

## "Footprints" Episode #273

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

- Diane and Brian's chat resulted in an argument over her past actions and his loyalty. Brian left but promised to stay in town for a few days so they could continue to talk.
- Lauren spent more time with Jason, while Courtney focused her energy on setting up Alex and Dylan on a blind date.
- As a capper to their date, Dylan took Alex to a club. While Dylan was in the bathroom, Alex once again saw the 'mystery man' from Cassie's. They finally exchanged a few words before Dylan returned; later, on the dance floor, he kissed Alex.
- After Stan tried to assault Claire at gunpoint but was interrupted by Ryan and Sally, a fracas broke out. The gun went off; Stan escaped but Sally was shot.

### **BROOKS HOME**

"Okay, I cannot spend that much money ever again!" Courtney declares as she drops the multitude of shopping bags onto the floor beside the couch. "Or at least not 'til after Christmas."

"Yeah, I know, I think I probably overdid it a little. But hey, you only live once, right?" Lauren sets her own bags on top of the island in the kitchen and begins rifling through them.

Courtney crosses from the living room into the kitchen. "Maybe, but I'd rather not live my one life in a cardboard box, eating out of dumpsters."

Lauren shrugs and smiles. "At least you'll be dressed well."

She goes back to sorting through her new acquisitions but doesn't miss the glance that Courtney casts at her watch.

"What's going on?" Lauren asks as she holds a new shirt up in front of her to make sure that the purchase was a wise decision.

"What do you mean?"

"You've been checking the time all night. Are you waiting for something?"

"No," Courtney says, but she doesn't convince Lauren for an instant.

"And by 'no' you mean 'yes, very much,' right?"

She sees Courtney waging an internal debate for a few seconds before answering: "I'm just waiting for a phone call."

"Oh." For a moment Lauren thinks that she can drop it there, but curiosity gets the best of her. "From who?"

The debate seems to continue within Courtney, but finally she says, "Alex."

This time, Lauren's "Oh" is a lot flatter.

"Lauren, look, I didn't wanna make things awkward for you or anything."

"It's just a phone call, Court. I'm pretty sure I can handle the knowledge that Alex might use a telephone sometime in his life ..."

"Not about the call." Courtney pauses again and suddenly Lauren finds herself awaiting what is surely big news.

"Then about what?" she has to prompt when Courtney doesn't continue.

"About ... I, uh, I set Alex up on a date tonight."

"You mean ... ?"

"With a guy, yeah. I just didn't want to make you uncomfortable--"

"It's okay. Really. I knew Alex was gonna date guys eventually. And I know the two of you are really close. I wouldn't hold that against you."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"Actually, I'm glad you told me," Lauren says, refolding the shirt and setting it down beside the bag. "I don't want us to have to keep stuff compartmentalized or whatever. We're best friends -- we shouldn't have to keep stuff from each other."

"You're right."

"That's actually a huge relief to me. 'Cause I knew you'd been spending time with Alex, and I've been spending time with Jason, and I don't want us to have to pretend like they don't exist when we hang out."

"I agree," Courtney says, though Lauren detects an odd beat in the statement.

"So, uh ... who'd you set Alex up with?"

"Dylan. My new skating partner."

"Oh ... that was kind of convenient, huh?"

"Yeah, it's weird that I met Dylan right when Alex was starting to get into this whole thing, and that Dylan happened to be single ... I just hope the date's going well."

"Yeah," Lauren says, even though the thought of Alex out on a date with a guy after she spent so much time going after him is difficult to grasp. "How's everything working out with Dylan?"

"Really well. It's been a lot easier to get into a rhythm with each other than I thought it'd be. We're making a lot of progress."

"So it's going to be a permanent thing, you think?"

"Yep." Courtney answers with a sort of firmness that, for some reason, puts Lauren on the defensive.

"You really like skating with him as much as you did with Jason?"

"It's different. But it's good."

"Well, that's good," Lauren says. "But you're really not gonna give Jason another chance? I always sorta figured that this would pass, and then things would go back to normal ..."

"'Normal' was a long time ago, Lauren. For the last -- what, two years, three years? -- him lying to both of us was par for the course. I'm not exactly dying to go back to that."

"You don't think you're being at all hard on him? I mean, Alex was the one who kept leading me on--"

"Alex was going through a huge ordeal! He wasn't ready to come to terms with it yet. Maybe he didn't make the best decisions, but he never meant to hurt you. I know that. But Jason--he knew what was going on and he just let it happen. That doesn't make you mad at him?"

"It did at first, yeah," Lauren says with a shrug. "But he was confused, too. He had no way of knowing what was going on in Alex's head. Maybe it wasn't his place to make that assumption."

