

## "Footprints" Episode #232

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

*\*Diane was awarded temporary custody of Samantha.*

*\*Sarah was stunned to hear Paula say that Molly is in the wrong regarding Brent, but did not know how to react to her mother.*

*\*Alex started to tell Jason about his experience in college, but they were interrupted by Courtney, who seemed to have overheard their conversation.*

## WINDMILLS

Sarah's thin fingers rest along the stem of the curvaceous glass. She watches her unpainted nails wrap around the thin pole and then unwind. With a sigh, she lifts the glimmering glass of champagne to her lips and draws a lengthy sip.

This isn't something she would normally do, going to sit at a bar by herself in the evening. Tonight, though, it seemed like an appealing change of pace. Matt called earlier and wanted to spend the night with Victoria, so she granted his wish. With nothing else to fill her evening and no particular desire to eat dinner, this seemed like a good place to pass some time and think.

Matt hardly said a word to her when he came by to pick up Victoria. The whole visit must have taken less than five minutes, amazing considering how much baggage Victoria required for one night away. He must have been very focused on getting in and out of there quickly.

Sarah had been hoping that his coldness toward her would subside over a few days or weeks, but no such luck. Actually, he isn't being cold anymore -- just indifferent. Very professional and removed. *He's always like that, in a way*, she thinks with a tinge of frustration.

Truthfully, she's been trying not to worry about too much. But she has been, probably more than she realizes or would like to acknowledge. Particularly in light of the talks she's had with Paula lately ... she could use Matt around to talk to again. That can't really be gone forever -- can it?

She's still trying to sort out what happened the other day with Paula. She really did say that Molly was dealing with Brent and Sarah badly, and that she might even be at fault for some of what has happened. Somehow Sarah can't quite believe that her mother actually placed Molly in that position, but she wants to believe it. Badly.

*That would make everything so much better ... Maybe there's some hope then. Maybe I*

*can fix things with Mom and Dad.*

Even as she has that thought, she isn't certain of quite where things went so wrong. Her contemplating is interrupted by a shrill ring.

She pulls her cell phone out of her tiny purse quickly, wanting to silence it before its frenzied call drives the rest of the restaurant insane. She gets to it just before the third ring begins.

"Hello?"

The voice on the other end makes her clam up immediately. Brent.

"Sarah, hi. How, uh, how are you?"

"All right," she manages, stammering far more than she would like. "How about you?"

"I'm fine. Listen, is there any way we could get together soon? Tomorrow night, maybe?"

"Oh, uh, yeah. Sure," she answers even as she is reviewing her mental calendar. "Of course."

"Okay, good. Um ... Why don't you meet me outside your dad's restaurant around seven?"

The proposition immediately strikes her as odd, but she tries to disregard that. "Sounds good."

"See you then."

Before she can even try to prolong the conversation, he has hung up. She tries to remind herself that she is going to see him tomorrow, but the very thought that he might be spending time with Molly right now sends her blood pressure soaring.

What was that about, anyway? And why in front of the restaurant? For dinner? For some kind of surprise? She tries not to have the thought, but it is too late. *Maybe he wants to work on things.*

"Sarah?"

The sound of her name from behind startles Sarah. Instinctively she turns.

"Hi," she says, still a little thrown, as Diane Bishop smiles at her.

## FISHER HOME

Claire's body is totally numb. She is faintly aware of Travis's little fingers holding onto her hand, of Samantha's minimal weight resting in her other arm, and of the pavement beneath her feet. But only faintly.

There is a haze surrounding her, a haze all too similar to one that she has experienced before. The scene is the same, the Fishers' house looming in front of her as she crosses the street, waiting to force her into saying out loud what she would rather ignore. Even the November weather has taken a turn for the worse and it is far too reminiscent of the chill of New Year's Day for her liking.

She climbs the front steps up to the porch. The door flies open in front of her and Paula appears in the doorway. Clearly they have been waiting for her, waiting to see what happened.

"Thank goodness," Paula gasps. Claire cannot fathom why she would say something so cruel until she feels Samantha's soft fingers reach up and touch her face.

