

"FOOTPRINTS"
episode #136
time frame: the day after [#135](#),
Christmas day

TEASER

INT: FISHER HOME (LIVING ROOM)
AFTERNOON

Jason lets go of the drapes, allowing them to swing back into position and cover the front window.

JASON: So much for a white Christmas, huh?

Molly looks up at him from her seat on the couch.

MOLLY: I guess so.

She stands, walking over to join her younger brother by the window.

MOLLY: When are Tim and Claire supposed to show up?

Jason glances at the clock on the mantel.

JASON: Any minute now.

Molly sighs, slapping her hands together.

MOLLY: Feels a little weird for Christmas, doesn't it?

JASON: You mean because there's no snow? We haven't had any in years-

MOLLY: No, no. Just ... in general.

He doesn't speak, opting instead to give her an odd look.

MOLLY: Like ... I don't know - Like something very un-Christmas-y is gonna happen.

INT: BRENT & SARAH'S APT. (LIVING ROOM)

AFTERNOON

Sarah crosses the room in response to the call of the doorbell. The moment she pulls the door open, a commotion of smiles and greetings hits.

DANIELLE: Merry Christmas!

She pulls her sister-in-law into a quick hug.

SARAH: It's so good to see you! You, too, Andy!

ANDY: Merry Christmas!

The jolly racket brings a grinning Brent into the room.

BRENT: Merry Christmas, you guys!

The frenzy continues for several minutes before Andy and Danielle hand Sarah their coats. She moves to take them into the bedroom, but Brent takes them from her and does it himself.

DANIELLE: I see you've got him trained well.

Sarah looks after Brent, then turns back to Danielle and returns her smile, albeit a bit uneasily.

SARAH: I guess I do.

INT: CHASE HOME (FOYER)

AFTERNOON

Don trails a jogging Courtney into the foyer. She places her hand on the doorknob, but doesn't turn it.

DON: Tell me what's going on! Who is this "mystery guest" you've got for me?

COURTNEY: Just calm down, Dad. You'll find out in good time.

She makes a motion that suggests she is going to open the door, but then pauses. She laughs as Don's face fills with complicated anticipation.

COURTNEY: You ready?

DON: Yes!

Without any further ado, Courtney yanks the door open - to reveal Alex.

DON: Alex! Wow!

He approaches the young man and reaches out a hand, which Alex meets with his own.

DON: This is a surprise. It'll be nice to have you spend the holiday with us.

His enthusiasm suddenly tapers off.

DON: Wait a second. If you're here, where is-

Perfectly on cue, Sally steps through the front door.

DON: ... your mother.

ACT ONE

INT: BRENT & SARAH'S APT. (LIVING ROOM)
AFTERNOON

The two couples are now lounging around the living room. Andy and Danielle are seated on the couch; each leans against one of the arms. Brent and Sarah have brought in chairs from the kitchen on which to sit.

BRENT: Is anyone else finding it hard to believe it's Christmas already?

DANIELLE: In a way, I guess, but I've been waiting to be at home for so long that it couldn't have come sooner.

ANDY: I'm just sorry you had to waste so much time away on that tour.

His bitter tone serves to intrigue Sarah.

SARAH: So what happened? Your mom-

She nods at Andy.

SARAH: -paid the woman from the record company to put the touring clause in Danielle's contract?

ANDY: From what Danielle was able to figure out, yes.

SARAH: Jeez ...

BRENT: Well, Danielle, look on the bright side. You got a record deal without having to even shop your demo around.

Danielle shrugs.

DANIELLE: I don't know ... It's strange to think about. I got this contract for no reason at all, and the only reason I get to hang onto it is because Roberta was scared her career would be ruined. I didn't exactly earn it.

ANDY: Don't think about it that way. You've got it - Why dwell on how you got it when you can focus on making the best of it?

DANIELLE: Because ... it doesn't feel right.

ANDY: I'm just saying, there's no need to get yourself worked up because of how you got the contract-

DANIELLE: Yes, there is! I have every reason to be upset, Andy! I have worked so hard for so many years trying to achieve this. I took odd jobs, I sang in nasty clubs, I worked my ass off!

ANDY: And that's over now! You have the contract.

DANIELLE: You just don't get it. All your life, you've been handed everything. You don't understand what it would mean to me for all my work to really pay off.

Brent and Sarah exchange worried looks.

