

"Footprints" Episode #238

[Previously ...](#)

**Matt tried to make Sarah understand how much he cares for her. Later, she agreed to spend Christmas with him.*

**Courtney refused to forgive Jason for keeping Alex's secret.*

**Lauren began to soften toward Alex but was unable to disregard everything that happened.*

**Diane explained to Sarah that she's no longer working in Los Angeles but refused to elaborate.*

CHASE HOME

A lively winter sunlight is pouring in through the living room windows, flooding the house with an uneasy warmth. It is still cold outside -- probably very crisp, with the sting of ice in the air -- but the sunlight inside makes it seem impossible that the weather would be anything but pleasant outdoors.

The juxtaposition of such extremes on this type of day has always baffled Courtney, and it does so even more today. The light streams in and covers the Christmas tree and its pile of unwrapped presents, but something makes the whole thing feel distinctly unlike any Christmas Courtney can remember.

She opens the door happily, knowing already whose finger pushed the doorbell a moment ago.

"Hey! Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas," Lauren beams, reaching out to give Courtney a warm hug. She comes into the house quickly, gives a quick shiver and then begins to unpack herself from her scarf and gloves. "So what'd you get? Anything really exciting?"

"You make it sound like we're still ten years old, you know that?"

"Can't help it. So c'mon -- what'd you get?"

"Mainly clothes," Courtney says, moving into the living room to sort through the pile of gifts and pick out samples to show Lauren. "Ooh, and these!" She holds up a pair of shoes. "I mentioned to my mom, like, three months ago that I liked them, and she remembered and went out and got them."

"Excellent."

"How about you?"

"Same kinda stuff. Wasn't it more fun when we were kids and Christmas morning was, like, this magical time? It's not the same when you can go out and buy the stuff yourself if you really wanted to."

"Yeah, I know. But still ... it's Christmas. That just makes it special in itself." Court picks up a gift bag from under the tree and holds it out. "Here, this is yours."

Lauren takes the bag, brimming with decorative tissue paper, and hands Courtney a gift-wrapped box. "And here's yours."

"So guess what?" Lauren says suddenly, before Courtney can suggest that they open their presents.

"What?"

"Trevor didn't even come home."

"Seriously? Wasn't he supposed to?"

"Yeah, but he called, like, two days ago and told my parents he wasn't coming home for Christmas. I didn't even get to talk to him."

"What is going on with him?" Courtney asks. "I remember a couple of years ago, you two were so tight."

"We were! But lately it's like I don't even have a brother." The idea seems genuinely troubling to Lauren, who shakes her head sadly. "It sucks."

"I'm sorry. And this is probably the hardest time of year to deal with something like that. You always miss people more around the holidays."

"Yeah ..." Lauren looks up and there is an unmistakable sparkle in her eye.

"What?" But the new direction of the conversation is not at all lost on Courtney.

"Jason," Lauren says. "Don't you miss him? Don't you wanna be spending Christmas with him?"

Courtney fights the truth for a moment, but with a sigh, she admits, "Of course. I wish

we could be together today. It just isn't that easy."

"Why not? If you wanna be with him--"

"Because I can't trust him! Not after the way he let you get hurt and made me look like such an idiot."

"So maybe you guys have some stuff to work on. That doesn't mean it has to be over."

"I wish it didn't," Court says sadly. "But if he kept something this big a secret, knowing that other people were going to get hurt, then how I am supposed to have any faith in him as a friend or a boyfriend?"

FISHER HOME

"Hey, Mol," Jason calls out from his bedroom.

It is a moment before Molly pokes her head in the door. "Yeah?"

"Does this match?" he asks, still examining himself in the mirror.

"Yeah, it looks good." She pushes the door all the way open and comes in. "Nice work. There may be hope for you yet, kid."

"I don't think I'll ever achieve your level of fashion maven-ness, but thanks, I do what I can." He spends a few seconds more adjusting himself in the mirror and then turns to her. "Jeez, this is some Christmas."

She can see right to the core of what he's implying. "Things still aren't better with Courtney?"

"Nope. She's totally blown off skating the last couple weeks -- she told Sandy that she's not sure what she wants to do now. And I haven't been able to have anything resembling a productive conversation with her."

"I guess I can see why she'd be upset about the whole thing, but this just seems ... extreme."

"I know!" He begins pacing over the beige carpet. "And it's not like I don't know that I screwed up. I should have at least kept Alex from leading Lauren on like that. But Courtney got mad at me when I tried to convince her not to push them together."

