

"Footprints" Episode #261

[Previously ...](#)

- Sarah and Diane reconciled and made a pact to face their respective problems head-on. As they parted, Diane shared that she saw Molly and Brent dining together at Windmills.
- Brent took Molly to a private spot on the beach, where they wound up lamenting their inability to take their connection to another level.
- While Jason bemoaned Courtney's choice to audition new skating partners, Helen convinced her daughter to talk to her ex before making any official decisions. Court and Jason made plans to meet.
- On his way out of Claire's building after spending the night with her, Ryan ran into Brent, who warned him not to get too comfortable in his burgeoning relationship with Claire.

CHARLENE POWERS AGENCY

Molly just happens to glance up from her desk at the right -- or wrong -- second, and in that second, she catches a flash of blonde hair flying across the office floor.

Oh no.

Sarah turns a corner at the end of a row of cubicles and has to look around for only the briefest moment before she spots her target. She heads for Molly with all the determination of a heat-seeking missile, incapable of being deterred even if there were anyone to stand in her way.

Which, of course, there isn't. Her angry gaze locks onto Molly's as she storms a furious path over the floor, right into the open side of Molly's cubicle.

Molly has little doubt what this must be about, but nevertheless she is determined not to let her sister make a scene -- or a fool of her -- in her workplace. "Sarah, what are you doing here?"

"I just found out something kind of interesting," Sarah says, her voice rough and threatening to jump to a far less tasteful level at any moment.

"And what was that?"

"I hear you had a little dinner date last night."

"I had *dinner* last night," Molly says calmly, though internally she is cursing Diane Bishop

for having to stick her nose into everything. "I didn't have a date."

"Sure sounds like you did," Sarah fires back accusatorily.

"Yes, I had dinner with Brent. But no, it was not a date. So calm down."

"You can say it wasn't a date all you want, but I don't think anyone's really buying it.

"It wasn't a date, Sarah. It couldn't have been a date. You know why? Because four and a half years ago, you saw Brent and I kiss, and instead of considering that we might really care about each other, you wormed your way into marrying him. So now he's your ex-husband and always will be, and I'm still your sister. That makes the whole dating thing kind of a big problem."

"Gee, how classy of you," Sarah sneers. "I bet all the other girls wish they had sisters who wouldn't date their ex-husbands--"

"Don't be sarcastic. Brent and I are always going to be friends, so you'd better get used to that idea. Especially since you're the one who set this whole mess in motion in the first place--"

"Don't you dare even try to blame this on me! I took responsibility for my part in all of this. I wish you would do the same thing."

"Keep your voice down," Molly warns. She wants to leap out of her chair and throttle her sister for having the nerve to confront her in the middle of the workday but knows that she's currently the only one with a real sense of restraint. Best not to lose that completely. "If you want to talk about this later, fine. I'm sure we can spend hours rehashing the same things over and over, since unfortunately, reality isn't going to change no matter how much you keep wishing it would."

"I love how you can turn on that whole sanctimonious act at the drop of a hat," Sarah says, shaking her head in clear disgust. "Maybe you can teach me to do that sometime. Obviously it works -- you've managed to fool everyone for thirty years."

"Sarah, calm down. I'm not getting into this any deeper with you right now. If you want to talk later--"

"Like you said, we're not gonna get anywhere, anyway. Saint Molly could never turn out to be wrong. So I'll go."

"Good."

"Don't think you're getting off the hook so easily," Sarah says as she hovers outside the

cubicle. "Turning me into the bad guy isn't going to make it any more okay for you and Brent to go public. Be 'friends' all you want, but I'm never going to be happy about it and it'll never be right."

She turns, blonde hair flipping behind her, and stomps across the floor to the elevator. Molly watches the melodramatic exit but, thankfully, no one else seems to take much notice.

She drops her head into her hands, silently wishing that somehow, the whole ugly situation could just be erased.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE

""Welcome to the real world,' she said to me
Condescendingly.
'Take a seat, take your life,
Plot it out in black and white ...""

