

"Footprints" Episode #298

[Previously ...](#)

- While writing at the coffee house, Alex encountered Trevor, who said he doesn't hold what happened with Lauren against Alex. Trevor offered to read some of Alex's novel and get back to him with feedback.
- Courtney told Helen that she feels betrayed by Lauren's pursuit of Jason.
- Nick and Katherine plotted together to break up Ryan and Claire. At a meeting for investors in Camille's new company, Ryan made it perfectly clear to Nick that he wants to know nothing about his father's business dealings.
- With Samantha's custody hearing approaching, Ryan offered to pay Diane to relinquish custody to Claire. Diane laughed in his face.
- After Paula told Bill that she'd searched for her son behind his back, he left the Fisher home. The next night, Paula had to admit to Claire that she had no idea where her husband was.

FISHER HOME

"Maybe you don't need to worry about it," Ryan Moriani says, staring ahead at the television as he lazily runs his fingers through the dark strands of Claire Fisher's hair.

"Yeah, I do," Claire says. She pauses and then adds, "Besides, that's what I do. I worry."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"Can you blame me, after all the crap I've had to put up with?"

That quiets Ryan and sends his mind wandering off into thought. They sit in silence on the Fishers' living room couch, Claire bunched up against Ryan as a *Friends* rerun plays out on the TV.

"You just need to take it easy," Ryan finally says. "You won't do anyone any favors by getting all worked up over this."

It takes Claire a moment to respond, but when she does, Ryan feels her tense up even more beneath his touch.

"Just thinking that a judge could tell me tomorrow that I have no right to see Samantha anymore--"

"No judge is going to say *that*," Ryan says. He hopes it's the truth. He'd like to believe it

is; Claire has been too good a parent to Samantha, despite not even being her biological mother, to lose all rights to her.

But there's no telling how a judge might interpret the situation, and if there's one thing Ryan realized from his brief encounter with Diane Bishop, it's that she won't go down without a fight.

"Maybe Travis, you, and me should go do something tonight. To take your mind off things," Ryan offers.

"Maybe. He's beat after that teeball game, though."

The telephone interrupts before Ryan can respond. They both move, but Paula's voice stops them by calling out from the kitchen: "I'll get it!"

The phone's next ring gets cut off halfway.

"Speaking of things to worry about," Claire says, "I'm worried about Paula and Bill."

"Why? Is something wrong?"

"*Something* is wrong, but I have no idea what. I'm pretty sure that Bill hasn't slept here the last couple of nights, and the only times I've seen him are for short spurts when Paula's not around."

"Are you sure they're not just on weird schedules?"

"No, Paula admitted to me that something is going on, but she wouldn't tell me what." Claire sighs heavily. "Whatever it is, though, it seems serious."

In the kitchen, Paula stands close to the wall, holding the phone with a trembling hand.

"I'll be waiting," she says.

There is a click on the other end of the line. He didn't even bother to say goodbye.

But he's coming over, and that's what matters. Maybe she can make him understand her point-of-view in this situation ...

She turns off the phone, places it back on the receiver, and looks around the kitchen for

something to occupy herself while she waits for Bill.

BROOKS HOME

Trevor Brooks hears the car door slam outside, but he thinks nothing of it until the doorbell rings a moment later. Even in the ring, he can sense bad news: there's something hostile about it, as if whoever rings it is stabbing it with a finger meant for someone very particular.

Trevor sets down the stack of printed pages that Alex gave him and hurries from the living room to the front door. He opens it to find Courtney Chase with a scowl on her face and a plastic crate in her arms.

"Is Lauren here?" she demands.

"Nope," he says, strangely uncomfortable at unexpectedly being caught one-on-one with her. He hasn't seen her since the night of the party, and he hasn't particularly wanted to, either.

"Well, whatever. I just wanna leave this for her."

Courtney pushes past Trevor -- nearly barreling him over with the crate -- and drops the box on the floor of the foyer.

"I take it you didn't bake her cookies," Trevor says, unable to resist.

"It's a bunch of stuff she left lying around my house and my car."

Trevor folds his arms. "So what is this, like, the official breakup gesture?"

"That's what it looks like," Courtney says. "Not like we have much of a friendship to hang onto, apparently."

"Ah-ha. So this is about the Jason thing, then?"

"She's told you about it?"

"I am her brother. We do like to talk to each other about what's going on in our lives from time to time."

Courtney stares scornfully at the crate. "Then yes, it's about that. How am I supposed to trust someone as my friend if she can't even respect the one major relationship I've had?"

"You know it's not that cut-and-dry," Trevor says. "I think Lauren's been developing feelings for Jason for a long time, and she never even considered acting on them because of you."

"But she did."

"You've done nothing but push him away for, what, a year and a half? And you've been pushing her to choose a side the whole time, too -- your side, of course. But you've gotta consider that maybe something significant has happened between them while they've been trying to get their lives back in order from that whole other mess."

Courtney narrows her eyes at him, and he prepares for a full-out attack. But when she speaks, it's a dismissive "Whatever."

