

"Footprints" Episode #253

[Previously ...](#)

- Jason lamented his breakup with Courtney and received support from Lauren, who also comforted Courtney when she admitted that she still has feelings for Jay but doesn't think that she can forgive him.
- Claire was horrified to learn that Ryan had revealed the truth about the rape to Stan, but Ryan countered that he simply wants to resolve the complex issues of his past and amend some of the mistakes that he has made.

KING'S BAY ICE ARENA

Jason hasn't hustled into the arena with this kind of intensity in a long, long time. In the past weeks, knowing that he's been coming in to practice and Courtney won't be there, it's practically been a chore to drag himself through the doors and onto the ice. He's done little but go through the motions, hoping that one day everything will fall back into place and he can get back to his usual routine, even though each day that passes makes that less and less of a likelihood.

But now the drive has returned. It came out of nowhere. Today's trip to the rink began like all the others lately. Everything was the same until that moment when he was pulling into the parking space and realized whose car he was looking at parked in the next row.

Courtney's.

She hasn't been to the rink since their blow-up, at least not at the same time as him -- the times when they used to practice together. So either she's been avoiding skating or avoiding him, and neither option is very appealing to consider.

But if she's here now ... maybe something has changed. It'd be just like Courtney to return without notice and expect to pick up where they left off.

He sees no one as he flies through the lobby, course set directly for the doors that open to the large room containing the ice surface itself. His hand grips the handle hard as he yanks the door open, pausing his steps just long enough so that he doesn't run into the door in the process of opening it.

His eyes begin the search for her immediately. They dismiss figure after figure on the ice, most of which are familiar enough that they don't merit close study -- especially not today, not now. His attention jets over the bodies moving around the ice until they find what they are looking for.

She is here. And she's skating.

He watches, only partially believing, as Courtney takes a few pushes into a routine that he recognizes immediately. She steps gracefully through a complicated set of strokes and turns, her blades accumulating a speed and ferocity that seems to defy the ease and beauty with which she is executing the pattern. It's the same footwork pattern they've been working on for two years as a part of their short program.

When she reaches the end of the sequence, Courtney comes to a halt. She turns back and begins saying something, projecting her voice halfway across the rink.

Jason looks, expecting to see Sandy, as usual, in her red coat, carrying her insulated Starbucks mug. But he sees someone completely contrary, someone whose presence completely rattles him.

Dylan Carrington?

He recognizes the other young man from all the time he's spent in the skating world. He always sees him at competitions, in publications, and the like. They've all moved up the ranks at about the same pace, him and Courtney and Dylan. Last he heard, Dylan was skating with some girl from Alaska whose potential as a skater was matched only by her propensity for flying off the handle and throwing wild tantrums anywhere and everywhere.

So what the hell is he doing here?

Mercifully, he doesn't have to wonder in solitude for too long. He sees Sandy for real this time, coming through the doors through which he passed just a minute ago. She begins to smile when she sees Jason, but the expression twists into a careful, uneasy grimace almost immediately.

"What's going on?" Jason demands, hurrying over to her side. "What's Courtney doing out there?"

Sandy casts a glance out onto the ice, as if to confirm that this is really happening and she has to deal with it. "She's auditioning for new partners."

MORIANI HOME

Look at you.

Ryan makes eye contact with his own image, a hunched over, dreary looking creature reflected in a glass panel of one of the doors to the large breakfront that lines the wall opposite the small bar.

I look like hell, he groans internally, still studying himself. His skin looks drawn and tight, his eyes sunken and exhausted. He shudders to think of what he looks like in real life, especially to the eyes of others.

Not like it matters that much. He doesn't really see anyone of any consequence these days, anyway... He takes care of odds and ends for Nick during the day, and spends the evenings either sitting around here or in whatever bar seems appealing at the time.

He watches himself shaking his head in the glass. This has to stop. This rut has gone on for far too long.

If only there were an end in sight, though. This Stan thing seems as though it's never going to blow over. The hole just keeps getting deeper and deeper.

He lifts the gin and tonic to his lips, lets a little bit of it swim inside his mouth, and then decides to finish the damn thing off.

Betrayal. He can't shake the feeling that that's what this is, no matter how hard he tries.

It's just because of how long it went on, his mind reasons forcefully. For a lie to drag on for so many years -- for it to spawn so much pain that *was* real, that is real even now, with the truth out in the open -- is essentially to make it a reality, to create a truth. Tearing all those years of work down is bound to be difficult.