The inviting acoustic sound of John Mayer fills the coffee house, creating a warm environment totally separate from that of the bright, lively summer day outside. It's a welcome change for Jason, who feels totally out of place in the sun today, considering the dark cloud that seems to have ensconced him.

He spots Courtney immediately. She's seated at a small wrought-iron table across the room. Her dark hair is pulled back into a ponytail, leaving her tanned shoulders to be bared by the light blue tank top she is wearing.

Extracting himself from his examination of her, he crosses the room. She looks up only once he is right beside the table.

"Hey," she greets him uncertainly.

He offers a wordless hello in response. Quickly he settles into the chair across from her, ready to get down to business. As much as he dreaded this meeting on his way here, he also can't wait to have another shot at reasoning with her -- or to hear her good news, if that's the case.

"Aren't you gonna get something to drink?" she asks, nodding down towards her own iced drink.

"Nah, I'm fine. I'd rather just get to talking."

"All right." She seems to be preparing herself, a sign that unsettles Jason even further.

"What is it, Court?"

"I guess I owe it to you to let you know what's going on," she says. "With me and skating, I mean."

Yeah, you do, he thinks, although he bites his tongue in favor of a leading, "Okay ..."

"It must've been a shock for you to come into the rink and see me skating with Dylan, yeah. But it came up so suddenly -- Sandy heard that he and his partner had broken up, and that he was looking for someone new. So we got in touch and he offered to come down for a tryout. It literally happened in, like, two days. It's not like this was some big thing I'd planned out."

"That's understandable," Jason says. "But yeah, it was a huge shock to see you skating with him all of a sudden. And with how uncertain things have been between us--" He cuts himself off, wondering if the future has seemed as unclear to her as it has to him. Maybe he's just been holding out false hope. "I dunno, I just would've appreciated knowing that you were even considering going after a new partner."

"That's what I'm trying to do now," she counters quickly. "Let you know what I'm doing."

He lifts his eyebrows at her. "Which is ... ?"

She hesitates, then spits it out: "I'm going to skate with Dylan."

MORIANI HOME

Ryan slips his key into the lock as quietly as possible and then waits. Slowly, carefully, he turns it, covering one hand with the other to make the motion more controlled. He hears the faint click of the lock sliding out of place and then grips the doorknob tightly. As steadily as he can, he turns the knob in his palm and pushes the door open.

He sets one foot, then the other, down on the wood floor of the foyer, careful to set down the toe of each first and then ease the heel down. Turning, he shuffles the lock back into position. Maybe he will be able to get upstairs without having to talk to anyone after all--

"Good morning," comes the rich, booming voice from across the foyer. The absolute quiet of the house -- and of his own entrance -- only amplifies Nick's voice more to Ryan's ears, making it sound even more smugly triumphant. Ryan grimaces before turning around to face his father.

"Hi," Ryan says, horribly conscious of the fact that he's wearing the same clothing that

Nick saw him wearing at Windmills last night.

"Long night, hmm?"

Ryan's eyes dart to the stairs hopefully before returning to Nick. "Sort of."

Nick doesn't miss a beat with the questions. "Where did you and Claire wind up, anyway?"

"Her apartment," Ryan admits, unable to think of anything else to say that wouldn't make him sound like a complete moron.

"Well, well." Nick's black dress shoe taps thoughtfully on the wood floor. "I have to admit, I wasn't so sure that you would get that far with her." Simple enough words, but it's everything that Nick *isn't* saying that makes it painfully clear to Ryan that he need not explain what happened or try to come up with a cover story: His father knows.

"You knew I wanted this," Ryan blurts out. "And you always taught me to take whatever I wanted, right? I was going to make it happen sooner or later."

"I wouldn't exactly call this 'sooner,' but nevermind that. Where do the two of you stand now? Or did you get to discuss that? Don't tell me you've spent years working toward some sort of one-night stand, Ryan--"

"It's not a one-night stand. We're going to--I don't know, exactly, but after last night, I think it's fair to say that Claire and I are going to be very ... close."