"I'm just saying, Courtney, that it might not be the black-and-white situation you're making it out to be--"

"And I'm telling you to shut up, okay?"

She marches out the front door but turns around once she's out on the porch. "I know you must think I'm some kind of joke," she spits, "letting me practically throw myself all over you at that party and then just walking away like you did."

"That wasn't--"

She plows onward, seemingly unaware that he has even tried to say anything. "I didn't put up with it with Jason, I'm not putting up with it with Lauren, and I'm sure as hell *not* gonna stand here and let you talk to me like I'm some idiot who's totally missing the big picture. Your sister is stomping all over our friendship by going after Jason like she is, and I'm not gonna see it any other way. End of story."

Courtney turns sharply, her dark ponytail whipping around behind her, and makes a beeline for her car at the bottom of the driveway. Before she gets in, she shoots one more aggravated look at Trevor.

He doesn't envy Lauren one bit for having to deal with this disaster of a situation.

MORIANI HOME

Nick Moriani taps his pen on the edge of the mahogany desk as he listens to the voice on the other end of the line.

"Yes," Nick tries to cut in, "but--"

It's no use. The man goes on berating him. Nick squeezes the pen tightly in his fist.

"With all due respect," he says when he finally gets the chance, "I don't know if that would be the--the most beneficial path."

But that just starts it up again. Nick allows his ear to get chewed off for another minute, but it's clear this is going nowhere. For every bit that the Espositos want to make this work, Nick hopes it won't. This isn't something he wants to be dealing with ...

He manages to get off the phone with very few additional words, just some more listening -- muzzling himself, for the moment, anyhow -- and a cordial goodbye. Not that that's going to sway anybody, but it's better not to piss anyone off right now.

His brain is already going into overdrive as he hangs up the phone. Unless he can find a way around it, which doesn't seem likely, they're going to force this on him. Damn it.

The first thought that comes to him is to call Ryan and brainstorm, but he remembers almost as quickly that that's not an option. As much as he hates to admit it, he could use his son's assistance with this.

He can't risk provoking the Espositos anymore. There has to be a way to make this work.

FISHER HOME

The house looks strange to Bill as he climbs the front steps. He's made several visits here, mainly to retrieve clothes and other things, since the night he left and checked into the hotel. But they've all been stealthy little missions, carried out at times when he was nearly certain the house would be empty.

This is different. He's the one who called Paula; he's the one who is making the effort to see her.

He hears voices as he enters the front door, and he recognizes them as belonging to Claire and Ryan once he's inside the house. They both freeze and stare at him, as if they know what's going on but have no intention of recognizing it.

"Hi," Bill says, deciding to follow their lead.

"Hi, Mr. Fisher," Ryan says. A quick hello from Claire follows. Neither of the greetings acknowledges that there's anything unusual about this instance of Bill walking into his own living room, but he can tell that they're both quite aware of it.

He wants to ask where Paula is but thinks better of it. Instead he passes quickly through the living room and goes straight for the kitchen.

Thankfully, she's in there. He could have pretended that he was coming in here for something to eat and then gone upstairs to find Paula, but not having to pass through the living room again is a relief to him.

Paula stands by the open dishwasher. Three stacks -- large plates, small plates, and bowls -- sit nearby on the counter, and several items remain in the dishwasher. They share a long stare.

Finally, Bill has to break it. "I, uh, I guess it's about time we talked, hmm?"

"I guess so." Paula's tone is curt, not at all the apologetic and selfless woman he was expecting to find.

"I'm going to move back in," he says, though much of the impact of delivering the news has been obliterated by her coolness.

"Good." It's more a filler than a legitimate response. There's certainly no emotion behind it.

The silence bears down on both of them for what feels like a very long few seconds.

"Paula, I never wanted this to be the end for us," he says. The words come spilling out. "I needed time to think. Being away from this all for a little while--that was the best way for me to do that."

She stares hard at him for another few seconds and then asks, "And? What did it accomplish?"

"It made me realize that I still want to be here. I belong here. This is my home--our home."

"Does that mean you're ready to accept my decision to look for my son? Because I can't--"

"I'd like to," he cuts in. "But I can't pretend that it hasn't hurt my trust in you. Things aren't automatically going to be perfect."

"I wouldn't expect them to be." That same cool tone. But then, suddenly, he sees her soften. The lines in her face relax, and her lips move out of the tight shape they've been in since he arrived.

"But I needed to do this, Bill," she says. "I needed to know about him. I don't know how many times I have to explain that to you. That child is a part of me."

"I know. And ... maybe it's something we'll never agree on. But do you really think I'm stupid enough to throw all of this away?" His hand sweeps out, gesturing toward the whole room, the whole house, but they both know that he's talking about so much more than that.

"I would hope not."

"I'm not. You know that."

The look she gives him shows a doubt that fills Bill with alarm. He's always wanted to believe that they were stronger than any disagreement, no matter how large.

