

"Footprints" Episode #258

[Previously ...](#)

- Courtney ran to Lauren after a fight with Jason but realized that she was already consoling Jay about it. Instead she turned to Alex, with whom she mended her friendship and went out for a night of clubbing.
- Sarah spied Matt looking through a box of old photos in his closet. She tried to investigate further but only got to look at one dropped picture before he returned.
- Caught in an emotional downward spiral, Claire confessed to Ryan that she doesn't feel as though she can allow herself to be happy. He drove her home and was trying to accept that they have no chance of being together, but Claire suddenly got to reminiscing and asked Ryan to stay when he made a move for the door.

BROOKS HOME

The outdoor lights fill the porch with an artificial glow as Courtney pushes the doorbell and then stands, waiting. She folds her arms a little tighter against her body. The rain has yet to cease and the chilly June night is getting to her, despite the lightweight sweater she has thrown on over the halter top that she wore to the club.

"Hey," Lauren greets her excitedly as soon as she opens the front door.

"Hey. Hope it's not too late ..."

"No, no, I was just hanging out. Please, it's just me and Trev here. Never too late to have a friend over."

"Good! I wasn't ready to call it a night yet, so I thought I'd give you a call," Court explains as she comes in to escape the frustratingly cool Northwest night.

"What've you been up to?" Lauren asks, eyeing Courtney's outfit.

"I went out with Alex for a little bit," Court answers carefully. "Anyway, I wanted to catch up with you!" She begins leading the way back to the kitchen and family room.

Lauren opens the refrigerator and begins rifling around for a late-night snack. "I've been working a *ton*."

"But it's going well?"

"Yeah, I mean, it's awesome experience, and it's actually making me pretty sure that

advertising is what I wanna do. Plus the money doesn't hurt!"

"Ugh, I wish I could get into something other than waitressing," Courtney groans. "Some of those people -- I could kill them, I swear."

"Having fun with the beer-and-burgers clientele, I see?"

"Ohhhh yeah." She watches Lauren shut the refrigerator, unsuccessful, and immediately opens the pantry. She's more than comfortable enough in the Brooks' home to go looting for snacks on her own, especially now that Lauren's parents are off on their cruise. "But I guess I can't really do much in the way of starting a real career if I'm gonna keep skating."

"Yeah, I heard you were working on that," Lauren says, carefully directing the conversation as the sound of a key in the front door, followed by its opening and closing, gives them momentary pause.

"Hello, ladies," Trevor says as he enters the kitchen.

"How was your night?" Lauren asks. She moves beside Courtney and snatches a bag of mini-Oreos from the pantry's depths.

"Not bad. Just hung out and stuff," he answers quickly. "Hey, let me get at those." He waits only long enough for Lauren to open the sealed bag before dipping a hand in and withdrawing several of the tiny cookies.

"These are so good," Lauren says, pushing the bag in Court's direction. "I could, like, eat the whole bag."

Courtney happily takes a few, but not without making a face. "Stop me if I try to do that. Eating, like, a hundred cookies isn't what I need right now."

Lauren scans her up and down, taking in the outfit again and no doubt wondering more about Alex. "So where'd you two go tonight, anyway?"

"I took Alex out. There was, you know, a gay night thing at The Lookout, so I figured it'd be good for him to get out a little bit." She is treading carefully, not wanting to disturb Lauren but not wanting to pretend she wasn't with Alex, especially since the initial reason she even went to see him was because Lauren and Jason were together.

"That's probably good for him," Lauren responds awkwardly.

"Yeah ..." Court goes quiet for a second and decides that there's no use playing coy. Lauren already hinted at what she wants to say, anyway. "Actually, the only reason I

even went to see him was 'cause I came over here and I saw Jason's car, and I figured it wasn't a good idea to barge in on that."

"Yeah, he told me you guys had a little ... encounter this morning." Lauren casts a sideways glance over at Trevor, something Courtney doesn't miss; obviously he was here when Jason showed up. Probably heard her getting bashed, too, which only puts her on the defensive even more.

"'Encounter' is one way to put it. He basically came into the rink and flipped that I was trying out with this other guy, and tried to get me to cut off the tryout."

"Well, he was probably a little shocked that you were already trying to find a new partner. It totally blindsided him, I think."

"I'm not gonna put my skating on hold because we broke up, especially because he chose to lie to me," Courtney counters. "He didn't do it when I got hurt. I can skate with whoever I want."

Lauren shrugs and casts an uncertain look at Trevor. "It wouldn't have hurt to at least talk it over with Jason first, just so he knew it was coming."

Courtney slams the few Oreos left in her hand down on the counter. "So what, you're on his side now?"

SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

"Whew!" Sarah stretches her arms out to the sides as far as they can reach. "She put up some fight tonight."

