

"Footprints"

Episode #234

Previously ...

*Paula talked Jason into going to see Courtney to work things out.

*Courtney told Lauren that she doesn't think that she can trust Jason anymore. Lauren said it might be impossible for her to forgive Alex.

*Bill encouraged Matt not to give up on Sarah just yet.

*Brent asked Sarah to sign the divorce papers.

CHASE HOME

"I should get going," Lauren says, rising from the desk chair. "I have a whole bunch of stuff to get done."

"All right. I'll give you a call later." Courtney sits up on the bed.

"Bye," Lauren says as she opens the door -- nearly running right into Jason.

"Uh, hi," she says quietly, a little confused.

"Hi," he answers just as awkwardly. "Listen--" He glances into the room to make sure that Courtney is really in there, as Helen promised. "Can we talk? There's some stuff I really need you to hear."

Lauren studies him for a moment, thinking, but then she shakes her head. Her ponytail wags behind her head. "Not right now. I've gotta--later, okay?"

"Okay." He watches as she virtually blows past him and down the stairs on her way out of the house.

He takes the few remaining steps into the bedroom. His gaze locks with Courtney's. There is a new tension present now that they are alone together, and it feels like it is going to suffocate him.

"Court," he pleads, "let's talk. Please."

Her stare doesn't falter. "Fine. Talk."

"I'm sorry, I need you to know that." He begins pacing the carpet, hoping to shake off the stifling pressure. "I didn't mean for any of this to happen. I was trying to be a good friend to Alex, and I *did* try to stop you and Lauren from letting this thing go on. I know I

didn't handle it in the best way, but ... I was trying. Can you understand that?"

She is still not showing much emotion. "I think I can understand why you did what you did, yeah," she responds finally.

"You can?"

"Yeah. But that doesn't mean I like it. And it definitely doesn't mean I'll be able to forgive you."

PIER 22

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

She looks at the papers as though they are diseased. Then she looks back up at Brent. The moonlight lies on his face, giving it the strangest tint. Is this really the man she married? Suddenly that all seems to have been a lifetime ago.

"Sarah, please," he repeats.

She snatches the papers out of his hand roughly. Unfolding them, she can't keep herself from looking over them. This is really it. Or it could be.

"No!" she shouts. Her eyes scan over the papers once more, her disgust growing, and then she flings them back at him.

The wind grabs hold of them, but Brent is able to snag them before they get away. He stares at Sarah in disbelief.

"What are you doing?" he asks, though he knows that the answer is going to be more than he could ever have wanted.

"I'm not signing them! I'm not making it that easy for you!"

"Easy for me? Sarah, this has been going on forever! Let both of us have some peace already!"

"No, because I know exactly what 'peace' is going to be for you!" Sarah blasts. "Molly, right? All I'd be doing by signing these papers would be opening up the path for you to be with her! I'm not going to let that happen!"

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

"You're done for the night?" Bill asks as Matt places his apron back in his locker and pulls out his jacket.

"Yep, time to head home," Matt answers with a smile.

"Do you have Victoria tonight?"

"Nope, last night was mine. It'll be nice to have a night to relax." He slips his arms inside the leather jacket and pulls it on.

He sees the change in Bill's expression as the tone of the conversation shifts. "Did you see Sarah when you picked Victoria up and dropped her off?"

"Yeah," Matt says. "It was fine. We were civil and everything."

"Just civil?"

"Yeah." He falls quiet for a moment. "Yeah, I think that's the best way for it to be. That way things aren't hard on Victoria."

"And that's all you want out of this, right? Just to be civil?" A smirk is beginning to appear on Bill's face.

Matt struggles with his answer. "That's the only way it can be right now. That or an all-out mess, and that's not gonna do Victoria any good."

Now it is Bill's turn to be quiet. His right hand strokes his chin as he thinks. "Sarah's going to come around. Right now she's really absorbed in Brent and everything that's going on there. She will get past that."

"I used to think so, too," Matt says.

Bill offers him a pat on the back. "Sarah's a good woman. Right now there are some things that she needs to work through, but when she does open her eyes, the best thing for her would be to have you standing there."

An uncomfortable smile manifests itself as Matt says, "I've tried. And I keep thinking that maybe if I wait just a little bit longer, she's gonna come around. But it's not happening."

Bill offers a knowing shrug in response. "Just hang in there."

He heads back into the kitchen area, leaving Matt to lean against the lockers and think about what he has just said.

MOLLY FISHER'S CAR

Molly eases the 1993 Ford Taurus up to the red traffic light. She glances around anxiously, watching the green light for the intersecting street. Just a few more blocks ...

