

"Footprints" Episode #282

[Previously ...](#)

- Brian came to Diane's office and announced he'd be returning to Los Angeles but wanted to patch things up with her first. The encounter quickly devolved into an argument about the differences in their perceptions of what happened in L.A. with Serena Scott.
- Lauren and Jason continued to enjoy hanging out together. When Molly wondered whether there might be something more to the relationship, Jason denied it.
- Claire brought Ryan to the Fishers' Christmas celebration. He was touched by the family's closeness and how deeply the loss of Tim affected them.
- Matt told Bill about Sarah's sudden reluctance to pursue a relationship with him, and Bill encouraged him to be persistent. But Sarah discovered information about Matt's past that made her nervous about ever being close with him.

VISION PUBLISHING

"How do you really want this to turn out, Brian?"

Diane plants her hands on her hips and stares him down. No muscle in her body flinches, and none will until she gets an answer out of him. She's tired of running in circles, thinking one minute that there might be hope for them and the next wondering why the hell they're even trying. Or why she even gives a damn.

"I guess I want us to be the way we used to be," he says, but before she can cut in, he continues, "except ... different, too."

"Gee, that's helpful."

"I want us to have the kind of relationship we had before. I loved having a confidante like that--someone I thought would be my ally through anything. It's never been like that with anyone else, not even Serena."

"Then let's have that!" she huffs, the words tumbling out in one huge, exasperated breath.

"But I don't want it to be exactly like it was! I want--I don't know, I want it to be more of an equal thing." His voice drops to little more than a thin line at the end; he must realize how cheesy that sounds.

She decides not to break the mood by pointing it out. They might actually be getting

somewhere. "Then how do we do that?"

He seems primed to give his answer, but then he turns his back again. He addresses the window as he says, "I don't want to feel like I'm at the mercy of your whims ... I'm too old for that, Diane. I can't run around playing sidekick anymore."

"I thought that went both ways."

"So did I. But think about -- we were always doing something that fit into *your* plans. How long did we spend terrorizing Tim and Claire?" He doesn't wait for an answer. "And you came out of that with Samantha, and what did I get? I wound up losing any chance I had with Molly because of it."

"You got lucky there. That chick is no prize, let me tell you."

"That's not the point! I should have been able to make that judgment for myself. It shouldn't have been made for me because--"

"Because you willingly participated in things I was gonna do with or without you?"

That stops him cold in his tracks. He shoves his hands into the pockets of his khaki pants and takes several slow, methodical steps away from the window, finally stopping uncertainly in front of the bookcase.

"That's what I mean," he says. "I did those things because I wanted to help you--God, because I wanted to have that bond with you. So maybe I made some stupid choices, yeah. Can't we be a little less ... destructive?"

There is a pause, and then he adds hastily, "And Serena. It didn't fit into your agenda for me to be so close with her, so you did what you could to break that up. I don't want a part of this relationship if it's going to revolve around whatever your agenda happens to be at the moment."

"I already apologized for Serena," Diane says defiantly.

Suddenly she fears what his response will be. She's sure it will be some sort of attack on her character or her lack of morals--

"Why'd you do it, Diane?"

"Do what?"

"Try to break up Serena and me." He pulls his hands out of his pockets and folds them together. Immediately his eyes drop to them. "Didn't you *want* me to be happy? Or were

you just ... jealous?"

"Don't flatter yourself!" Diane barks instantly. The moment is broken.

"Just tell me ..."

"I'll tell you what. You get the hell out of my office and go back to L.A. and forget we ever had this conversation, okay?"

His wide eyes seem to be searching her for some sort of explanation, but she's not going to grant him the time to find one.

"Get out," she repeats. "Leave me the hell alone."

He just stands there, staring absolutely puzzled at her, for a long moment. But when she takes a step toward him, he takes the hint and moves for the door.

"Fine," he says. She can see that he's still trying to piece everything together in his head, even if the answer should be plainly obvious to him. How dare he come in here and try to turn this around on her by accusing her of being jealous of him and Serena? Did he come all this way just to twist her arm into saying that she was?

