

## "Footprints" Episode #254

### [Previously ...](#)

- Jason tried to talk Courtney out of auditioning new skating partners but his pleas fell on deaf ears. She was determined not to let the end of their relationship be the end of her success in skating.
- Troubled by thoughts of Ryan's accusations, Stan rushed out on Sally to go see his son, and wound up in an argument, proclaiming that his efforts with Ryan were all a waste.

### **MARSHALL APARTMENT**

*This isn't a good idea.*

That idea keeps repeating itself in Courtney's head, a haunting mantra that accompanies the clattering of her feet down the hallway. She's never liked coming to this building -- there's something dark and dingy about it that makes her uncomfortable, with the aged maroon carpet in the halls and the dulled white of the paint on the walls, all cast in that odd, dim lighting. But right now, it seems to fit her mood perfectly.

Of course, she wouldn't have thought to come here at first. After her encounter with Jason at the rink, she hightailed it to her usual destination -- Lauren's place. But the minute she turned onto the street, she knew she wouldn't be stopping there.

She never expected to see Jason's car there. But the Honda Civic was parked on the street not far from the Brooks' driveway, and she knew from the moment she saw it what it meant: She wouldn't be able to talk to Lauren about this, not today. Maybe not for quite a while, if Lauren's getting Jason's side of the story right now, before hers.

She wasn't sure what to do next, but the idea of going home and stewing in her own juices was sickening. It still is; that's why she is heading to see Alex instead. When she thought of who else she could go to if she wanted to talk this out, he popped into her head immediately. And she was so determined to get away from Lauren's, away from Jason, that she set her course for Alex's right away.

But as she waited motionlessly in the elevator for it to take her up to the proper floor, her thoughts had a chance to catch up to her. And now she realizes how much more complicated it is to drop in on Alex like this than she had considered; it's been a long time since she had any contact with him -- too long -- and that's because of all the sour feelings between them.

She never wanted to lose him as a friend, though. She was upset -- okay, very angry --

over the way that he treated Lauren when she was so interested in him. Finding out about Alex and Jason ... whatever might have happened between them ... didn't help one bit. But she hasn't stopped caring about Alex, and she never intended to cut him out of her life the way that she inadvertently has.

She's not sure of how he will receive her -- God only knows how he feels about her since he's been getting Jason's side of the story for so long. But she knows that Jason is over at Lauren's right now, once again spreading his view of things without giving Courtney's perspective a chance. She can't have two friends thinking of her that way.

And that's why she stops in front of the Marshalls' door when she reaches it. She lifts her hand and knocks.

No sooner has she finished than does she hear the elevator opening up again. A casual glance in its direction shows a man who looks vaguely familiar come bursting out of it.

Courtney's heartrate picks up momentum as the man sets his focus down the hall, towards her, and begins moving with all the grace of an elephant. There's something about his gait, an unevenness, a lack of regular rhythm, that catches her attention. And as she catches sight of the crazed twinkle in his eye, she hopes that someone inside the apartment is about to open the door.

She knocks again, more urgently. But the man keeps coming at her and the door remains closed, offering no means of escape. She's not certain, but he seems to be focused right on her and coming straight at her.

He *is* coming at her. *Oh, God*, she thinks, her heart about to leap into her throat. *Someone open the door. Let me in. Let me--*

The man stops not five feet away from her.

"What are you doin' here?" he asks, a laziness about his voice that confirms what she suspected watching him walk: He's drunk.

"I'm, uh, I'm here to see a friend," she answers as politely as she can, rushing the words out in the vain hope that it will speed up time and get her into the apartment.

"Here?"

The question confuses her for a moment. "Yeah, he lives here," she says finally. *Dammit, Alex, open the door.*

"Oh, I remember you now!" the man proclaims. His eyes travel up and down her body appreciatively, a move that makes Courtney take a reflexive step back. "You're a friend

of Sally's kid, huh?"

"Uh, yeah," Courtney answers hesitantly. And with that, she is finally able to place his face. He is Alex's mom's boyfriend. Steve? Sam? Stan?

The realization should be calming her down, but it isn't. There is a glimmer in his eye that is making her very nervous, and it's more than the alcohol.

And then, thankfully, the Marshalls' door finally opens.

"Hi," Courtney says, turning immediately to face Sally. "Is, uh, is Alex home?"