"Unbelievable," Courtney mutters. "Unbelievable. How did he manage to snow you so badly?"

## ALEX MARSHALL & JASON FISHER'S APARTMENT

Alex eases the key into the lock and turns it with painstaking care. In the few weeks since they moved into the apartment, he's noticed that Jason has an uncanny ability to hear the front door opening even from his bedroom in the back of the apartment, even when he's sound asleep. It's weird -- probably not a bad thing security-wise, but weird. But there's no need for Jason to wake up now, so Alex does his best to be quiet as he opens the door.

It turns out that there was no need for such care. When he gets the door open, he is greeted by the sight of Jason stretched out across one of the couches, his hand inside a box of Cheez-Its. The room is dark, lit only by the television's glow.

"I didn't think you'd still be up," Alex says as he removes his jacket.

"What, you thought I didn't have a big night planned, too? C'mon, I've got 'Top Gun,' I've got food ..."

Alex drops down onto the other couch with a laugh. "Sorry I underestimated you."

A few more seconds of the movie go on before Jason sits up. "So come on, tell me about this big date. How'd it go?"

Alex's eyes stay fixed on the screen. "Fine. Good, I guess."

"You guess?"

"Well ... it was a little weird at first, you know? Like, we didn't know each other, we didn't know if we had anything in common, that kinda thing. But it wound up being pretty good."

Jason chomps on a few Cheez-Its before asking, "What'd you guys do? Just dinner and then hanging out?"

"We ate at 322, then he took me to this club. It was ... a little bit of a shock, I guess. And he was way more forward than I was expecting!"

"What do you mean?"

"Like, by the end of the night, he seemed a lot more serious about the whole thing than I

would've expected," Alex says. "Once we got to the club, he got kinda touchy."

"That's not a bad thing, Alex."

"I know, I know. I'm just not used to it. He was just, like, all over--"

"What do you mean?"

"Like ..." Alex feels the grin breaking on his face. "We wound up making out in the middle of the club."

"Sounds like you had a fun night."

"Yeah, I guess I did."

Jason lies back down. "So there's a second date in the works?"

"I think so--" Alex begins, but he is cut off by a sharp knock on the door.

He jumps to his feet. Maybe it's Dylan. Maybe he forget something, or--

All thoughts of Dylan go out of his head the moment he pulls the door open. There are two police officers standing before him, stern expressions plastered on both of their faces.

"We're looking for Alex Marshall," one of them announces.

## **SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT**

Sarah is ready for the knock the instant she hears it. She's been sitting here, trying to care about what's on TV, for almost half an hour, since Diane called and announced that she just had to come over and share some major news.

She springs up off the couch and bounds to the door to admit Diane.

"All right, what's going on?" she says more than asks. She's been kept waiting long enough.

Diane places her purse on the couch and removes her coat. "Guess who showed up at my door tonight."

"Who? Diane--" Then it hits her. "Brian?"

Diane nods with satisfaction.

"What was he doing here?"

"Well, apparently ..." Diane trails a finger along the top of the couch, obviously relishing the oh-so-dramatic reveal. "... apparently he felt bad about turning me away so hastily when I dropped by to see him. So he came rushing up here to make sure he hadn't burned the bridge too badly."

"So what'd you say to him?"

"That's where it got a little ugly. Guess who I had over when Brian showed up?"

"Oh no!" Sarah feels herself being swept up in the drama of the whole situation. "Eric?"

"Yeah -- which, in and of itself, wouldn't have been so bad, except that I had to ask Eric to leave so I could talk with Brian."

"Ouch."

Diane widens her eyes. "I know. But I didn't want to miss the chance to have an actual conversation with Brian, especially since he'd come all that way .."

"At least you guys got to talk, then," Sarah says as she picks up the remote and switches off the television. It's proving just as irritating as background noise as it did as time filler.

"A little bit, anyway. It was very ... strained." Diane's demeanor has suddenly turned much more serious, much quieter and more contemplative. "I was hoping this would be a lot easier than it's proving to be."

"So what happened? You fought?"

"Basically. He agreed to stay in town for a little while so that we could talk this over some more, but it didn't go too smoothly."

The obvious question is burning on Sarah's tongue, but it takes a bit of internal pushing to get herself to ask it. "What happened between the two of you, anyway? How did things get so bad?"

"I don't know. I never even saw it coming," Diane says with a sigh. "There was this woman -- Serena Scott -- who was a writer looking to be published. Somehow Brian met her, and instead of bringing her manuscript to me, he kept it. So I found it among his things and figured we'd found another great writer and turned it in ... turns out Brian wanted that to be his break, and he got all pissed off that I'd taken credit for discovering

her."