INT: CHASE HOME (FOYER)
AFTERNOON

Courtney swallows, and she can practically hear her throat working in the dead silence. The air feels stiff, strange - she doesn't even feel it would be right to close the door.

Don shakes his head before finally breaking the silence.

DON: Sally?

Sally's voice comes out surprisingly meek.

SALLY: Yes?

DON: You're spending Christmas here, too?

Though a good part of her is tempted to answer in the negative and depart, Sally forces herself to say what she's been meaning to say for weeks.

SALLY: I know it might be weird, Don, but I think it's something we need to do. I want to show that there are no hard feelings, that I'm not trying to sabotage you or anything-

DON: Oh, yeah, because I can believe that without a shred of worry, right? Forget everything you did for all those months and give you the chance to cause trouble again?

SALLY: No, Don-

He cuts her off by holding up both hands.

DON: Don't. Please.

He turns to Courtney.

DON: Court, I appreciate you trying to help out by having Alex join us, but I think it would be better if we just spent Christmas as a family - you, me, and Mom.

HELEN: No!

All heads turn to the hallway, where Helen is standing with hands on her hips and a stern expression on her face.

ACT TWO

INT: FISHER HOME (LIVING ROOM)

AFTERNOON

The holiday festivities are now in full swing. Tim and Claire have arrived and set the children down on the floor to play; the adults are seated around the room, chatting.

JASON: So how'd my little nephew and niece make out with Santa?

CLAIRE: Well ...

Travis has just stood up beside her, and he is grabbing onto the couch. Claire pats his head and then turns back to the conversation, keeping one eye on her son to make sure he doesn't topple over.

CLAIRE: It does sorta look like Toys'R'Us threw up in our living room, but I suppose that's good for them.

BILL: I still remember Christmas around here when the kids were little. This place could've doubled as an asylum.

TIM: We weren't that bad!

Bill laughs.

BILL: Oh, of course not. What's a little chaos at six o'clock in the morning?

CLAIRE: You guys really got up that early to open presents?

MOLLY: Oh, we were up at five, five-thirty. They made us wait until six to come downstairs.

PAULA: And that was a task in itself.

JASON: You have to admit, those were fun days. It was the one time every year that we knew we were getting gifts and there wasn't any fighting.

TIM: That's because we had to band together to get down here and open everything! It was four against two - we couldn't lose!

He tips his head back, resting it on the back of the couch.

MOLLY: Good thing for Mom and Dad there were only four of us. Any more and they would've had no control.

Though delivered with harmless intentions, Molly's comment drains the energy out of the air in a way that she, Claire, and Jason really do not grasp. All they know is that it is suddenly very quiet.

Samantha cries out, and several heads turn sharply in her direction. Tim flashes Paula one quick look,

but looks to his daughter when Paula looks at him. He looks away just in time to miss Bill shooting Paula a very similar look.

INT: CHASE HOME (FOYER)
AFTERNOON

The showdown intensifies as Helen captures the attention of everyone else.

HELEN: Courtney spoke to me about this, and I think it's a great idea.

DON: You do?

HELEN: Yes, I do. I figured you would love to have Alex here.

DON: I would. But-

HELEN: But what?

DON: Aren't you in the least bit ... concerned?

HELEN: No.

Don gapes at her in shock.

DON: What is going on?

HELEN: It's the start of a new millenium. I think this would be the perfect time for all of us to start fresh and put the past behind us. I even had a few words with Sally about this, and she seems to agree.

Sally nods rapidly.

SALLY: Don, you have to believe me when I say that I don't want any trouble. Everything that happened - I'm putting it behind me. It's not worth all that unhappiness.

Don is clearly dazed, so much so that he can't even produce a response.

HELEN: Why doesn't everybody come inside for drinks?

At last, Courtney closes the door. She, Alex, and Sally follow Helen into the kitchen. Don follows,

several seconds later, still shaking his head in confusion.

ACT THREE

INT: BRENT & SARAH'S APT. (LIVING ROOM)
AFTERNOON

An uncertain static lingers in the air as Andy tries to figure out how to respond to Danielle. After much grappling with himself, Brent decides to fill the silence.

BRENT: Danielle, there's no point in focusing on what's done. You can't change it, can you? No. So don't worry about it.

Danielle makes an obvious move to protest, but Brent silences her with a look of warning.

SARAH: Brent's right. You guys are here together, despite everything that happened this last year that could have separated you.