"He's in his room," Sally answers. "Go on in." She steps aside to allow Courtney inside, already focused on her boyfriend.

Courtney makes her escape as quickly as she can.

## **BROOKS HOME**

"Here you go," Lauren says, handing the plate to Jason as she takes a seat in the recliner.

"Thanks." He takes the plate and looks over the BLT appreciatively. "You didn't need to make me lunch."

"You looked hungry. And besides," she adds with a grin, "I was gonna eat, and it didn't seem fair to make you sit there and watch me pig out."

"Well, thanks, I appreciate it."

"My pleasure. It's one of the few things I can make without blowing up the kitchen or something."

"It looks good," he says, surveying the sandwich. She's pretty sure that he's telling the truth, too. It looks pretty decent, as far as BLTs go. And there were no disasters in the kitchen to taint the way she looks at it, either. Job well done.

She takes a bite. Not bad at all. She finishes chewing and swallows. "So what's up?"

"I'm that transparent, huh?" he asks, seeming a little bit amused by how pathetic he looked when he showed up at the door half-an-hour ago. That's Jason, able to find humor in just about everything.

"It's okay, I like the company."

"Excellent ... because I sure as hell seem to have a lot for you to listen to."

"Shoot." She takes another bite of the BLT.

Now he looks a little less comfortable. It takes him a few seconds to find some sort of approach. "Have you talked to Court lately?" he finally manages.

"Not really," Lauren admits, a little disappointedly. For whatever reason, she and Courtney haven't had the chance to spend as much time together lately. She's been working more and Courtney has taken on a few more hours at the restaurant lately, so their schedules have been more loaded. Still, their time together is something she really misses.

"She's trying out new partners," Jason says quickly. He follows the announcement with a bite of his sandwich, rendering him incapable of saying anything else right away. The ball is in Lauren's court now.

"She is?" The news is, well, news to Lauren.

"Yeah, I walk into the rink and she's out on the ice, teaching *our* footwork sequence to this snobby kid from Alaska."

"So she's skating with this other guy now?"

"Apparently this was just a tryout, but it seemed to be going pretty well." He brushes his hand back over his sandy brown hair. "The point is, she's gonna wind up skating with *someone*. Someone who's not me."

"That seems kind of ... extreme."

"That's why I said to her! But she's, like, hell-bent on passing her Senior test, with or without me." He leans forward on the sofa, elbows resting on his knees, holding the plate in his right hand.

"I'm really sorry," Lauren says, suddenly feeling herself to be at a horrible loss. Jason is sitting right in front of her, staring off completely into space, looking totally dazed. She finds herself wishing that there were something, anything, she could do to help.

"With all the hard feelings between you two, skating with Courtney wouldn't work too well, you know?" she attempts.

"I know," he says without even a pause. "I keep reminding myself how mad I was at her with the way she acted about the whole Alex thing ... I didn't even wanna be skating with her. But seeing her out there with Dylan--"

Lauren runs the name through her head quickly, but she's never heard anything about a Dylan. How weird that Courtney wouldn't have mentioned anything about this to her. It's a huge step.

"This is just so ... final," Jason is saying. "Like, skating's always been about me and Courtney doing it together. Even when I was skating with Shannon, the goal was to keep sharp so that Court and I would have something to go back to. And with this whole thing lately -- I kept thinking that eventually, we'd both come to our senses and get back to work."

"I'm sorry," Lauren repeats. That expression on his face is killing her. It's so close to a blank look, except it's filled with the kind of paralyzing hurt that she knows she can't possibly debunk with a few uplifting words.

The sudden opening and closing of the door rattles Lauren. And the hurried footsteps and loud greeting that follow break the somber mood completely.

"Hey, little sis, where are ya?" comes the call from the foyer.

She doesn't answer until Trevor appears in the doorway to the living room.

"Hey," she says quietly, trying to alert Trevor to the fact that she and Jason were in the middle of a serious conversation.

At first he doesn't seem to take the hint, but then he spots Jason. "Hey," Trevor says, tipping his head at the other young man and deepening his voice just a tad. Lauren finds herself a little bit amused by his sudden shift in demeanor.

"Hey," Jason answers back. Lauren can tell that the last thing he wants right now is to be meeting someone new, having to pull himself together.

"Jason, this is my brother, Trevor. Trevor, Jason Fisher."

