

"Footprints" Episode #223

[Previously ...](#)

**Katherine admitted to Andy that she arranged for Danielle's tour so that Andy and Danielle could never reunite. Mother and son had harsh words for one another and Andy stormed out.*

**After Ryan visited the hospital to check on Brent's condition, he and Claire had another argument. He accused her of going after him and Nick because her father didn't live to be punished for his crimes.*

**Courtney convinced Lauren to attend a party being thrown by their friend, Whitney, despite the fact that Alex will also be there.*

**Alex reflected back on his time in college but found the memories too painful to explore in depth.*

WINDMILLS

"Is everything all right? I would swear you're in an entirely different place right now."

The accusation jerks Katherine back to the present. Even so, it takes her a moment to pry herself away from her thoughts and settle herself. Her gaze wanders over the restaurant yet again, though less absently than it has been doing for the last fifteen minutes or so. She suddenly realizes that Nick has been making conversation the whole time and she has not heard a word of it, supplying only "hmm"s and "oh"s at what seem like appropriate intervals.

"I'm sorry," she says with a shake of the head. "I'm not particularly good company tonight, I suppose."

A smile rises briefly underneath Nick's silver mustache. "You're wonderful company anytime, Katherine. But it worries me to see you so upset."

Katherine draws in a deep breath through her nose and then lets the air drift back out. "It's Andrew. That confrontation the other night--" She stumbles, at a loss for the proper words. She tries to figure out what it is, exactly, that she is even thinking. "This is the worst it's ever been, Nick. Even worse than when he and Danielle originally found out what I had done, I think."

"He'll come around," Nick says as his lips hug the edge of his wine glass. He takes the slightest sip and then places the glass down.

"What if he doesn't? What if he isn't able to see that I did what I did for his good? What if--" Again, she trips over her thoughts as they rush out too quickly to become words.

"Katherine," Nick interrupts. "Are you sure that's all that's bothering you? You're in a frenzy."

Her first instinct is to cover. "I'm not--it's just--" But she can't. She composes herself as best she can, using a lengthy sip of wine to try and calm herself.

And then it comes out of nowhere, before she even realizes it is on the way: "I want to know about your business, Nick. The truth. I want to know how exactly you make your money."

Shock registers on Nick's face instantly. His efforts to reign it in are minimally effective and he is forced to stroke his mustache as he tries to soothe his screaming nerves.

"Where is this coming from?" he asks finally, pleased with how even he is able to keep his voice. "And why has it got you so concerned all of a sudden? We discussed this months ago."

"I know." She folds her hands together in her lap and inhales deeply. "I know. But I--I've heard some suggestions, what with Andrew and Brent Taylor and that Maggie trying to force me to leave you."

"What kinds of suggestions?"

Katherine's eyes remain fixed on the table as she forces the words out with all the might she can muster. "Why did you marry me, Nick? Was it for money?"

MORIANI HOME

The electric buzz of the television drones on, registering only on the periphery of Ryan's mind. He is aware of the energetic play-by-play spouting out of the announcers, of the cracking of bats against balls, and of the cheers and boos ripping through the crowd. But none of it is penetrating his mind tonight.

The television's light spills out over Ryan as he slouches in the leather armchair, head propped up in one hand as he stares blankly ahead. Nights like this are what make him crazy. The days are easier to handle: There are things to get done and people everywhere. But the nights, especially in the empty house, are getting to be too much for him.

He throws back another slug of scotch. If everything had gone correctly -- the way he'd hoped -- things would be so different now. All he wanted from King's Bay was Claire. He was so sure that he could make her see how special what they had was, that she'd

realize it and drop everything to come back to him. Even though he'd been withholding the truth about her attack and she'd been with Tim and there were a million other things in the way ... Ryan just kept thinking that if he could make her feel that passion again, none of that would matter.

