

"Footprints" Episode #288

[Previously ...](#)

- Claire and Ryan's evening at home turned awkward when Samantha called Ryan "Daddy."
- At the party, Courtney and Trevor danced together. Just as Courtney became sure that they were going to kiss, Trevor broke away from her and rushed off.
- Alex ran into Trevor at the party -- and recognized him as the guy from the coffee shop and the clubs!

BROOKS HOME

"What are you doing?"

Courtney stands by the front door of the Brooks' house, her purse slung over her shoulder and her arms folded tightly in front of her.

"I'm going home," Courtney says, flashing her eyes across Lauren just long enough to be sure that it's her and then turning back to the door.

"What? Why?"

"I need to get out of here."

"What happened?" Lauren's fingers rest on Courtney's arm. It's a touch that is meant to be comforting, but right now it's just irritating.

"You tell me." Courtney adjusts her purse and glances around to make sure no one is within hearing distance. "Things didn't exactly go as planned."

"What do you mean--" Lauren cuts herself off, and Courtney watches recognition dawn on her friend's face. "With Trevor?"

"Yeah."

"What happened?"

"I have no idea. One minute we were dancing, and I was sure we were about to kiss, and then--bam. Nothing. He just took off."

The silence dangles between them for a moment before Lauren asks, "Did he say anything?"

"Not really. He just--" Courtney snaps her fingers. "--went running away."

"Weird."

"Yeah, seriously."

"That doesn't mean you have to leave."

"Except I feel like a total idiot," Courtney says. "It didn't just not happen. He, like, gave me the slip. He was definitely avoiding it."

"I should find him and figure out what's going on," Lauren thinks aloud. "Wait, so how are you getting home?"

"Whitney's taking off. She's giving me a ride."

Lauren can't really protest, as much as she'd like to. Whitney has been making a point all night of announcing to anyone within earshot that she would not be drinking tonight because of a job interview in the morning.

"Are you sure you wanna go?" she finally manages, hoping that it'll be enough to goad Courtney into staying.

"Yes. I don't want to hang around here and feel like a jackass for the rest of the night."

"Maybe he just freaked out," Lauren says. "Because you're my best friend or something. Maybe he thought it would be weird."

Courtney's already shaking her head. "Whatever. I'm not gonna go groveling for a second chance. I'll cut my losses off and go home."

"You ready to go?" comes Whitney's voice from a few feet away.

Courtney nods. Whitney walks right past both of them and opens the front door. Then she turns back to Lauren.

"Great party," she says, her bright-red lips pulled wide in an obnoxiously sugary smile.

Lauren forces a smile of her own. "Thanks. You guys be safe, okay?"

"I've got it under control," Whitney says. "I haven't had a thing to drink. I've got a--"

"I know," Lauren says. "Court, I'll call you later."

With a nod, Courtney follows Whitney out of the house. Lauren closes the door behind them, then starts wading back through the crowd to find Trevor and figure out what the hell just happened.

BROOKS HOME

Alex trails behind Jason, finishing off the last of his beer as they head inside from the deck.

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.

Trevor's eyes meet Alex's, and in that moment, scattered pieces from the furthest corners of his mind all come shooting together. Lauren's brother. Lauren's brother is the guy he's been running into all over town.

And he's gay. He must be. He was in both those clubs ...

Suddenly, all Alex's worrying, about Sally and Stan and his own bad mood, fades away, back into some spot where it can wait to pounce again later. Right now, the enormity of this realization has to dominate him.

"Oh yeah," Jason says, turning back from the door as if chiding himself for his own forgetfulness. "You guys haven't met. Alex, this is Trevor, Lauren's brother. Trevor, this is our friend Alex."

Alex's mind goes into overdrive, trying to discern whether he should pretend he's encountering Trevor for the first time. He can see the same thing going on within Trevor.

"Nice to meet you," Trevor says. He sticks out his hand and Alex meets it with his own, surprised to find that it's trembling just a little bit.

"You too," Alex answers.

He becomes aware that Trevor's eyes are searching him -- his face, in particular. Trevor's lips wear the barest hint of a smirk, as if he's somehow entertained by the whole situation; Alex wonders how Trevor can be so easygoing about this.

"There you are," comes Lauren's voice from just inside the house.

All the air in his body seems to lodge in Alex's throat at the thought that Lauren is about to see him and Trevor together. Even though he knows that they've done nothing wrong--and that she doesn't know that they have met already--and that she might even know about Trevor being gay--it fills him with panic.

"Can I talk to you?" she asks Trevor, almost completely ignoring Alex and Jason.

"Uh, sure, yeah." Trevor follows her into the house.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Jason asks once Lauren and Trevor are gone, as Alex realizes that he must be wearing his jumbled reaction all over his face.