"Oh ..." It's immediately apparent to Sarah where Diane went wrong, but she's not so sure that Diane sees it the same way. And she's not sure that she dares point that out just yet.

"But the thing is, Brian had gotten involved with her somewhere along the line. I'm sure that completely tainted his view on the whole thing. Suddenly it was the two of them against me instead of the two of us dealing with her. That was when I left L.A. -- the way they were going, they would've tried to run me out of my job if I hadn't quit and come here instead."

"Are they still together?" Sarah asks. The pieces are slowly coming together in her head; she wonders if the picture is as clear to Diane.

"No, that busted up all on its own. I had no part in it. Which just goes to show that Brian should've stuck with me to begin with, right?" Diane shakes her head.

"Diane ..."

"What?"

"This thing with you and Brian," Sarah begins tentatively, "is it a friendship you're trying to get back on track, or something more?"

"Please!" Diane scoffs. "This is Brian we're talking about. I want my friend back. I want things to be the way they were. He was--he was like my sidekick. I miss that, I don't have a problem admitting that."

Sarah nods, knowing that there's no need to force the issue right now. She certainly doesn't need Diane biting her head off over it. But the possibility that the feelings run deeper than Diane says -- or perhaps even realizes -- is too great to be ignored, that much Sarah knows.

## **BROOKS HOME**

"He hasn't 'snowed' me, Courtney!" Lauren shoots back. "Jason *is* a good guy! You have to admit at least that much."

"I'm not saying he's some devious villain, but he made some huge mistakes. He betrayed my trust big-time." Courtney doesn't break the gaze, almost daring Lauren to try and rebuke her.

Lauren takes the challenge. "Maybe there's a time to start getting over that. It's been months and months. Don't you miss him?"

"Of course I miss him! But I'm not gonna put myself in the position of being made to look like a total ass again -- especially when it wasn't just me he did it to, but my best friend, too!"

"I've gotten past it. I don't see why you can't. You have no idea how much pain Jason is in! Still. It hurts to talk to him sometimes because it's obvious how badly he's hurting."

"Well, boo-hoo," Courtney says, spinning on her heels and grabbing her shopping bags. "You can cry for him all you want. It's not gonna justify what he did."

"Court!" Lauren cries out, but it's no use. Courtney blazes a determined path back to the front door.

Courtney is about to turn the doorknob when it turns for her -- and the door opens right in her face.

"Well, hello there," Trevor says, mere inches in front of her.

"Hi," she says with all the tenderness of a cactus. She is already trying to push past him and out of the house when he stops her with a hand on the shoulder.

"Whoa there. What are you in such a rush for?"

"Get out of my way," she grunts, but he is strong enough to hold her inside the house.

"What's going on?" he demands more than asks.

"Nothing! Get out of my way!"

"You're not storming out of here all bat-out-of-hell style," Trevor says. "Especially since I gather it has something to do with my sister."

Her eyes fling daggers into his, but when that has no effect, she cracks the tiniest bit: "We just had a little disagreement!"

He steps back to study her and a grin breaks on his lips. "I'd hate to see how you deal with a major disagreement."

"Shut up."

"Courtney, what's wrong?" he asks, his voice suddenly softer. The change in tone is enough to get her to stop trying to push past him, at least for now.

"I'm just tired of this!"

"Tired of what?"

"Having to defend still being mad at Jason. I'm still upset with him. I still don't feel like I can trust him. I'm sick of people telling me I'm *wrong* to feel like that!"

"You can't change the way you feel," Trevor says. Finally he is able to drop his hands, with seemingly little chance of her bolting through him and away from the house.

"That's what I think. But ... everyone seems to think I should've forgiven him by now, or gotten over it. I can't just get over it."

"You don't have to." The cold night air sends a shiver through his body and he makes a move to go inside the house. Courtney moves with him.

"So what happened with Lauren?" he asks.

"She--I dunno, she's been spending all this time with Jason, and now she's defending him ... It's like she's on his side instead of mine all of a sudden."

Lauren enters from the kitchen, obviously having overheard the entire exchange. Both Courtney and Trevor's gazes pause on her; finally Lauren breaks the silence.

"Court, I don't want you to think I'm taking sides," she says, eyeing both of them somewhat nervously. "I'm not. I just ... I understand Jason's point-of-view, too."

"I just don't wanna feel like I'm wrong for feeling the way I do," Courtney says. "Or if that's what you think ... then--"

"That's not what I think. Sorry, I didn't mean for it to sound that way. But you can't expect me to act like Jason is entirely to blame and I should hate him."

"I don't expect that. Look, Lauren, I'm sorry. I just blew up."

"It's okay," Lauren says after an awkward pause. "Sorry I bit your head off."

