

"Footprints" Episode #225

[Previously ...](#)

**Brent bid farewell to Andy.*

**Molly promised Jason that she is not holding out for a happy ending with Brent, and then expressed hope that the situation with Brent and Sarah would be resolved soon.*

**Matt stormed out after Sarah told him about her scheme at the hospital. Later, she was stunned to realize that he didn't even tell her about his new job at Bill's restaurant.*

**While Lauren expressed her insecurities over men to Courtney, Alex received support from Jason -- and once again realized how attracted he is to Jay.*

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Flakes of the toasted wheat bread crumble over the plate's surface as the sandwich is set back down. Molly leans against the cushy back of the booth and finishes chewing as she surveys the nearly empty restaurant.

Now that she's here and eating, she realizes how little she wants to be here. But she didn't feel like going home, either, and this is still a much more desirable option than that. She just wants to wait until it's late enough that she can go back without having to have the same tired conversations with everyone.

A little stab of guilt strikes her. She shouldn't be complaining ... Some people have it a lot worse. At least her family cares enough to keep involved. Sometimes she just wishes she could turn down the "concern" knob a bit.

Oh, well, a change of scenery is good anyhow. For the last few weeks, it feels as though she has done nothing but go to work, go home, go back to work, and go home again. Except for a visit to see Andy and Danielle the other day, she's hardly had a moment of socializing or leisure time in far too long. Maybe--

Wait, is that ... ?

She nearly mouths the words to herself as she strains to get a better view of the door. In their roving, her eyes saw someone come in who must be ... Yeah, it is. She thinks for a mere instant before getting up to go speak with Matt Gray.

"Hey," she calls out when she is just a few feet from him.

He turns immediately. "Molly! Hey!"

"How have you been?"

"Pretty good. How 'bout you?"

"Can't complain," she says, thinking back to the pondering she was doing a minute ago.

"So what are you doing here?" he asks.

"I don't know ... Eating, maybe?" she smiles. "C'mon, why don't you join me?"

"All right," he agrees after what looks like some initial hesitation. She leads him back to the booth.

"I'm glad I ran into you," he says. "Only reason I came here was to avoid goin' back to an empty apartment."

"Sounds like the opposite of my problem. I had no desire to go back to that crowded house just yet."

She catches his eyes dropping a little bit as he says, "You're lucky to have a family that cares that much."

"Yeah, I know. Sometimes I just let it overwhelm me ... but you're right, I am lucky." The waitress arrives to take Matt's order and Molly uses the opportunity to make some more progress on her sandwich.

"So," she says as the waitress departs, "I heard about your job. Congratulations."

"Thanks. It was real nice of your dad to offer it to me."

Molly shakes her head. "You know, I never took you for the cooking type."

"No one ever does. Just somethin' I picked up along the way, I guess." He shrugs and begins fiddling with a sugar packet in anticipation of the coffee that is on its way. "I can't tell you how happy I am to have this job. I'm liking it a lot better than the construction stuff. And it gives me a real reason to stay in town, besides Victoria ..." The statement trails off, but the intended ending is not lost on either of them: *Or Sarah*.

The waitress returns and leaves Matt's coffee with him. He adds the sugar, and the clinks of the spoon against the cup ring in the silence that has fallen over him and Molly.

"I've actually been meaning to get in touch with you for a while," Molly says finally. "There's something I've wanted to ask you."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. I, um ... I was wondering if Sarah mentioned anything to you about what happened ... at the hospital ..." She is trying not to say too much, but she is aware that she has opened the can of worms anyway.

Thankfully, a glimmer of familiarity quickly passes over Matt's face. "Yeah, she did. And I haven't spoken to her since."

"You haven't?"

"Nah." He raises the coffee cup to his lips and draws in those steamy first few sips. "It's like I don't even know what to say to her anymore. She was tryin' to turn that whole thing around on you, and make me believe that you were the one who did somethin' wrong ... like I'm some kinda idiot or something."

Molly works through another bite of the sandwich as she digests the comment. "Well, what about Victoria? You haven't seen her since then, either?"

"Nope. I know I need to get in touch eventually, 'cause I wanna see her, but I can't even think about talkin' to Sarah right now. Thinkin' about it just makes me mad." He places the coffee cup back down on the table. "I think she really did it this time. She crossed a line with this little plan of hers and there ain't any going back now. I'm not even sure if I can trust her anymore."

BRENT TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

Brent's eyes jerk from the Seahawks game on the television as he hears the keys jostling in the door. He is about to rise to open it when it does so by itself -- or, rather, thanks to Danielle, who pushes her way inside with two arms full of grocery bags.

"Stay put," she calls over to him. She moves to the dining room table as quickly as she can and sets the bags down, keeping an eye on Brent to ensure that he doesn't move.

"I'm fine," he says with annoyance.

"I know you are. I just want to make sure it stays that way."

He rolls his eyes. "Hey, you missed some excitement around here."