She knows that she has to say it now, but she can't. She is hoping that her expression will do the talking for her.

"What's wrong?" Paula asks as Bill appears behind her.

Holding her lips together tightly, Claire shakes her head.

"What happened?" Bill demands.

Claire wonders if this is reminding them of that horrible New Year's Day, too.

"I lost her," she murmurs finally. She cannot bring herself to look at the Fishers. "Diane got custody."

"Then why do you have her?" Paula asks, as though there has been some gross misunderstanding and she has just found the key to clearing it all up and restoring things to normal.

"Diane's not taking her until tomorrow. The judge thought it would make the transition easier if we had a final night ... to say goodbye and to get things ready."

Paula turns to Bill. "We should have been there." She can tell that he is thinking the same thing.

"No," Claire says. "I didn't want you to come, I told you that. It wasn't the place for it ..."

Paula's head shakes insistently. "No. If we had been there, the judge would have seen what kind of family Samantha has--"

"It wouldn't have helped. Diane got custody because she's a biological parent and I'm not, case closed."

"But after everything she did," Paula argues, "that can't be enough."

"It was. I didn't exactly come off sounding squeaky-clean, the way her lawyer told the story."

Paula's lips part, ready with another argument, but there is no use and she knows it. Painful silence sits upon them as reality sinks in: There is nothing they can do. Again.

## **KING'S BAY PARK**

"Courtney," Jason says, her name suddenly the most graceless thing he has ever heard as it drops off his lips. Something is very wrong, he can tell that much just by looking at her.

Her cold stare does all the talking that could ever be necessary, but she doesn't let that stop her. "You knew. You *knew!*"

He knows that his stare betrays the truth, no matter what he might want to say. He looks over at Alex on the other swing. Alex looks up at Courtney, but she hardly even acknowledges him.

"I can't believe you!" she rails at Jason. "How long did you know?"

He shrugs awkwardly. The gesture makes it all too clear that he is trying to figure out what answer to give.

"Court," Alex cuts in with a hint of urgency, "what are you talking about?" He knows the answer already.

"About ... you," she says carefully. Then she holds up her palms. "Don't worry, Lauren

didn't tell me or anything. I just sorta ... pieced it together. She told me to come talk to you if I wanted to know what was going on."

"Well ... I appreciate that," he says in a voice close to a mumble, very reflectively. Then his volume increases. "So why are you mad at Jason? He was just respecting my privacy."

"That's not the problem! He let Lauren keep going after you, he let me keep encouraging her, and he let you keep going along with it!" She turns sharply to her boyfriend. "How long did you know, anyway?"

"A--I don't know, uh--a while," Jason stammers. His heart feels like it is trying to jump out of his throat.

"How'd you find out? And without us finding out?"

He shrugs uncomfortably. "I don't know. I just ... it came up. I sorta figured it out. We talked about it a little."

"And you let Lauren and I act like total idiots for how long? Real smooth, Jay." Courtney shakes her head angrily. "I can't believe you!"

"Courtney, wait," Alex calls out before she can make a move. "Don't let this ruin things. Don't hold this against Jason."

## WINDMILLS

"Diane!" Sarah says with genuine surprise. "Uh, how are you?"

"I'm all right. How about you?"

Sarah shrugs. "Same old."

Awkwardness blankets them for a moment, but waiting it out is not something to which Diane is accustomed, and she doesn't intend to start now. "Mind if I sit down?" she asks.

"Uh, no, go ahead." Sarah's attention turns back to the champagne, at least momentarily.

Diane flags down the bartender and orders her drink.

"So what brings you here?" Sarah asks suddenly, as though the thought just struck her and she must know right this instant.

"I've been in King's Bay for a while, on and off," Diane says. "For Samantha."

"Oh yeah! How's all that going?"

"There was a hearing this afternoon, actually." She lets Sarah linger for a moment. "A preliminary thing, just until the court gets itself in gear, and we all know how long that can take."

"And ... ?"

"The judge gave me custody."

Sarah's eyes go wide. "What? Claire lost custody?"

"Yeah. The judge thought it would be best for Samantha to have the time with me, I guess."

