

"Footprints" Episode #291

[Previously ...](#)

- After everyone had left the party -- or so they thought -- Jason and Lauren wound up kissing. Unbeknownst to them, however, someone was still inside the house, and that person saw them kiss before running out.
- The next morning, Alex and Trevor advised Jason and Lauren, respectively, to tread carefully because of how messy their situation could be with regard to Courtney.
- Sarah spoke to Mia Davich, a friend of the late Nicole Gray. Mia's information seemed to confirm that Nicole's death was the breaking point in the relationship between Matt and his brother, Jake.
- After Paula and Claire had a talk about how important Ryan has become to Claire, Paula realized that she has to do something about her secret knowledge that Ryan is her son.

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

Lauren Brooks scans the lobby of the restaurant as she steps through its front doors. There's no one waiting to be seated, so she steps up to the hostess.

Then she sees Jason Fisher coming down the few steps from the bar area. Lauren freezes momentarily when she sees him. She's been trying to figure out what this moment would be like, how she would handle it, and now all it's here, and it's an uncomfortable mixture of all the painful scenarios she envisioned.

He does look good, though, in a pair of dark jeans and a grey t-shirt that fits snugly across his chest and shoulders.

"I grabbed us a table already," he says. His hands move awkwardly to his back pockets as he nods toward the bar.

Lauren follows him into the bar area, which is almost completely quiet except for the drone of the television, fixed to ESPN. Their table is a small, round one toward the corner.

A shiver goes through her as she thinks for the billionth time today about facing this situation. She doesn't want to. She wants to hear what he has to say.

A waitress arrives beside the table before either of them can say anything. Jason orders a Coke, Lauren an iced tea, and then the waitress leaves them to their as-yet-unspoken problems.

"How are you?" Jason asks.

It's polite enough, and it's the way that this probably should start off. But--no. Lauren doesn't have it in her to deal with formalities right now. She doesn't even know why they had to meet for lunch. When Jason asked her to meet him here, his voice sounding falsely strong, she wanted to ask if he'd thought about the timing of the whole thing, how it would be after he did his whole let-her-down-easy routine. Are they just supposed to sit here and finish a meal and pretend that everything's fine and back to normal?

More and more, Lauren's realizing that she can't do that, because she doesn't want it to be that way.

"I'm fine," she answers, at a loss for anything else. "How about you?"

He's nodding his head already. "Fine. Good."

She watches intently as his fingertips graze over the edge of the table, then the top of it, pressing down so hard that it looks as if he's trying to coax something out of it.

"I guess we have some stuff to talk about, huh?" He looks up at her, making the first real eye contact of the day.

She is about to agree, to sit back and take this and tell him everything's fine and suffer through lunch and go home -- but she suddenly finds words in her mouth that she hadn't planned on having there.

"There's something I need to say," she cuts in before he has the chance to speak. "That whole thing after the party -- us kissing -- that was a mistake. Can we just blame it on the alcohol and move on?"

DYLAN CARRINGTON'S CAR

"Can we listen to a different CD?" Courtney Chase asks, although the question part is something of an afterthought, because her finger is already jabbing at the 'eject' button on the panel.

"I like this song!" Dylan Carrington argues, but it's no use. Courtney pulls the CD from the player and opens up Dylan's CD case, which until now has been sitting on the floor by her feet.

Dylan makes a grab for the case, but Courtney yanks it away.

"You're in quite the mood today," Dylan says, refocusing on the road.

Courtney doesn't look up from the pages of CDs that she is flipping through. "No, I'm not."

A harsh little chuckle escapes Dylan's throat. "Please. You looked like you were ready to rip someone's head off every time either one of us made a tiny mistake at practice."

"So wanting us to skate well means I'm in a bad mood?"

"No. But being all pissy does." He turns to her and lowers his sunglasses so that she can see his eyes. "And you, my dear, are pissy."

"I'm just hungry." Courtney pulls a CD out of the case and sticks it into the player. Dylan recognizes the opening of the Christina Aguilera album.

"Come on, Courtney, talk to me." He slows the car as they come to a red light. "Besides, I am not sitting through a whole meal with you acting like this."