FISHER HOME

The sounds of the front door opening and people coming into the house rattles Claire. She's been expecting Bill and Paula to return home for more than half an hour, but the sudden intrusion of movement and conversation upon the stillness of the house startles her nevertheless.

She sets down the cup of decaf coffee that she's been cradling between her hands and waits for them to come into the kitchen.

She listens to their voices -- though she can't quite make out what they are saying -- out in the living room, and to the creaking of the stairs a moment later. Soon after, Paula comes into the kitchen, still wearing the tasteful ensemble that Claire helped her pick out hours ago for her night out with Bill.

Claire watches as Paula reacts to the dimly lit kitchen by reaching for the light switch, only to freeze mid-motion once she spots Claire.

"I didn't expect you to be awake," Paula says, leaving the lights alone and coming closer to the table.

"I didn't expect to be awake," Claire says. She folds her arms, pulling her bathrobe tight

against her body. "But I don't have the energy to go to sleep, if that makes sense."

Paula responds with a knowing nod. "It does."

"How was your night?"

A warm smile spreads across Paula's face. "Very nice. We had a wonderful dinner, and the play was terrific."

"Good," Claire says, her head falling into a rhythmic nod.

"And your evening?"

"What?"

"Your night. How was it?"

"Fine. Quiet," Claire says as she pulls herself from her stupor. "We had a little ... bump, you could say. But it was fine."

"What happened?"

"Do you really want to hear about it?" Claire asks, certain that going upstairs to change must be infinitely more appealing to Paula right now.

But Paula simply goes to the cupboard and pulls out a coffee cup that matches the one from which Claire is drinking. "Is this decaf?"

"Yep."

Paula pours herself a cup and joins Claire at the table. "So tell me what happened."

With a sigh, Claire launches into the tale of Samantha calling Ryan "Daddy" and the damage control that had to follow.

"It sounds like you handled the situation well," Paula says.

"It went well, yeah. But just having to deal with it sort of rocked my world. I wasn't really ready to be at this point with Ryan and the kids yet."

"Unfortunately, you usually don't get to control when those things decide they need to be addressed." Paula sips her coffee thoughtfully. "But you've been thinking about having to deal with this?"

"Yeah. Every time I have the kids around Ryan. It's hard not to."

"How did Ryan react?"

"He took it well. I'm sure he was a little thrown by the whole thing, but he hung in there," Claire says, picturing the way that a look of total shock appeared on Ryan's face earlier, only to be wiped away in an instant as he tried to respond calmly to Samantha.

"It sounds like this relationship is becoming pretty serious," Paula says. "This is a pretty significant thing to be discussing."

It feels as though Paula's prodding her for some information, though Claire has no idea why or for what. As she answers, she realizes for the first time just why the evening's events have knocked her so far off-kilter: "I guess it's making me realize how important Ryan's become to me. He's a huge part of my life now. God, if not for him, I don't know how I would've even made it through that whole mess with Stan and Sally ..."

"That *is* serious." Paula goes quiet, gazing absently around the room, probably lost in thought. Claire sits silently, waiting for whatever advice or insight might emerge.

"Do you really think that this relationship might last?" Paula asks finally. She leans forward to await the answer.

It takes Claire a minute to produce one, though. "Yeah. I think it might," she says, a little surprised to be voicing the thought aloud.

"Good," Paula says. A weak smile appears on her face, and Claire gets the sense that it might be forced. But it must be hard for Paula to hear all this, knowing that the only reason it's happening is because her son died ...

Paula feels her breaths growing more and more shallow as she absorbs Claire's announcement. This is only getting worse -- more complicated, more convoluted. And it's becoming clearer and clearer to Paula that there's only one way to deal with it.

BROOKS HOME

Alex takes a deep breath. He feels his stomach twisting, though as he tries to convince it to calm down, he realizes that he's not even sure why he is so nervous.

"I'm fine," he says. But there's nothing definitive about it. Both he and Jason continue to stand there, as if they're in the middle of a conversation -- as if Jason knows just as well as Alex does that there's something else Alex wants to say.

He doesn't get the chance.

Even though he's staring into the house through the open back door, Alex hears Dylan's voice before he sees him.

"I'm here, finally!" Dylan announces. A second later, he comes into view as he rushes out onto the deck.

"That took longer than I thought it would," Dylan explains as he comes up beside Alex and puts an arm around Alex's shoulders.

Alex leans against him. "No problem."

"So how's the party?" Dylan asks.

Alex shrugs. Maybe getting out of here would be best for now. "It's okay. I'm not really in the mood for it."

"You wanna take off?"

"Probably a good idea."

