Molly says, "but it sounds like she needs some time alone. I don't know if going up there right now is the best idea."

As much as Ryan wants to disregard that advice and go settle things with Claire this instant, part of him is sure that Molly is right.

"Listen," he says, the words emerging before he's even had time to think to the end of his sentence, "I know this has to be really bizarre for the three of you, but I hope--I mean, I've barely had time to let it sink in--but I hope we'll all get the chance to, you know, get to know each other--"

Jason's interruption saves Ryan from having to bumble his way through the rest of the statement, but it's only a fraction of a second before Ryan realizes that it's not the kind of interruption for which he was hoping.

"Do you really expect it to be that simple?" Jason challenges. There's something about the intensity in the younger man's expression that makes Ryan suddenly feel very sorry for even being here.

"You can't just walk in here and take over Tim's life," Jason says.

Before Ryan can even conjure a response, Jason stomps up the stairs.

Ryan is surprised to find Sarah at his side a moment later.

"He'll get over it," she says. "He just needs time to adjust. We all do."

"I hope you're right," Ryan says under his breath, though every bit of confidence he was forcing himself to have about this situation has just fallen to pieces.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE

"Is he content without 'Bryant'?"

Trevor's question rings in Alex's head. His lips part, giving way to the mushy outline of an answer--

But it falls happily back into oblivion when he spots the look on Trevor's face.

Alex swings around to watch what has captured Trevor's attention: the young woman walking into the coffee house.

A strange burst of panic rushes through Alex as he takes in the dark blonde hair, the petite figure, and the familiar face. Instinctively he turns back around, but he can tell by the change in Trevor's expression a moment later that Lauren is coming their way.

"Hey," she says over Alex's head, clearly to Trevor alone. Alex braces for the painful moment when she realizes who her brother is sitting here with.

"Hi," Trevor says, smiling what looks to Alex to be too broad a grin. "Did you get off work early?"

"Yeah, things slowed down, so we started clearing out. I thought I'd swing by and get something to drink on my way home."

Alex can picture this sibling conversation going on for minutes, but he can't picture getting out of here without Lauren realizing his presence. With agonizing slowness, he turns to look at her over the back of his oversized armchair.

"Hey," he says, holding his breath in his lungs.

"Oh, hi," Lauren says. He watches the stages of her reaction: first, the discomfort of having to see him; then the cover-up and the cordial greeting; and, finally, the shock that comes with absorbing the fact that he is here with Trevor.

Trevor must see it, too, because the next thing out of his mouth is, "I ran into Alex here the other day and offered to read some of his book for him. I'm just giving him my feedback now."

"I could use the extra set of eyes," Alex adds.

"Oh." Lauren's reaction keeps evolving -- thankfully right past any sort of anger or, at least, enough to spur an outburst. "I'm gonna go order my drink. Are you gonna be home for dinner?"

Trevor nods quickly. "Uh, yeah. Actually, I should get going now. I'll walk out with you."

He hurries to his feet, grabbing his drink and cell phone with what seems to Alex to be amazing swiftness.

"Give me a call if you have any more stuff for me to read," Trevor says, tapping Alex on the shoulder with his phone as he follows Lauren over to the counter.

"Yeah. Thanks," Alex manages. He watches the siblings walk away, though it seems they're both trying very hard not to look back in his direction.

He decides to make it easier for all of them. He turns back around and sinks lower into his chair, holding a few of the pages in his hands and scanning them absentmindedly.

FISHER HOME

Paula moves to close the front door behind them, but when she reaches her hand to the doorknob, it comes into contact with another hand. She and Bill share the briefest moment of eye contact before she pulls her hand away and he closes the door.

Nick paces around the small porch for a few steps. Paula finds the movement annoying; he obviously knows what he's come here to say, so there is no reason to prolong it even

further.

Finally Nick stops. Katherine settles right back by his side, as though permanently affixed to him.

"I realize that this situation must very, well, very difficult for you -- for your whole family," Nick says.

Bill speaks so quickly that he nearly interrupts Nick. "We're aware of that, yes."

He sounds frustrated, to say the least; it's a tone that Paula has come to know well in the last several weeks. But knowing that it's directed not *at* her, but at someone else in an effort to protect her and their family -- there's something very comforting about it now.

Nick's lips spring into an obnoxious grin, as if there's something amusing about Bill's assertiveness.

"I just hope both of you -- and your family, for that matter," Nick says, "realize that this changes very little in the grand scheme of things."

Paula can't restrain herself from sounding annoyed. "As far as I can tell, this changes quite a lot."

Now Nick looks her square in the eyes.

"Ryan is still my son, Mrs. Fisher. I hope that your family will be respectful of that."

"And we hope that you'll be respectful of the effect that this situation has on us," Bill says with a defiance that, for some reason, makes Paula grip his forearm.

Nick's eyes narrow as he says, "There's no need to get hostile."

"No, there's not," Paula cuts in before Bill has the chance to respond. "You're both more than welcome to stay and adjust to this situation with the rest of us. But this is something that involves both of our families, and it's going to be a lot easier if we all cooperate."

For the first time since the Morianis arrived, Katherine opens her mouth to speak.

"That's all my husband is asking," she says in a tone that tells them all that this has gone as far toward an argument as it's going to go. "To be aware of our place as part of Ryan's family and to respect our roles in his life."

"We have every intention of doing that," Paula says, at the same time wondering how in the world she'll ever be able to spend any sort of time with these people.

END OF EPISODE #303

Will the Fishers and Morianis be able to deal with this new situation? Is there any chance for Alex and Trevor, given Lauren's past with Alex? Join us in the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts!

[Next Episode](#)