Molly takes a seat on the bed before he can run her down. "You were being a good friend to Alex. Maybe the interests conflicted a little, but you were in a tough position. I think you made a good choice in respecting his privacy."

"Thanks," he says quietly. "It's nice to hear someone say that. Courtney seems to think that I put my friendship with Alex ahead of my relationship with her. She thinks she can't trust me anymore."

"I don't know what to tell you. If it were me in her position -- I wouldn't be reacting like this, I'll tell you that."

"This is how she reacts to everything. She has a fit and has to make it something bigger than it is. But you know what's the worst part? I miss her. I wanna get back to where we were before all of this."

"Then fight for her," Molly says with obvious confidence. "Make it work. If the two of you are meant to be together, you'll get through this."

ERIC WESTIN'S APARTMENT

A pair of long-stemmed silver candles burn brightly in the center of the small dining table, surrounded by the makings of a sumptuous Christmas feast.

"Thank God for catering services," Diane says as she slips into one of the high-backed chairs. "I think I would've killed all three of us if I'd even tried to cook something like this."

"Yeah, I don't think I would have been much of a help," Eric agrees. He surveys the meal laid out before them. "I don't think the two of us and Samantha are going to be able to finish all of this."

"Leftovers are a good thing."

He flashes her a smile, all dimples and sparkling white teeth. "How domestic of you."

"That's me, June Cleaver." She scoops up a forkful of mashed potatoes from the plate in front of Samantha. "C'mon, baby, dig in."

Samantha eagerly eats up the potatoes, then takes the fork from Diane.

"Ooh, big girl. Guess you can take care of yourself, huh?"

The little girl responds with an exaggerated nod and a broad smile.

"She really is adorable," Eric says after downing a hearty gulp of wine.

"Yeah, she is. I'm so glad I have her back. You worked wonders in that courtroom."

"That's what you hired me for, isn't it?"

"Of course. Well ... that and some other incredible talents." She offers him a wink.

He doesn't accept it too easily. "Diane, I'm fine with whatever is going on between us, but we really need to keep it separate from my professional life and from your case. Being involved with a client is not looked upon so favorably."

"I can handle that," she says, suddenly very defensive. "No problem. But seriously, you didn't have anyone better to hang out with on Christmas day than me?"

"I prefer a low-key kind of holiday. I'm too busy to fly back to Minnesota to be with my family, anyway. A nice, quiet celebration was just what I needed."

"I don't know that I do 'nice' or 'quiet' so well."

"You know what I mean," he says, amused by her self-awareness. "I'd rather have a more private type of Christmas."

"Now, 'private' -- *that* I can handle." Her trademark smirk returns. "Just wait til later."

"I can hardly wait ... but what about you? What would you have done if we didn't have plans today?"

"I dunno," Diane shrugs. "Maybe nothing. The holidays kinda bum me out, to tell the truth. They weren't much fun when I was growing up. I don't really have any desire to go spend time with my family and relive all that crap."

Eric pauses to take a few bites of the food and then asks, "Are you going to look for a place out here? You can't go on living in the hotel much longer."

"I've been scouting out a few places," she says. "I've gotta look for a job, too. I was thinking of scoping out Seattle for something, after this custody thing gets settled."

"So you're not going to go back to Los Angeles?"

"No way," she says after a too-long pause. "There's nothing left for me there anymore."

MATT GRAY'S APARTMENT

"Look who's here!" Sarah announces as Matt opens the door. Victoria toddles into the apartment happily.

"Hey there, little princess!" Matt smiles as he reaches down to scoop up his daughter. "Merry Christmas!"

In return he gets a very deliberate poke in the nose.

"So what'd you get from Santa?" he asks.

"Teletubby," Victoria answers, her baby voice softening the syllables.

"A Teletubby? Wow!"

"She makes it sound so simple," Sarah says. "What she really means by 'Teletubby' is that she got a Teletubby doll, a baby doll, a stuffed puppy, a new dress ..."

Matt puts on a mock-apologetic expression. "Well, I think I've got some bad news for you, Mom."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Santa, he, uh, he left a bunch of stuff here, too."

Sarah's face lights up as she looks at Victoria. "Did you hear that? Santa came here, too!"

The little girl's eyes bug out and she searches frantically all over the apartment. "More presents?"