"I'm glad you've achieved your goal, or whatever this is," Nick says. "But I hate to think that you're harboring delusions now about having some sort of happy future with that woman."

Ryan feels the heat boiling within him. His hands curl into taut fists at his sides. "Why would they be delusions?"

"One night cannot erase years of lying and hating and everything else, Ryan. It can mask it, perhaps. But erase it? Never." Nick's face twists into a self-satisfied sneer, the kind of expression that Ryan hates maybe more than anything else in the world. It's a look -- more than that, a declaration -- that Ryan's perspective will always be lacking something, some crucial element that only Nick's wisdom can provide.

"Regardless," Nick continues, brushing aside his warnings for the moment but somehow making sure that they linger over Ryan, "I have something for you to take care of today. It needs to be done before this evening."

"Fine, what is it?"

"A delivery, that's all. Nothing major. Why don't you go upstairs and get yourself together and then I'll explain?"

Wordlessly Ryan moves for the stairs, trudging despite the incredible need he feels to be away from Nick's presence right now. He feels Nick watching him, knowing that he's expecting Ryan to be ready in just a few minutes, but Ryan has no intention of rushing. *Screw it. This job can wait.*

And just like that, his night with Claire weaves back in with the reality of his everyday life. It felt real -- too powerful to be a dream -- but somehow removed from the course of events that shape his daily existence. Now it all comes together as one; the rest of the world hasn't stopped turning simply because Ryan's has morphed into something that it wasn't even twelve hours ago.

Part of that everyday routine, of course, are Nick's little "jobs." The same jobs that, only a few months ago, Claire was chomping at the bit to figure out so she could squeal to Brent Taylor and who knows who else.

Still trying to piece those seemingly different universes together, Ryan drags himself up the stairs, unable to deny the newborn surge of worry flaring up inside himself.

CHARLENE POWERS AGENCY

Molly's knuckles bounce lightly against the door. For an instant she thinks that there is going to be no response, although she hasn't seen Camille leave. But then she hears the call from inside: "Come in!"

She opens the door tentatively, peeking inside before making a full entrance. Camille is seated at her desk, a pencil in hand and her chin in the other. There is a sketchpad resting in front of her and, from what Molly can tell, it is commanding far too much of her boss's attention.

"What can I do for you?" Camille asks, looking up at Molly though she continues to steal frazzled glances at whatever is on the pad.

"It's not a big deal. If you're busy I can--"

"Please, I could use a distraction," Camille says with a laugh. Her tone is inviting enough to convince Molly to close the door behind her.

Molly moves a little closer, close enough to see that the source of Camille's frustration seems to be a very rough sketch of a jacket-and-pants ensemble. "You look you're about

to rip your eyeballs out."

"That would be putting it politely. I'm working on some new designs, but I can't for the life of me make this one work."

"What's wrong with it?" Molly asks, now across the desk from the older woman. She leans forward just a bit to get more of a look at the design-in-progress.

"I'm not quite sure ..." Camille taps her pencil against the edge of the pad and then drops it onto the desk. "Something isn't clicking. It doesn't feel ... interesting enough."

"Mind if I have a look?"

"Go ahead."

Molly takes the sketchpad from Camille's hand and begins studying it. Immediately, the style, the whole character of the outfit, jumps out at her.

"Wow," she says. "This is a lot edgier than the stuff we usually produce, isn't it?"

"It is, yeah. I had a rush of inspiration for some things with a fresher look to them, but now ... I'm having trouble making the pieces fit together. The designs aren't coming together the way I'd hoped."

"I really like this," Molly says as she continues to study the sketch. "It has a really young look, you're right."

Camille sighs heavily. "Maybe I'm just too old to be designing this sort of thing," she muses aloud, tacking onto the end what sounds to Molly like a very uncomfortable laugh.

