

"Footprints" Episode #278

[Previously ...](#)

- Courtney brought dinner for a grieving Alex but had a run-in with Jason while she waited for him. Instead of erupting into an argument, they shared a surprisingly warm moment over their concern for Alex.
- After a meeting with the court intermediary, Sarah headed to her parents' knowing the identity of Paula's oldest son. But when she overheard her mother telling Bill about her encounter with Stan, Sarah realized the complex web of connections and decided not to tell just yet.
- Molly's date with Eric went nicely until he leaned in to kiss her and she realized that, through the entire night, Brent had never been far from her mind. She apologized to Eric and left him mid-date.

FISHER HOME

"You're sure you don't want anything?" Paula asks as she uneasily lowers herself onto the floral pad of the patio chair.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Sarah says. The words emerge wrapped in a sigh, and she brings an elbow up to the table. Her hand lingers in front of her face as she gazes out into the black night. Pinpricks of gold light the pitch canvas of the sky, with nary more than a non-threatening wisp of a cloud here and there. The scene is docile, calm -- nothing that would suggest the life-altering tension that now fills the Fishers' deck.

Paula herself probably isn't even aware of it, Sarah realizes, although by now she must have some idea that this is serious. On the phone, Sarah gave no specific reason for wanting to come over other than wanting to talk to her mother. She's sure that Paula's mind must be alive with possibilities by now.

"What did you need to talk about?" Paula asks, as if reading her daughter's mind.

Sarah straightens in the chair. She draws her hands into her lap and pulls the sleeves of her heavy sweater down to her fingers. It's freezing out, but she'd rather not do this inside. Especially not with Bill and Claire around.

"I got a call today," Sarah begins tentatively. She could stop herself now, make something else up, and forget it all; that was the plan after she overheard Paula telling Bill about Stan earlier today. But the knowledge was too much to keep to herself, even for a day, and she knew she couldn't confide in anyone about it without telling Paula first. It wouldn't be right.

She forces herself to go on: "It was the woman from the court -- Joyce Geller. She had some news, finally."

Paula's eyes widen. "You mean, about ..."

"Yeah." Sarah makes no effort to complete the statement. Some part of her finds it oddly amusing that they can't even name the topic -- and yet Paula's son himself has a name now. He's no longer a faceless what-if, but an actual person, a person they know.

"What did she say?"

"She found your son in the records."

Paula's lungs draw in a rush of the cold air, and it's entirely audible to Sarah.

"He's alive, Mom. I know exactly what happened to him."

Expectant eyes hover over Sarah, needing no words to urge her to continue.

"He was adopted by a couple in King's Bay," she says, going into recital mode. Just hours ago, this story was foreign to her, but she's twisted the facts through her mind so much that now they feel like second nature. "He was only a few months old when they got him, and they moved to Illinois not long afterward."

"How did he grow up? Where is he now?" Paula finally asks, likely unable to bear even the brief pauses in Sarah's telling. Sarah herself could barely stand it when Joyce Geller was sharing the tale this afternoon, so it must be like torture for Paula.

But Sarah knows how she has to tell this story, so she proceeds as she planned.

"The couple--they were in a car accident two months after they moved. They were both killed, and--your son went up for adoption again."

Paula gasps again, a thin, frantic breath that seems to be wondering if there is anything she can do to protect the child she's worried so much about, even though all this happened over three decades ago.

"He was adopted again less than a year later," Sarah continues. "By a woman named Rose McGuire who was having trouble conceiving. She--well, she's dead now, but Joyce interviewed the family that she has left, and apparently this Rose McGuire was hoping that having a child would save her marriage."

She sees Paula grimacing, probably anticipating the train wreck to come in that situation.

"It did," Sarah says reassuringly. She pauses, hoping to let Paula's nerves relax -- at least for the moment. "He grew up with Rose and her husband in Chicago."

This is the critical point, she knows, but it's a struggle to make herself speak the words. "When he was seven, Rose passed away."

