

"Footprints" Episode #259

[Previously ...](#)

- Jason and Courtney quarreled over her auditioning new skating partners. Later, she accused Lauren of taking Jason's side, but Trevor made her realize that she is trying to hurt Jason because he hurt her.
- After Sarah confessed to calling Brian to tell him about Diane's car accident, Diane exploded at her.
- In the midst of a breakdown, Claire confessed to Ryan that she shares his curiosity over what might have been between them and convinced him to spend the night. Things got passionate between them ...

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE

A barista's voice calls out one drink after another, but the names all blend together for Sarah. None of them are what she ordered, she knows that much. She doesn't really care to pay any more attention than that.

The door's chiming bells prove yet again to be a momentary distraction, so she looks in their direction. A tall man with extremely large, dark, and -- as far as Sarah is concerned -- hideous glasses exits carrying a coffee cup much like his own figure: tall and slender. And just as he passes through the door, another customer enters.

Only, Sarah recognizes this one.

Since she is waiting off to the side of the door, by the pickup area of the counter, she can observe the people going in and out of the door without any of them taking much notice of her. Now she watches as Diane Bishop crosses the floor to stand in the line of customers waiting to order, a line that has not diminished in the least since Sarah stepped into the coffee house over five minutes ago.

At least it's busy, Sarah tells herself, surprised that she's actually thankful that the place is swarmed with people. This way, Diane might not notice her at all. Running into her was not something Sarah expected or particularly wanted.

So much for that possibility, though. Seconds after the thought runs through Sarah's head, she glances over at Diane, and the other woman's gaze meets hers.

They remain locked like that for an uncomfortable moment until one of them pulls away and the other quickly follows suit. Sarah isn't sure who does which.

So do I just stand here now and pretend it's no big deal? she wonders, focusing very hard on the baristas and their work and hoping that her drink will be the next one up.

It isn't, of course. So she stands there, as nonchalantly as possible, now leaning against the wall.

Diane's watching her, though. She knows that. Diane watches like a hawk.

Maybe I should go over there and try to talk to her, she thinks, but the thought is cut off by the memory of that scene in the hotel when Diane chewed her out for calling Brian. *Maybe not.*

Except ... maybe she's mellowed out a little bit. Sarah can only hope so. Not that they're constantly in close proximity and this has to be dealt with -- it could be left at this and not addressed at all -- but a large part of her wants to address it. And, hopefully, get past it.

Of course, since she stopped thinking about it, she suddenly hears her drink being called. She steps up to the counter and takes it, offering a quick "thanks" to the barista before stepping away.

Then she pauses. *Do I leave? Do I talk to her?* She looks over again and sees that Diane is looking back at her.

Here goes nothing, she tells herself, taking the first step before her brain has a chance to talk her into aborting the mission.

"Diane," she says as she steps up beside the line, doing her best to keep from sounding weak and pathetic. She's not going to be groveling here.

The response is cool and not very promising. "Hi."

"Look ... I figure we've had a little bit of time, so now maybe we can talk about this thing?"

Diane shrugs, her disinterest so pronounced that it's obvious she does care. She steps up to the counter and gives her order as Sarah waits in the background.

When Diane steps back to await her morning latte, Sarah is right there with her. She's not letting this one go so easily.

"Maybe I jumped the gun by calling Brian," she begins right away, planting herself right in front of Diane both to keep the confrontation private and to keep from being ignored. "So I'm sorry for that."

"You should be," Diane answers, her desire to give Sarah the cold shoulder obviously overwhelmed by her love of a good confrontation. "You have no idea what went on in L.A. You have no business butting into it like that."

"Maybe not. But I thought I was doing you a favor, Diane. I still think I was. I'm sorry if it upset you, but it's pretty obvious to me that you're running away from whatever happened with Brian. You're gonna need to face it sooner or later."

Diane's eyes, accentuated by the heavy yet stylish ring of dark eyeliner surrounding them, go wide. "Later would be fine by me. Or never, for that matter."

Sarah's response is caked in sarcasm. "Sure. Simple as that, right? You never see or speak to Brian again and you'll be fine?"

"Um, yeah, pretty much," Diane says with a shrug.

"No way. You know, you can put up this whole 'I don't give a crap' attitude, but it's not really doing anything for me."

"Sarah, please--"

"I'm not dropping this so easily," Sarah says. "I kinda thought we were getting to be friends, before this whole thing happened. You can toss that out the window if you want, I guess. But you can't run away from this Brian thing forever."

CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

A flash of morning sunlight stabs into Claire's vision, blinding her momentarily. Quickly its brightness subsides and the room comes into view: her bedroom.

