

"Footprints" Episode #262

[Previously ...](#)

- Jason was floored when Courtney announced that she is going to skate with Dylan Carrington. He questioned how she could toss away their history together, but she countered that he already did that by keeping so many secrets from her.
- After learning from Diane that Molly and Brent were dining together at Windmills, Sarah confronted her sister at work and vowed not to be made a fool. Molly later discussed the situation with her boss, Camille Lemieux, who urged her not to give up if Brent truly makes her happy.
- Diane and Sarah reconciled, then made a pact to face the lingering issues in their lives: Sarah's uncertainty over Matt's past and Diane's mysterious break from Brian.

CASCADE RIDGE APARTMENTS

Jason fingers the key again as he stands in the open doorway, drinking in the naked apartment. *His* naked apartment. Not for long, though: The clean white of the walls and the subdued beige of the carpet are just calling out to be furnished, to have someone's life breathed into them, and he's more than happy to oblige. Excited, actually.

"Dude, I cannot believe this place is ours!" he exclaims, eyes still roving all over the place.

"I know!" comes Alex's response from the kitchen. Jason hears a few cupboards open and close and smiles at the knowledge that Alex must be as pumped about this as he is.

"We gotta go shopping for furniture and stuff really soon," Jason calls back.

"Yeah, I'm really, really excited about all that stuff," Alex says as he emerges from the kitchen. He walks to the middle of the small dining area, where a chandelier is hanging from the ceiling, just waiting to have a table beneath it. "This is so awesome! I can't believe we have our own place."

"It's gonna be really annoying to sleep at my parents' house for the next couple of days, knowing that this place is just sitting here."

Alex nods vigorously. "Yeah, I am dying to get out of that apartment with my mom. Especially since she's got that boyfriend over all the time now."

"We should totally just camp out here with, like, sleeping bags or something. At least for one night before we get moved in. It'd be funny."

He can tell that Alex likes the idea. "Count me in. Even though that makes us huge dorks."

"Huge dorks with our own apartment!" Jason cries out as a huge grin spreads over his face. He turns and heads down the short hallway to the bedrooms, turning in at the one on the right. This one's going to be his. Even though the other one has an adjoining bathroom, it doesn't really matter. He's just as happy to let Alex have that one. His fingers still wrapped around the key, he studies appreciatively the place that he'll now be able to call home.

He hears Alex's footsteps coming down the hallway and, in a moment, his new roommate joins him in the entrance to the bedroom. "This is so awesome, huh?" Alex asks.

Jason doesn't turn as he answers, still too busy gazing around the room. "Hell yeah. I cannot *wait* to get moved in!" He shuffles over to the closet and opens it up, again surveying it as he considers what will go where.

"Maybe this sounds weird, but ... don't you love how, like, fresh this whole place feels? Like we get to have this whole new beginning and start a new chapter here?"

Now Jason shifts his attention to his friend. "Yeah, I guess you're right."

Alex shrugs. "I dunno, I get really excited about stuff like that. Fresh starts are so nice. It's just such a cool idea -- even if you can't really ever just start from scratch."

"But we can damn well try! I think a fresh start is exactly what I need, after that bomb Courtney dropped on me before."

"I don't know if this helps," Alex says after a pause that Jason is sure feels very heavy to both of them, "but maybe you should look at that as a fresh beginning for your skating. Don't think of it as the end of something -- look at it as the start of something new for your skating career."

The idea doesn't sound as repulsive to Jason as he would have thought it might. "Yeah, maybe. It's like, I don't even know where to go from here. I don't wanna quit, I know that."

"So don't."

"Well, yeah, but what do I do? Get a new partner? That still seems really weird."

"Then just keep practicing and training. Get better. If you want to go and get a new partner and go somewhere with that, then you can. You have the option, that's the nice

part."

"I guess you're right," Jason says softly, still trying to wrap his mind around the idea that his future -- both on and off the ice -- now has nothing to do with Courtney.

MOLLY FISHER'S APARTMENT

"Come in!" Molly calls out, too consumed with trying to get her hands around the overly energetic puppy to deal with answering the door.

The door opens swiftly and she smiles when she sees who it is, but the look that greets her is less happy than she would have imagined.

"What's wrong?" she asks as Brent closes the door behind him.

"I don't like the idea of you leaving the door unlocked. And yelling for people to just come in? I would've thought you'd be more worried after Craig ..."

"Craig was one maniac," she says lightly, although inside she is simultaneously scolding herself for being so careless and trying to convince herself that there really isn't any reason to worry.

"Just be careful," Brent says, a grave expression still dominating his face. Molly can't help but find his concern charming.