"Nice to meet you," Trevor says, lifting a hand in greeting.

Jason responds with a nod of the head.

"Listen, I've got some more stuff to take care of, so I'm gonna head out again in a couple minutes," Trevor says. "We still on for dinner?"

"Absolutely," Lauren answers with a smile. "I'll be waiting."

"Nice. See you later."

"Bye." Lauren watches Trevor head out of the room and listens to the sound of his feet traveling up the stairs.

"Sorry about that," she says to Jason.

"No prob. Probably better that he came in, anyway. I'm really dragging down the mood here, huh?"

"Don't worry about it. Listen, Jason ..."

"Yeah?"

"I know this isn't easy to deal with. I--I can only imagine trying to deal with things being so different all of a sudden, after so many years of you and Court being so close and skating together and everything."

He nods again, eyes cast down as he works on the BLT.

"Just don't put all the blame for this on yourself. And believe that things are gonna get better, no matter how it happens." She sets her plate on the coffee table and covers his free hand with one of hers.

He raises his eyebrows and is about to roll his eyes when Lauren cuts him off with a squeeze on the hand.

"You're a good guy. Things are gonna work out."

He doesn't quite seem to buy it at first, but then lets out a sigh. "Do you know what a trooper you are, putting up with all my crap?"

"It's not so bad. You listened to me whine for months and months about Alex, remember?"

He doesn't crack a smile as she expected he would, but then she remembers how much more was going on beneath the surface for Jason when she was panicking over whether or not Alex returned her feelings.

"Thanks," he says, appreciation written all over his face. His gaze links up with hers and rests there.

"Hey," she says abruptly, pulling her hand away from his and grabbing her plate, "we better finish these or they're gonna get all soggy and nasty."

"Good idea." He returns his attention to the sandwich.

She watches him for just a moment more before doing the same.

## **MARSHALL APARTMENT**

"It's good to see you," Alex says, an awkward note in his voice as he ushers Courtney into his room.

"You, too," Courtney says. She pauses to gaze around the room. It's dark, the way she remembers it always being; the overhead light is off, the only light coming from a small lamp on the desk and whatever extra the sun has deemed to fit to send in through the window. It's the kind of quiet setting that she knows Alex appreciates.

"How have you been?" she asks. She folds her arms in front of her body, not sure what to do with herself.

"Good, I guess." It's the standard response, the one Alex always gives, as if he's afraid to disturb anyone by suggesting that things are not all right. It's the response he gave for all those months while he was wrestling with the demons inside of him, not letting anyone else see what was going on within him.

"You sure about that?"

"Yeah." He closes the door and lingers in front of it, keeping his back to Courtney for a very long moment. When he does turn around, words are already spilling out of his mouth. "Hey, I don't wanna sound rude or anything, but what are you doing here? I'm kinda surprised to see you just show up here, after everything that's happened ..."

"I wanna apologize for that," Courtney says quickly. "I-I'm sorry. I guess I needed space ... I needed to make sense of everything on my own. But I was totally unsupportive. I shouldn't have let this much time go by."

"I can understand why you did. You had every right to be furious over what I did to Lauren. I'm still kicking myself for it."

"And that's why I'm here. You're a good guy, Alex. And a terrific friend. I know that, no matter what happened. I think the circumstances--well, things weren't exactly normal. Everyone gets pushed over the edge sometimes."

"Thanks," he says, sounding a little unsure. "I, uh, I'm glad you came by. I've missed you."

"I've missed you, too. I--I guess Jason's told you what happened between us--"

"Yeah, Court, I'm sorry you had to read about that, the way you did. You deserved to have the truth told to you ... although seriously, there wasn't anything to hear. Nothing happened -- it was all me, Jason was just passed out."

"Spare me the details," she says, her voice taking on a sudden edge. She catches it, reminding herself why she is here and what she just said to Alex. She meant those things, and dredging more ugliness back up isn't going to accomplish anything. "I don't want to talk about that. It's--it's not necessary."

"Okay ..."

"I guess I need your advice or something."

"On what?"

"Jason," she answers, perhaps a little too hurriedly. "Well, sort of. It's about skating. I had a long talk with Sandy, and I realized that I don't want to quit yet. I want to at least finish up, take my last test, and maybe even compete some more. I'm not ready to stop skating yet."

Thankfully, he makes the leap in logic. "But you can't do that without Jason."

