

## "Footprints" Episode #287

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

- Lauren and Jason set up the Brooks' home for the party. Courtney arrived early to chat with Lauren and was enthusiastic about her plan to go after Trevor, but she also noticed Lauren's focus upon Jason.
- Alex and Dylan seemed to have very different ideas about where their relationship stands.
- After seeing some of Molly's sketches, Camille promoted Molly to a design position in the new firm.
- Sarah remained curious about Matt's past after learning that he has a living brother and had a sister-in-law who committed suicide, but she worried that she would destroy her chance at happiness if she pursued the evidence further.

### **BROOKS HOME**

"So then he throws the ketchup at the cop and we just floor it outta there!"

The guy standing in front of Courtney laughs the same laugh -- the same rollicking guffaw that's making her want to tear off her ears -- that he's been laughing for however long he's had her cornered. She knows it's probably only been about ten minutes, but it feels like much, much longer. And even ten minutes is too long.

She sighs and listens over the pounding music as he continues his story. He seems to find his tale of criminal mischief quite entertaining; Courtney wishes she could say the same. She makes a mental wish that he's drunk, because she really hopes there isn't a person like this roaming the streets full-time.

Her eyes scan the packed living room for any hope of an escape. She recognizes some of the faces, but not well enough to gesture to them for a rescue.

"... and we're going, like, 75 through this neighborhood, and the cop's chasing us ..."

Courtney takes another sip of her drink. She's not entirely sure what it is -- maybe it doesn't even have an official name -- but it's one of Lauren's better concoctions. She's going through it pretty quickly, too.

*Maybe I can finish it fast and slip away to get more,* she thinks as the guy continues to prattle on.

She eyes the bar area. It's crowded, as it has been all night. She can understand why

Lauren and Trevor thought it might be cool to mix drinks and have people pay for them, but it's not so convenient when there are this many people drinking.

"... so we switch seats, and he said he was the one driving the whole time!"

The guy -- A.J. or J.D. or something like that, she remembers -- starts in with the laugh again. Courtney squeezes out what she hopes looks like a smile, then wonders why she's even concerned about seeming polite. But it's too late. Initial Boy starts moving closer, his body cavorting awkwardly to the Justin Timberlake song that's filling the room.

She's trying to think of a way to get out of dancing with him when she spots them: Lauren and Trevor, coming straight for her through the throng of dancers and loiterers.

All Courtney has to do is lift her eyebrows and grimace a little over her new friend's shoulder. Lauren gets the signal and rushes over, pulling Trevor by the hand behind her.

"Hey, babe," Lauren shouts over the music, snatching Courtney away from Initial Boy for a completely unnecessary hug. Court hugs back.

"I've been looking for you," Lauren says. "Can we talk for a minute?"

"Yeah, sure." Courtney does her best to look apologetic as she lets Lauren yank her away into the crowd.

"Thank you!" Court shouts when they stop somewhere in the middle of the living room.

"Aww, but you guys looked like you were having so much fun," Trevor pipes in from behind Lauren, a devious gleam in his eye.

"Oh yeah, plenty of fun."

Courtney notices Lauren starting to move to the music. She has an idea where this is going. It's their usual routine: When one of them wants a chance to dance with a guy, the other one starts it up, they dance with him together for a while, and then the initiator slips away.

Court has to laugh a little at the sight of Lauren dancing with her own brother, but she has a feeling that if she points it out, Trevor might stop dancing. So she keeps her mouth shut and joins them casually.

The song changes and the three keep dancing. Lauren comes over and dances behind Courtney for a while; that's the exit sign. A minute more and Lauren begins to break away.

"I'm gonna go check out the bar and make sure everything's okay," Lauren says to both of them.

Courtney nods and watches for Trevor's reaction out of the corner of her eye. He just nods. Good sign. No grimace, no look of fear.

Court draws herself in closer to him as their bodies keep pace with the beats and bass.

## **BROOKS HOME**

Alex picks his beer up off the coffee table and takes what has to be his tenth drink of it in the last two minutes.