The next question springs out of him suddenly: "So you know who he is, then? His name, his address, that kind of thing?"

He can see Paula tense up again. "Yes. All of that."

"Have you contacted him yet?"

"No." But she hastens to add, "I'm planning to, though."

Bill's system floods with an instinct to protest, but he contains it. He has to start somewhere.

But maybe this is enough for now.

"I'm going to go back to the hotel," he says. "Tomorrow, I'll check out and bring my things back here. And then we can start to figure out what we do next."

Paula nods, another tight, restricted movement. He wants to reach out and pull her to him, wrap her into an embrace, but something wouldn't be right about it at the moment. He knows that.

"I'll see you tomorrow," he says. He starts to turn but stops himself. "I love you."

"I love you, too," she answers.

Those words carry him back out through the living room, past the inquisitive eyes of Claire and Ryan, down the front steps, and back into his car.

But when he looks back at the house, it still looks strange. All these years, and one piece of news is all it takes to make a home seem like some sort of alien structure.

BROOKS HOME

The stack of papers hits the couch with a loud *whiff*. Trevor lays his head on the back of the couch and covers his hands with his eyes.

Before Courtney's pleasant little visit, he was consumed by the introductory chapters of Alex's novel. From the way Alex described it, Trevor was expecting to have to put some serious effort into slogging through the reading. But it's proven to be a pretty easy read, engaging but not too heavy.

But the encounter with Courtney blew whatever concentration he had.

"I know you must think I'm some kind of joke, letting me practically throw myself all over you at that party and then just walking away like you did."

It wasn't like that. Trevor knows that. He wishes Courtney understood it, too. But there's no reason to expect she would ...

The jingling of keys in the front door breaks his train of thought, at least temporarily. As Lauren steps into the house, though, the two tracks merge in his mind.

"Hey," she says. She looks at him a little more carefully. "Everything okay?"

"Uh, yeah. Sort of."

"Sort of?"

Trevor stands and points to the plastic crate, still sitting where Courtney dumped it. "You had a visitor. Courtney came by to drop off some of your stuff," he explains.

"Oh, God." Lauren goes over to the crate, opens it up, and begins sifting through the contents. "Was she completely raging?"

"To put it mildly ... yes."

"Ouch. Sorry you had to deal with that."

"That's what brothers are for, right?" he says with a smile.

Lauren laughs a little. "To deal with your friends who are pissed off that you might have something going on with their exes?"

"Yup." The smile lingers on his face for a moment, but he can feel it fading fast. He rubs his hands together. "Hey, I know you've got a lot to worry about, but do you have some time to talk?"

She must be able to tell that it's serious, because she immediately shifts gears. "Yeah. Of course. What's up?"

"It's kinda complicated," he says, "but there's something I need to tell you about."

FISHER HOME

Claire and Ryan watch the TV in silence until the front door closes.

"That was quick," Claire says.

Ryan nods. He was thinking the same thing, but he wasn't going to say anything.

"I hope that's not a bad sign," she says, "although I don't see how it wouldn't be ..."

"Everything is fine," comes the voice from the edge of the living room.

Ryan's head turns at the same time as Claire's to see Paula standing just inside the dining room.

She takes a few steps closer to them as she continues, "I don't want you two to be concerned. Bill is coming back."

Ryan assumes that they're supposed to be relieved, but the way Paula speaks makes it sound as though they've put a band-aid over the situation instead of actually resolving it.

"Claire, do you want me to go up and get Travis ready for bed?" Paula asks.

Claire stands before she answers. "No, I'll go do it." She glances at her watch and adds, "It probably is time for him to pack it in. He's had a long day."

Ryan looks up at her. "Do you need any help?"

"No, just wait here. I'll be back in a minute."

Claire hurries up the stairs. An awkward silence enfolds Ryan and Paula; though he's spent a fair amount of time around the Fishers, he hasn't often been alone with any of them, and Claire's absence makes casual conversation a lot more difficult.

He's about to spring into some sort of generic topic when Paula says something instead.

"Ryan," she says quietly, maybe even trying to keep her voice down, "I need to ask a favor of you."

He nods. He's not sure whether he should be putting up his defenses or pleased that she seems to be asking for his assistance, so he waits for more.

"Sometime soon -- later tonight, or sometime in the next few days -- could we make some time to sit down and talk? Without Claire?"

The request strikes Ryan as odd, but he agrees nevertheless: "Sure. I know Claire has to work in the morning, so maybe after she goes to bed--"

"That'd be perfect. I'm just going to be around the house for the rest of the night, anyway."

Without another word, Paula disappears from the room, back into the kitchen. He hears the glass doors out to the deck open and then close.

But a strange sense of dread has begun to flood his system. What could she want to talk about? And why did she sound so hush-hush about it?

END OF EPISODE #298

Is the time right for Paula to tell Ryan the truth? What did you think of Trevor's encounters with Courtney and Lauren? And how about that cryptic scene with Nick? Come and share your thoughts in the Footprints Forum!

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