"Yeah. But the thing is, I can't skate with him again. Not right now ... not ever, I don't think. It's like whatever was there before, holding us together so tightly -- it's totally broken now, and as close as I felt to him before, I feel that far from him now." She stops, shoulders drooping. "Does that even make sense?"

"I think so." He takes a seat at the desk, leaning back for just a moment in the leather swivel chair, one of the few luxuries he seems to have allowed himself. Then he leans forward thoughtfully. "So is the question whether or not you should go ahead and skate with someone else?"

"I guess so," she responds after a stretch of simply staring at him. "I had a tryout today, and--it went really well, actually. But Jay showed up at the rink while I was skating with this other guy, and he tried to talk me out of it."

His ice-blue eyes lock with hers. "Did it work?"

"No. I mean, I can't go back to skating with him. I know that. But can I skate with someone else? I don't even know what that would be like ..."

"You want to keep skating, right?"

"Yeah."

"Even if it means you aren't skating with Jason?"

"Yeah. I-I can't just pretend things are okay because I need him to skate with me again. It'd be like ... like skipping too many steps or something."

Immediately she has the feeling that she's said too much. Alex's contemplative gaze confirms it. She shouldn't be admitting that there's even the possibility of things ever going back to the way they were. It shouldn't even exist.

"I'll figure it out," she says. "I just needed to explain it to someone, try to make a little sense out of it ...". She gathers a handful of raven hair in one fist, forming it into a lazy ponytail. "Enough about that. How have you been?" She sees him ready to give the standard response again. "Really been, I mean."

"Fine." He shrugs in response to the disapproving scowl that appears on her face. "Seriously, I can't complain. I've been doing a lot of writing, hanging out, stuff like that. I even did a little bit of job searching. Who knows, I may get out into the work force yet."

"Hopefully doing something a little more rewarding than what I'm doing," she comments with a slight roll of the eyes. "How about the social life? Anything going on there?"

He shakes his head, waves of embarrassment evident in his dimpled cheeks. He knows what she's talking about. "Nope. I've been doing my usual thing, hanging by myself, you know."

"We need to get you out on the market!" she grins, dropping her hands back to her sides. "I'm sure you'd be, you know, an appreciated commodity."

"Right, yeah."

"Seriously! Give yourself some credit, kiddo."

He picks up a mechanical pencil from the desk and begins clicking the eraser, sending the lead pumping out the other end. "I wouldn't even know where to start," he says uneasily.

"Getting out, you mean? Or giving yourself some credit?"

"Both!"

"All right, we have a mission," she announces after a lengthy moment of thought. "You busy tonight?"

"Nope ..." She knows that her plan must be written all over her face, because she watches his eyes broaden in anxious response. "What are you thinking?"

"Keep that calendar clear," she says, "because you've got yourself a date tonight."

## MARSHALL APARTMENT

"You're back," Sally says as Stan barrels inside the apartment. She knows that she sounds shocked, but she can't help it; the way he cut out on her earlier, she wasn't expecting to see him again anytime soon.

"Yeah, 'course I am." He leans in and plants a sloppy kiss on her lips. "I told ya I just had somethin' to take care of. So I went 'n' did it."

There's something loose and uncoordinated about his carriage and his movements that has caught her attention. "Are you okay?" she asks, not sure if it's the right thing to be doing but unable to deny the impulse.

"Oh, I'm *fine*," he says emphatically, his sarcasm as thick as the tongue that seems to be interfering with his speech. "Fine as any guy'd be after figurin' out what an ungrateful little snot he has for a son."

He's definitely drunk, Sally realizes as she continues to observe him. And not just drunk, but close to sloshed. The realization comes as something of an unsettling surprise, but it's nothing she hasn't dealt with before.

"Did something happen with Ryan?" she asks when he doesn't offer any more information. Immediately she wonders if the inquiry was unnecessary.

"It sure as hell did," Stan announces as he slides down onto the couch. "Kid's a little rat, that's all he is. That Moriani guy ruined him. Turned him into the same kinda dirty little crook he is. Cheap crooks dressed up in nice suits, that's all they are."

The volume of his voice has been rising steadily and an ugly intensity has begun to flare in his face, so Sally decides to leave it at that. But now Stan has decided to continue on his own.

