

## "Footprints" Episode #227

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

*\*Diane paid Claire a late-night visit and asked to see Samantha. When Claire asked about Los Angeles and Brian, Diane made a hasty exit.*

*\*Matt told Molly that he doesn't think he can trust Sarah anymore.*

*\*A panicked Jason followed Alex and Lauren upstairs at the party. When he found the room they'd gone into, he found Lauren alone, crying. She said that Alex had set the record straight between them. Jason remarked that at least it's not her fault that Alex is gay ... and Lauren didn't get it.*

### **KING'S BAY METROPOLITAN HOTEL**

The dark room swims around Diane, different angles rolling into sight and then disappearing again as she tosses and turns in the bed. She tries pulling the soft comforter more tightly around her body, but that only seems to make it worse. Throwing the covers off has the exact same effect.

She had hoped that seeing Samantha would put her at ease, at least for the night. A few hours ago, all she wanted was to see her daughter. It was intense, desperate -- she knew she had to go see her, even if it was a little late.

But still, now, she cannot sleep. Can't even get her mind to quiet down enough so that she can feel like she's resting. She might as well be cracking away at her laptop or downstairs in the gym, because this sure as hell is *not* relaxing.

"Look, Diane, we can get along. When we're both with Samantha, we're fine. There's no need for us to be arguing all the time."

"You should remind yourself of that more often."

"How have you been, anyway? How are things in Los Angeles? How's Brian doing?"

"Don't try to make small talk!"

The conversation with Claire rushes through Diane's mind once again, and she rolls onto her back. *That nosy bitch. What the hell does she care about how I'm doing?*

She doesn't even try to answer the question. Her mind is still stuck on Claire's inquiries.

"Dammit," she mutters finally, again flinging the comforter from her body and sitting up. She flips on the small lamp on the nightstand and reaches for the phone.

She pauses over the receiver. *Do I really want to do this?* Her hand answers for her, picking up the phone. The other hand starts dialing the familiar set of numbers.

The first ring sticks in her ear with an unsettling realness. The silence until it repeats seems to last forever, but when the second ring comes, Diane feels her heart rate pick up. It escalates even more with the third.

But then the fourth comes ... and she hears the click indicating that the answering machine has picked up. She listens to it for just a moment, hears that voice again, before she hangs up. She doesn't leave a message, doesn't even consider doing it.

She has to hang up.

## **SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT**

At first, Sarah isn't sure where the mechanical tune is coming from. But it is not a Nokia commercial on the television, so she scans the room as the tune continues.

"Ah-ha," she says to herself as she spots her cell phone sitting on the table in the small dining area. She lifts herself from the couch, leaving Letterman behind.

Her first thought is that it must be work-related. Maybe a client just learned something that might be of use to her, or something just happened that would turn a case on its head. But when she sees the caller ID flashing on the small screen, she freezes.

"Hi," she says when she finally does answer the phone.

"Hi," Matt says back. His voice doesn't betray much, try as Sarah might to read it.

"How've you been?"

"Fine."

*Fine.* Ouch. That doesn't tell her anything at all. Or maybe it does ... *Jeez, he didn't even ask how I am,* she realizes as they sit in silence.

She is next to speak up. "I'm glad you called. I've been worried--wait, is something wrong? Why are you calling so late?"

"Nothing's wrong," he says coolly. He makes it sound like a fact, nothing more. It's clear

that he isn't making any effort to reassure her. "I just needed to talk to you," he adds.

Sarah feels a little jump inside. "Yeah?"

"Yeah. It's something real important and I don't think it can wait."

## WHITNEY'S HOUSE

"Gay?" Lauren asks, suddenly wide-eyed.

Jason's world has stopped turning. He just sits there on the bed beside Lauren, paralyzed by a shock so deep that it feels as though his entire body is shutting down. He waits for Lauren to make the next move, because without some prompting he has no idea where to begin.

But she is caught up in her own reaction. The shock that washed over her tear-stained face a moment ago is now giving way to something else.

"Oh ... my ... God," she says slowly, almost inaudibly, as her hand rises to her mouth.

Suddenly Jason can take the waiting no longer. "What did Alex tell you?" he blurts out in a rush of breath.

She glances up at him, a bit startled, as if in absorbing the surprise she forgot he was there. "He said I needed to know for good that we'd never be together -- after I kissed him downstairs, he told me to come up here so we could talk ... but he didn't say ..." She sounds distant, almost dreamy, as she reviews everything that has happened tonight and in the last months from a completely new point of view.

"Did he tell you?" she asks suddenly, whipping around to face Jason. "I mean, do you know for sure?"

There is suddenly a lump blocking Jason's throat, and it takes him what feels like forever to force it out of the way. "I--Lauren, I just thought--"

"You thought or you knew?"