Sarah can tell that her mother is speechless, possibly devastated by the story thus far, and it gives her even greater pause than she has been carrying around all day.

"There was a custody fight," she says. "Rose's family didn't want her husband to keep their son, but he won custody eventually. From there on out ... well, he stayed with his adoptive father."

"Where is he now?" Paula asks, leaning forward, her knuckles pale from gripping the edge of the table.

"That's the most ironic part ... He's living back in King's Bay now."

"He is?"

"Yeah. But Mom--"

"What does he do?" Paula interrupts.

"That's the thing. Mom, his adoptive father--Rose McGuire's husband--it's Nick Moriani."

BRENT TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

As the bills pass from Molly's hand to the cab driver's, it hits her that she might be handing him entirely too much money. But she's too frenzied and too nervous to care right now, so she hops out of the cab before he can even count it.

Her heels click across the parking lot's pavement in a frantic rhythm. That serene quality that she felt in the air before, when she was walking through with park with Eric, has morphed into a strange hush. It's as though the world is waiting with baited breath for the same moment that Molly is.

The world isn't, of course; the world could probably care less. She knows that. But this is it. Something happened back there in the park -- something finally clicked, fell into place, whatever. It's something she's been awaiting for a long time, something she's been needing. She's known that something would eventually have to give, one way or the other, or she'd wind up going insane.

Maybe she has gone insane. She welcomes the thought, and she welcomes whatever this wonderful feeling is. Freedom. She feels free for the first time in ... forever, it feels like.

She bounds up the stairs as quickly as she can, doing her best not to let her high heels slam her face-first into the concrete. Somehow she manages to reach the landing outside Brent's door.

This is it, she realizes as she takes a long drag of the night air and holds it in her lungs. This has to happen. If she doesn't do it now ... well, this feeling could go away. And she doesn't want to lose it.

Her hand raises and beats on the door. It's weird that Brent has no idea that she's here or what's running through her head, but that makes it all the more exciting.

Her heart leaps up into her throat as she hears the door being unlocked. A split-second later, it opens and there is Brent. His look is completely the opposite of hers: sweatpants to her eveningwear, ruffled hair to her carefully placed strands, and yet--he looks perfect.

And the way his face lights up automatically at the sight of her, even in spite of their tense confrontation this afternoon, clinches it for her.

"Hi," he says, and she can see him sliding back into that same defensive, uncertain mode that this afternoon put her in.

"Brent." His name slips out in a gasp, as if she's pulling it into her, and she reaches for his hands. He lets her take them. "Let's not do this anymore."

BROOKS HOME

"This was a terrible idea," Jason says, a light chuckle brushing the back of his throat, as he picks up the dishtowel to wipe his hands.

"It was a *great* idea!" Lauren counters. She scoops up some more white frosting with her knife and spreads it over the cookie in front of her. "How can you not like making Christmas cookies?"

"Um, because I suck at it?"

"You do not." She sets down the knife and moves across the counter to look at the handful of cookies that Jason has decorated in the time it's taken her to do a whole tray. "Okay, so maybe you do."

"Gee, thanks."

"I'm kidding! Jason, they're fine!"

His index finger strikes out accusatorily at one of the cookies, a reindeer shape covered in red and white frosting. "This one looks like it was done by an extremely ungifted three-year-old!"

"It does not!" She scans the cookies for a moment, then picks up a Christmas tree that has been frosted green and adorned with some green sprinkles and red candies. "This one's cute."

"Blind luck."

"Mm-hmm." She returns her focus to the reindeer. "This really isn't bad, Jason."

"Do you know any toddlers I can blame it on?"

She rolls her eyes and picks up the cookie. "Here. We'll remove the blemish from your record, then."

She breaks it in half and hands him one of the pieces. He can't help looking it over uncertainly before taking a bite.

"Doesn't taste as bad as it looks," she manages to say between chewing and laughing.

He finishes chewing and deadpans, "Careful, you might choke on it."

She makes a face at him and returns to her post to decorate more cookies.

Jason fidgets on the stool, contemplating another stab at the decorating. "How did I let you rope me into this?"