She looks up from unpacking the groceries momentarily. "Oh, yeah?"

"Well, sort of. Actually, maybe it's better that you missed it."

She motions for him to continue. "Sooo ... ?"

"Andy came by," he says. "He wanted to say goodbye."

"He's gone for good?"

Brent nods.

"Wow." Danielle stops, putting down the bag of pretzels she's been holding. "It seems weird that I'm here and he's not now."

"I know ... I'm going to miss him a lot."

"He's been a good friend to you." She grabs the pretzels and takes them, along with a few other items, in the kitchen. When she returns, she says, "I am glad that I got to have that talk with him, though. Getting things resolved was like this enormous weight off my shoulders."

"I can imagine." Brent grabs a few cans and tries to balance them without putting too much pressure on his bandaged hands. Maintaining what appears to be a delicate balance, he takes them into the kitchen.

Danielle stands by the dining room table, sorting absently through the rest of the groceries as she decides what to take inside next.

"Hey," she calls out.

Brent appears back in the doorway that bridges the dining area and the kitchen. "Yeah?"

"You know, before I head back to San Diego," she says slowly, "there is something I've been hoping you would do."

"What's that?"

"Get some resolution of your own." She narrows her gaze at him, making it clear that they both know exactly what she is talking about. "Figure out this situation with Sarah and Molly for good."

WHITNEY'S HOUSE

"Yeah, I can imagine," Jason nods. "Look, bro, I'm behind you 100 percent, like I said before. If you wanna talk or just have someone to hang out with or whatever, I'm totally here." He gives Alex's shoulder a squeeze.

The touch sends that same thrill through Alex again. He can remember the feel of Jason's hands on him that night ... almost two years ago now. For that instant, everything was right. Everything was going to turn out perfectly.

And then it all got shot to hell, of course. But the unbelievable sensations of that moment -- the sensations he had thought he would never feel again -- have stayed with Alex, and he's called on them more times than he can even remember. If only that feeling would stay. If only ...

He looks up at Jason, meeting his eyes -- so supportive, dazzling with kindness and intelligence and that crazy spark of humor. *That's everything I want.*

He's *everything I want.*

And suddenly, that long-ago night and that perfect moment don't feel so far away anymore.

Alex swallows hard and reaches his hand up to touch Jason's cheek.

Jason's gaze suddenly grows a thousand times harder.

"Jason ..." Alex manages, his voice little more than a croak.

He can't identify the emotion -- or emotions -- that have seized Jason, but it is clear that they have petrified him. "What?" he asks. Alex can't even hear it over the music, but the movements of his lips are enough.

"Thank you," he says finally, letting his hand fall away.

Jason relaxes before his eyes. Now his face -- eyes, mouth, brow, all of it -- is begging for some sort of explanation.

"Thank you for being so cool with me," Alex says, trying to keep his voice down but finding it very difficult. "You've been ... totally unbelievable through this whole thing. I know I've been impossible and confusing and--the way you've stuck by me, it's like it makes it all okay."

The declaration seems to have shocked Jason, but slowly a smile spreads across his face. "You're welcome, bud. If you feel like you're comfortable or--or at least getting there, then I'm happy for ya."

"Thanks, Jay." Alex's first instinct is to give him a hug, and he is acting on it before he realizes it. He tries to make it feel more masculine, more platonic.

When they part, he's not sure that he can look Jason in the face. Thankfully, he sees Lauren coming towards them and shifts his attention to her.

"Hey, what's up?" he asks awkwardly, trying his best to maintain his balance on what feels like a terribly treacherous tightrope.

"Not much," she says. "Jay, could you give us a minute alone?"

"Oh yeah, sure," Jason says. "I, uh, I'll see you guys later." He makes his exit without hesitation.

"So ..." Alex leads, feeling the awkwardness about to suffocate them.

"Yeah." Lauren draws in a deep breath and then releases it in a heavy rush. "I, um, I need to talk to you. It's really important."

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Molly is nearly overcome with the temptation to reply sarcastically, but she contains it. "She just kept pushing," she says finally, doing what she can to maintain her calm. "Eventually something had to give."

"Yeah." Matt's eyes dip down into the sharp brown of the coffee. He moves the spoon around in the cup aimlessly. "I kept warning her, she just wouldn't listen."

Molly lets go of her sandwich entirely and shakes her head. "I knew she would push it as far as she could. That's Sarah. She doesn't listen."

"Yeah, but ... c'mon, it's not like she didn't have any reason for what she did." He is on guard for the brewing argument.

But it's not necessary. "No, you're right," Molly admits. "She did have reasons. Maybe they weren't the best ones, or maybe she didn't do exactly the right things, but she definitely had motivation."

She can feel Matt's surprise from across the table.

"It's not like I hate her," she adds hastily. "I mean ... I've always been hard on her. That's just how things are with Sarah and me. But she is my sister and I want her to be happy."