"No way! This is great. I don't know if it really fits with our image, but it's great stuff." Before Camille can respond, Molly pulls the pad closer to her face and then moves it away, her examination much more intense as a sudden thought strikes her. "I don't know if you thought of this, but ..." She hesitates with putting the idea out there. It's one thing to sketch out her own designs and envision them going into production, but offering suggestions to a real designer, especially one with as much experience and success as Camille Lemieux, seems like a line that she probably shouldn't cross.

"What?"

"No, nothing," Molly says, hurriedly handing the pad back to Camille.

"Let me hear it. At this point, anything might help."

Molly shoots another look over at the sketch, almost needing to be assured that her idea has some basis in reality. "I was thinking, if you just got rid of that fringy stuff -- it would really clean it up. It makes it sort of a different overall look, but it could be cool."

Now it is Camille's turn to study the drawing from this new perspective she's just been handed. To Molly's surprise, she doesn't grimace, nor does she wave the idea away quickly.

"You know, you might be onto something there, Molly."

"You think so?"

"Yeah!" Almost in a frenzy, Camille scoops up the pencil and sends its eraser flying over the sketch. "Absolutely, yeah. It's simpler, but ... very cute. Thanks, Molly."

"Uh, no problem." Molly is still trying to step away from her complete and utter shock that Camille liked her idea when the pencil and pad are set firmly upon the desk.

"All right, enough of that for now. Did you need something?"

"Oh," Molly stammers, trying to regain her mental footing. "I was coming in to vent, I guess."

"About what? Has that old bat **Blah Blah** been getting on your case?" Camille asks with a chuckle.

"I wish it were something I could brush off that easily, actually ... Do you remember how I told you all about my sister and her husband--ex-husband?"

"Brent, yes. Did something happen?"

"Of course. It's getting hard to remember a time when something *wasn't* happening," Molly says wearily. "Brent and I went out to dinner last night ... and we ran into this woman, Diane, who can be rather, um, difficult. Turns out she and my sister have been spending time together, so naturally, Diane had to run to Sarah and tell her that Brent and I were out."

Camille folds her hands on top of the desk. "I'm assuming Sarah's reaction is the reason you needed to vent?"

"Exactly. She came storming in here a little while ago like a bat out of hell, threatening that I'd better watch my step and everything. I ... I don't even know what I'm supposed to do anymore."

"I can absolutely understand why your sister would be upset at the thought of you and Brent getting together," Camille says.

"Yeah, me too," Molly agrees as a heavy sense of defeat begins to press down upon her.

"But," Camille adds, the unexpected turn in her tone setting Molly's emotions off on a rollercoaster ride, "that doesn't negate the fact that you and Brent have had feelings for each other since before they got married -- or that you have been *such* close friends for *such* a long time -- or that you will continue to be close whether or not Sarah likes it."

"So you're saying ... I should just forget about Sarah not liking it?"

"Well, no." Camille brushes a loose tendril of her upswept, dark blonde hair out of her face. "You have to be respectful of the fact that they were married and that she still harbors a lot of resentment over everything that has happened. But don't back down, either. Stick it out. If being with Brent is what truly makes you happy ... it'll be worth it in the end."

Molly nods, resolving for the millionth time not to cast aside the deepest feelings she has ever known simply because of Sarah -- and yet questioning whether she has the strength to do that.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE

"I'm going to skate with Dylan." Courtney spits out the phrase in one anxious mouthful, then watches as it makes itself a piece of Jason's reality. His face shows disbelief, hurt, and anger, morphing from one to another so seamlessly that Courtney thinks she can see new emotions in between them, a whole spectrum of pain that makes her stomach clench and twist at the thought that she brought it on.

No, she didn't bring it on. Jason did. If he'd never lied -- or if he'd been completely honest with her about the Alex thing after the *first* time she found out he'd been keeping a secret -- then they would still be together, on and off the ice.

"How can you do that?" he erupts with a suddenness that sends a rattle through Courtney's entire being. "How can you even think about skating with someone else?"

"Because skating means something to me! I'm not letting you take that away from me, too!" she shoots back.

