

"Footprints" Episode #295

[Previously ...](#)

- Courtney spotted Lauren and Jason eating together and told them how disgusted she was by their behavior. Later, she confessed to Dylan that she had spied them kissing after the party.
- Hoping to help Claire win custody of Samantha, Ryan offered Diane money, but she flatly rejected the idea.
- After Paula's revelation that she'd conducted a search for her other son, Bill advised Matt not to keep secrets from Sarah.
- Stan Lincoln disappeared from King's Bay after attacking Claire at gunpoint and accidentally killing his fiancée, Sally Marshall.

322 BAR & GRILL

The dinner crowd in the downtown eatery has begun to thin out as the summer evening turns to night. Diners are scattered throughout the restaurant now, and the packed house of an hour ago is a fading memory. A John Mayer song plays over the speaker system, providing a comfortable backdrop for the meals being finished.

Lauren Brooks scans the dining room. At first there is no sign of the reason she came here. Just as she is about to step up to the lanky teenager standing behind the host's podium, though, that reason appears.

Lauren watches intently as Courtney Chase emerges from the kitchen, holding a plate in each hand. Outwardly, she looks fine; she even smiles convincingly as she delivers the food to a booth by the back wall.

For a moment, Lauren wonders if the smile might have been genuine. Maybe Courtney's fine, and there was no reason to chase her down like this. Somehow, though, she doubts it.

Without even acknowledging the host, Lauren slips back into the dining room. She speeds up her steps to catch up with Courtney, but when it looks as though Court is going to disappear back into the kitchen, Lauren calls out for her.

"Courtney!"

Courtney turns, obviously out of instinct, but as soon as she sees who it is, she pushes the kitchen door open. Luckily, the pause has allowed Lauren just enough time to catch up to her.

"I've gotta talk to you," Lauren says, trying to find a balance in volume so that Courtney will understand her urgency but the rest of the restaurant won't be paying attention.

"I'm working," Courtney says curtly.

"But I need to talk to you. I've been trying to get a hold of you, and you haven't answered any of my calls--"

"I know." Courtney looks ready to dismiss her entirely.

"When's your shift over?" Lauren asks. "I'll wait."

"We don't have anything to talk about."

"We have plenty to talk about. Courtney, come on. After the way you acted the other day--"

Courtney exhales heavily. "I'm done in 15 minutes."

"I'll wait at the bar."

Courtney wastes no time in heading back inside the kitchen. Lauren tries to figure out where to wait and settles quickly on the bar; besides, a drink might help loosen her up for what she is sure will be one of the more uncomfortable conversations she's ever had.

The next time Courtney comes out of the kitchen, she has to pass right by the bar, but she focuses everywhere but on Lauren -- deliberately, no doubt. Lauren sighs as the bartender brings over her drink, wondering how she's supposed to salvage a friendship that the other person doesn't even seem interested in saving.

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

"One second!" Sarah Fisher calls out at the sound of the doorbell. She flips over the chicken breast in the pan and then hurries over to the front door.

"There you are!" she says when she opens the door to Diane Bishop. "I was starting to think you were gonna stand me up."

"I just got caught up finishing things at the office. People kept tossing crap on my desk all day." Diane sets her purse on the couch and follows Sarah back to the kitchen. "You cooking?"

"Yeah. Have you eaten? I can throw some extra food in."

"Nah, I'm fine. I've gotta go pick up Samantha from the babysitter's in the next half-hour, anyway."

Sarah makes a small incision in the chicken breast to check the color inside. It's still pretty pink. She presses down on it with the spatula, and the pan sizzles accordingly.

"What's this big announcement you wanted to tell me all about?" Sarah asks. "I've been waiting all day."

Diane holds up a hand. "I'll get to that. First things first, though. How well do you know that guy who Claire's dating?"

"Ryan?" Sarah asks. Her breathing tightens.

"Yeah. Do you know him well?"

"Not really. I've only met him a couple of times." That much is true. She doesn't know him well at all, actually. Even the minimal amount of researching she's done on him -- which she keeps meaning to continue, if she weren't already dealing with this Matt situation and her regular workload -- hasn't provided her with much insight into her half-brother. At this point, he's more a symbol to her, an indistinct individual who holds a very precarious, complicated position in her family.

"He came by my office today," Diane says. "Get this: He thought he could pay me to back off the custody suit and just hand Samantha over to Claire. Can you believe that?"

Sarah absorbs the information internally, keeping herself as focused on her cooking as she can to mask any outer reaction that might show.

Finally she shrugs. "He really wants to help Claire out, I guess."

"Then he should've hired someone a little smoother to do it! It was like he walked into the office expecting me to fall down at his feet. It was pretty pathetic."