"I've just been writing," he says to the girl seated beside him. He remembers her being in one of his classes the year he went to school in King's Bay. And apparently she remembers him, too, because she's planted herself firmly on the sofa and has been asking him all sorts of questions.

"You're not missing out on much," she says. "All I have to show for my degree is a 20-cent-an-hour raise at Starbucks."

"I didn't say I'm not looking for a job. I just haven't found one!"

"I'm thinking of going to grad school. Delaying the inevitable, I guess." The girl takes a tiny sip of her own drink. Alex watches her; she's pretty in a mousy sort of way. She sits with her shoulders hunched in and both hands circling the red plastic cup, flashing him a smile that makes it clear that she's really trying.

A flash of remorse rushes through him. She's sitting here, trying her hardest to forge some sort of connection with him. She's a perfectly nice girl, and the conversation hasn't been bad. But he's not in the mood for it.

He takes another drink from his beer. The can is getting light. He knows he should probably just stop drinking, but sulking sober doesn't seem any more appealing right now than sulking drunk.

The girl is still talking about her plans for the future when Alex feels a pair of hands come down on his shoulders. His first thought is that it must be Dylan, but he knows that Dylan had something to take care of and won't be there for at least another half-hour or so. Besides, it's not that sort of touch; he can just tell.

"What's up?" Jason says, giving Alex's shoulders a squeeze before removing his hands.

Alex turns and gives a shrug. The girl stares at both of them expectantly.

"Oh, uh, Jason," Alex says, trying to figure out how to do this gracefully, "this is--"

Luckily -- divine intervention, maybe -- Jason jumps right in. "Emily, right?" he asks, extending his hand to her.

She accepts it for a shake. "Yeah. We had Bio lab together sophomore year, didn't we?"

"Yeah. How're you doing?"

Alex zones out while Jason picks up the slack for him and makes small talk with Emily. He finishes off the rest of his beer and then holds the empty can in his hand, shaking it around for no particular reason.

"You need another drink?" Jason asks, breaking off his conversation with Emily.

"Yeah." Alex nods vigorously. Finally, an escape.

Jason drains the last of his beer. "Let's go take care of these," he says to Alex. He turns quickly to Emily. "We'll catch up with you later."

"Okay." There is a hopefulness in her voice that sends stabs of guilt searing through Alex. He certainly has no intention of going back, and he's pretty sure Jason feels the same way.

"Are you doing okay?" Jason asks as soon as they are a few feet away from the couches. "You look a little out of it."

Alex knows there's no point in lying. "Yeah, I am."

"What's wrong?"

"I don't know," Alex answers with a shrug. It's only half-true.

"You bummed about Dylan not being here?"

"Yeah, of course, I'm that pathetic and dependent." Alex turns off the sarcasm quickly and says, "I just feel a little weird being here."

"Why?" Jason asks, but before Alex can answer, Jason ducks behind the bar. He emerges a moment later with two more beers. "Let's go outside for a while."

Alex takes one of the beers and they begin forcing their way to the back door. It takes a surprisingly short amount of time, considering how densely packed the house is.

Jason sits down on the edge of the deck and pops open his can. "So what's bothering you?"

Alex sighs. He hates doing this. Of course, part of him has been hoping that someone would notice how uncomfortable he's been all night and come talk to him about it, but an equal part feels like an enormous imposition spilling all this out on someone.

"I guess it's the whole thing with my mom," he says finally.

"What about her?"

"I started thinking about her and it just, like, snowballed. And then I was sitting there talking to that Emily girl and all I could think about was that I'm wasting even more time now, and there are probably things I should be doing that I'm not--"

"Whoa. You *are* entitled to a little bit of recreation time."

"Yeah, but ..." Alex opens his beer and takes a drink of it as he paces back and forth behind Jason. "I don't like that I regret it so much."

"Regret what?"

"The way she died."

"You know there wasn't anything you could have done to prevent that," Jason says. He sounds weary all of a sudden, and it makes Alex weary, too.