Jason lowers his voice, bringing his focus directly to her eyes. She has to glance away. "Yes, I enjoy skating. Obviously. Otherwise I wouldn't have kept doing it for so many years," he says. "But a huge part of it was the fact that you and I were doing it together!"

We were achieving something that we both wanted together. It can't be the same with someone else."

"No, it can't," she admits, falling momentarily quiet but then quickly rebounding. "But maybe that's better. Maybe being so emotionally involved in what should be a professional relationship--maybe it's not a good idea."

"You're saying that because you're still mad over what happened. That emotional involvement -- that's what makes it so special! That's what makes us care so much." He shakes his head. "I just don't see how you can throw away this much history."

"I'm not throwing it away! You already took care of that, remember?"

"That's not fair, Court. You can be mad at me over the whole thing with Alex, but it's not like I was being all malicious and trying to sabotage everything we had--"

"That doesn't mean you didn't accomplish it!" she cuts in. "Don't you realize that every time I look at you, I feel like a complete fool? How can I skate with you if I can't even be around you without feeling like an idiot for trusting you or believing in what we had?"

He doesn't miss a beat. "I thought that's what a relationship was about -- working on stuff! How can you just give up on us, on something that was such a huge part of your life, because of this one thing?"

"*Because* it was such a huge part of my life! It still is! That 'one thing' made me completely question everything, Jason. Everything we ever had, it's like--I don't know, like it never meant the same thing to you that it did to me. Do you know what that feels like?"

She waits for him to argue that yes, of course he does, but when his response comes, it is the last thing she expected. It's not even a verbal response; rather, he rises from his chair, pushing it in roughly and never breaking the cold gaze that he has cast upon her.

She's not going to beg him to stay. She doesn't need to keep arguing in circles with him because she's not going to change her mind about any of this.

Jason pounds a path away from the table and out the door, not bothering to look back at her. How can he just not care? How can he just leave in the middle of this?

Because he's going to go to someone who will reassure him that he's in the right, that's why. He doesn't have to sit here and be reminded of what huge mistakes he made when he has someone to cheer him on and pick him up.

He must be going to see Lauren, Courtney realizes, a flicker of rage leaping up inside her.

Let him go. Let them wonder how she can be so cold-hearted. It doesn't matter, because she knows that she's making the right decision and she's doing what's best for her.

MORIANI HOME

Nick blows into the study without hesitation, closing the door behind himself before he even looks at Katherine, who is seated at the desk.

"What's the matter?" she asks as she sets down her pen.

"It's Ryan," he says. "It seems like we have a larger problem than we thought."

"In what sense?"

"With him and Claire. He spent the night with her last night, Katherine. God only knows where he thinks this is headed now."

She rises from the leather chair behind the desk with a boldness that catches Nick's attention. "Are you sure that they slept together?"

"I know they did. I could just tell ... Why does he have to be such a fool about this? Doesn't he realize that this is going to end in disaster?"

"I'm sure he does, on some level," she says calmly. "Unfortunately it's either not a conscious level or it's one that he's trying very hard to ignore."

Nick's hand toys with his silver mustache as he turns toward the bookshelf, panning over its contents without actually taking in any of them. "It's a crusade to prove that he never did anything wrong. I still can't figure out what possessed him to cover for Stan in that situation. But all these years later, he's still reacting to that decision, I know he is."

"I was certain that when Claire ran out of the restaurant last night, that was the end of whatever might have been going on between them."

"Honestly, so did I. Now it sounds as though they're closer than ever -- far closer than I ever thought they would get, to be honest." He shakes his head as worries that he can never voice to his wife begin to overpower him.

"We have to stop this," Katherine says firmly. She reaches out a gentle hand, resting it on Nick's shoulder. Her touch sends the slightest wave of ease through him as he listens to her confident declaration: "And I think I know just the thing to do it."

END OF EPISODE #261

Shouldn't Katherine have learned her lesson from what happened with Andy? Will she and Nick succeed in splitting up Ryan and Claire? Should Molly forget about Sarah and get closer to Brent? Come voice your opinions over at the Footprints Forum!

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