

"Footprints" Episode #233

[Previously ...](#)

**Courtney realized that Jason had known about Alex for quite some time. She confronted both of them and blasted them for being so deceptive.*

**Sarah received a call from Brent asking her to meet him in front of Bill's restaurant for something important.*

FISHER HOME

The half-eaten grilled cheese sandwich drops from Jason's indifferent hands. It lands back on the plate, scattering crumbs over the clean white surface. Jason leans back in the chair, exhales heavily, and brings his hands up to his hair.

He doesn't even have an appetite now. It's not that he isn't really hungry, but he just doesn't feel like eating. Just like he hasn't felt like doing anything else today. Thank goodness skating was such a bust today, because he wouldn't have been able to do much of anything, anyway. Trying to distract himself by cooking the grilled cheese was like pulling teeth. So why should eating be any different?

He groans inwardly when he hears the footsteps approaching the kitchen. His first instinct is to get up and out of there before he has to talk to anyone, but he knows he doesn't have the time to pull it off, and anything less than a smooth execution will just lead to more questions. So he stays put, hoping his melancholy will go unnoticed.

Fat chance. Paula stops in the doorway, appraises him worriedly, and then begins to come closer as she asks, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," he says, knowing even as he speaks that he is not doing a very convincing job.

"So that's why you've been milling around all day like you're in some sort of funk?"

He can't think of any way to respond. Instead, he drops his shoulders in defeat and then rests his elbows on the table.

"What happened?" Paula asks as she settles herself in another chair at the table, across the corner from him.

His mind scrambles to figure out how much he can tell, or wants to tell. Finally it cracks under the pressure and it comes spilling out. "Courtney and I had a fight. She didn't even come to skating this morning. I haven't been able to get a hold of her."

Paula considers the information in that motherly way to which Jason has become so accustomed. Then she says, in an even but still very warm tone of voice, "This sounds like it was a pretty serious fight."

"Yeah." It feels good even to admit that much. He hadn't been able to do that this morning when Sandy wondered where Courtney was. He had given her some excuse that she probably hadn't bought anyway -- but at least it had let him prolong admitting how bad this might be for a few more hours.

"What happened?" Paula strikes that perfect balance between not pushing too hard and yet digging deeper. If not for the circumstances, it would probably make Jason bust into an amused grin.

"She found out something," he says slowly, but then quickly adds, "something I knew about that she didn't."

"So she's upset that you knew ... whatever this was, and didn't tell her sooner?"

"Pretty much, yeah." For a moment he is drawn back into yesterday, to that instant when he realized that Courtney had overheard him and Alex, when he looked into her eyes and knew that everything was about to explode. He drags himself out of it as best he can.

"She totally lost it."

"Did she have reason to? Was it something that you should have told her?"

He shrugs and his frustration comes shining through. "Maybe. I don't know. I mean, part of me wanted to tell her all along. I even tried to tell her without actually *telling* her. But she didn't pick it up."

Slow seconds pass as Paula thinks some more, trying to find the questions that will help Jason get the situation in order without rattling him into doing nothing at all. "Why couldn't you tell her whatever it was directly?"

He meets her gaze for the briefest moment and then drops his eyes to the plate.

"Because it wasn't mine to tell. It was something about someone else. I was trying not to break that confidence without totally leaving Court in the dark. But now she thinks that I was just being sneaky or not caring about her."

"Then maybe you need to explain that to her. Courtney's a good girl. I think she'd be able to appreciate you being loyal to a friend, even if it meant keeping something from her."

"I thought she would, too. Or I hoped so. But I tried telling her that, and she didn't care. She thinks she had a right to know because it affected her, too."

"Did it really affect her?"

Another tiny shrug. "I guess so, yeah."

Paula hesitates before letting herself ask the next question, but she goes for it anyway. "So what was it that you couldn't tell her?"

CHASE HOME

"I just can't believe he *knew*," Courtney practically spits as she shuts the door to her bedroom. She deposits herself on the bed as Lauren takes a seat in the leather computer chair.

"I figured he knew before I did," Lauren says. "When Alex was telling me, I could tell that Jason knew what was going on. But I thought maybe he'd just found out. I didn't think he'd known about it for so long."

Courtney grabs one of the throw pillows on the bed and wraps it inside her arms. "There were times I thought he might have had an idea what was going on with Alex, but ... I never thought it would be like this. I didn't think he was flat-out keeping it from us."

"Me neither," Lauren says with a shake of her head. Her dark blonde ponytail swings from side to side behind her head. "But yeah, there were definitely times that I got the impression he knew something. He practically blurted it out to me a couple of times. There was this one time we went out to eat and he just kept telling me to give up on Alex, but he wouldn't give me a solid reason why."