"It's not that. It's--I barely even acknowledged her for the last year or two. We just lived in the same apartment and that was it."

"You can't do anything to change that. It's in the past." Jason looks up at Alex and then pats the deck beside himself. "Sit down. You're driving me crazy."

Alex sits down next to Jason and slumps silently, holding his beer between both palms.

"There was so much I never said to her," Alex says finally. "And so much that was just sort of hanging there between us. Now I've got this thing going on with Dylan and all I can think is ... I'll never have the chance to explain it to my mom. It's weird."

Jason's response comes with surprising quickness. "But you've got Don. And Courtney.

And me. And now Dylan. I know none of us are ever going to exactly be your mom -- well, I hope not, 'cause that would be kinda weird -- but we're all here."

"Yeah." It's the only thing Alex can think of to say. He's had this conversation with himself a hundred times. No matter what, nothing is going to bring his mother back. No amount of being depressed or bumming around or feeling guilty can do that.

He and Jason fall into silence underneath the navy sky, both of them looking heavenward as though they might be able to read the answer up there if they just look hard enough.

## **BRENT TAYLOR'S APARTMENT**

The sounds of the movie playing in the living room come to Molly as she stands in the kitchen, pouring coffee into two of the random mugs from Brent's cupboard. She places the pot back in its position in the coffee maker and goes in search of the milk and sugar. The milk's not so hard: It's sitting on the top shelf of the refrigerator. But the sugar is no longer in the cabinet where it's been for the last few weeks.

She begins opening and closing cabinets quickly, running her eyes over their contents and marveling at the complete lack of order. She's about to call out to Brent and ask where the sugar might be when she finally sees it.

She fixes their coffee -- both milk and sugar in hers, just a little bit of sugar in his -- and returns everything to its original place. That includes placing the sugar back in the cabinet in which she's used to seeing it.

Brent turns from the TV as she whisks both their mugs into the living room.

"You're missing a great part," he says.

"I'm sure I am." She sets the coffees down, appropriately enough, on the coffee table, thankful that she can find two of his NFL coasters for the mugs.

She settles back beside him on the couch and tries to refocus on the movie. But she wasn't too captivated by it before she got up to get the coffee, which was part of the reason she even proposed making it before; now she has no motivation to pay even the slightest bit of attention. She picks up her coffee, which is still too hot to be anywhere near her tongue, puts it back down, and glances over at Brent.

He's enjoying the movie, she can tell. He was concerned at the video store that she would hate it, but she urged him to get it because she could tell that he would like it. Now she's stuck watching Mel Gibson run around in the middle of some war, and the DVD's display tells her that there must be at least 45 minutes left.

Absently she picks up the mug again and goes for another sip of coffee. This time it hits her tongue, a split-second before she realizes that it probably still hasn't cooled down enough. Too late. She gasps as the coffee scorches the tip of her tongue.

"Too hot?" Brent asks, stirred from his movie-viewing daze by her sudden reaction.

"Yeah. It needs to cool down for a minute." Molly sets down her mug and directs her attention back to the TV. But she has no particular attachment to or interest in anything that's on the screen, so a minute or two later, she's glancing around the room.

This time Brent is the one to pull her abruptly from her gaze. "You're not so into this movie, huh?" he asks.

"No, no, it's fine," she says in what she hopes is a reassuring tone, even though she's pretty sure it isn't too effective.

He's already reaching for the remote. "I knew you wouldn't like it."

"Keep watching. It's fine."

"I'm not just gonna sit here and watch while you're bored out of your mind!" He doesn't sound annoyed or upset, just concerned that she's not enjoying it.

That makes her feel even worse about having him turn it off. "Finish watching it!"

"I can finish it later."

He points the remote at the DVD player, but Molly snatches it out of his hand.

"Hey--"

"I want you to finish watching it!" She moves the remote behind her back.

"And I want to turn it off!" He tries reaching around her to take the remote back, but she won't allow him to get ahold of it. She moves it from side to side behind herself, switching hands and keeping it just out of his reach.