Impatiently, she takes in what she can see of downtown King's Bay from her spot at the intersection. The water is only a few streets down. She can see the bay reaching out to the horizon now, the moon dangling up above.

She can't wait to share the news. The minute that she got the call, she felt like doing something a little spontaneous. Why just head straight home at a time like this? No, a surprise would be much better.

She taps her fingers against the steering wheel, trying to wait out the red light. This car ... She's grown so tired of it lately. Not that it's in bad shape, but she'd love to have something newer. Something a little more fun.

Maybe that will be possible now.

The tingle of excitement returns. She breathes a sign of relief as the light turns to green. Her blood starts pumping faster again as she steps on the gas. Just a few more blocks until she can share her news ...

MARSHALL APARTMENT

Alex sits at the desk, his elbows up on its surface. In part, they are providing support for his chin, which is resting against his fists. But they are also serving as a sort of security, as well.

His arms are surrounding the journal, spread open in front of him. The only light in the room is the direct beam of the desk lamp just in front of him. He is in his own little world, one in which he and the journal are all that exist.

His eyes run over the pages furiously, drinking in all the words that he has tried to block out for so long. Since he opened this book a few months ago for the first time in so long,

he has run to it more times than he would care to admit. He hasn't written in it again; the half of the journal that remains untouched will stay that way forever. He started a new journal when that semester ended and he put this one away, and now it serves only as a portal back to that time.

He looks up from the journal, staring at the calendar hung on the wall in front of him. "Seth," he says quietly, barely even a whisper. The name sounds so strange on his lips, for he has uttered it so few times in recent years.

If I could just go back in time ... if I could change the way things went ... He knows it is the greatest impossibility, but that doesn't stop him from imagining. If things had gone down differently back then, maybe none of what happened with Jason and Lauren would have had to happen. *Maybe I'd have been strong enough not to be sucked into that.*

It's too late for that, though, and he knows it too well. He drops his attention back down to the pages of the journal and relives the emotions that once dominated his existence.

He is so absorbed that he doesn't even hear the tiny knock on the door, already cracked open.

Through the slight opening, Lauren can see Alex's back. He is bent over something at the desk and reading, it appears, very intently. She cannot help but stand there and watch him.

This is the first time she has seen him since the night of Whitney's party. That night, the news was so shocking to her. It was like being in some sort of parallel universe. Now, with the time that has passed, it seems far more real. She's had time to look at her relationship -- if it can even be called that -- with Alex in retrospect, and she's been able to assemble all the clues with the benefit of hindsight. It is possible for her to see how the young man just a few feet away from her -- the young man to whom she devoted so much energy and about whom she spent so much time thinking -- could be gay. It no longer seems like some cruel trick that he was playing on her; it feels like reality.

"Alex," she says softly, hoping it will be enough to get his attention. That it does. He whips around, startled by her sudden appearance.

"Your mom let me in," she explains. She opens the door tentatively and takes an unsure first step into the room. He doesn't stop her.

He closes the journal but leaves it out on the desk. "What are you doing here?"

"I wasn't going to come," she says. "But I wanted to see you, for some reason. I felt like I had to."

"I'm so sorry," he blurts out. "If I had any guts, I would've taken the initiative to let you know that instead of waiting for you to come to me. I never meant to hurt you, Lauren."

"I know."

"You do?"

"Yeah." She shuts the door to give them some more privacy. "I came over here thinking I needed to bite your head off for treating me like such an idiot. And I am still mad -- I can't get over that so easily."

"I take responsibility for everything I did," he says. "Jason tried to talk me out of it a million times. I just ... I didn't want to accept it. I didn't want it to be true. And I thought that if I could make it work with a girl -- especially a girl as beautiful and as lively as you, the kind of girl I always thought I'd be with -- then the other stuff would all just go away."

"Obviously it wasn't that simple."

"No. And now I've gotta face up to who I really am. I'm ready to do that, I think. I just wish it didn't take you getting hurt for me to get to this point."

"I do, too," she says sadly.

"Look, Lauren, I know I really blew it--"

"Yeah, you did. Honestly, I'm not sure why I came to see you. Part of me wanted to totally tear into you for this, and part of me was hoping that when I saw you, everything would be all right and we could be cool again."

The thought lingers in the air, and finally Alex has to pick it up. "Can we?"

"Maybe," she says very uncertainly. "I hope so. But it's gonna take time. Maybe I needed to come here for me, to see that I could do this. I don't know."

Listening to her sounding so devastated, so confused, is breaking his heart. "I am so sorry, Laur."