"Because, as I recall, *you* were looking for something to do and *I* was already doing this. And Trevor was tricky enough to escape."

"Well, this does beat being in the apartment."

"Was it really that awkward?"

He leans an elbow on the counter and uses his fist to prop up his chin. "Sorta, yeah. I mean--it was actually way less ugly with Courtney than it's been in a long, long time. But it was far from comfortable."

Jason thinks he detects an awkward pause before Lauren says, "Maybe this thing with Alex's mom will put everything in perspective, though. It's one of those things that really makes you think about how short life can be."

"Yeah, jeez." He picks up a container of sprinkles and begins shaking it for no reason. "And I'm sitting here bitching and moaning about Courtney, *still*, and Alex's mom just died. God, I hope he makes it through this okay."

"He will. He's got good friends to help him through."

"At least Courtney's there spending time with him, yeah ... I just wish there was something I could really *do*."

Lauren sets down her knife. "There isn't anything anybody can do. Not besides being there to listen and talk to him."

"True. Did ... did Court tell you about his date?"

"With her partner? Yeah. That'll be good for him."

"I hope so," Jason says, as Alex's words of self-loathing come back to him in a rush. "He's, like, blaming himself for being out on a date when his mom got shot, though. Like that made any difference."

"Maybe that's how your mind works when you're grieving," she says.

"Yeah, maybe." He pauses and suddenly doesn't want to be stuck on that topic anymore. His apartment is filled with it, and he'll take whatever reprieve he can get. "I think it's time to change the CD. This is getting a little boring."

"Go ahead."

He goes into the living room and flips through the ridiculously large stack of holidays CDs sitting beside the stereo. It takes him nearly an entire song to examine the track listings and decide on one of the Christmas compilations.

"What are you putting on?" Lauren calls out when he stops the CD that's been playing.

"Just listen!" He moves as quickly as he can. A few seconds later, the opening strains of Eartha Kitt's "Santa Baby" are filling the house.

"Oh God!" Lauren groans.

Jason rushes back to the kitchen. "This is the funniest song!"

"It's so stupid!"

"I know! That's why I love it."

She just shakes her head, unable to hide her amusement, and returns to decorating what appears to be her zillionth cookie of the night.

And as the song, goofy as it is, plays on, Jason can't help smiling. It finally does feel like the holidays. Despite everything else that's going on -- his troubles with Courtney, Alex's mom dying, Claire being attacked -- for him and Lauren, right now, it's just like the holidays he remembers from when he was a kid.

FISHER HOME

Just like that, just by speaking a name, Sarah has changed her mother's life forever. It feels as if a giant vacuum has suddenly sucked all the air out of the world, and now they're both struggling for whatever breaths they can steal.

"That can't be," Paula says, though it's utterly without conviction. Sarah can see the gears at work, processing the information and piecing the story together.

"Mom ... Ryan Moriani--he's your son."

"He--" Paula stares at Sarah expectantly, desperately, as if Sarah is the one who arranged the entire situation. "How?"

"Think about it," Sarah says. "I--well, I overheard you talking to Dad before about ... that man--the father of your son. Think about it."

"Stanley--oh my goodness! He's the same--" A choking sound interrupts Paula. "That means he--Claire ..."

"I know," is the solemnest reply Sarah can manage. She folds her arms together, her hands still buried within the sleeves of her sweater.

They sit there, muted and tortured, for what feels to Sarah like an unbearably long time. Now that she's unleashed this on her mother, and probably on the entire family, she feels as though she needs to do something to contain it.

Paula is finally the one to break the silence, with a twisted sob. "How could things turn

out this way?"

"I wish I knew. I--"

Suddenly the outdoor lights burst to life. Both women spring up to rigid positions as the back door opens.

"Oh, hey," Claire says, taking in the sight of them. "I thought I heard voices out here."

"We're just talking," Paula says as a sniff creeps into the end of her sentence.

Sarah nods, hoping to shoo Claire away as quickly as possible. The last thing they need to do right now is drag someone else into this -- especially Claire.