The events of last night quickly wind their way through her consciousness. She holds her breath, keeping as still as possible on the edge of the bed. Even though she's facing the outside of the bed, she knows that Ryan must still be there, just inches away in her bed.

The bed she used to share with Tim.

An aching blackness swells up inside her and threatens to rise into her throat. With the shallowest breaths she can manage, she tries to calm the horrified screams coming from within her.

How can Ryan be in her bed? How could they have gotten to this point?

I didn't do anything wrong, she tells herself, another attempt to ease the outcry coming from her own body. And she knows she didn't ... yet she cannot shake the feeling that she somehow betrayed Tim -- or herself.

But she remembers the things that she said last night. None of them were lies, although perhaps without the overwhelming emotion that struck her, none of them ever would have been spoken aloud. Much of it she hadn't even recognized herself until it began spilling out and wouldn't stop.

She needed Ryan last night. She knew that he needed her, too, and that he wanted to be there for her. The amount of resistance he offered came as an enormous surprise to her.

But now what?

A stirring from the other side of the bed makes her eyes clamp shut. She lies still, the comforter crushed within one palm and held tight to her body.

There is some more shuffling and a pause that to Claire lasts for some ungodly amount of time. Then the weight on the bed shifts and she hears the floor groaning. Ryan's feet begin to pad across the floor -- out of the room, from what she can hear. She waits for him to exit, doing her best not to appear awake.

But his steps end. He must be standing there, watching her. She can feel his gaze burning into her, hotter than the summer morning's sun and ten times more stifling. Slowly she opens her eyes.

"Good morning," Ryan says, his voice heavy with uncertainty and still ragged from sleep.

"Hey," she croaks. She's not sure if it's because she just woke up or because of how nervous she is to speak to him. Probably both.

"I, uh--" He tilts his head towards the door. "I'm just gonna get my stuff together and I'll get out of here."

As appealing as it sounds to delay facing this, she doesn't want him to go. At least not with him thinking that she doesn't want him there. That doubt is apparent in his speech, and it just makes her feel worse.

"You don't have to go," she says. "I could--make coffee or something."

The counter-argument comes immediately. "I should go. I shouldn't even be here."

She looks over at the side of the bed where he slept, at the ruffled sheets and dented pillow, as if to confirm that it all really happened. "You regret it?"

His words stumble out. "I--I don't like the idea that I took advantage of you being so emotional. I never should've let myself stay, or do anything else--"

"You didn't take advantage of me. I told you that last night. I *wanted* you here, Ryan."

"Maybe you think that," he says. "I'm not so sure ... You'll come to your senses eventually."

"Ryan, that's ridiculous. I knew what I was doing and I wanted to do it."

"I hope you mean that," he says, seeming to choke on the end of the sentence. "I'm gonna get out of here--"

"No, wait."

"For now. I need to go. I need to get my head together and--I don't know, think about everything that happened. I'll call you later, okay?"

She restrains her protests, realizing that he's probably onto something, and merely offers a calm nod.

Then she lies back in bed, covers still bunched around her despite the morning's heat. She listens to the sounds of Ryan gathering the rest of his clothing from the living room and then the door being opened and closed. He's gone in under a minute.

CHASE HOME

"Whoa!" The startled exclamation leaps from Courtney's throat as her body jumps back a full step.

"I'm sorry, honey," Helen offers as both women catch their breath.

"Scared me there," Courtney says. For some reason, when she turned the knob to open the front door and it pulled open from inside at the same time, her heart rate must have multiplied by a hundred. Now she's trying to coax it back down to normal by evening out her breathing.

"I was just on my way to the office. I didn't expect you to be done with skating so soon."

"Dylan had a flight to catch, so we wrapped up early." Courtney steps inside the house, lugging her equipment bag through the doorway with her.

"He's flying back to Alaska?" Helen's question is drenched in curiosity, begging for Courtney to reveal more.

"Yeah ... for now."

"For now? Does that mean ..."

Courtney nods, her dark ponytail flapping against the back of her neck. "I think so, yeah. We've been skating really well together, and we get along well, too. It'd be stupid not to take advantage of the opportunity, especially considering how few guys there are to skate with out there."

"Well, I'm glad this audition process was so simple for you," Helen says. Her voice drops as she adds, "Although it is odd to think of you having a partner besides Jason."

"It's weird for me, too. It's just, I don't want to waste the last few good years I have left skating because of something personal. I know I'd regret it later on."

"You really don't think you and Jason could have a professional relationship and skate together?" Helen asks, a sort of last plea for Courtney to consider this decision, as though she needs someone else to handle the rational part of it for her.