"Are you sure you're doing okay?" Jason asks.

Alex holds up a hand. "Yeah, I'm fine."

Jason nods, but Alex can tell he's not totally convinced. For the moment, though, that doesn't matter.

"I'll see you back at the apartment," Alex says as he leads Dylan back into the house so they can leave.

Jason stands out on the deck and watches as they disappear back into the party.

Lauren waits until she and Trevor are at the top of the stairs, away from the party, before she says anything.

"What happened?" she asks. "I thought for sure you and Courtney would--"

"You don't have to play matchmaker," Trevor says firmly.

"I know. But I thought you guys might be good together. You looked like you were having fun."

"Yeah, I was. That doesn't mean I'm gonna marry her." Trevor's eyes scan the rest of the hallway, avoiding Lauren's.

It takes Lauren a moment to come out and ask him flat-out: "So you're not interested?"

He hesitates, just for an instant. "No. I'm not."

She's about to say something--anything--on Courtney's behalf, but Trevor doesn't give her the opportunity. He turns and goes to his bedroom.

He opens the door and then pauses. "Just don't worry about it, Lauren."

He goes into the room and shuts the door before she can say anything else.

BROOKS HOME

"Is it clear?" Jason asks at the sound of footsteps on the deck. He sits on the edge of the deck, feet dangling in the air, but he doesn't have to turn around to know that it's Lauren approaching.

"Yup," she says. The taps of her shoes against the deck's surface grow louder, then stop. "Everyone's gone."

He swivels his head and cranes his neck to look up at her. "Nice job, then. Turned out to be a good party."

"It seemed like it, yeah. I don't think I was really feeling the whole thing."

"Me neither." She lowers herself to sit beside him, and he notices the great care she takes to balance herself.

"Did you have fun?" she asks, sounding as if she already knows the answer.

"I didn't *not* have fun. But I think I was the same way as you. I had Alex out here for half the night talking about all his stuff ..."

"I spent way too much time worrying about other people, too," she says as she hangs her legs over the edge of the deck. Immediately they start swinging back and forth. Jason watches, mesmerized; the fuzzy wrap of the alcohol around his brain keeps his gaze

locked on the pendulum-like motion.

"Is everything okay?" Lauren asks after a silence just long enough to startle Jason. He breaks his eyes from her swinging legs.

"Yeah. I'm fine."

"And with Alex?"

"He's still working through all that stuff with his mom. It's gonna be a long time before he's really ready to move on, I think."

"It was good of you to sit out here and talk with him for so long. I'm sure it helped him a lot."

Jason starts swinging his legs to match the rhythm of hers. "I hope so. I just wish I'd gotten to run around more."

"Yeah, I was looking forward to getting to hang out with you," she says. Her legs swipe to the side and knock his out of rhythm.

He strikes right back, and that only prompts another kick back.

"In the name of peace," Jason says, "I'm not going to retaliate. But it's not a sign of surrender."

"Uh-huh."

"I'm serious."

"Sure ya are."

Without thinking about it, Jason throws an arm around her and pulls her in close to him. It's another step in the pseudo-battle, but that moment passes quickly, and he realizes that he's holding her close to him.

Suddenly his throat is dry. He swallows, and he's sure that she can feel the movement.

"You know what I was thinking tonight?"

He looks down at her. "What?"

"All this stuff that's happened--with me and Alex, and you and Courtney--maybe there

was a reason it all had to happen."

"To make us both total wrecks?"

"That, yeah. But also ... If that stuff hadn't happened, we never would have gotten to be as close as we have."

"Yeah." The night air buzzes all around him. "I wonder if that stuff will ever just be some kind of distant memory."

"It will. Everyone moves on eventually. You have to."

"I hope so." He tilts his neck upward. The dark sky hangs over them, endless swirls of navy and black. And when he brings his head back down, Lauren's is only a few inches away.

It takes him a moment to realize that she's simply studying his face.

It goes on for a long time, long enough to send Jason's mind wandering into a new realm. Before he knows it, their faces are inching closer and closer together.

When their lips touch, the first thing that hits him is how soft hers are. And when they part, he immediately tastes the hard lemonade on her tongue and in her mouth.

They stay like that for minutes and minutes, kissing and then pulling apart, smiling at each other, and then kissing again.

Neither of them ever looks back at the house. Neither of them ever sees the face staring at them from the open door.

And neither of them hears the footsteps retreating back through the house and out the front door, their pace growing faster and faster as they go.

END OF EPISODE #288

Are you glad that something finally happened between Jason and Lauren? Who saw them? Should Alex tell Dylan about Trevor? And what does Paula know she needs to do? Come discuss this episode in the Footprints Forum!

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