Matt sips at his coffee thoughtfully, allowing a long moment to pass before he responds. "I'm happy to hear you say that, Molly. With how bad things are ... I kinda thought you'd forgotten that you two are sisters. That counts for a lot."

"I know. And I need to remind myself of it more often ... I wish we could just both be happy. Then we'd be out of each other's hair."

"Yeah," Matt says, clearly swept away in thought. When he comes back down to earth, he looks her straight in the eye. "You wanna know the truth?"

"What?"

"I'm hoping Sarah will just forget about Brent and move on." He speaks in nearly a whisper, as if saying something forbidden.

"I feel the same way," Molly agrees. Her mind is reaching back to a long-ago conversation during which Matt confessed to having feelings for Sarah. She can't help wondering how much bearing those words have on what he's saying now.

"She's not gonna be happy with him. There's no way she can be, now. They just need a clean break."

"Yeah." Molly returns to the sandwich, but she does it more to allow herself some thinking time than anything else. "You're right. The last thing Sarah needs is to be hanging onto Brent right now."

She sees that glimmer -- almost accusatory -- in Matt's eye, but thankfully, he lets it go. Molly practically lets out a sigh of relief. It's the last thing she needs to be questioned about right now.

BRENT TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

Brent leans his head against the doorframe and closes his eyes. "I'm trying, Danielle."

"Are you?" She grabs a few more items and moves past him into the kitchen. As she

places them in various cabinets, she says, "You haven't even talked to Sarah since the hospital, right?"

Brent turns around in the doorway. "Yeah. But ... I needed time to sort stuff out. Everything has been so insane." He glances down at his bandaged hands.

"So what now?"

"I'm going to get moving," he says.

"Meaning ... ?"

"The divorce. I'm going ahead with it. I started proceedings months ago and then with the fire and everything--it just got fouled up. I think it gave Sarah some sense of false hope, too. That maybe there was a reason I wasn't able to go through with it or something."

Danielle heads back into the dining room and begins folding the paper grocery bags. "It will be good to move on with this -- for both of you."

"I know. Sarah needs to get the message, too. There's been too much jerking around and I think she's really getting the wrong idea."

"You mean that there might be a chance for you two to get back together?"

"Yeah. I don't know why else she would still be trying so hard." He pauses, shakes his head, and then goes to the table to fold the remaining bag. "We'll see what happens ... Maybe I *can* forgive her for this stuff. God knows I haven't been perfect. So maybe we'll be able to get along someday ... but there's no way I could spend my life with her. Too much has happened. We're too far apart now."

"I understand, believe me," Danielle says. She gathers the bags up and goes to put them in the kitchen, but she pauses in her tracks. "There is one other thing."

"What?"

"I haven't forgotten what you told me at my wedding. About you and Molly."

Immediately Brent's gaze moves away from her.

"Brent ... What's going on there? I saw the way you two were when Molly came to see you at the hospital."

"It was nothing," he says quickly, grabbing the bags from her and bringing them into the kitchen himself.

"Nothing?"

"Yeah." He reappears in the doorway. "We're fine, Danielle, I swear. Everything is under control."

"Are you sure? The way you talked about it--"

"It's fine!" he says forcefully. Then, suddenly, his voice and his entire demeanor drop several notches. "Believe me, I get it. As much as I might want to be with her ... as much as I'm dying to ... it's never going to be possible."

WHITNEY'S HOUSE

"Hey," Jason says as he sidles up to Courtney.

"Hey, you! I've been waiting for you." She snakes her arm around his back and rests her hand against his far hip. It takes a moment for him to feel comfortable with her touch again.

"So how's Alex?" she asks, moving closer to his ear because of the music.

"Not too bad. He seemed happy to be here tonight."

"Good! I should go talk to him some more in a little bit."

"Yeah," Jason says, doing his best to mask his uncertainty. "But you'll have to wait. Looks like things are getting kinda serious over there." He points across the room, where Lauren and Alex are clearly engaged in deep conversation.

"I didn't want to let her go to him," Courtney says. "But she was insisting on it, and then she just sorta slipped away. Who knows, maybe they'll get their act together."

"Yeah, maybe," Jason says distractedly as he watches them. He sees Alex glancing away from Lauren uncomfortably.

"Oh my God!" Courtney cries out suddenly. Her free hand reaches across and practically smacks Jason in the chest.

He is almost too stunned to realize what he is watching, but it comes into focus ...

Alex and Lauren are kissing.

He watches, half-confused and half-horrified, as the kiss drags on for what feels like an eternity. And when it ends, he sees Lauren taking Alex by the hand ... tipping her head ... Alex responding ...

And they begin to head upstairs.

END OF EPISODE #225

What just happened with Alex and Lauren? What was going on with Alex's behavior towards Jason? And how did you feel about Matt, Molly, and Brent? Your thoughts, predictions, and whatever else are all welcome over at the [Message Forum!](#)

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