"Was he an ass about it?" Sarah asks. She finds herself hoping that Diane has something positive to say about him.

"He was completely pompous. I basically laughed in his face and told him to get lost," Diane says. She shakes her head and grins, as if relishing the memory.

"Well, I can understand where he's coming from. He wants Claire to be happy."

"He's certainly not doing her any favors."

Sarah wants to continue the discussion, but she's not sure that she can do that without letting too much information out -- and, given the state of things between her parents, it's best not to push it right now.

"So what's your big news?" she asks, hoping to change the subject.

Thankfully, Diane takes the bait. "You aren't gonna believe what I pulled off," she says, folding her arms in front of her.

FISHER HOME

"Are Bill and Paula home?" Brent Taylor asks as Claire Fisher leads him into the living room.

Claire shakes her head. "Bill must be at the restaurant, I guess. Paula went out a few hours ago and hasn't been back yet."

"That's probably better," Brent says. "There's no point in anyone but you hearing what I have to say, anyway."

He stuffs his hands into the pockets of his slacks, looking pained. His whole demeanor is making Claire nervous.

She gestures toward the couch. "Have a seat. Can I get you something to drink, or--"

"No thanks," he says, holding up a hand. "How have you been, anyway? I've been meaning to get in touch with you for awhile."

Claire takes a seat on the larger of the two sofas. "I'm doing okay, actually. Things are-- well, not normal, but close."

"The kids are doing well?" Brent asks as he follows her lead and takes a seat, as well.

"Yeah. Diane and I are scheduled to go to court in a few days to finally get Samantha's custody figured out. I have no idea what to expect, but ..."

"Keep your chin up. You're a great parent. God knows you've managed to do an amazing job with Sam and Travis even with all this other crap that's been going on."

For some reason, the compliment embarrasses her slightly, and her eyes go to the floor

for a brief moment.

"Thanks," she says, refocusing herself to continue. "So what's going on?"

"It's nothing to panic over."

"Well, when the police commander calls and asks if he can come over to talk to you, your mind kind of starts shooting off in all directions -- especially when you've got a history like I do with the police."

She cracks a smile, but at the same time it feels strangely inappropriate to acknowledge the sheer ridiculousness of the situations that have dominated the last few years of her life.

Brent returns the smile as he says, "There's just something that I thought you might like to know. Or that you should know, actually."

"What is it?" she asks. Her teeth grit, anticipating some kind of warning -- or, even worse, actual evidence -- about Ryan and illegal activities.

There is a pause in the conversation -- in the whole encounter, really, because Claire swears that time suddenly slows down and starts ticking itself away in increasingly painful milliseconds -- before Brent speaks.

"Stan might be headed back to King's Bay," he says. "If he ever left, that is."

Her nervousness about Ryan, a kind of dull ache in the pit of her stomach that she tells herself she's learned to live with, gives way to a much sharper, much louder panic. Alarms start whirring in her head, and she can almost feel Stan's grubby hands all over her again and his stale breath blowing in her face.

"Why? What happened?" she tries to ask, though it comes out sounding much more like a demand.

"We got a report that he was spotted alongside the freeway, trying to hitchhike in this direction."

"Where?"

"About 30 miles north. We sent some officers out to follow up, but of course he'd disappeared by then -- if it was even him to begin with."

"Oh God." Claire racks her brain for a more intelligent response, but none presents itself. "Oh God. Is there some way you can ... ?"

"We can offer you protection, if you'd like it. There isn't much more we can do about finding him without some other kind of information, though." He pauses, as if giving her a moment to grieve, and then adds, "There is one question I have for you, though."

"What?"

She can tell it's going to be bad by the way he draws a deep breath before spitting out the question.

"Is there any chance -- any chance at *all* -- that Ryan might know anything about Stan's whereabouts?" Brent asks. Claire swears that he recoils the moment he's done asking it, as if he expects a slap or an attack in return.

"He doesn't," she says firmly. "If he did, he'd have killed him already. If there's one thing you have to believe about Ryan, it's that he hates that man."

Brent seems to restrain himself from pursuing the issue any further, which is fine by Claire.

"Sorry to be the bearer of bad news," he says.

She sighs. "I'm used to it by now."

322 BAR & GRILL

Lauren is so caught up in her thoughts that she barely notices when someone places a purse on the bar and then sits down beside her. But the tension, a sort of cold, irresistible force, makes it impossible for her to go more than a few seconds without noticing Courtney's presence.

They sit in silence, both before Courtney asks the bartender for a drink and afterward. Lauren tries to come up with some way to start this up, but every bit of preparation she's done for this moment went flying out of her head the instant she set foot in the restaurant.

The bartender brings over Courtney's drink. Lauren is sure that she sees him giving them a weird look. *God, even he knows something's up*, she thinks, forcing herself to open her mouth to speak.