"She did that the last two nights, too," Matt says, putting down the *Sports Illustrated* he's been leafing through. "Could be the start of some bad pattern."

"We *are* headed for the 'Terrible Twos,'" Sarah muses with a less-than-thrilled roll of the eyes. "Just what I need ... a kid who refuses to sleep."

Matt rises from the couch. "It's just getting her to lie down and be quiet. Even if she's dead-tired, she fights it like you're tryin' to drown her or something."

"Well, hopefully it passes soon! She's a lot more fun when she's not being a pain in the ass."

"I'm with ya on that," Matt laughs. "Listen, thanks for dinner ... might be some hope for your cooking yet."

"You're taking off?" Sarah asks, ignoring the jab at her culinary skills.

He shrugs and glances around, as if to confirm that there isn't much going on anymore. "Yeah, I guess so."

"You wanna ... watch a movie or something? I'm not ready to go to bed yet."

"Um, sure, yeah. What are you gonna watch?"

"You can help me decide," she says, moving to the bookcase beside the television on which videos and DVDs occupy the two bottom shelves.

Matt joins her in kneeling on the ground and begins perusing the selections. "You own *Weekend at Bernie's*?" he asks in amused disbelief.

"It's funny!" she cries, snatching it out of his hands.

"It's a piece of crap!" he shoots back, unable to contain his laughter.

"One person's garbage is another person's treasure ..."

"Apparently! Jeez, maybe I gave you more credit than you deserved."

"We're both entitled to our opinions." She replaces the video on the shelf and pulls out another one. "How about *Pretty Woman*? I haven't watched that in a long time."

He raises one side of his upper lip distastefully.

"All right, back to the drawing board," she says as she puts *Pretty Woman* back in its spot. "You're a difficult one, you know that?"

"I can't help it if I have higher standards than corpses and hookers!"

"Very funny." She sticks out her tongue at him and scans the entire row again. "Anything here you *will* watch?"

"Ummm ..." He takes his time examining the possibilities, pausing every now and then to consider something before moving on. "Wait, yeah, here we go."

"Which one?"

"*Ocean's Eleven*. I can watch that."

"Works for me," she says, picking up the brand-new DVD. "See, *some* people aren't that picky."

"Excuse your bad taste however you can," he teases, giving her an affectionate rub on the arm. He seems to execute the motion very casually, but it gives Sarah pause; comfortable touches like that haven't ever been a part of their relationship. Not that she necessarily minds.

She pops the DVD into the player and grabs the remote, which for some reason always winds up on top of the television even though it does no one any good all the way over there. Matt hits the lights and they move to the couch simultaneously.

She drops down right beside him, relishing the softness of the cushions beneath her weary legs. Even more, she enjoys the sudden closeness to Matt -- there are just a few inches separating them now.

Extending the remote out at arm's length, she hits 'play' and sets it down on the coffee table. The opening shots of the movie fill the dark room.

Sarah leans her head onto the back of the couch and feels it come into contact with something. Matt's arm. Time seems to stand still for an instant as she waits for some sort of reaction, but he doesn't move.

Even that small amount of contact is unbelievably exciting for her, more than she would have thought it'd be. She tries to wait a while before moving in any closer but barely a minute goes by before she pulls her knees up onto the couch and nestles them up against Matt's body.

She can't help smiling to herself as their bodies rest against one another, the movie merely a distraction. This is the way it should be.

CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

"Please, Ryan, don't leave. Stay with me."

Ryan's limbs go cold as he stands in the doorway. He grips the doorknob firmly, bracing himself on it as his legs suddenly threaten to give out.

"I don't want you to leave," Claire says, her voice quieter now, as if a rush of adrenaline has subsided and left her without the confidence she had a moment ago.

And still, she's asking him to stay.

"That's not a good idea," he says. He turns to face her but refuses to close the door. Closing it would mean giving in to Claire's request, and he can't let himself do that. He shouldn't.

"You said yourself that I shouldn't be alone right now. And you're right. I need someone here."

"I agree. But even more, you need stability. You need someone who's going to give you hope, not force you to dwell on everything that's making you so miserable. I don't think I can be that person."

"You *are* the person I need right now," she says, the assertiveness suddenly back. "You understand this pain better than anyone else can."

In a way, he knows that it's true. He has been trying to drill that idea into her for a long time, but only now does he realize just how much they have in common: Both trying to escape the misdeeds and command of out-of-control fathers, both scarred by a horrible act that they will never be able to forget entirely. He can even understand, to a degree, the great sense of loss that burns inside of her every day; it's the same feeling he has lived with since he lost her to Stan's brutality and his own impulsive decision to cover it up.