"I was thinking about the whole thing, and I--I figured maybe ..."

"Maybe what? Jason ..."

For the first time, Jason brings himself to look at her, to truly look at her. Her makeup is distorted and her eyes are puffy. Tears have left the mark of sadness and finality on her cheeks, trails leading nowhere but down. The insecurities that have come out so many times in neurotic fits are there, smudged all over her face, but there is something different about them now. They seem more realistic, more ... tragic.

"Lauren--" He grabs hold of her hands. "This is not your fault. This isn't even--it's not about you, not really."

"Then he is? Jason, tell me. I need to know. Is--" Suddenly she stops, mid-question. Jason follows her eyes over his shoulder, to the door, where Alex is now standing.

Jason notices the bunch of tissues in his hand. *He must have gone to get those for her ... before he told her the whole story. If he was going to tell her the whole story.*

"Jason," Alex says weakly as he evaluates the scene before him. "W-what's going on?"

To Jason, the room feels as though it is about to explode. He looks at Alex and then at Lauren, and then back at Alex. Where is this going?

"Alex," Lauren says suddenly, popping to her feet. A sob blurs her voice and she pauses a moment before continuing. "I need to know the truth."

"The truth?" Alex glances over at Jason, who tries to offer an apologetic look. He sees horror warping Alex's features as he realizes what has happened.

"Tell me," she says forcefully. It sounds to Jason as though she is doing everything she can to keep going and make this happen.

She focuses her gaze more strongly on Alex. "Are you gay?"

## **ERIC WESTIN'S APARTMENT**

"What are you doing here?"

Diane's full lips curl up in a mischievous grin. "I dunno. I was just sorta hoping you'd be up for a visit."

"It's the middle of the night," Eric says, but Diane can already see his eyes tracing the contours of her body.

She wastes no time in returning the favor. The young lawyer is wearing a deep burgundy robe, the top split open just enough to reveal a sample of his smooth, tanned chest.

"I'm not interrupting anything super-important, am I?" she asks.

"I--" Diane's index finger lands softly on Eric's chest and begins traveling its way down his hard torso. "I was just relaxing," he says.

"Excellent. That's just the sorta thing I had in mind." She strolls past him, into the apartment, and slips out of her short leather jacket. She keeps walking, the heels of her boots clicking on the wood floor as she takes in the apartment.

"I love this place," she says as she turns to face him, hands resting in the back pockets of her jeans. "You have incredible taste."

She sees his dimples cracking as he smiles. "I like to think so."

She begins walking back towards him and he follows suit, shutting the door first. His slippers and her boots make their own music, a symphony building to its crescendo.

Their music ceases when they meet in the middle of the room.

"How did I manage to find a lawyer who would keep me so thoroughly interested?" Diane's voice oozes with wonder, with suggestiveness, and with sheer delight as her hand returns to his chest.

"And how did I stumble upon the good fortune of having such an enticing client?"

She lifts her eyebrows. "You keep saying things like that and you'll have me investigating those legal briefs of yours in no time."

"Don't get corny on me."

"Couldn't help it. I've always wanted to say that," she grins, bringing her finger up to his lips.

"I can let it slide." He kisses the tip of her finger and then it drops, allowing him to move in for her mouth.

He feels her fingers moving again and then going to work. His robe flops open as the belt falls, undone.

"Well, well, what have we here?" she smirks. "No legal briefs. Or legal boxers, for that matter. Lucky me."

Her mouth engulfs his again. The heat moves back and forth between them, but when Eric feels her slender fingers moving around under his now-opened robe, he has to pull back.

"Diane," he pants, "maybe I shouldn't let this happen again. We have a professional relationship--"

"And we need to enhance it," she says quickly, silencing him with her mouth.

His body tenses with hesitation, but she does her best to ignore it. To her delight, his reluctance fades away after a moment in a deep sigh and his body gives in to her.

She takes that as her cue to get rid of his robe entirely. And once that barrier has been broken, there's no stopping either one of them.

## **SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT**

Sarah's hopes are dashed even before she can fully realize them.

"I need to see Victoria," Matt says. "It's been way too long."

"So come over and see her sometime!" Sarah fires back suddenly. It's not what she would have said had she been thinking, but it feels strangely good to get a little rough with him. After all, *he's* the one who hasn't called.

Matt's response matches her attitude. "You remember the last time we talked, don't you? You didn't exactly give me reason to want to see you again."

She stammers before spitting out, "I didn't say I was proud of what I did!"

"No, but you weren't sorry about it, either!"

"Matt--"

"I'm not gonna get into this with you now. I called for a reason -- I wanna see my daughter."

"Oh." Sarah shifts the phone to her other ear, trying to pull herself away from the

explosion of a few seconds ago. "When? I'm not exactly trying to keep you from her."