"I'm sorry, too," she says, opening the door again. "I really am."

She disappears out of the bedroom, pulling the door closed behind him. Alex continues staring at the door, but when that becomes too difficult, he swings back around in the

chair and puts his head down on the desk.

"Why did I have to ruin everything so badly?" he mutters, wanting nothing more than to kick himself senseless. "When is this ever going to be easy?"

CHASE HOME

"So what does this mean for us?" Jason asks. He has stopped pacing and his legs are shaking.

Courtney shrugs with mock nonchalance. "I don't know. If I can't trust you ... what kind of relationship do we have?"

"You *can* trust me," he says desperately. "This is such a weird situation! How often am I going to be caught in a position like this?"

"Hopefully not too often -- because you sure blew it this time." Her tone and the look on her face serve as a swift blow to the stomach for him. The air is knocked right out of his lungs.

"Courtney, please. Think about this. Think about--"

"*I am thinking!*" she fires, cutting in. "That's all I've been doing since I realized you had known for so long. And I keep having these terrible thoughts! I keep wondering what was real in our relationship and what was a front. How am I supposed to know any of that now?"

"*Everything* was real! Why do you doubt that?"

"If you were able to keep this from me so easily for so long, why should I believe that you weren't keeping other things from me?"

"I--you ..." But his protests trail off, dead. He cannot conjure a response that sounds at all effective.

He sees her staring at a poster on the wall as she speaks again. "How do I know that there wasn't something going on between you and Alex, and *that's* not why you kept this a secret for so long?"

His reaction is delayed just a fraction of a second, but it sounds to Jason's ears like the most gaping hole he could have left. "You think I was cheating on you with Alex? That's what this is about?"

"Were you?"

"No! Courtney, you were there when we slept together, weren't you? Didn't you feel how badly I wanted you? Couldn't you tell how much I loved you?"

"I don't know what to believe anymore." She remains focused on the wall.

Jason jams his hands into his pockets, not knowing what else to do with them. "So what now?"

"I have no idea," she says. "But I think you should leave now."

A large part of him wants to stay and hash this out some more. Maybe if they keep talking about it, they will reach an understanding. But another part of him just wants to retreat. And besides, he knows that there is no point. He's not going to get through to her, not now.

Courtney watches silently as he leaves.

PIER 22

"Forget about Molly for a minute, will you?" Brent snaps. "This has nothing to do with her!"

Sarah's eyes widen with outrage. "I wish you would stop insisting that! This has everything to do with her!"

"Look, Sarah," Brent says, trying to control himself. It seems as though he can't even talk to her rationally anymore and the only other instinct he has is to shake her into listening to him. He has to ball up his hands into fists, one still clutching the rumpled divorce papers, to keep from doing that.

"Say Molly didn't exist," he says as calmly as he can. "Or say she was off living someplace else. Our marriage would still need to end."

"No, it wouldn't, because it never would have gotten so crazy in the first place!"

"That's not true."

"You don't know that, do you? No! Because she's been a factor from day one. You don't

know what it would like between us if there was no Molly."

As much as he would prefer not to, he has to admit that is true. "You're right ... but still -- this wasn't meant to be. I think we both have to realize that by now. You have to let go."

Her hand flies out and strikes him hard in the chest. "Don't you dare start talking down to me! Not after you led me on for so long and made me think there was actually a chance for us!"

"I wanted there to be a chance for us," Brent says raggedly. "I tried. But too much has happened ..."

"She happened! It's always about her, and she always wins. And she's going to again!" Sarah's voice cracks, giving way to a sob that is followed quickly by another. Her body begins to shake, and she folds her arms in front of her and drops her head.

It is too much for Brent to watch. They have spent so little time together lately that he has almost forgotten how fragile she can become at the drop of a hat, the strong facade swept away into thin air with hardly any prompting at all. To think that he did this ...

Suddenly his only option is to do something. His arms reach out and draw her in, and the forgotten familiarity of the way she feels in his embrace comes back in an instant.

"I'm sorry," he whispers as he pulls her closer. At first she is tense to his touch, but then she melts right into him.

He feels her begin to pull away, but instead of extracting herself from his hold, she backs up just enough to look up into his face.

"Brent ..."

She raises herself up onto her toes and, in the blink of an eye, her mouth is crushed against his in a kiss like it has been so many times before.

END OF EPISODE #234

***What's going on with Sarah and Brent? How will Molly and Matt factor in?
Should Courtney give Jason another chance? Your comments, predictions, and criticisms are all welcome over at the [Message Forum!](#)***

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