"Yup," Matt says, putting her down so that she can run over to the pile of wrapped gifts in the middle of the living room.

"You didn't have to do this, Matt," Sarah says as they watch Victoria dig into the fresh pile.

"I wanted to. I thought it'd be fun for her."

"Oh, she's definitely enjoying it."

Matt stands back, taking in the joy on Sarah's face as she watches their daughter's excitement. "I'm really happy you guys came over today," he says finally.

She turns to him with an appreciative smile. "I'm glad we did, too. It'll be good for Victoria to spend the day with both of us."

"Yeah." He pauses a moment, finding that he has to muster up some courage to say what comes next. "It'll be good for both of us, too."

Sarah seems a little surprised by how direct he suddenly sounds.

"I meant what I said the other night," he says. "I really do care about you, Sarah. And the best gift you could gimme for Christmas would be telling me that you wanna move on with your life -- with me."

CHASE HOME

"It's not like he was in an easy position," Lauren says, not quite sure why she is arguing on behalf of Jason. "Alex confided in him -- what kind of guy would he be if he turned around and told us?"

"I'm not saying he had to tell us the minute Alex told him," Courtney counters. "But he should've stepped in when he saw how out of control things were getting. It's not like there was an isolated incident of Alex getting a little too friendly with you ... He led you on for, like, a year and a half!"

"Shouldn't you be more mad at Alex over that?" Then she adds, more quietly, "I know I am."

"I am upset with the way Alex handled the whole thing. But he was also the one who was confused! Maybe he wasn't sure ... *what* he wanted. Jason was watching the whole thing from the outside."

Lauren is able to see the logic in that argument, even though it is hard for her to shift the focus of her anger away from Alex.

"And besides," Courtney continues, "it sounds like Jason knew for a long time. I don't know how many times he and I talked about you and Alex. It's like he was lying to my face -- or treating me like a total idiot, or both -- that whole time! It's really hard to

swallow, you know?"

"Yeah," Lauren says slowly, still processing the idea, "yeah, I can understand that. But c'mon -- is this really something the two of you can't work through?"

"I don't know. I didn't say I'm not willing to work on it. I just need some time for things to settle down. It's like I'm looking at a totally different relationship all of a sudden."

"Well, what about skating? It's not like you can just put that on hold til you figure out where your relationship is going."

"I know ... I need to figure that out. I've been trying to." The pain is evident in Courtney's voice, and Lauren shudders to think of how she would handle things if she were in the same situation. "Part of me just wants to go back to how things were before I found out about this. Jason and I have had years and years of good times and fun and ... the last few months were so great. But then that just makes it feel like even more of a betrayal."

Lauren looks away. "I'm sorry this is all happening just because I was too dumb to see what was going on. If I'd known what this would do to you and Jason--"

"Lauren, stop it. This is not your fault." Courtney waits until Lauren is looking at her again. "I love you. You're my best friend, and we are gonna get through this no matter what."

"I hope so."

"We will. Don't blame yourself for any of this ... You had no way of knowing what was really going on."

FISHER HOME

"You're sounding awfully optimistic all of a sudden," Jason says. Now that he thinks about it, he can see some sort of change in Molly, too -- something has been different in the past few days.

She shrugs, trying to remain nonchalant, but despite her best efforts can't keep that flutter of excitement hidden. "Sometimes things just ... fall into place."

The statement is loaded for Jason, whose shock manifests itself immediately. "You mean -- you and Brent? What happened?"

"I think he and Sarah are finally wrapping things up. Not that she's handled it very well, but still ... Their marriage is finally coming to a close. And I've had some really good talks with him lately."

"Good talks, how?"

Molly hesitates, but then blurts out in a rush: "I told Brent how I feel. And he said that he feels the same way."

As much as Jason wants to be happy for her, he can't, not really. "Mol, that doesn't mean you're just gonna have this free and open path now. I mean, even once the divorce goes through, he's still gonna be our sister's ex-husband. That's not exactly a relationship you can dive right into, you know?"

"I do know. Brent and I talked about that. But even so -- just knowing that I was right all this time, that his feelings for me really are as strong as mine for him -- it gives me a weird sort of hope."

"Well ... good. As long as you keep in mind that Sarah is still and probably always will be a part of this--"

"It's firmly implanted there, don't worry," she says, frustration showing through even though she tries to curb it. "But it finally feels like I'm getting my life in order, and it feels incredible. Speaking of which ..."

"What?"