"He thinks I owe him my life for doing such a crappy job being a father. I'll be

goddamned if he gets any more effort outta me, I'll tell you that. I'm not wastin' my time on some twerp in a fancy suit who thinks he can blame me for everything that went wrong in his life."

Sally isn't sure how to respond. Stan seems to be on a roll and attempting to stop him might not be wise, in light of how worked up he has become. But to offer any sort of remark or idea to calm him down, she needs to know more about whatever it is that's bothering him, and she's not sure she wants to dig any deeper.

"I didn't do nothin'," Stan spits. She can't even tell if he's addressing her anymore. "He's never gonna prove anything. He can't just go around makin' up stories like that!"

"How about a cup of coffee?" Sally asks nervously. Maybe she can divert his attention and get him to calm down a bit. Hopefully. Her hands are shaking the same way they used to, something she thought had been left behind with all those lousy men and bad relationships.

"I don't want any damn coffee!" he barks.

"I was just thinking you might--"

"Shut up! Get outta my sight, would ya?" He stares at her, his lip curled in disgust, until she disappears into the kitchen.

*This isn't happening again*, she tells herself as she busies herself with preparing a pot of coffee anyway. If he doesn't want it, she'll drink it. And he'll cool down eventually and come to his senses. She needs to keep herself busy somehow until then.

"It'll only be a little while," she assures herself, the words no more than a weak whisper, as she digs through the cabinet for a filter.

## **CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT**

The shrill ringing tears into the air as soon as Claire opens the door to the apartment. She cuts a straight path for the telephone. For all she knows that was the third ring, and the machine might cut in and pick up any second now.

"Hello?" she answers, pushing the 'talk' button and bringing the portable to her ear all in one swift move.

"Claire." The voice on the other end is urgent and all too familiar.

"Hi," she says, breathless all of a sudden. The rush inside to get the phone must be

catching up to her. Or maybe it's hearing Ryan on the other end.

"Where have you been?"

"Out." A twinge of annoyance seeps rapidly into her response. It keeps her from offering any further information or making any attempt to prolong the conversation. Instead she casts a backward glance at the still-open door; the grocery bags she brought in with her are sitting in the doorway, and Travis has begun digging through them, no doubt looking for the package of Gummi bears she for some reason allowed him to toss in the cart.

"Stan was just here," Ryan announces, apparently undeterred by her silence.

The statement does manage to grab more of her attention than she'd like to admit.

"What'd he want?"

"I think the same as usual -- he wanted me to take back what I said."

"And?"

"He got pissed off when I wouldn't. Anyway, it turned into kind of an ugly argument. I just--I wanted to let you know that you should be careful. I don't know what he's capable of."

The remark stings Claire, and she's oddly certain that it's probably doing the same to Ryan. She's *all* too aware of Stan's capabilities, unfortunately. "Well, what am I supposed to do? Not leave the apartment?"

"That'd be one way to deal with it," Ryan sighs. "Listen, Claire -- I really think you should get the cops involved here."

"No."

"Why not?" She can hear him rethinking the impulsive question through the phone line. "Okay, maybe I can understand that ... but it's worth reconsidering."

"I ... I can't do that." She reaches over and grabs Travis by the arm, pulling him away from the groceries.

"He's dangerous. I don't want him going after you -- or the kids."

The kids.

"You don't think he would, do you?" she asks frantically. She tucks the phone in between

her shoulder and head as she reaches down with both arms to pick up Travis.

She holds the boy closer as she listens to Ryan's reply. "I don't know what to expect from him anymore."

"I don't know ..." she says through a dry mouth.

"I want you to consider it--"

"I don't want to bring the police into this!"

"Better that you do it than Stan does, by doing something stupid."

The thought is enough to stop her argument in its track.

"Listen," Ryan says, "I want to talk to you about this. And ... I want to see you. How about dinner tonight?"

"Dinner?" Her initial surprise manifests itself aloud.

"Yeah ... so we can talk about this." She waits for him to fill the quiet. "Come on. Windmills. It'll be nice."

Despite the very loud instinct drumming on her brain, she gulps hard and then gives her answer.

"Sure. Dinner tonight."

## **END OF EPISODE #254**

*Is Claire making a mistake accepting Ryan's invitation? What kind of trouble is Stan going to cause next? What do you think Alex's night will be like? Chime in at the Footprints Forum and let us know what you think!*

[Next Episode](#)