Sarah isn't sure if she is gloating or not. The bartender interrupts to deliver Diane's drink.

"Poor Claire ..." Sarah says almost under her breath. "First Tim and now this."

"I was so sorry to hear about Tim," Diane says with an honesty that takes Sarah by surprise. "But Samantha -- she's my daughter. Do you and your husband have kids yet?"

Sarah does her best to stifle a groan. "I have a daughter, yeah. Victoria." A smile curls her lips.

"So think about it. Your husband marries some other chick and then all of a sudden, she's your kid's mother and you're four weekends a year. Not exactly easy to stomach."

"No, I guess not."

"That's how it is for me -- or was. I mean, I know Samantha's conception wasn't so ... simple, but she still is my daughter. And for two years, everyone has acted like Claire's her mother. Isn't it about time things swung around in my favor a little?"

"Maybe, yeah," Sarah says thoughtfully, the idea still playing on her brain.

Diane slugs back an impressive amount of her drink and then sets the glass back down

on the bar, cradling it in both hands. "No offense, but Samantha's my kid and I'm tired of being second best." Her voice falls several notches. "It's gotten to be way too familiar and I'm not taking it anymore."

"I'll second that," Sarah says, downing the last of her champagne in a self-toast tinged with all the bitterness of the last few years.

## FISHER HOME

Claire sinks onto the familiar living room sofa. "What is happening to me?"

Paula folds her arms in front of her, grappling for some kind of response. The woman sitting a few feet away from her is a ghost of the confident woman Tim brought home with him five years ago, and a shell of the daughter-in-law with whom Paula has shared so many talks and times. The realization of how much this past year and its events have changed Claire rattles Paula.

"These are tough times," Bill says from the entrance to the room. He walks slowly to stand beside Paula. "We just have to stick together. That's all we can do."

Claire's head is shaking already. "That's the problem! We just keep getting ripped apart!"

"We're still here, dear," Paula says, a bit more softly than she'd like.

"For how long?" Claire cries as her head drops into her hands. "Don't you see what's happening? Everything is falling apart!"

Bill takes a deep breath. "Claire--"

"Don't try to tell me it's not happening, because I know it is! Everything is falling apart!" She exhales heavily and drops her hands, letting her head to fall down as well. "I told you this was what would happen, Paula!"

Bill casts a confused glance at his wife. "What?"

Paula offers him an *I'll explain later, just pay attention* look and turns quickly back to Claire. "You are a Fisher, Claire. That isn't going to change."

"But it *is* changing! Everything is! I knew this was going to happen. I knew it was all going to slip away, even when it started ... It was like it was all too good to be true."

Paula and Bill share another concerned look. They have dealt with so many difficult situations throughout the years, but still they are at a loss right now.

"Maybe I'm not supposed to have any of this," Claire says, her steely gaze focused on the fireplace ahead of her. "It's not who I am. It never was. Eventually I'm going to be forced to recognize that, whether I want to or not."

"Claire, no ..." Paula says, but she knows that her pleas will only fall on deaf ears. Reaching out with what would be a comforting touch doesn't seem like an appropriate move right now, either.

"I need to sleep," Claire says suddenly, shooting up from her spot on the sofa. "I'm going to go to Tim's room."

"All right," Paula says breathlessly. "What about the kids?"

"Can you handle them for a while -- please?" Her eyes are apologetic and pleading. "Paula, I can't, not now ... I can't be with them right now. I just need to sleep. I need to be away ..."

"Go upstairs," Paula says without hesitation. "Rest."

With a nod of the head, Claire is gone.

Travis and Samantha are sitting on the floor, oblivious to what is going on around them. Even so, Paula has a sudden urge to scoop them up in her arms. She grips Bill's sleeve. "There has to be something we can do."

But she doesn't really believe it.

\* \* \*

Upstairs, Claire pulls the quilt tightly around her body. This bed has been here for as long as she has known this house, always made, always there as a reminder of Tim's happy childhood. There were times when he'd take her up here, before they got married and even sometimes after, and they'd just talk and try to learn everything they could about each other.