His arms shoot out and grab her around the waist. With a shriek, she throws up her arms, holding the remote aloft with one hand.

"Give it to me!" Brent shouts, his voice broken by a laugh.

"No!"

He dives on top of her. She brings her hands down and tries to bury them underneath her body, but Brent is right on their heels.

Molly explodes in a fit of giggles as his hands employ an alternate means of attack.

"You're not getting it!" she yells, even though she can tell he's about to take possession.

A second later, he does. She holds on with all her might, but it's not enough. Brent's hand grabs the remote and holds it above both of them, but he makes no move to get off her.

"I win," he says, his grin just inches from her face.

"You do not."

"I do! Look." With the click of a button, the DVD stops playing and the screen goes blue. "See? I win."

"Actually, *I* win," Molly says. "The movie's off, isn't it?"

"Yeah, because I wanted it off."

"Only because I wanted it off first."

He doesn't produce another comeback. She's about to announce that she really does win when she feels his hand begin caressing her stomach.

"How do you know that I didn't want to get that movie just so you wouldn't want to watch it and we'd get to turn it off and not watch a movie at all?" he asks, obviously pleased with himself for producing such a twisted explanation.

"Because I do," she shoots back with wide eyes, "although I must say, that would be a pretty devious little plan."

"So there we go. I win. You lose."

"I don't know if this counts as losing ..." She lifts her head just enough to meet his lips and feels his weight sink down on top of her. All traces of the battle are forgotten in an instant as her hands begin to remove his t-shirt.

## **SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT**



The telephone's shrill rings cry out to Sarah through the front door. She turns in the key in the lock quickly and opens the door to rush inside. But Victoria goes sprinting in ahead of her, in a mad dash to bring her new doll to meet all the old ones, and by the time Sarah gets anywhere close to the phone, the answering machine has taken over.

She listens to her own voice on the message and the beep that follows. Instead of another voice, though, what comes next is another beep -- a button being pushed on the other end.

Sarah heads back to her bedroom, pausing to peek in on Victoria along the way. The little girl and her new doll are comfortably surrounded by an assortment of toys, somehow settled in already as if the play has been going on for hours.

Sarah heads the whirl of the fax machine before she even gets to her room. She goes to stand over her desk, waiting excitedly to find out what new information the machine is delivering.

She crosses her fingers in the hope that it has something to do with the divorce case -- potential divorce, the client has been saying to her, even though they both know where it's headed -- that she's been investigating. But as she reads the upside-down printout, she realizes that it has nothing to do with that case.

"Thank you, Troy," she says under her breath as she takes the document, several pages long, from the machine's tray.

The thin, glossy paper feels slippery between her fingers as she flips through the pages, scanning their contents as quickly as she can to get a feel for what it is that she's been sent.

It's an official police statement from the state of Pennsylvania, that much she can tell almost immediately. It's dated October 17, 1993. And it's signed by someone named Mia Davich, whoever that is.

*"Nicole had been distant for weeks. She wouldn't tell me anything. We barely spent any time together in the last month or so."*

Sarah sits down on the bed to read the document more carefully. Its bleak narrative tells her much of what she needs to know: apparently Mia Davich and Nicole Gray were close friends; Mia saw less and less of her friend in the weeks before Nicole's death; though she could tell something was seriously troubling Nicole, Mia had no idea what it might be.

Then comes the horrific part.

*"I tried to wake her up, but I couldn't. I could tell something was wrong. Her body was*

*limp and her hands were cold."*

During her time on the police force, Sarah often wondered if an officer eventually became desensitized to death. She never reached that point. Now, reading through the gruesome details of the statement, she's certain that she never would have. It's simply too terrifying.

Sarah finishes reading the account. By the time she sets it down on the bed, her own blood seems to have run cold inside her body. The fax sits in front of her, but she doesn't touch it, doesn't read it except for the few words that her eyes catch every time they move briefly in its direction.