"Acting like what?" she snaps.

He just grins.

"All right, fine, I'm not in the best mood," she says, making it sound as if she's revealing something greatly surprising. "It's no big deal."

The light turns green, and Dylan waits for the car in front of them to go. It takes longer than it should, but finally they start moving through the downtown streets again.

They drive a few blocks in silence. Then Dylan says, "Courtney, just tell me what it is. You know you want to."

"It's nothing." She turns up the music and folds her arms in front of her.

Dylan glances over at her but says nothing. She's got a whole lunch to spill to him. And from the way she's acting, it's got to be something juicy.

FISHER HOME

Sarah Fisher steps through the already-open sliding door that leads from her parents' kitchen to their backyard. As she expected, she finds her mother crouched down in the garden that takes up a sizable portion of the yard, toiling away as usual.

"Hey," Sarah calls out.

Paula looks up, already smiling. "Hi, honey! What are you doing here?"

"I had to go see a client a couple of blocks away and I thought I'd drop in and say hi," Sarah says. She steps out onto the patio but remains within the comfortable shade of the shadow cast by the house.

"I'm glad you did," Paula says. She pulls off her gloves and sets them aside. "I could use a break, anyway."

"I don't know how you haven't passed out yet. It's about 600 degrees out here today."

"We should enjoy it while we can. It's not often we get weather like this." Paula removes her sunglasses as she joins Sarah in the shade.

"I could do with it being about 15 degrees cooler." Sarah's only been outside for a matter of moments, and she's already uncomfortable; she has no idea how her mother can spend hours out in this heat.

"Here, sit down. I'll get us some water." Paula disappears into the kitchen, and Sarah takes a seat at the round patio table, shielded from the sun by its large umbrella.

Her mother returns a minute later with two glasses of ice water, their outsides already misty with condensation. She hands one glass to Sarah as she asks, "So how are things? How's Victoria?"

"She's good," Sarah says, deliberately sidestepping the first question. "Right now she's playing with one of her little friends who lives near us. Julia--this little girl's mother--and I have been trading off afternoons when one of us needs a few free hours."

Nodding, Paula takes a sip of her water. She takes a seat in one of the other chairs. "And she's been seeing enough of Matt?"

There's something about the way Paula asks the question that unsettles Sarah. It's almost as if she knew it would be a sore subject and was looking for any angle from which to get at it.

Sarah dodges the topic with a simple "Yeah," and then goes on, "I started looking at preschools this week. We need to get her signed up for the fall."

"You should talk to Claire," Paula says.

"Yeah, I should." Sarah takes a drink of her water, a drink that lasts longer than she

thought it would; the coldness is a welcome, if fleeting, relief from the baking sun. "How are things around here?"

"Things are going well. Your father's busy with work, I've been able to work in the garden and spend time with Travis, and Claire's doing well. I think it's been good for her to be in the house with your father and me."

"After everything that happened, I'm sure it is," Sarah says. "And how about Ryan? Are they still together?"

Paula sighs. It's a sigh of acquiescence, like she knew that the subject of the family would bring them to this. "Yes, they are. She seems very happy with him, actually."

"You sound surprised."

"I am. Surprised and--" It takes a few seconds for Paula to produce a description. "--disappointed, I guess, in a way. Not that I'm not happy for her ..."

"... but that makes things a lot harder."

"Exactly."

Sarah takes another drink of her water. "I assume you haven't talked to Dad about this whole thing yet?"

"No, not yet." Paula's eyes go wide, but there's something about the expression that takes Sarah by surprise. It's not so much a look of terror as it is a look of resignation -- submission to something that Paula must realize she has to face eventually.

"You're gonna have to do it soon," Sarah says, though it's half-statement and half-question.

"I know." Paula lifts her glass to her lips, but it just lingers there while she stares off into space. "I can't ignore this forever."

"Are you gonna do it soon? Or are you waiting for a certain time?"

"I really don't know. I've been waiting, but I'm starting to realize that I don't have any idea what I'm waiting for except *some other time*," Paula says. "But it's up to me to make that time and confront this."