"Don't go," she pleads again. Her warm brown eyes quiver with the fear of being alone with herself right now, revealing to him in an instant the sort of vulnerability that she has tried so hard to hide from him for so long.

"I can't," he says, swallowing the mounting lump in his throat. "I want to. I want to be able to spend every second with you that I possibly can, I think I've proven that! But right now I don't trust myself to keep from doing something that's just going to hurt you more in the end."

"Ryan. I'm asking you to stay with me. Do you realize what--"

"What you mean? Yeah, I think so!" he nearly explodes, doing his best to rein himself in to keep from making things any worse for her. "But seeing you the way you are right now ... that is the last thing you need. I've pushed you hard enough for way too long. Now I see how selfish that was. I'm not going to do something that you'll realize in a few hours you never really wanted to do--"

"There's something you need to know."

He feels the power shift even more to her side. "What?"

"The reason I'm such a mess tonight," she says slowly, staring past him into the hallway,

"the reason I'm falling apart like this -- it's not just because of everything that's happened. There was a missing piece of the puzzle and I found it tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"It's been three years since you showed up at my door wanting another chance. I couldn't give it to you because of Tim -- because I had a life that I was happy with. But things have changed. A lot. And now I think I can admit that--" She hesitates, bringing a hand to her forehead, drawing out each strand of time as far as it will possibly reach. "That I have the same curiosity over what might have been between us. That I've always had it. And that tonight, I realized that exploring it might be what I need to feel like I have a life worth living again."

BROOKS HOME

"I'm not taking sides," Lauren announces in the same quiet voice she always uses when she and Courtney have a falling-out and one of them has to apologize. "But Jason's my friend, too, and if he needs me to be there for him, I'm gonna be."

"I can understand that," Courtney says, relenting a little as a concession to the pseudo-apology. "But still, it's like, you keep listening to Jason's side of this thing and I feel like you're getting the idea that I'm some evil bitch trying to make his life a living hell."

"It's not like I don't stand up for you, Court. But yeah, I think you could've handled this a little bit better."

Courtney huffs and rolls her eyes, hoping that will be enough to let Lauren know that she *is* too much on Jason's side of the fence here. Yet much to her surprise, the next words spoken come not from Lauren, but from Trevor, and their tone is decidedly different from what she was expecting.

"Maybe you need to own up to what you're really doing and the kind of position you're putting Lauren in," he suggests, his voice dominated by an accusatory note that makes Courtney want to reach out and smack him.

"And what is it that I'm doing, exactly?" she challenges.

"You're out for revenge," he shrugs, just like 'it's easy as that, nothing out of the ordinary.'

"Revenge? Please!"

"No, seriously, you're trying to get Jason back for hurting you or whatever. It's pretty

damn obvious."

"How dare you--"

"I'm not gonna stand here and watch you kick my sister around for being a loyal friend," Trevor counters, stepping closer so that his six-foot-plus frame is looming large over her. "That's what you value most about her, isn't it? That she's such a good friend to you? So don't go making her out to be some bad guy who's trying to screw you over. She's still being a good friend, it just so happens that Jason might need her a little more right now -- and because of you, no less."

"You've got some nerve, you know that?"

"Actually, yeah, I do," he answers with a cocky grin. "Doesn't really make anything I said less valid, though."

Courtney is about to rip into him when she catches a glimpse of Lauren, who is staring at Trevor in disbelief. But it's not angry or annoyed disbelief -- just shock. Shock that he said what he said.

Maybe she believes it, too.

"All right," Courtney says, "maybe I was wrong to jump all over you like that, Lauren. I'm sorry, I just--I hate the idea that Jason had you there for him when I needed you, too."

"It's okay," Lauren says. She eats another Oreo, a sign that the worst of the tension has passed. "I know how hard this whole thing has been on both of you. I'm just trying to be supportive without, like, favoring one of you. It's hard."

"I know. And I appreciate how hard you're trying." Court smiles and pulls her friend into a hug.

"And on that note, it's shower and bedtime for Trevor," he announces from the sidelines.

"Night, Trev," Lauren says. "And thanks."

"No prob, little sis. And *goodnight*, Courtney," he adds in a teasing tone, partly playful but with a hefty reminder of his words to her.

She doesn't respond except with the slightest nod of her head.

SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

On the screen, Brad Pitt and George Clooney are deftly piecing together their scheme to rob the casinos of Las Vegas, but their machinations are merely a background distraction to Sarah. She and Matt have shifted again, so that she is resting against him, and she is enjoying it too much to care about the movie.

Her head lies on his firm chest, appreciating the muscles even more every time he shifts; one of his arms is draped over her, as if holding her in, and the protective barrier is more than welcome.