She takes the phone from her nightstand and begins dialing, then stops mid-number. Not yet. Soon, but not yet.

But she knows what she has to do. And maybe, just maybe, the end of this road is about to come into view.

## **BROOKS HOME**

Throughout the evening, more and more people have been spilling into the area cleared out for dancing. Now the living room is flooded with bodies moving to the music, limiting access to the bar, and trapping the people on the couches in the corner.

Courtney and Trevor are right out there with the crowd. They've been dancing for quite some time, taking only the occasional break for a drink refill or a breather during a so-so song. Now they're in the thick of it, and the Outkast song that's playing provides a perfect soundtrack to their not-quite-sober movements.

"You're a really good dancer," Courtney says, leaning in close to Trevor's ear in the hope that he might actually hear her over the music.

"Thanks. You, too." He pauses, leans back, and adds with a grin, "I don't dance with someone for very long if they can't keep up."

"I can keep up, don't worry."

They continue dancing, Courtney's arms hung loosely around his neck. She feels his hands on the small of her back; every now and then, throughout the night, they've moved to her hips, but they always return to her back. She's been waiting for them to move somewhere else, to give some indication that this is going beyond just dancing with a friend, but so far, nothing.

While her body keeps rocking, her mind decides that it's time to step it up a notch.

"You know," she shouts, leaning in to him again, "those first couple times we met after you came back to King's Bay--I definitely didn't think we'd wind up spending time dancing together and enjoying it."

"What, I wasn't completely charming?"

"You were ... you know, a little difficult."

"Oh, *I* was difficult, huh?" She feels him pulling away and worries that she's just pushed too hard, but he's just doing it so that he can look at her face while they talk. He seems amused, even flirty. "And how were you, exactly?"

"My usual angelic self, of course!"

"Oh, of course." Their dancing slows as he says, "Well, as I remember it, I wasn't totally unjustified in standing up to you."

She shrugs, smiling wickedly at him. They keep dancing, and the song changes to a Nelly tune. Finally, taking a deep breath that she hopes he doesn't hear, Courtney leans back in.

"I think I can probably put up with you being such a pain in the ass," she says, her face just inches from his.

"Good, because I will continue to be that way."

She smiles again and moves her face closer. Now they're just millimeters apart. *Come on, Trevor, she urges him silently. Just go for it!*

Instead, she feels his hands pull off her back.

He's already moving away from her. "I'll be right back," he says.

Though she has no idea why, she gets the feeling that he won't.

## **BROOKS HOME**

"You feeling better?" Jason asks, shaking his empty beer can.

Alex nods silently. Just being away from the party for a while, getting to talk to Jason,

having the chance to get out everything that'd been building inside him all night -- it's made a huge difference.

Jason tips his head toward the house. "You ready? Or do you wanna sit out here for a little while longer?"

"No, I'm good. Let's go in." Alex can tell that Jason's itching to get back inside anyway, even though he'd probably sit out here for hours if Alex said that was what he needed.

"Besides," Alex adds, "Dylan'll probably be here soon."

Jason springs to his feet. Alex follows a moment later. He finishes the last of his beer and begins to follow Jason to the back door.

Jason reaches for the handle, but before he can grab it, the door comes flying open. It nearly hits Jason square in the face, but he manages to jump back just enough to avoid it.

"Sorry," the guy who's coming outside mumbles, already moving past them -- but he pauses just a bit when he sees Jason. "Hey."

"Hey, Trev," Jason says in return, and he continues moving back inside the house.

Now it's Alex's turn to pause. The guy -- it's him. The guy from the coffee house, and the Lookout, and the other club.

Alex is trying to figure out whether he should say something or just follow Jason inside when the other guy glances back at him.

## **END OF EPISODE #287**

*What are your thoughts on this episode? Feelings about Courtney and Trevor? Reaction to the ending? Insights on the situation with Nicole Gray, Mia Davich, and how Matt might relate? Join us in the Footprints Forum to discuss it all!*

[Next Episode](#)