Claire withdraws into the house and switches the lights off, and Sarah's own sigh of relief is too loud for her to hear whether Paula releases a similar one. At least they got rid of Claire without arousing any suspicion.

"If she asks what we were doing out here," Sarah says, "just say it was about me and Molly or whatever. She'll buy that."

Instantly she feels bad for reminding her mother of the bad blood between her only daughters, but Paula's understanding, determined gaze as she nods surprises Sarah. A silent message passes between them with that look: If this isn't handled carefully, as carefully as absolutely possible, it's going to shatter this family. And in that moment, none of their disagreements and none of the other animosity matter, because they both want the same thing: the family they've always known.

BRENT TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

Wary eyes scan Molly, no doubt trying to make something of the dress and the hair and the makeup. "What are you talking about?" Brent asks uneasily.

"Something happened to me tonight," she says, squeezing his hands.

"What? Are you okay?"

She shakes her head. "Not like that. I'm fine, Brent. Better than fine. Tonight, I--I went on a date."

"Oh." His eyes fall and his lips droop. "Good. Good for you."

Seeing him so defeated, so suddenly despondent, and yet making the immediate effort to be happy for her -- it just solidifies what she realized tonight. What she knew all along, even if there were too many things in the way for her to acknowledge it freely.

"No, that's not what I mean," she says. She steps into the apartment, still holding onto his hands. "I went on a date tonight, and I was determined to have a good time. I was determined to have a nice, normal date with good conversation and the chance of a second date and--and no guilt."

He just stares, too confused to respond, she's sure.

"And it went well. It went really well," she continues. "It was just nice. I felt comfortable, we had things to talk about, all of that. But we were walking through the park and I had one of those perfect holiday feelings--you know, like when you just *feel* like it's almost Christmas and you love the cold and excitement and everything. And you know what I realized?"

"I have no idea what to think right now."

She's unable to keep a grin off her face as she goes on, "I realized that there was one thing that would really, truly make it perfect. Everything was nice with Eric, but ... he wasn't you. He never will be, and he never could be."

A new splash of hope explodes across Brent's face. "Molly ..."

"I don't care anymore," she says. "I don't care what's happened, and I don't care if we're not supposed to feel like this. It doesn't matter. None of it does. *This* is what I want."

Finally his hands come to life inside hers, squeezing back. "It's what I want, too."

"I know. I'm so sorry that it's taken me so long to be able to--to do something about it."

Brent pulls back and looks her right in the eyes. "Are we doing something about it?"

A smile overtakes her lips. Her breaths are coming harder now. "Absolutely."

She doesn't waste another instant bringing her lips to his. They've kissed before, but never like this. The first time it was so unexpected, so confusing; the time at Danielle's wedding was sneaky and full of guilt; and the time on the pier a year ago was so full of worries about Sarah. The promise of that night never turned to anything -- until now.

Now, it's all about them. It's not just about one stolen moment in time. When Eric moved to kiss her tonight, Molly realized that she could never spend the rest of her life doing that. She can't. Another relationship can't possibly cover up what she and Brent share.

She's waited five years for *this* kiss -- this freedom. And now she doesn't want to stop.

"Let's forget about everything," she says, pulling her lips away from his long enough to speak. She kicks the door closed behind her.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm not waiting another five years to feel like this again!" She grabs his head in her hands and pulls it back to her.

Her hands waste no time in running down to his chest, exploring it like this for the first time ever. She toys with the bottom of his t-shirt for just a second before running her fingers up underneath it. The instant her nails brush against the soft skin beneath, she knows there's no chance of fighting this.

"I love you," she breathes between kisses, forcing herself to pull away long enough to get his shirt over his head.

"I love you, too," he whispers back. Their lips join together again and they move as one to the bedroom.

END OF EPISODE #278

Did Molly make the right choice? Will she and Brent be home-free now? What do you think about the secret that Sarah and Paula now share? Come share your thoughts in the Footprints Forum!

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