For a long time, she's had the mounting suspicion that there could be more to this -- that the night Victoria was conceived could have merely been a prelude to something bigger and better. That there might be life -- a better, less complicated one -- after Brent.

Only things with Matt are not without complication, she knows that. From day one, she has realized that the enigma that is Matt Gray would provide a more-than-ample challenge. She is only now beginning to recognize just how much of a challenge.

First there was his sudden uprooting, leaving New York for King's Bay at the drop of a hat with hardly any trouble at all. He was more than content to do his own thing in King's Bay for months. The fact that he and Sarah remained connected was something he enjoyed, that much she realizes; that night on the docks, when Brent presented her with the divorce papers, Matt finally let her know how badly he had wanted to be with her all that time. But had it not panned out, had they lost contact, she has little doubt that he would have been perfectly okay living and working in King's Bay in relative isolation.

But then came the job at the Fisherman's Pier. Only by accident, of course -- until then, she had absolutely no idea that he could cook or that he enjoyed it. She might never have, had he not decided to assist Bill in the kitchen that night.

And then there's that picture she saw, the one of two little boys. Him and a brother? He's continually denied having any family left. Then again, maybe he doesn't ... but he has opened up so little about the topic that she really has no idea what to believe.

He pulls her in a little tighter and she slides quite willingly back into him. She wants to be here, like this, so much. But how long can it last if she really has no idea who he is?

She feels a familiar itching inside that warns her that she is going to be compelled to find out, whether or not she really wants to know.

CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

The haziness of a dream suddenly surrounds Ryan and he is stricken with panic. He is going to wake up any instant and find that none of this has actually happened and that's

he right back where he has been for so long with Claire.

But it never happens. He doesn't wake up. Not even when Claire reaches out a trembling hand and rests it against his chest.

His first instinct is to melt right into her touch. He's dreamed of it so often, trying to remember what it once felt like but also too terrified to delve deep into those memories because of everything with which they are associated.

But as dreamlike as the entire scenario feels, Claire's touch also comes as a startling reminder of reality. Everything that he just professed to her, his desire not to hurt her and not to make any more mistakes that he will spend years regretting, comes rushing back and overrides that undeniable longing.

For now, at least.

"I can't do this," he says, moving back and finding himself right up against the open door. "I can't let you do this."

"I want to," she says, almost pleading.

"You--you're trying to find a way to patch up this fractured thing that your life has become. This isn't about me, it's about comfort. Reassurance. And even though you might be able to get those things now, will they matter when you wake up in the morning and realize what you did to get them?" He speaks the words and simultaneously gives himself a series of swift, hard mental kicks. Can he really be turning her down?

"You're partly right," she admits. "I am trying to piece my life back together. But you're very wrong about one thing."

He stares, waiting for the explanation, not daring to ask what that one thing is. Part of him is hoping that she won't say it if he doesn't ask, and then the whole thing will be moot.

No such luck. Or maybe excellent luck, whichever.

"I need you to do that," she goes on. "Tonight I saw that. You've been telling me for so long how much you care about me, how much you've missed having me in your life ... and had things gone differently when we were younger, I probably would have wound up feeling the same way about you."

Unable to speak, he relishes the admission. He wasn't wrong. He hasn't been wasting his time on a one-sided dream. There has always been the possibility of ... this.

"You're what I need," she says. "I see in you a man who can help me repair my life." She raises her hand back to his chest. She applies no pressure at all, just lets it sit there, the softest and yet most forceful reminder of how much he has always desired her and how possible this all is now.

"I need to know that you mean all of this," he says. "I don't want to take advantage of you being so emotional, or--"

"I mean it. There was a time when I never would've considered being with you, you're right. But a lot has changed, Ryan."

He freezes, his heavy, sluggish breath barely moving in and out of his lungs. An intensity the likes of which he has never known captures his body as her red-hot lips reach up and plant a searing kiss on his.

A groan escapes his throat as her hand moves across his chest. He allows his hands to meet at the small of her back, drawing her in closer as their mouths dance together like the tongues of a fire spreading out-of-control.

"Claire," he gasps between kisses. He needs to say her name aloud, to make it more real, somehow.

Her hand grazes away from his chest and down his stomach -- tight inside with the anxiety of abandon -- and her fingernails begin tracing a pattern around his abdominals.

He catches her lower lip between both of his, holding it there for the briefest moment and savoring the taste of the woman he has wanted for so long. And when her hand moves even lower, to the button of his dress slacks, all hope for stopping disappears.

Ryan kicks the door shut behind them, never even breaking their kiss.

END OF EPISODE #258

Do you think Claire is making a mistake with Ryan? Or could this be good for both of them? Did the scenes with Lauren, Courtney, and Trevor interest you? Any speculation on what those photos of Matt's might mean? Come join us in the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts and see what others have to say!

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