"I know," Matt says after a pause. Even over the phone line, she can hear him trying to calm himself. "Could I take her for the next two or three nights? Just so I can have some time with her?"

"Yeah, I guess. When do you want to pick her up?"

"How's after dinner tomorrow?"

Sarah goes through the motions, consenting as Matt sets up the rest of the plan. He sounds detached, like he doesn't want to be talking to her. She can't throw herself into it, either.

The call finishes up and she turns off the phone. As she sets it back on the table, she feels something new washing over her.

Or maybe it's not so new. It's something she now realizes has been bubbling inside of her for the last few weeks.

The apartment falls to black as she hits the lights. Head hung, she troops back to the bedroom, sadness flooding her entire being more powerfully than she has allowed it to for so long.

## **WHITNEY'S HOUSE**

The tension in the air is too much for Jason. He springs to his feet as well. "Lauren, don't. It's not--"

"Don't, Jason," Alex interrupts. He raises a hand as a signal for Jason to stop.

Alex's sudden calmness takes Jason even more by surprise. He shoots the darker-haired young man a puzzled look, but Alex responds with merely a calm look. A comfortable look -- like he's in control now.

"Guys ..." Lauren says, suddenly needing to make her presence remembered. Jason isn't sure if she is begging to be let in on what is going on or scolding them for it.

"Thank you, Jason," Alex says. "For everything. For being so good to me through all of this and supporting me and helping me out. You're the reason I was able to get to this point."

"What point?" Lauren cuts in, her growing agitation apparent.

Alex takes a step towards her. There is still quite a gap between them, and he doesn't think he can close it entirely, but he needed to be able to come closer.

"I'm sorry," he says softly. "I'm sorry I've put you through this. No one else should have had to get dragged along on this with me. I never wanted you to get hurt ... That's why I have to do this. I want you to understand that this isn't about you. You're a beautiful girl. You're charming, you're funny ..." He cracks a smile. "A little wacky. But you're a terrific girl."

Jason has been watching Alex speak, amazed at what he is hearing and how strong it sounds. But now he brings himself to look at Lauren. She is everything that Alex is not. She's ashen, almost sick-looking, and her features are contorted as she tries to figure out what kind of turn this night has taken.

"I'm so sorry," Alex says again, shaking his head. "I ... Lauren, I--Yes, I am. I'm gay."

Something changes in the room at that instant. To have those words out there ... Jason realizes that it is the first time he has actually heard Alex say it. Lauren looks like she's on the border, uncertain whether she should be relieved or devastated. And Alex looks like he is in the midst of an out-of-body experience.

"There. It's out," he says, glancing up at both Lauren and Jason to study their reactions.

Jason finds himself moving towards Alex, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. "I'm proud of you, buddy."

Something different seems to be descending upon them. Jason isn't sure what it is, but he tries to enjoy it. Some peace, at last. *The calm after the storm*, he thinks.

But too quickly, he sees the change coming over Lauren. The whole time, she has been on the fence -- or maybe a million different fences -- torn between shock and acceptance and so many other things.

*Wait*, he thinks abruptly. *It's the calm before the storm*. And it lasts all too briefly.

"You knew?" Lauren cries. Her eyes narrow as her devastation focuses directly on the boys. Jason feels like her gaze is burning right through him. "Why did you let this go on? Why didn't somebody stop me from making a complete *idiot* of myself?!"

Before either Alex or Jason can respond, she pushes past them and yanks the door open. She nearly rams into Courtney as she flies from the room.

Frozen outside in the hallway, Courtney watches Lauren storm out, too confused to make a move. Seconds pass before she looks inside the room at Jason and Alex.

"What just happened?" she asks, slowly entering the room as though she is on guard against whatever drove Lauren out of here.

"We'll explain later," Jason says before Alex can get in even a word. "Let Lauren go."

"I don't want her to get in the car--"

"I'll make sure she doesn't," Alex says. "I'll make sure Whitney or somebody keeps an eye on her."

That doesn't seem to comfort Courtney much, but Jason begins leading her down the hall. "Come on, Court. Let's crash. I'm exhausted."

"I wanna know what happened," she protests.

"You'll find out," he assures her. "Just not now."

Reluctantly she agrees, allowing herself to be led only after Alex gives her another assurance that he will make sure Lauren is okay. He watches the couple disappear down the hall, looking for a room to sleep in so that they can shut out the night's events for at least a few more hours. He knows that he won't be able to do that tonight.

And he knows that, no matter what happens now, tonight he has irreversibly changed every one of their lives.

## **END OF EPISODE #227**

*What did you think about how Alex's admission played out and how the others reacted? What about Diane's very different pair of scenes? Come over to the [Message Forum](#) and join in on the discussion about this episode!*

[Next Episode](#)