"Well, now we know. I feel like such an idiot for pushing you so hard to keep going after him."

"*You* feel like an idiot? Please!" A sarcastic grin briefly appears on Lauren's face. "I'm the one who chased after a gay guy for two years and never got the hint."

"I just thought he was insecure or something. He always talked about how he didn't have that many friends before and how he wasn't that experienced and stuff. I just figured ... I don't know." Courtney puts the pillow aside. "Seriously, I wouldn't have guessed just from the way he acts or anything."

"Yeah, me neither! Hopefully if it had been super-obvious I wouldn't have acted like such

a total retard."

"Don't feel stupid," Courtney says softly. "Alex is a really nice guy. You guys totally clicked. And he's still *hot*. He's just ... not available."

Lauren leans back in the chair and it follows the motion of her body, reclining. She throws up her hands. "I can't believe he let me keep making such a fool of myself! Thank God I never actually slept with him. But still, it's like, he could have stopped me before it almost got to that point like ten times."

"I know, I yelled at him for it, too. I know this has gotta be hard for him, but that doesn't give him the right to screw around with other people like that. Especially people he called friends."

"Ugh, I know!" The chair springs forward as Lauren whips her head downward. She lets it hang, breathing heavily as she says, "I don't even know what I would say to him. Either one of them, for that matter."

"I think I pretty much covered it last night, but don't let that stop you from giving it to 'em again. They could use it." Courtney flicks her hair back behind her head with a little sigh of disgust. "I just absolutely chewed out both of them."

"Good!" Lauren says enthusiastically, but then a cloud of worry lowers over her. "So what does this mean for you and Jay?"

Courtney freezes before she can get out an answer.

PIER 22

The autumn has brought the darkness early, so even though it is only seven o'clock, it feels to Brent like it is much later in the night. He is standing out on the pier, beside the restaurant, keeping his eye out for Sarah. He told her to meet in front of the restaurant, but this is more the setting he had in mind.

He allows himself to turn slightly and the moonlight catches his attention. It is hitting the surface of the water at just the right angle that it has been splayed all over the bay.

He can't remember the last time he sat back and enjoyed -- allowed himself to enjoy -- something so simple. The last months, the past year, maybe even more, all feels like he has been trapped inside a box, running the same routine over and over and struggling to maintain just enough balance to keep himself from going absolutely insane.

Maybe that will end tonight, he thinks as a reluctant glimmer of hope surges in his chest.

Somehow he finds the thought almost impossible to swallow. *Can this even end? Will it ever?*

The very thought of setting things straight makes him even more determined to see that tonight is a success.

"Brent!"

The call travels over the pier to him, and the voice alerts him that the game is on. Here goes nothing ... everything.

Sarah strides quickly across the pier to him. Brent notices that she manages a fast, steady pace despite the high heels of her boots. She is wearing a fitted pair of jeans and a long, black sweater worn open, its tie dangling casually by her sides, with a black t-shirt underneath. Her hair falls neatly around her shoulders. For a moment, Brent is able to appreciate her as a very attractive woman without thinking about everything that has happened.

For a moment.

As she comes closer, he is all too aware that this is Sarah. Her face wears the hopeful expression that he has been wishing would not make an appearance tonight.

"Hey," she says as she stops in front of him. "What are you doing out here? I was about to go in the restaurant when I saw someone standing out here. If I hadn't looked again, I wouldn't have realized it was you."

"Hi," he says civilly. "Actually, out here is good. You're not cold, are you?"

She shakes her head, in spite of having folded her arms in front of her. "Not really, no. Why? What's going on?"

He glances around, back out at the water and then over at the restaurant, where the dinner crowd is streaming in and out. *You're so close. Just do it.*

"Brent?" she asks again, impatiently. "What's going on? Why did you want me to meet you?"

FISHER HOME

"It was about Alex," Jason says, accepting defeat and realizing that as much as he wants to keep this to himself and deny it, he also wants to let every last bit of it out. Well, maybe not every last bit.

"Did he do something wrong?" Paula prods gently. Years of trying to walk the kids through solving their own problems has made it a fine-tuned skill.

"Kind of." Jason folds his hands together and leans his forehead against the combined fist. "He's ... Alex is--he's gay."

He can feel that he has managed to shock Paula.

"So," she asks after some silence, less in-control now, "Alex told you but he didn't tell Courtney?"

"Or Lauren."

"Ah." The simple sound fills with understanding as Paula pieces together the puzzle. "And Alex and Lauren were dating, right?"