He did make her feel it, too, he knows that much. He's seen that flicker of remembrance dance over her eyes so many times during their encounters; he felt that electric pull, even if only for a split-second, the one time he kissed her; and he's heard it in her words as she reams him out time after time. He knows that she remembers.

But none of that is enough now. It certainly doesn't seem like it. Even with Tim *gone*, nothing has happened. For so many years, all Ryan felt for Claire was this incredible longing. If he could have her, everything would be perfect.

And now that she's back in his life, he feels something else boiling inside. Hatred. For her? No, not possible. It's hatred of the situation they're in. Hatred for Nick, for forcing him to continue in their line of business. Hatred for Tim, for being such an enormous part of Claire. Hatred for ... for everyone and everything that's standing in their way now.

He doesn't even hear the doorbell at first. It blends into the muted tapestry of noises coming from the TV, and it rings a second time before Ryan realizes that something is off. Even then it takes him a long moment to become aware that someone is at the door.

He doesn't want to answer it. The groan as he pulls himself from the chair indicates as much. Yet he moves out of the chair nonetheless, and makes his way to the front door.

The foyer is dark as he crosses it but it is flooded by the porch lights as soon as he opens the door. And Ryan stands there, covered in light now, completely silent, his face a stony mask.

"Hey," Stan says. "You, uh, you alone?"

"Yeah, I am," Ryan says after a momentary hesitation. He thinks of asking what Stan is doing there but finds that he doesn't want to say anything more than is absolutely necessary.

"What, the big guy went out and left you here?" Stan offers an awkward grin.

Ryan doesn't return it. When it becomes clear that Stan isn't going to move this along, though, Ryan has to take the bait. "What are you doing here?" he asks, infusing as much coldness as he can into the question.

"I wanted to see you."

"What is with these visits? You just drop by unannounced every couple of months and then disappear again--"

"You might be seeing a lot more of me now."

"What?"

Stan pauses, clearly relishing the drama of having an announcement to share. "Looks like I'm gonna be settling in King's Bay."

CHASE HOME

He's done this a million times before, ever since he was a little boy, but something about it feels very different right now.

Jason pauses, his finger lingering over the Chases' doorbell. This shouldn't be any different ... but it is. The idea of facing Don and Helen seems a little strange, after what he shared with their daughter the other night. Not that they necessarily know -- or that they didn't think it had happened already -- but *he* knows it did.

His finger punches at the doorbell and he hears the chime on the other side of the door. A quick moment passes before he hears shoes clicking on the wooden floor of the entryway.

"Hey, you," Courtney says with a smile as she answers the door.

"Hey, hey," Jason says, leaning in to kiss her on the cheek. His lips feel a surge of electricity that pulls him back to that night at the hotel and his smile widens.

"What do you think of the outfit?" She does a turn, arms in the air, to show off the ensemble. She is wearing a pair of tightly fitting black pants and a light blue halter top. Her dark hair, a little bit of a curl added to the ends, is tumbling down over her tan shoulders. Jason can see traces of body glitter on her shoulders, back, and arms.

"Two thumbs up," Jason says after taking a few seconds to evaluate. "Two thumbs very high up."

He continues to drink in the sight of her, but eventually pulls his attention away enough to clap his hands together. "All right, you ready to go? We've got a party to hit."

"Mmm ..." The change in her demeanor is obvious. "Not quite."

"What do you mean?"

Her front teeth bite down on her lower lip. "Um, we sort of have a giant problem."

WINDMILLS

Nick's eyes go wide with shock. "What? Katherine, that is ridiculous! You know precisely why I married you."

Katherine's emerald eyes harden. "Why?"

"Because I love you!" he says, sputtering a touch before the words come out. "You know that, Katherine. I'm shocked that you doubt it. And frankly, I don't think the thought would have crossed your mind if it weren't for Andrew and his ridiculous allegations."

He can see the flare of doubt in Katherine begin to ease as quickly as it rose. She folds her hands on the table in front of her.