The thought is still of little comfort. How could he protect Stan for so long and then just turn on him, destroying all that effort and putting him in a position of very real jeopardy?

But that ache, he realizes, is dull in comparison to another. He does feel bad that he had to expose Stan, but he feels even worse that he now has to admit to throwing away what could have been the life he wanted in favor of saving a man who's never done a thing to deserve it.

It was never fair to ruin his own life like that. If he could just go back to that first confrontation with Claire -- the one where she had the guts to confront him about what she thought *he* had done to her ... as if he could ever have hurt her like that. If he could just go back to that day, he would have told the truth; he would have made sure she knew that it was Stan, not him. He'd never have lost her, and he'd never have forced himself to hold Stan up for so long to try and justify an impulsive, idiotic move that's done nothing but bring him pain.

There is one way to ease it. He knows that now. There is one way to undo at least some of the damage.

He has to restore the feelings that have lingered in his memory for so long, obscuring anything that might have stood in the way of their almost improbable coming to fruition. He has to make that potential real -- he has to make her feel it.

He has to get Claire back.

MARSHALL APARTMENT

"My whole body is so tired," Sally says, moving her head from the back of the couch onto Stan's shoulder. "I hate working these long flights without overnights."

Stan grunts some kind of agreement and refocuses on the TV, shifting his position a little bit to make having Sally on him more comfortable.

"I'm not making this up! I swear to God, if I could make this go away, I would. Do you think I want to know that my father is a rapist -- that he hurt the only girl I've ever loved that badly?"

Goddamn Ryan. What the hell does that kid think he's doing, throwing accusations around like that? Does he think he's gonna be able to get revenge or something for all the years that he's bitter about?

"Stan? How does that sound?"

Sally's voice comes floating back into his ear with an urgency that makes him realize he missed whatever she just said. He turns to her with an apologetic look.

"Does that sound good? Spending next weekend at the coast?"

"Uh, yeah," he says, though the idea is still sinking in. "Sure."

"Is something wrong?" she asks, sitting up.

"No."

"You just seem kind of--"

"I'm fine." He stands, leaving her behind on the couch.

"Stan--"

He stands silently for a moment before walking over to the chair at the head of the dining

room table, on which his worn brown coat is hanging. He picks it up and begins sliding into it.

"Stan?" Sally repeats, a new panic evident in her voice.

"I've gotta go do something," he says.

Sally rises from the couch. "When will you be back?"

"I dunno." He reaches for the front door and yanks it open. "See you later," he says gruffly as he shuffles out of the apartment.

He pulls the door closed tightly behind him, as if sealing Sally inside, and begins beating a frenzied path down the hallway.

This is going to get taken care of. Today.

KING'S BAY ICE ARENA

"Court!" he calls out, rounding the end of the rink and coming up to the home team's box at the side of the ice.

He knows she has seen him -- they had a moment of unmistakable eye contact as he rushed away from Sandy. But she turned back to Dylan and kept trying to work through the footwork sequence with him.

Now, though, Jason is climbing into the box and coming up to the boards, right next to the ice, and she can't ignore him. He can see her attention being pulled back towards him even though she's trying to focus upon Dylan.

"What?" she demands, turning around and snapping at him. Still, the fact that she addresses him comes as a little bit of a surprise.

"Can we talk for a minute?"

She takes a few strokes to bring her closer to Jason, though he can tell it's more for the purpose of removing Dylan from the awkward situation. "I'm busy."

"I can tell," he says calmly. "But this is important."

She hesitates, clearly considering his request very carefully. He is ready for her to strike him down and order him away from her, but instead she moves a little bit closer. "Fine."

What is it?"

Now that he's gotten her to commit to talking to him, he can't help but slump his shoulders and bulge his eyes as if to ask how she can even *pretend* not to know what he needs to speak with her about.

"I'm not just gonna give up skating because things didn't work out with us," she says coldly.

"'Didn't work out'? It's not like we went on a blind date, Courtney! Come on."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better? I am not just going to get over what happened."

"All right," Jason says, cutting her off. "I ... I can understand you not wanting to be with me, I mean, still be together, you know. But getting a new skating partner? I couldn't imagine going for my senior test with anyone else--"

"I couldn't imagine it, either! I'm not even sure that I can now. But I know that I want to pass that test, and I'm not gonna be able to do this forever. I'm not gonna wait around hoping that things work themselves out so we can get back to our plans."