"Once everyone gets here, I've got an announcement to make."

"Huh? About what?"

She holds up her hands. "You'll just have to wait."

"Aw, c'mon," he begs, slipping right back into obnoxious-little-brother mode. "Give me a hint."

"No, no, a little suspense never killed anyone." She flashes a victorious smile and stands. "And on that note, I've got to go finish getting myself together."

"So sorry to interrupt your six-hour preparation ritual."

"I've always got time for my little bro," she says as she slips out of the room. "Even when

he's pesky and tries to get smart with me ..."

"I do what I can!" he calls down the hall after her.

He moves back to the stereo and flips the Christmas music back on, giving himself a final once-over in the mirror. "Nothin' like a family Christmas," he says to himself as he shakes his head with amusement.

ERIC WESTIN'S APARTMENT

"The Los Angeles publishing industry is probably a little bit larger than the one in Seattle -- or King's Bay, for that matter," Eric says matter-of-factly. "There must be another job to be had there."

"I'm sure there is. But I'm not interested," Diane replies curtly.

"So you're going to pass up what could be some very lucrative career opportunities because you don't want to go back to Los Angeles? I may not know you that well, Diane, but that doesn't sound too characteristic. What happened that you aren't telling me?"

The look that she fires at him is all steel and daggers. "Nothing happened. Drop it. Let's just enjoy Christmas, okay?"

Eric throws up his hands. "All right, I surrender. But don't think that I can't see through this."

Diane chooses not to validate the statement with a response. Instead she turns her attention to the food. After swallowing several bites, she says, "Come on, eat up. Once we're done eating, I'll sit Sam down with that video she wants to watch. And then you and I can get to our playtime ..."

Eric feels her naked toes tracing their way up his leg. A shiver of excitement surges through his body.

He meets the wicked smirk of her vivid red lips with his own playful grin. "Then stop distracting me so I can finish eating, Ms. Bishop."

"I'll try," she sighs. She feeds Samantha another few bites of food.

"Diane," Eric says after a long moment of silence between them. "About Los Angeles -- if there is something you want to discuss, if something happened that's bothering you -- I want you to know that I am here to listen."

At first she looks at him skeptically, but then her reaction softens. She offers an awkward, pleasant smile and then refocuses on Samantha.

Eric continues staring at her, observing, as he resumes eating. *Diane Bishop ... Why do you have to be so closed off? What aren't you telling me?*

MATT GRAY'S APARTMENT

"Matt," Sarah says uncomfortably, the words creeping through her suddenly dry mouth. "I ... I don't know what to say."

She is certain that he can feel the same incredible tension that she feels, but out of nowhere, he breaks their stare and turns away.

"Sorry," he says quickly. "That was--I was outta line. I know you're still getting through this Brent thing."

Neither of them makes a move for what feels like a painful eternity, but then Sarah moves in to him and places a warm hand on his shoulder. It feels so strong under her touch, perhaps even stronger now that he's closing himself off from her.

"I am still trying to pull myself through everything with Brent," she says softly. Worried that that sounds like too much of a 'let-you-down-easy,' she adds quickly, "But I really do value you. You need to know that."

She feels him soften beneath her hand. "You have been incredible to me through all of this," she continues. "You supported me while I made mistake after mistake. You were there for me when no one else was. Without you there I probably would have run myself off the tracks by now. And even when I pushed too hard -- you waited for me to come around. I wouldn't have been able to do it without you."

"... But you can't make any promises now. I get that." His voice is rough, like those are the last words he wants to be saying, except that it hurts a lot less to hear himself speaking them than to hear them coming from Sarah's mouth.

"No, I can't." She slides her hand down off his shoulder, and it lingers on his muscular back for a second. "Because you're too important to me. I'm not going to make promises to you that I can't keep. You don't deserve to get hurt like that."

At last he allows his eyes to rest on her. Sarah is sure that she sees some torture flickering behind the screen, the depths of which she cannot even imagine. But she wants

to know it, and she wants to wash it away.

Watching him standing there, stubble dotting his chin and cheeks, lips drawn tightly together, and watching Victoria happily tearing her way through the pile of presents, Sarah becomes aware for the first time of a new part inside herself, suddenly free. She does want this.

"Come on," she says, giving Matt's hand a squeeze. "I've got an idea that'll make this a real Christmas."

END OF EPISODE #238

What do you make of this episode? Join us in the [Message Forum](#) to join in on the conversation!

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