"And we've discussed my business before, too," he adds. "I hold a spot on Willis Advertising's board, as you know since that's where we met!" He stops, allowing the point to sink in, and then a knowing look spreads over his face. "Ahh ... Is this about the joint account?"

She closes her eyes as she swept up in concentration. Seconds later, they open slowly and she begins to shake her head. "No, no."

"Are you sure? That money went into a solid investment, Katherine, you know that much. I have the papers if you'd like to see them."

She lifts a palm. "No, I don't need to. I wouldn't understand them anyway."

"All right." Nick's shoulders drop and he picks up the wine glass again. "I don't want you doubting me. If you can't believe that I love you ..."

"I do believe it," she says quickly. Her lips part but then no words come. She raises a hand to her forehead. "I'm sorry. So much has happened lately. I feel as though Andrew is slipping away for good and it's making me feel crazy--I'm sorry."

Nick drains the last of his wine. "You don't need to apologize. I'm worried about you. Andrew has been so determined to make you believe these horrible things about me -- God knows why -- that he's practically made you sick."

Katherine has acquired a glazed appearance and her gaze does not move as she snakes her fingers around her glass. "I couldn't help myself the other night. He was frustrating me so terribly -- suddenly I *wanted* to hurt him. I wanted him to be as angry with me as I was with him."

"That's understandable," Nick says, reaching a hand across the table to hold one of hers. "How about we don't talk about Andrew for the rest of the night? Let's put all of this aside and focus on having a good time. I haven't seen you smile nearly enough lately."

Her eyes lift to meet his. "Deal."

"How about a dance?"

"I'd be delighted," Katherine says. Nick moves to help her out of her seat.

Still, as he leads her to the dance floor, she is unable to banish the things that Andrew, Brent, and Maggie said on the night of the fire. And one question remains ... but she knows that she will not ask it tonight.

MORIANI HOME

"What!?" Ryan cries, more of a statement that he refuses to believe it than a question.

"I might be moving here," Stan repeats.

"Why?" Ryan is so flustered that he has no idea where to begin.

"I've been seeing a woman who lives here. It's gettin' a little serious now and I figure, I don't really got much going on anyway, so why not come out here, right? Plus I'd get to see you more."

"Yeah." Ryan rolls his eyes, half-concealing the gesture even though he is kind of hoping that Stan will notice it. He doesn't.

"It'll be nice, huh? I know I haven't been too great about comin' out to see you or callin' and stuff ..." The thought trails off. Ryan gets the impression that Stan is hoping it will be implied and understood, but Ryan wants to hear him say it.

When Stan doesn't say anything more, Ryan speaks up. "You just drop by every couple of months and say that. Ever think it's going to be too late?"

Stan's features sag and, suddenly, he looks every day of his fifty-something years to Ryan. "I'm sorry, Ry, I am," he says, almost mumbling. "You know I get busy and I have stuff to take care of ... That's just how I am. If I'm living here it'll be a helluva lot easier--"

"Yeah, great, that's what I need," Ryan mutters, pounding his fist against the open door.

"What?" There is a sharp note of offense in Stan's voice. Ryan knows that it is probably a move to gain sympathy -- yet again -- but it just fuels whatever is raging inside of him now.

"Do you have to keep doing this?" he explodes. "Are you trying to *torture* me? Is that what this is? Because I am getting pretty damn sick of it!"

"What are you talking about?"

"You just come flying in and out of my life, make a giant mess, and then blow the hell back out so you don't have to deal with any of it! It's getting *really* freaking old, Stan!"

Stan's age is showing now, more than Ryan thought was even possible. "I don't understand what's goin' on with you, kid."

"Of course you don't! You have no idea!" Ryan's voice has maintained its roar up until this point but now it drops back down, and he is speaking in between deep huffs. "This is the way it's always been with you. Do you know how many times I have wished that it would change, that we could just have a good relationship? I'm beginning to realize that it's never gonna change. It can't."