Flashes of everything that's been consuming her -- with Matt, Nicole Gray, Matt's brother, Mia Davich, all of it -- go surging through Sarah's mind. "Yeah."

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

Bill Fisher finishes tying the apron around his waist as he approaches the counter where Matt Gray stands, dipping pieces of fish into a bowl of batter.

"All right," Bill says, counting the number of pieces that remain to be dipped. "I can take over here."

"Kay," Matt says, but he continues with the dipping, his hand moving back and forth mechanically and his eyes glassy.

Bill stands there for a few more seconds, waiting for Matt to finish up, but he keeps going.

"You can go on your break," Bill says.

He's not sure if Matt hears him. There is no indication that he does.

"Or you could just skip it," Bill continues. "I'm sure you want to pick up a couple of extra unpaid shifts, right?" No response. "Oh, a UFO landed in my backyard last night. And, by the way, I'm leaving my wife for a 25-year-old man."

Bill might as well not be speaking, because none of it seems to be registering with Matt. Finally Bill takes the batter bowl away. That gets Matt to look at him, though his initial reaction appears to be one of surprise, as though it's news to him that Bill is standing there.

"Take your break," Bill says. He can tell he's getting through to Matt, at last. "What's going on with you?"

"Nothing," comes the answer. Bill recognizes it as a lie immediately, one only marginally better than the ones of which his kids were capable when they were five years old.

"You're a zombie. Why?"

Matt just shrugs and starts to remove his apron.

Bill blocks him before he can walk away. His tone grows sterner as he adds, "Matt, you can't be working like this. If you need time off, let me know. But it isn't smart for you to be in the kitchen like this."

"Sorry," Matt says with a sigh of defeat.

Bill lowers his voice and returns to a softer tone. "What's wrong?"

"I didn't get much sleep last night, that's all."

"Why not?"

"Look, does it matter? I'm tired. That's it. I'll get some rest tonight and I'll be good to go tomorrow."

"It does matter," Bill says. "You're not just another employee, Matt. You're my granddaughter's father. And you're a major part of my daughter's life."

"Yeah, well ..."

Ah-ha. *There we go*, Bill thinks. "You're very important to Sarah. You know that."

"That's what I thought."

"Why would you even question that? You know--"

"I don't know anything," Matt says. He looks tired, almost bored, with the conversation, but Bill is pretty sure that it's just his way of drowning out the world.

"What's going on with the two of you?"

"Nothing." Bill is about to question that, but Matt continues, "Just *nothing*. We don't spend any time together, and I get the impression that Sarah has other stuff that's a lot more important. It's like it just stopped."

"What do you mean?" Bill asks, wracking his brain for anything that he might've heard about Sarah's workload or Victoria or anything else that could give him a clue.

"A couple months ago, I thought it was going somewhere. We were getting closer, we were starting to date, we were spending a ton of time together. And then -- nothing. It's like someone flipped a switch and it just stopped."

"And Sarah's acting strangely?"

"Kinda, yeah. Like ... I dunno, like none of that is what she has in mind anymore." Matt pauses, then looks directly at Bill for the first time in the whole conversation. "Maybe she never did."

"I'm almost certain she did," Bill is quick to say. "I find it hard to believe that she

would've just changed her mind, either. Are you sure you're not just misreading things?"

"I don't see how I could be. I was thinking -- I've been thinking about it a lot lately -- and I wonder if maybe she's still hung up on Brent."

"That could be," Bill admits, as much as he would rather not. "Have you talked to her about this?"

Matt shrugs. "Kinda."

"Meaning, not really?"

"I've tried, but she just sorta avoids the issue." Matt pulls the apron over his head. "I've gotta go take care of some stuff during my break."

"All right," Bill says, but as Matt starts to walk off, Bill grabs his arm. "Wait."

"What?"

"I just don't want you to give up on this, at least not without a good fight. Sarah needs you in her life -- I know she does, and you know she does, whether or not she realizes it. I think you two have a chance at something wonderful, if you can get yourselves on the same page for more than a few minutes."

Matt just nods and then walks away.

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

"That's what you want? To just write the whole thing off and forget about it?" Jason asks, slowly, carefully.