"That was personal. This is--this is professional, look at it that way."

"It's *all* personal! What do you think of when you think about us skating together? I think about going to Coasts in San Jose and running around that amusement park for two days because we didn't even get past the qualifying round. I think about you splitting the pants on your costume five minutes before we skated at Regionals that one year, or making fun of the judges together, or pinning Sandy down and taking off her skates on her birthday. I think about us, not some business arrangement."

His mouth, suddenly very dry, opens and closes without producing any words. He glances over her shoulder, at Dylan, for just a split-second. This threat is suddenly very real.

"So maybe it's *about* us," he says, his voice beginning to go hoarse with desperation. "Maybe it's more than just the skating. You can't pretend like a big part of this wasn't us doing it together."

"I'm not pretending that at all! That was exactly the problem! I just want to be able to skate and accomplish what I set out to now, without worrying about any of that other crap. Does every part of my life have to be ruined because of what happened?"

"No," he says, but he is already moving away from her. He's lost the battle for now, that much is clear. There is nothing he can say to refute the points Courtney has raised.

He climbs out of the box without looking at her again. Quickly he makes his way back to the other side of the rink, back to where Sandy is still standing. She says something to him as he bends down to grab his equipment bag, but he doesn't hear it and he doesn't make any attempt to answer as he blows past her and out of the arena.

MORIANI HOME

Something tells him that it is bad news before he even makes a move for the door.

There is something about the knock -- the hasty, rapid pounding, with something about it that sounds so demanding -- that makes Ryan almost certain that he doesn't want to deal with this now. So he stands in the kitchen, waiting it out, hoping that the first series of knocks will fade away into the air and no more will follow.

No such luck. Another impatient round comes but a few seconds later. For a split-second Ryan sticks to his guns, but then he caves and makes the trek to the foyer. Dealing with the problem by not fueling it any further is one thing, but blatantly ignoring it when it is beating down the door is another entirely. He's always been taught that a refusal to address something is simply a surefire way to make it worse.

"Ry," Stan blurts out the moment the door flies open. It sounds as though he is trying to gain control of the conversation from the very start.

"What now?" Ryan asks impatiently. He's never used this sort of attitude -- at least, never felt that he could or should -- when addressing Stan, at least to his face, and to do so now is amazingly freeing.

"I was--I was thinkin', and ... you don't want things to be like this between us, do you? Things were just startin' to get better."

"Get better? Are you insane? Things were just getting more convoluted!"

"Look, Ry, I know you're really twisted up in this whole mess with--that chick, but it's gonna take some work for us to get things back on track here, you know?"

"There wouldn't be a mess to be twisted up in if not for you!" Ryan shoots back incredulously. "You are just amazing me, thoroughly amazing me! How can you be so dense about this?"

He watches Stan's face harden. "What's with the attitude? I come here lookin' to make things right and all I get from you--"

"--is the truth! Drop the bull already, Jesus! You didn't come here looking to make things right, not really. You wanted me to take back what I said and pretend none of it never happened. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

Stan's only response is a stony stare.

"I'm through with that," Ryan says. "I'm through burying the truth because of some sick sense of obligation. Learn to deal with it."

"You little piece of shit," Stan snarls back. "Who the hell do you think you are? The old man's got you thinkin' you can treat your real father like some piece of garbage just 'cause you're a Moriani, huh? Well, I got news for you. That doesn't mean a goddamn thing to me. And it sure doesn't make you worth all the trouble I've been puttin' myself through."

Ryan doesn't say anything. He doesn't need to, and adding anything more for Stan to argue with is just going to prolong this.

"What a waste. Waste of time and a waste of effort. Damn good thing I never tried hard enough anyway, for an ungrateful brat like you." Stan backs down the porch steps, eyes on Ryan only for as long as it takes him to finish speaking.

Ryan watches him retreat down the driveway and climb into his beaten-up car, total fury emanating from him. But Ryan doesn't miss the backward glance, right as Stan is settling in behind the wheel. The last hope, that glance. The last hope that Ryan might chase after him and erase the horrible reality he created with his confession.

It's never going to happen, Ryan thinks with disgust, slamming the front door. Never gonna happen.

END OF EPISODE #253

What did you think of this condensed episode? Should Courtney move on with a new skating partner? Should Jason even care? Come join us in the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts!

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