She lets him go without saying another word, and the moment he's gone, she muffles whatever inclination she has to slam the door and instead presses it forcefully into the frame. Her hand grips the knob tightly for a time, and then she turns and leans her back against the door.

Let him go back to L.A. Let him keep thinking that she ever wanted something more than friendship. Let him go back to Serena, for all she cares.

She returns to her desk and searches for a pen, determining right now that she'll not worry about Brian Hamilton anymore.

BROOKS HOME

"Are you seriously okay with watching this?" Lauren asks, crouched in front of the DVD player.

"I'm fine with it," Jason assures her. He busies himself with constructing a comfortable mound of pillows behind him on the couch.

She sets the DVD in the tray, pushes it in, and springs back to her feet. A moment later, the '60s-spoof world of Austin Powers bursts to life on the screen.

"You know what I hate?" she says as she grabs the remote to select the 'play' item on the menu. "When people run around saying stuff like, 'Yeah, baby' in that stupid Austin Powers voice."

"Same here. It makes me embarrassed for them." He pauses to reach behind him and adjust one of the pillows and then adds, "I refuse to be seen with those people."

"*Those people*," she says ominously, returning to her spot on the couch.

They settle in and watch the movie's opening. Aside from the requisite laughs, neither of them has anything to say. But sometime during the first actual scene, Lauren speaks up.

"You know what Austin Powers always makes me think of?"

"What?"

He's ready for another comment like the one she made earlier about people trying to imitate Austin's voice, so what she says takes him by surprise. "When the four of us all used to hang out -- you and me and Court and Alex."

He shoots her a puzzled look.

"Remember how we all went to see 'The Spy Who Shagged Me' together? Don't ask me why, but I still think of that whenever I see any of these movies."

"That was a fun night," Jason says, thinking back on it for the first time in a long, long time.

They return to watching the movie, but the silence only holds for a few seconds.

"I miss when things were like that," Lauren says.

"So do I." The mood is turning a little too melancholy for his liking, though. "But hey, that's what happens, right? You grow up and you move on. Things change."

"Guess so." She thinks about that for a moment. "I'm glad to hear you say something like that. That's a big step."

"I thought I was the one trying to make you feel better!"

"This time, yeah. But think about how bad you've been wishing things would go back to how they were. You're making progress, kiddo."

"It's about freaking time," he groans as he drops his head back down into the pile of pillows.

"It's just weird how much things have changed. Like, you and Alex live together, Courtney and Alex are pretty close--and you and I spend all this time together. A year ago, that's totally not how I would've pictured things going."

"Seriously."

He watches her pull back her hair, hold it in a ponytail, and then let it all fall down. "And I kinda feel like things are weird between Courtney and me, too. I don't know what happened, but it's like ... we don't spend time together like we used to anymore. We have to make specific plans."

"You're both busy," he says, though he's not entirely convinced that's the only reason. "I'm starting to think things might ease up, though. When Court was at the apartment and it was actually civil between us--I honestly didn't think it would ever get to that point."

Lauren props herself up on one arm. "You think you guys might ..."

"No way. I seriously don't think she's ever gonna get over what happened. But it'd be nice if we could be in the same room with all our friends and not have it be completely painful."

"Yeah, that would be nice." She pauses for just an instant before a spark flares in her eyes. "Hey, you know what?"

"What?"

"My parents are gonna be back in a couple weeks. Trevor and I have been saying we should have at least a party while they're gone, you know? So what if we had a party and invited Courtney and Alex and everyone else?"

The idea makes him completely uncomfortable, but at the same time, there's something appealing about it -- a return to the old days or something, even though they just finished discussing how it's time to move on.

"That sounds like a good idea," he says, even as images of their past party disasters flicker through his mind. "I could go for a good party."

"And there'll be enough people that it's not like we'll all be stuck with each other all night."

"Yeah." He shrugs. "Yeah, why not? Let's do it."