But Courtney beats her to it.

"I saw you kissing," Courtney says, flatly, and yet with a hint of something else in there.

An accusatory stab, maybe. That's certainly how it feels to Lauren.

"You what?"

"After the party. I forgot my purse, so I had Whitney drive me back to get it. I was in the kitchen, and I saw you guys in the backyard." Courtney ends the explanation quickly but continues staring right at Lauren, as if expecting her to top *that*.

Lauren opens her mouth, but it closes of its own will.

"Did you guys seriously think I wouldn't find out?" Courtney asks. "You could've *told* me about it."

"There's nothing to tell! That night is literally all that's happened -- and you saw the extent of it."

Disbelief drips from Courtney's voice. "I just happened to catch the one isolated instance of you two hooking up?"

"We didn't hook up!" Lauren counters, fighting to keep her voice down. "We kissed. That's it. It's not like we've been having some secret affair for months and months."

She can tell that Courtney doesn't quite believe her.

"I'm telling the truth, Court. I swear. Jason asked me to meet him for lunch so we could talk about what happened and get everything straight."

That seems to disarm Courtney, at least momentarily. But just as Lauren starts to relax a little, Courtney springs back into action.

"So what'd you decide?" she asks. "Are you just gonna pretend it never happened and go on like normal?"

Lauren wants to answer quickly, but she can't think of anything -- a *lie*, jeez, that's what she's trying to come up with -- fast enough. It feels like something is searing a hole in her stomach.

"Well, that's great. There's my answer," Courtney says with all the authority of a Greek chorus. She starts to stand up. "I can't believe you would do this."

"It's not like that. Jason and I have just spent a lot of time together--"

Courtney hops fully off the barstool. "You know what? Do whatever you want. I'm not

gonna stop you."

The words should be a relief, but they feel like an indictment to Lauren. She starts to protest but doesn't even get a sound out before Courtney cuts her off.

"I guess I just thought you were a better friend than that," Courtney says, grabbing her purse from the bar and walking away.

Lauren doesn't even bother to try to keep her from going. There's nothing she can say or do right now that's going to make this situation any better.

She stares into her drink, repulsed by the thought of taking another sip of it, and becomes aware for the first time in minutes of the music that is still playing over the restaurant's speakers. She's heard the song before; it's by Jason Mraz. Her ears perk up and then flinch at the line she knows is coming, and she forgets the song and falls back into thought once that line has come and gone:

*"Shine the light on all of your friends,
'Cause it all amounts to nothing in the end ..."*

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

The self-satisfied look lingers on Diane's face as she draws out the moment, clearing wanting to squeeze every possible drop of drama out of it.

"Come on," Sarah prompts, though it's more for Diane's benefit than her own.

"|--"

Before Diane can even launch into her explanation, the doorbell rings again. Sarah holds up her index finger to tell Diane to hold on and then exits the kitchen.

All thoughts of Diane's surprise fall away as Sarah finds a surprise of a completely different nature: Matt, standing at her front door, looking very uncomfortable.

"Can I come in?" he asks. He sounds genuinely concerned that she's going to refuse.

"Yeah, of course." She steps aside to let him in. "What's up?"

"There's something I need to talk to you about."

"Okay ..."

Suddenly Diane appears from the kitchen. "I should get out of here," she says, already hoisting her purse back onto her shoulder.

"I didn't realize you had someone over," Matt says. "I can--"

Diane shakes her head. "I've gotta go, anyway. I need to pick Samantha up at daycare."

She starts moving for the door, then turns back to Sarah. "Do you want me to jot down that address for you?"

It takes Sarah a moment to remember that Diane had a website to show her, too.

Sarah nods. "Yeah, there's some paper by the phone in the kitchen." She looks to Matt. "We can go in the bedroom and talk." Then back to Diane: "Just let yourself out."

"All right, I'll give you a call tomorrow," Diane says as she goes back to the kitchen.

Sarah leads the way to the master bedroom. Matt follows, looking as if he's about to throw up.

Diane finds a pen sitting on top of the tiny pad of white paper, right next to the phone in the kitchen as Sarah said it would be. She quickly writes down the website address and caps the pen.

She's on her way out when something on the kitchen table catches her eye. She's not sure why she even gives it a second look, but something tells her that she *has to*. So she goes over to the table and gives the paper, which is the first in a stack of papers sitting inside an open file folder, a quick scan.

She's almost certain that her jaw actually drops.

END OF EPISODE #295

What's going on with Diane and her big announcement? Why did Matt show up looking so uncomfortable? Is there a chance for Lauren and Courtney's friendship? And is Stan on his way back for Claire? Visit the Footprints Forum to join in the discussion!

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