"I'm sure we couldn't," Courtney says firmly. "It'd be impossible to keep things from getting personal. Yesterday he comes into the rink and sees me trying out with Dylan and he totally flipped--"

"You didn't tell him that you were auditioning new partners?"

"No, I--" Court catches the disapproval in her mother's tone and hurries to her own defense. "It wasn't any of his business. I told him we weren't gonna skate together anymore and that's all he really needed to know -- or deserved to know, considering everything he did."

"Still, it had to be something of a shock for him to walk into the rink and find you working with another partner."

"So let him be shocked! I was sure shocked when I found out how much he'd kept hidden from me."

Helen sighs. It's the kind of sigh Courtney hates, the kind that implies that she is in the wrong.

"Mom, Jason and I broke up! I don't have to keep him informed about every decision I

make."

"Of course not. But ... I really think you should have a discussion with him before you officially begin skating with Dylan."

Courtney opens her mouth to protest again, but Helen's expression stops her dead in her tracks. It's the kind of look that says, "I don't care what you think, because you have to do this anyway."

And she knows that she does.

OUTSIDE CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT

A ding announces the elevator's arrival and a moment later its doors part to let Ryan inside. He steps aboard, immediately grateful that no one else is in the car, and silently urges the elevator to hasten its descent before someone else decides to use it. Although maybe sharing cramped quarters with a stranger for even a minute would help keep his mind off the thoughts that are already ravaging it ...

He is trying to get a handle on everything that happened inside that apartment in the last hours and how much it all could change his entire world.

He knew Claire had to have some feelings for him. He'd begun to doubt that anything would ever happen between them, but because of all the outside complications, not because of him and Claire themselves. Still, he knew that there had to be some feelings there.

The fact that Claire initiated all of that last night -- that's what shocks him most, even now. He was trying his hardest to have enough willpower not to manipulate the situation and hurt her even more, and then she did the last thing he ever expected and declared her feelings. He was almost ready to pack it in and give up, more ready than he's ever been in the nearly three years since he came to King's Bay in search of her, and then everything he's been hoping for just fell into his lap.

But what now? Part of him doesn't even want to consider that. The night that he and Claire shared was incredible; for the first time in longer than he can remember, he felt that connection between them come alive, the connection that has lingered on in his memory for so many years. Maybe it would be best to savor that and not ruin it with the complications that he knows are sure to follow ... No. Now that he's tasted it again, he has to have it. For real.

Hopefully Claire doesn't regret it. The way she was acting this morning -- he didn't even know how to face her. He didn't want to consider that she might not be as thrilled with what happened as he is.

The elevator settles to a stop on the ground floor. Ryan waits impatiently for the doors to let him out, and when they do, he busts right out--

--and right into another person.

He steps back to collect himself and is about to mutter a quick apology and be on his way when he glances up and realizes who he just slammed into: Brent Taylor.

Ryan stifles a groan, but in the static moment when their eyes meet, he realizes that he's not getting away without some sort of confrontation.

"Moriani," Brent says quietly. Ryan gets the impression that he's being looked up and down, evaluated -- which he probably is.

"Commander," Ryan says, returning the terse greeting but offering nothing more.

"What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same thing, no?"

"I'm here to see Claire," Brent says. He gives Ryan another scan, obviously taking in the fact that he's still wearing what he wore to dinner last night. "Apparently you've already done that."

"Yes I have, and if you don't mind, I was on my way out--"

"Hold up."

The pronounced sense of authority in Brent's voice rubs Ryan's already-raw nerves just the wrong way. "What, Taylor? Time for more threats? It's been awhile since you came around to harass my father and me--"

"No threats," Brent says coolly. "There's no need for threats. Threats are something you use to gain leverage in a situation, and I already know that I've got it."

"Oooh," Ryan mocks, holding up his hands and shaking them as if spooked by Brent's assertion. Truthfully, it's not the most comforting thing in the world to hear, but he's not letting that on. Especially not to such a righteous jerk.

"Just don't get too comfortable," Brent says as he pushes the button to call back the elevator, which has escaped. "Watch your step -- especially where Claire is concerned. I'll be watching you."

Ryan sneers at him, but thankfully, the elevator returns. Brent steps into it, still staring at Ryan as the doors close between them.

Somehow Ryan doesn't doubt that Brent will be watching. The question is, what will he see?

END OF EPISODE #259

What did you think of this shorter installment? Where do Claire and Ryan go from here? Should Courtney have to explain her decision to Jason any further? Is Diane going to forgive Sarah -- and should she? Come and share your commentary on this episode in the Footprints Forum!

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