"Yeah. Sort of. He was ... he kept backing out but then going back into it. Because he was confused, I guess."

Paula takes her time to soak up the situation and sort through it in her head. "So Courtney is mad that you helped Alex lead Lauren on, basically?"

"No!" Jason responds quickly, but then he realizes that that is exactly what has happened. "Well ... I kept trying to talk Lauren out of being interested in him. And I kept trying to tell Court to back off and stop pushing them together. But she didn't get it and I couldn't just come out and tell her."

"No, you probably couldn't. That must have been a really difficult spot to be in."

"Yeah, there's an understatement ..."

"You know what I think?"

He makes eye contact with her, cautiously. "What?"

"Courtney's pretty ... touchy. She doesn't react well to situations like this. But she's had some time to cool off now."

"So you think I should go try and talk to her?"

"I think you have to," Paula says. "If you want to make things right between the two of you, it's the only option you have."

CHASE HOME

"Honestly ... I don't know." Courtney rolls onto her back, burying her head among the pile of pillows. "I need more time. To think about it, figure out exactly what was going on, all that stuff."

Lauren's attention is caught by a framed photograph of Courtney and Jason in costume from a skating event. "So you think you might be able to forgive him for this?"

No sound comes from the bed for a long time. "Maybe," Court finally says. "Not now. Not this soon. And not until he gives me good reason to."

"I just can't believe Jason would have let this go on for so long. He's such a good guy."

"Or we thought he was."

"You've known him for so long, Court. I think you would've figured it out before now if he wasn't." Lauren picks up the picture of Jason and Courtney, studying it even more closely.

"I don't know what to believe right now," Courtney sighs. "Everything feels like it's totally upside-down." Suddenly she scrambles up from her position on the bed and reaches out for the photo. Lauren hands it over.

Courtney's gaze moves up and down the length of Jason's photographed body. He looks like the same person she has known all these years, but his personality seems like something totally abstract. Something that was an illusion all along.

"I wonder ..." She places the photo face-down on the bed, suddenly unable to look at it. "I wonder if something happened -- between Alex and Jason, I mean."

"What do you mean?" Lauren's eyes go wide with shock as understanding comes to her. "You mean, *happened* happened?"

"Yeah. Maybe that's why Jason didn't tell us sooner. Because if we knew that, we'd be one step closer to putting it all together."

"No way," Lauren says with an emphatic shake of the head. "Jason wouldn't have fooled around with Alex. I mean, he's ... he's totally into you, you know that? He's not gay, Court."

Hearing that seems to be enough for Courtney, but it still provides her with no answers, and certainly with no comfort. "I just don't know what to think anymore. I don't even know if I can trust him."

Lauren folds her hands in her lap and drops her head. "Man ... I can't even imagine what this has to be like for you. There's no way I could trust Alex again, not right now. Or any guy, for that matter."

This is exactly what has been worrying Courtney ever since she figured out the truth about Alex. Lauren's confidence in men -- and in herself -- was low enough before. This sure isn't going to help it.

"What the hell does it matter?" Lauren continues, exasperated. "If I'm not gonna be good with guys, I might as well be downright terrible, huh?"

Courtney prepares to launch into the reassurances that have become too much of a routine for them, aching for Lauren and for all the damage that has been done. *Jason's not getting off the hook for this so easily.*

PIER 22

Sarah is quiet as she awaits Brent's answer. The hopeful look is still on her face, but it seems false. Before he opens his mouth to speak, Brent realizes that she knows what is coming.

"I'm sorry this went on so long," he says. "It should have happened this summer, but there was the fire, and ... I kept putting it off."

He can see that Sarah is ready for him to lash out at her for her role in the chain of events that has led to this moment, but that isn't what he's here to do tonight. They have wasted too much time on that already.

"Truthfully, I think I was avoiding it a little," he continues. "I don't think I wanted to own up to my part in this whole thing."

That sends Sarah shooting back to that awful night several months ago when Brent jumped to Molly's defense -- by admitting that *he* was the one who had feelings for *her*. Whatever vindication she might have felt at hearing him take responsibility is dampened

by the knowledge that he is confessing to wanting Molly.

He reaches inside his jacket and Sarah flinches. This is really it.

"But I'm ready now," he says. "I have to be. It's time for us to move on."

Sarah's chest tightens as his hand reemerges from his jacket. It reaches out to hand her what it has recovered.

"The divorce papers," he explains, as though it were necessary. "Please, set us both free. Sign them."

END OF EPISODE #233

Is it really over for Brent and Sarah? Will they both be able to move on to new things? How can Courtney and Jason salvage their relationship -- or should they? Join us in the [Message Forum](#) and make your feelings known!

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