"Yeah," Lauren says, but it takes a little bit of force to pull the word off her lips.

"Oh."

Lauren watches him carefully as the waiter arrives and sets down their drinks. He offers the waitress a halfhearted thanks -- more than Lauren can muster at the moment -- and begins fiddling with the straw in his Coke.

She can't take the silence any longer. "So everything's cool?"

"I guess so," he says. He mulls that over for a moment, then looks up sharply. "That's it,

then?"

Lauren finds herself nodding and at the same time marvelling at what she just did.

"I don't know if this is gonna make the whole friends thing awkward," he says suddenly, "but -- I mean, it shouldn't, 'cause we're such good friends, but you never know ..."

"What?"

"The reason I wanted to sit down and talk to you ... I guess I kind of assumed we'd be on the same page with this thing."

Her stomach suddenly feels both unbearably heavy and uncomfortably light. "We're not?"

He shakes his head but hastens to add, "I mean, if this is how you want it to be, then that's cool. But I really thought ... you know."

"You thought what?"

One of his shoulders rises in a weak shrug. "I kind of thought this was the beginning of something. Or the other night was, I mean."

Is he serious? Her mind starts shouting warnings not to jump to conclusions, not to read too much into things, not to put herself in the same situation she's put herself in before, but she can't help it. "You mean ... *something?*"

"Yeah." He smiles -- just a little bit, but it's his smile, the smile she's so familiar with, and it does an amazingly good job of helping to put her at ease. "But if you don't ..."

Screw it. He is serious. "No, Jason, I am--I do. I mean--"

Thankfully, he seems to grasp what she's getting at. "I thought you just said you wanted to forget the whole thing."

"I thought that's what you were gonna say," she says, her cheeks already filling with heat. "I just--I didn't wanna make you uncomfortable or put any pressure on you or anything."

She expects him to say something else, but he goes quiet. Every millisecond that passes chips away at Lauren's mind: *He thinks I'm nuts. Or an idiot. Or that I'm just covering because I feel bad. Maybe he's just saying this because he doesn't want me to feel bad. Wait, that doesn't make sense. He wouldn't do that. He just thinks I'm a total--*

"So are you, you know, *not* wanting to forget about the whole thing?"

She shakes her head. *Wait, he might think you mean that you do want to forget it.* "I don't. I want to--I don't even know, but if you want to--"

"I do." He seems relieved, but the weight that was just lifted from his shoulders appears to be replaced almost immediately. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about. This could be really messy. With the Courtney situation and all, I mean."

"Yeah."

"But what happened the other night," he says before she has to think of anything else to say, "that was something good. I really felt like it was. And I wanna see what comes of it -- if that's what you want, of course."

"That's exactly what I want," she says, finally feeling her lips relax into a smile.

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

Dylan pulls the keys out of the ignition. "Are you gonna at least, like, make conversation while we're eating, or should I bring something to read?"

Courtney just shakes her head and gives a little laugh. Dylan wonders if she realizes that he's serious.

They get out of the car and begin walking toward the restaurant.

"Courtney, come on," he says. "You'd better start talkin' once we sit down."

"It's not a big deal."

"Don't make me go back there and get *People*. Because I will."

"I think we can find something to talk about besides what a mess my life is," she says as they reach the door.

Dylan pulls open the door and holds it for her. She steps inside the restaurant, and he follows.

"See, that's totally, like, a cry for help," he says. "You *want* me to keep asking questions until I pry it all out of you, right? Just save us both the trouble and spill now."

She doesn't say anything. For a second, he figures she's just being difficult, so he keeps walking over to the hostess. Then he realizes that Courtney has stopped dead in her tracks.

So have her eyes, he realizes when he looks at her. He follows her gaze up into the bar.

That has to be what's got her so wound up, he realizes as he watches Jason and Lauren sitting there, talking, and then watches Courtney watching them. Steam might as well be blowing out her ears.

This could get very, very ugly, he thinks as he awaits the first move.

END OF EPISODE #291

How is Courtney going to react? Were you surprised by the way that Lauren and Jason's conversation went? And what's going to happen with Matt and Sarah? Join us in the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts and see what others think!

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