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

"Thanks for coming down here," Claire says as she sets her tray down on the table. "It gave me a reason to trudge through the first part of my shift."

"Busy day?" Ryan asks. He sets down his tray, too, and takes a seat across the tiny table from her.

"No more than usual, I guess. I'm just tired, I think. One of those days, you know."

"Yeah." He picks up his fork and begins poking at the pasta concoction on his plate. "How often do you actually eat in here?"

"Not too often, thank God," she says, snickering.

"What?"

"You have this look of complete disgust on your face. It's funny."

"Well, it doesn't look *that* bad."

"No ... not compared to some other days, especially. It can get pretty revolting."

He makes sure to wipe the reluctance off his face and smiles. "Well, it's part of the whole experience of coming down to have lunch with you."

"Thank you. You have no idea how much I enjoy being classified with disgusting food as part of an 'experience'."

"You know what I mean," he counters, but there's no need for it. They are already sharing a laugh.

"If you want some slightly better food sometime," she offers, "you're welcome to come have dinner at Bill and Paula's. They love having visitors."

"They're really nice people," he says, finishing a bite and trying to convince himself that the pasta isn't as wretched as he feared.

"I'm glad you like them. For what it's worth, I think they really enjoyed having you there for Christmas, too."

He shakes his head. "Really? I never thought the day would come when I'd be having Christmas dinner with you and your in-laws ... let alone having it not be a disaster."

"Neither did I."

He can tell from her expression that she means it, too. They sink into a moment of reflection; he's sure that she is thinking something very close to what he is.

"I really can't believe that we've made it to this point," he says.

"You can't? I--jeez, this is the last place I ever thought I'd wind up, Ryan."

He can't contain a smirk. "In the hospital cafeteria, eating 'revolting' food?"

"That, too," she says. "But in all seriousness ... I'm completely amazed by how far we've come."

He puts down his fork and reaches out a hand to take one of hers. She doesn't protest.

"So am I," he says, holding her hand within his. "Claire--you have no idea how badly I wanted this for all those years. The fact that it's actually happened is unbelievable."

"We had a lot to work through," she says through a sigh.

"Yeah, really." He picks up his fork again and begins shuffling the pasta around. Somehow, they've gotten through it.

Still, every moment he's with her, something is hanging over him. It's the knowledge of how things were when he first came to King's Bay -- her not trusting him, not believing him, wanting nothing more than to see him and Nick in jail. Sometimes he thinks that he should just come clean; if things go as he's hoping, it won't matter, because he will have severed all ties with Nick business-wise anyway.

But he knows that it will matter. If Claire finds out that he's lied all this time about helping to carry on the business tradition of both their fathers, there could be hell to pay. And he can't take that risk.

He can make a clean break. He knows he can. All he has to do is make it happen, and then they'll never have to worry about it again.

FISHER HOME

Even though she's been expecting it for the last fifteen minutes, the abrupt sound of the front door being unlocked still jars Paula. She shoots to an upright position on the couch, the book in her hand suddenly forgotten.

She is still calming herself by the time Bill closes the door behind him and hangs up his wet coat on the nearby rack.

He turns to her, ready to say something, and then obviously changes course once he gets a look at her. "You look like you just saw a ghost."

"I feel like I did, too," she says, shaking her head. "I was just caught up in reading, I guess."

He rubs his hands together and then glances quickly back outside, into the dull, rainy day. "I think I could've picked a better day to take the afternoon off, huh?"

"This sort of day can still be relaxing," Paula says. She marks her page and sets the book down on the coffee table. "Can I get you anything?"

"No, I'm fine. But thanks." He removes his shoes, then refocuses on her. There is a seriousness about him that disturbs her; she can tell when he's about to steer the subject to something unpleasant.

"Have you spoken to Sarah much lately?" he asks.

Her mind immediately flies to all the talks that she and Sarah had before Christmas -- about the search, about Ryan, about how to deal with it all. There were a few whispered comments in passing on Christmas day, but no serious discussion. He couldn't have overheard any of that ...