"There we go. Friends again," Trevor says with excessive pomp and an enormous grin. "Now hug, you two."

They look at each other, both roll their eyes, and then follow the order. He folds his arms, watching in amusement ... and returns the gesture when Lauren flashes him a wink as a silent thank-you.

## **ALEX MARSHALL & JASON FISHER'S APT.**

An eerie pall hangs over the room, disturbing both in its silence and in all that it is saying. It's been there since the officers dropped their bomb and even worse since they left. The scant memories that he does have of Sally are rushing through Jason's head; he can only imagine what is happening inside Alex's.

"I'm really sorry," Jason says for lack of anything more profound. The words scrape out of his dry throat and fall like lead into the middle of the silence. The TV was turned off when the police came inside, and it's too late for there to be much noise outside. So they are stuck with their thoughts and this devastating news.

"You don't have to be sorry," Alex says after so long a pause that Jason has given up hope of a response. "It's not your fault."

"Well, yeah, but you know--"

"Yeah. Thanks."

Jason watches Alex pick up a TIME magazine off the coffee table, flip through it for a grand total of three seconds, and then drop it back to the table with a ceremonious plop. It just lies there, splayed, for a moment, and then Alex picks it up again and places it back neatly in the pile of magazines.

"How could I be so *stupid*?" Alex asks, seemingly out of nowhere, once he has paced across the room and back a few times.

"What, because you didn't try to stop her from marrying that psycho?"

"That, too. Great. I knew I should've done something. I never should've tried to let her learn a lesson by herself, or whatever the hell I was hoping would happen."

The flow of the conversation is beginning to resemble that of a regular conversation and still Jason feels as though he's trying to spark a flame with wet kindling. His tongue is completely tied.

Finally he manages, "You were trying to be supportive. You didn't want her butting into your business, so you weren't gonna butt into hers. That was a good decision, Alex."

Alex turns to him with an uncharacteristic sharpness. "A good decision? She's dead, Jason! Because of Stan. He pretty much led her right into her grave!"

"You couldn't have known this was how it would turn out."

"I should've been smarter than that! I should've remembered that my mother never has any clue when she's getting in too deep with something! This is *my mother*, for God's sake -- the woman who basically kidnapped Courtney's dad. I knew what terrible decisions she had a pattern of making and I still pretended this would turn out okay."

"It's not a bad thing that you feel responsible," Jason says softly. He hopes that the shift in his own tone will calm Alex a little; there's no need to rile him into full-out shouting.

"No, it's not ... because I should feel responsible."

Jason closes the gap between them with a few uneasy steps. "You're a good person, Alex. This is not your fault," he says as he reaches out and places a very uncertain arm around his friend's shoulders.

He can tell that the gesture takes Alex by surprise, maybe even makes him uncomfortable, too. Even since they sorted everything out between them, there has been very little physical contact between them. It's almost as if there has been some sort of rule about touching: If you don't want it to get awkward, avoid contact.

But now it seems necessary to Jason, and obviously for Alex, as well, because after that first strange moment, Jason feels his roommate's muscles relaxing under his touch.

"This isn't your fault," Jason repeats, squeezing Alex's shoulder.

Alex doesn't respond. He doesn't have to. Jason's touch is enough to prove to him that this is more than just lip service, that he should take seriously what Jason is saying.

But Jason knows it's not going to be as easy as this to absolve Alex of all his guilt.

"I was on a date," Alex mutters, and Jason can feel him stiffening beneath the touch again. "I was on a date and my mother was being shot to death."

"So you happened to be on a date. You could've been at a movie or out to eat or--I don't know--at the circus. You can't put your life on hold for the unexpected."

"Of course not. Especially not when you're too wrapped up in your own crap to notice what's really important." Alex shrugs Jason's arm away.

Jason doesn't make a move to replace it. "Your mother wasn't--isn't--more important

than you ..."

"No, because I tried to pretend I didn't care what she did or if she cared about me or anything." Self-disgust flares in Alex's face. "Look, I--I just need to think. I'm gonna go to bed."

"All right," Jason says somewhat reluctantly, not sure if it's a good idea to let Alex out of his sight just yet but knowing that he can't really do much else. "If you need anything, let me know. And if you wanna talk or something--wake me up."

A weak nod is the only reply he gets as Alex drags himself back to his bedroom.

And Jason is left standing in the middle of the living room, as helpless and as chilled as if Sally's body were lying right beside him.

### **END OF EPISODE #273**

*How do you feel about Sally's death? What kind of effect is it going to have on the rest of the characters? Did Lauren and Courtney's argument -- and Trevor's intervention -- surprise you? Come comment on this episode in the Footprints Forum!*

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