She wishes she could go back to that time, with Tim still here. She can almost feel him in this bed, waiting for her, like he never really left.

Almost.

"Come back," she whispers into the dark, a desperate plea that dies in the cold air.

## **KING'S BAY PARK**

Courtney's feet step over the bark, crunching it lightly as she walks closer to the swings.

"Alex, I love you," she says as she stops just a couple of feet in front of him. "You're practically my brother. I want you to be happy."

"I love you, too," he says. The beginnings of relief are washing through his body and he loosens his grip on the chains a little.

Courtney sees him start to smile a little, the evening moonlight catching his soft face at just the right angle for her to realize why Lauren was so into him for so long. It makes it even more difficult to say what she is going to say.

She forces it out, though. She knows she has to. "I wish I could have found out about this in a different way. I'd want to be there for you and help you through this."

There is a little pause before he responds. "Thanks."

"But just because you're going through a rough time does *not* make what you put Lauren through okay! And it's even worse that Jason let it go on!"

Alex rises from the swing, still holding the chains but rising almost to his full height. "I asked him to keep quiet about it--"

"He still let it go on! Lauren got hurt really badly. He knew that was going to happen." Courtney is staring Jason down now.

Jason's defense comes ripping out of him abruptly and furiously. "I tried! You got mad at me for telling you to back off, remember that? And you don't have any idea of half the stuff that went on--"

"No, I don't! That's the problem, Jason!" She throws up her hands in total frustration. "How is this supposed to work between us if I can't even trust you to watch out for me or your other friends?"

"It's complicated," he says, much more quietly. "More than you understand." He looks like he is going to cry now.

"Maybe." She steps back from them. Jason can see the shock of what has just happened painted all over her face, still sinking in.

"I need to go," she says. "To think." Holding her purse at her side with the other arm, she turns and jogs off.

Jason finally stands up, off of the swing, but his legs don't take him anywhere. "I need to go after her ..."

"Let her go," Alex says. "Just for now. Let her cool down. You guys will work this out. I know you will."

Jason watches her shadow disappearing into the night, fading away from him.

## **WINDMILLS**

Diane's fingers linger on her glass as she leans back in the high chair. "Sounds like you know what I'm talking about."

"Uh-huh," Sarah deadpans, the rim of her glass still sitting against her lips.

"Things not going well with your husband?" Diane pauses, but the information she's seeking isn't coming back to her. "What's his name?"

"Brent. And no, things aren't so hot."

"Some other chick?"

Sarah is taken aback by the question, and it shows.

"Is there someone else?" Diane repeats. "C'mon, I know that look."

Sarah hesitates. As much as she's worried about it and complained about it for who knows how long, admitting it to someone else is still painful. "You got me. We have interference, all right ... and its name is Molly."

Diane's eyes nearly jump out of their sockets. "Your sister?!"

"Yeah," Sarah confirms, disgust dripping from her lips.

"Man, that is brutal." Diane shakes her head and finishes off her drink. "So she just went

after him? Some sister."

"You're telling me."

"She's trouble, I knew it all along. The way she jerked Brian around ..." Diane falls silent for a moment at the thought of him.

"I get where you're coming from," she continues, moving to a slightly different track. "My sister's a real piece of work, too. Always had to be the center of everything. She was a gymnast, and she had my parents totally wrapped around her finger. Our whole lives revolved around her stupid gymnastics."

Sarah casts a sideways glance at Diane, surprised at how intensely her bitterness shows through. She wonders if she sounds the same way.

"Sisters, huh?" Diane finally says, not looking up from the bar.

"Yeah, really." Sarah sighs heavily. "What a joke."

And they sit there in silence, side-by-side, each still digesting what has happened tonight. *Of all places to find someone who understands me*, Sarah thinks, throwing another quick look over at the dark-haired woman beside her. *But at least someone does.*

## **END OF EPISODE #232**

*What did you think of the encounter between Sarah and Diane? Where is Claire headed after this latest devastation? How bad are things between Jason and Courtney? We want to know what you think! Take a moment to pop into the [Message Forum](#) to let us know!*

[Next Episode](#)