"No more than usual." She waits for some sign from him, some indication that this shouldn't trouble her.

"Well, Matt is a little concerned. He seems to think that Sarah is pulling away from him."

"What do you mean?"

Bill takes a seat beside her on the sofa. "The way he tells it, things were beginning to look a little more serious between the two of them -- and now, all of a sudden, Sarah seems much less enthusiastic."

Paula can feel her muscles tensing up. "He has no idea as to why?"

"Nope. He said she's been turning down every invitation to spend time together. He thinks she's avoiding him. Do you know if something might be bothering her?"

She does her best to keep her features from turning to slush right before his eyes. Could this business with Ryan have Sarah so worked up ... ?

"I don't know," she says weakly.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes--yes, Bill, Sarah hasn't told me anything that might be bothering her." That much *is* true. She's trying to shake the feeling that she's been caught in some sort of horrible lie -- which she hasn't, except ...

"Paula, if something is going on, I think Matt deserves to know, don't you? He's waited patiently for a long time for Sarah to be ready for this."

"Maybe she's just reluctant to get involved in another serious relationship after how badly things turned out with Brent," Paula offers.

"That's what I told Matt," Bill says. He seems to be lost in thought, and Paula seizes the opportunity to free herself from the situation.

"I could use some lunch," she announces. "Do you want some?"

"No, I'm fine."

She thinks that she sees him eyeing her strangely, but she slips out of the room before she has to endure it for too long.

Calm down. He doesn't know anything. When the time is right, you can tell him about Ryan. But not until the time is right.

But Bill's questioning -- even if he had no idea what he was probing into -- has greatly unsettled her. She has a strange feeling that she's no longer in complete control of the secret. Nor does she feel as though she's convinced Bill that there couldn't possibly be anything distracting Sarah.

She knows him better than that. She definitely hasn't convinced him. And she's doesn't want to deal with more questions, more awkward responses, more dancing around the truth.

She can hear the clock ticking -- the prelude to a bomb.

BROOKS HOME

The world slowly comes back to color as Lauren drags her heavy eyelids apart. The movie is still playing -- it's only about halfway through, she can tell from having watched it too many times. She has no idea how she managed to fall asleep, although the darkness of the room and the outdoor gloominess that the windows reveal might be some clues.

Her head and the rest of her body feel just as heavy as her eyes. *What a blah day*, she thinks, shaking her head in an effort to stimulate some sort of awakesness.

On the other leg of the L-shaped sofa, Jason has fallen asleep, too. His face is pressed hard into the top pillow, his hand lying just beside it, nearly touching his nose.

She cracks a smile at the sight of him asleep. People always tell each other that they look "peaceful" when they sleep. Jason definitely doesn't. He looks funny -- almost as if sleep is some sort of commodity and he's grasping onto the opportunity with all that he has. And his hair is pushed up, thanks to the pillow. Lauren's smile lingers as she considers how that's going to look when he wakes up.

But it's cute. He looks adorable, lying there with his face jammed into the pillow, his eyes and his mouth soft with the freedom of sleep.

One of her favorite Dr. Evil lines draws her attention back to the movie. She watches the scene, chuckling at it as usual, but she keeps stealing glances back at Jason. There's something distinctly odd about being in the same room as someone who's sleeping. Like you're intruding on something private.

She grabs the blanket off the top of the sofa and pulls it over herself. A nap sounds more appealing than finishing the movie, especially alone, right now.

As she drifts back to sleep, she barely has the chance to notice the feeling that's drawing her back there. It's relaxing, like she has nothing to worry about and no reason to care about dozing away an entire afternoon. Before sleep grabs hold of her, she briefly considers what it might be -- contentment, almost. Knowing that Jason is just a few feet away, out like a light, makes her feel strangely at ease.

Peaceful, even.

END OF EPISODE #282

Are you rooting for Lauren and Jason to get closer? How should Paula break the news to Bill and the rest of the family? Come discuss this episode in the Footprints Forum!

[Next Episode](#)