DANIELLE: I guess you're right.

Her eyes roll over in Andy's direction.

DANIELLE: We did make it through a lot.

He reassures her with a smile and by taking one of her hands in his. Sarah, meanwhile, looks over at Brent lovingly.

SARAH: I guess the same could be said for us, huh?

Brent does his best to offer a carefree smile. Danielle, however, appears confused.

DANIELLE: What do you mean, Sarah?

Sarah snaps out of her sentimental stupor and glances around at the other three. Uh-oh ...

INT: CHASE HOME (KITCHEN)
AFTERNOON

Don is assisting Helen in getting the drinks ready. Sally has just checked out to go "freshen up," though

Alex has his doubts, as he pulls Courtney over to the side.

ALEX: You know, maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

He speaks in a hushed voice, glancing over at Don and Helen to be sure they aren't overhearing his words.

COURTNEY: Alex-

ALEX: No, seriously. My mom being here-it's making your dad uncomfortable, and your mom is trying extra-hard to make everything perfect. It's totally ruining their holiday.

COURTNEY: I think my parents have been through enough that they see it's important to confront problems rather than left them linger in the background. If the hostility between your mom and my parents doesn't end now, it'll just make things worse.

Alex shrugs.

ALEX: I guess you're right. I just ... feel sorta bad. I didn't want us to intrude or anything.

COURTNEY: You're not intruding, believe me. My dad loves having you here.

She sees how reluctant he is to ignore the tension of the day.

COURTNEY: Come on, it's the holidays! You've gotta enjoy them.

ALEX: Speaking of which ... I got an invitation from Jason's parents for New Year's Eve.

COURTNEY: Oh, you did? Cool!

ALEX: What is it? Some huge party? It's at, like, the hotel.

COURTNEY: They have it every year. They invite all the restaurant employees and a bunch of family and friends and stuff.

ALEX: You and Jason will be there?

COURTNEY: Lauren, too.

A mischievous twinkle gleams in her eye.

COURTNEY: Hey! Why don't you ask her to go with you?

ALEX: What? No, I-I couldn't ...

COURTNEY: C'mon, it would be so much fun!

ALEX: Yeah, maybe.

She just continues smiling, as if pleading with him to do this.

ACT FOUR

INT: FISHER HOME (LIVING ROOM)
AFTERNOON

Tim and Claire are holding Travis and Samantha, respectively, on their laps. The couple is seated on the couch, and Molly stands over them.

MOLLY: Jeez. Just a year ago, we were hanging a stocking to celebrate Travis's first Christmas, and now we get to add another for Samantha.

CLAIRE: What can I say? We're blessed.

MOLLY: Does Diane get to see Samantha at all, or what?

TIM: She's flying in next week for a couple of days, and I'm going to bring Samantha to see her.

MOLLY: You haven't had any more trouble from her, have you?

CLAIRE: Thank goodness, no. It's amazing, things were so much worse before Diane had Samantha. She started to calm down afterward - and then with the custody ruling, she basically got out of our hair for good. Right, Tim?

As Claire quickly notices, Tim is too distracted to answer her. His eyes follow Paula into the kitchen.

CLAIRE: Tim?

Tim snaps back to her.

TIM: Oh, uh-Hang on a sec, okay?

Before Claire or Molly can say a thing, he is gone.

MOLLY: What was that all about?

CLAIRE: I'm not sure ... but it's getting mighty annoying.

INT: CHASE HOME (DINING ROOM)
AFTERNOON

Don is seated at the head of the table. He is flanked by Helen, on his left, and Courtney, on his right. Sally has chosen to sit next to Courtney-not Helen-leaving Alex across from her and next to Helen.

HELEN: So, um, how did you spend Christmas Eve?

ALEX: We stayed at home.

SALLY: We, um, just wanted a quiet night, you know?

She does not lift her eyes off the table, instead idly examining the shiny gloss of Helen's floral dishes.

HELEN: Yes. We did the same thing, actually. We don't have any family here, so if we're not with the Fishers, we stay alone.

Sally nods slowly, though not for any particular reason. An acute stiffness rests on top of all five of them, and each finds that he or she has nothing to say. Finally Sally clears her throat, drawing stares from the others.

SALLY: I know this is uncomfortable for everyone, but there's something I just want to say.

DON: Go right ahead.