It looks as though Stan has been punched in the stomach. Ryan is flooded with sudden remorse, even though he hates it, as Stan says, "I dunno what's going on with you. All of a sudden you just start throwin' this all in my face ... I gotta go. I'll come by some other time when you can talk normally."

He turns and heads away from the house, a scene Ryan has watched too many times in too many different places. He wants to keep watching but instead slams the door, hoping that the noise chills Stan.

Ryan turns around and leans against the closed door, confronted again by the dark, nearly silent house. The TV is still buzzing in the background and he can see its light falling out of the living room. Suddenly he has the urge to go in and smash the screen in.

Something inside stops him, and he realizes that he knows why. Smashing the television isn't what he really wants to do.

If I'd only had the balls to say what I really wanted to Stan ... but I didn't. I don't.

He goes back to the living room, hoping he can leave the encounter out here. Somehow he doubts it will be possible.

CHASE HOME

Jason narrows his gaze. "What do you mean? What giant problem?"

"It's Alex," Courtney says. "He called a couple minutes ago. He won't go to the party."

"What? Why not?"

Courtney tosses up her hands. "I dunno. Said he didn't feel like it." Her tone now grows more intense. "I'm seriously worried about him. He has been acting so weird these last few weeks."

Jason's sole response is a distracted nod. Without realizing it, he begins rapping his knuckles on the bannister.

"So what are we gonna do?" Courtney finally asks. "We can't just go to the party without him."

"I know," Jason says, abruptly snapping out of his daze. Another moment passes before he adds, "Get me the phone."

Courtney scurries into the living room to grab the portable off the couch. "You're gonna call him?"

"Yeah."

She returns and hands him the phone. He takes it and begins punching numbers.

"Good luck," she says. "He wouldn't listen to me."

Jason lifts the phone to his ear as the ringing continues. Courtney hears Alex answer. "Hello?"

"Alex, it's Jason. You almost ready for the party?"

"W--I ... Actually, I don't think I'm gonna go," Alex says. "I'm not feeling so hot ..."

"C'mon, it'll be good for you, dude. Whitney will want you there." Jason flashes Courtney a hopeful look as he continues, "Besides, I haven't seen you in *forever*. It'll be fun to hang out."

Alex is silent, but Jason can almost hear the tide shifting over the phone line. When Alex speaks at last, he sounds resigned -- but not entirely unexcited. "All right. I'll go."

"Awesome. Hey, you wanna come with Court and me? We can swing by and pick you up."

"Uh, sure, yeah."

"All right, we're heading out now. You better be ready! The Jaymobile waits for no one."

"I'll be ready," Alex says with a chuckle that comes across the line sounding very muffled.

"Coolio. See ya in a few." Jason clicks the phone off and hands it to Courtney.

She wraps her arms around his middle. "What the hell was that?"

"What?"

"It took you, like, ten seconds to get through to him. I was on with him for fifteen minutes before and he wouldn't listen to a word I was saying!"

Jason plays it off with a shrug. The truth is, he really does want to see Alex. He wants to make sure that he's doing okay. Besides, he's missed him as a friend.

"I am impressed," Courtney says, placing the phone down on a small table in the entryway. "You must have some special powers." She grins wickedly and lifts her eyebrows. "Oh, wait, I knew that."

He manages a smile but is thankful that she giggles, because he thinks the tension would otherwise be overwhelming for him.

"Let's get going," she says. "I don't wanna miss too much of this party!"

She leads him out of the house by the hand and he stands behind her as she locks the door. He hears her explaining that her parents are out and will be back later, but it doesn't really register.

"I hope it won't be awkward, with Alex and Lauren both there," she says as they head out to the car.

"Yeah," Jason agrees. But he can feel the beginnings of a terrible headache settling in on him already. *This is gonna be some night.*

END OF EPISODE #223

What are you hoping will happen at the party? How did you feel about the altercations between Ryan & Stan and Nick & Katherine? We would love to hear your thoughts over in the [Message Forum!](#)

[Next Episode](#)