He sends out a hand, as if to open the floor to her, but there is something in the gesture that only weighs down on Sally even more. She hesitates in speaking.

ACT FIVE

INT: BRENT & SARAH'S APT. (LIVING ROOM)
AFTERNOON

Sarah does her best to shake off Danielle's inquiry.

SARAH: Well, I mean, nothing as extreme as you and Andy, but I think Brent and I have certainly beaten the odds.

DANIELLE: Definitely.

Brent suddenly feels compelled to change the subject.

BRENT: Hey, uh, Danielle, did you talk to Dad and Max today?

DANIELLE: Yeah, this morning. They were going over to Aunt Carol's for dinner, I know.

BRENT: Oh ... that must be where they were when I called them. I left a message.

The conversation continues, but Sarah sort of blanks it out. She isn't even certain what, exactly, it is, but some loose end lingers on, tugging on her nerves just enough to cause a disturbance.

INT: CHASE HOME (DINING ROOM)
AFTERNOON

Sally shakes off Don's sarcastic attitude and goes on.

SALLY: I did so much, for so many months, and I know it hurt all of you. Not just you, Don-and not just Helen. I know how badly it all affected Courtney here, and even Alex ... He was so angry with me for the longest time. I just-I realized that none of it was worth it.

She looks up from her fingers and finds that Don is actually listening intently. She finds that she can't look at anyone else, no matter to whom her words are directed; she feels as though he, above all others, needs to hear this and know she means it.

SALLY: Now, I know this is not the most comfortable situation for any of us, but I can't thank you enough, Helen-or Courtney-for inviting us today. I'm sure it means a lot to Alex to spend the time with Don, and I hope Don feels the same way ... and it's an opportunity for me to do what I can to repair the damage I did.

She drops her head solemnly, not wanting to face anyone else's reaction. A glimmer of hope sparks within her, however, when she feels Alex's hands reach across the table and settle on top of hers.

INT: FISHER HOME (KITCHEN)
AFTERNOON

Paula is lifting a tray of appetizers when Tim enters.

TIM: Mom?

PAULA: Yes?

She sets the tray down and readjusts the plastic wrap on top of it.

TIM: I was ... wondering if I could ask you something.

She stares at him rigidly for a moment, but produces a short nod.

TIM: Mom, tell me what's going on.

PAULA: W-what do you mean?

TIM: What's going on with you? You seem so ... depressed lately.

PAULA: I'm fine.

She again lifts the tray and begins to exit.

TIM: Mom.

He speaks the single word forcefully, stopping her in her tracks.

TIM: I saw you on Thanksgiving.

She doesn't turn around, but doesn't walk on, either. She simply stands in silence.

TIM: And when I visited you the other day ... and now today. Something isn't right.

PAULA: I'm just-having trouble with the holidays this year. I don't know why ... It just hit me so hard all of a sudden that you kids are all grown up, and it felt so strange ...

Swiftly, she returns to the action of the party, leaving him alone and dumbfounded.

INT: FISHER HOME (LIVING ROOM)

AFTERNOON

Tim follows his mother in, watching as she busily sets the tray down on the coffee table. His eyes stay on her, not even noticing that Claire is attempting to get his attention. She shakes her head and turns back to Molly.

PAULA: Can I have everyone's attention?

Bill and Jason come into the room, having heard her call; Molly and Claire look up. Tim has stayed focused on her the whole time.

PAULA: There's something I'd like to do now.

She reaches into a cabinet and her hand comes back out with a stocking in it.

PAULA: Last year, we hung stockings on the mantel to welcome both Brent and Travis into the family. And this year, we had another new addition - Samantha.

Paula raises the stocking and hangs it on the newly added hook with the ease of one who has done this innumerable times before. When she is done, she bows her head, and the others, familiar with the routine, follow suit.

PAULA: Dear God, at this time of year, I always realize how much I have to be thankful for. It's so easy to forget sometimes ... I know we're not always the most devoted Catholics, but I also know that we appreciate and are so grateful for all the gifts you have given us - most of all, each other.

She is quiet for a few seconds, giving everyone time to appreciate her words in silence.

PAULA: I ask you to keep all my loved ones - family and friends - safe and happy. Amen.

Everyone repeats the "amen" - everyone except Tim. He and Paula make eye contact for a flash of a second, but she pulls away. He just continues watching her, trying to figure out how it all fits together.

END OF EPISODE #136

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