He walks to the middle of the living room, where Rex the pug has momentarily fallen quiet, watching both of them with eyes full of intensity. Brent chuckles.

"Has this guy been crazy lately?" he asks.

"Is he ever anything but?" Molly counters with a laugh. She moves to sweep the puppy up into her arms but he darts to the left and tears a quick, frantic circle around the coffee table.

Brent shakes his head in amusement as he watches. "Someone told me they grow out of this eventually."

"Good! He likes to do this at the absolute most inopportune times."

"That's a puppy for ya," Brent grins. "Just ignore him, he'll calm down. I got your message -- what's going on?"

Molly plops down onto the sofa. "Well, guess who had to open her mouth about seeing us at dinner last night?"

"Diane?" he guesses with an annoyed roll of the eyes.

"Of course. She must've made a beeline for Sarah. I swear, that woman gets off on stirring up trouble."

"I don't doubt it. So what kind of trouble did she stir up?"

"I got a little visit at the office today. From Sarah."

"Oh, jeez. What'd she do, make a big scene? She must be taking lessons from Diane."

"Well, she didn't attract too much attention," Molly says, inserting a sigh of relief as she recalls how nervous she was that people were going to realize what was going on between the sisters. "Thank God. But she gave me the usual lecture about how she'll never believe that you and I are just friends and that it must have been a date."

His jaw clenched tightly, Brent moves a few throw pillows out of the way to sit down on the sofa. He seems to be wrapped deeply in thought, or at least concern.

"I told her that it wasn't a date and that whether she likes it or not, we're still going to be friends," Molly continues. "Basically she demanded that I admit I was in the wrong and then stomped away when I refused to get into the same argument with her again."

"I don't even know how we deal with this. Do we just ignore it? Or give in and stop spending time together? Either way, it seems ridiculous."

"Yeah, it does. Anyway, I went in and talked to Camille about it -- oh, my God, guess what else?"

"What?" he asks, obviously jarred by the sudden shift in her tone.

"When I went in the office to talk to Camille, she was working on a sketch, and it was giving her a ton of trouble. So I had a look at it and made a suggestion, and she loved it! She was so happy with the way it turned out."

"Excellent! At least you got to have an up-point in your day."

"Yeah, it was really exciting," Molly says. "But this Sarah thing ... Camille thinks we should just stick it out and hope that Sarah gets over it eventually. Only thing is, I'm not so sure she will."

"With Diane around? Even fatter chance than before. Those two are not good for each other." He leans back as Rex reappears and leaps onto the couch. "Apparently trying to be subtle about it and not throw anything in her face isn't really doing much."

"Yeah, but we can't exactly just say screw it and say we're 'together,' either. My parents would kill me. And I don't want to do that to Sarah."

"Neither do I," Brent says, scratching under Rex's chin as the puppy yawns. "But I'm feeling like no matter what we do, someone's going to get hurt in the end. There's no clean way out of this."

"No, there isn't. And I don't want to be selfish or pathetic or anything like that, but I don't think I could just walk away and forget about us, you know?"

"Same here." He stares straight ahead at the blank television, holding Rex in his lap as he thinks for a long moment. "I don't plan on doing that. We're gonna keep doing things exactly the way that we have -- we can spend time together without being tasteless about it. And," he adds with a smile, "we're gonna enjoy it, dammit."

"Sounds good to me," Molly says, savoring the fleeting moment of peace that they are fortunate enough to share.

VISION PUBLISHING

Diane eagerly pulls the last piece of paper from the printer's tray and places it face-down on top of the others. She turns the stack over, flips through it once just to confirm that she's done, and evens out the pile as she sets it back down on the desk.

She leans back in her leather chair, feeling it stretch back so that eventually her gaze is directed up at the ceiling. She's been waiting to get out of here for two hours, but she wouldn't allow herself to leave until that last task was all finished up. Now it is and she just wants to sit here, relishing the freedom and, even more, the accomplishment of having a big project completed ...

Drawing a deep breath, she sets down her feet so that her weight moves forward and brings the chair back to an upright position. Her eyes slingshot right from the ceiling to the phone.

Damn. Thoughts of another task flood her mind, unable to be ignored.

"Well, if I look into Matt's family, then you have to go try and settle things with Brian."

The deal with Sarah. This isn't something Diane especially wants to be facing now -- or

ever, for that matter. But especially now, since all afternoon she's been entertaining thoughts of picking Samantha up from the babysitter, changing into something comfortable and completely inappropriate for wearing out in public, ordering Chinese takeout, and spending the night relaxing on the couch with her daughter.

Now that the possibility of trying to get Brian on the phone has crossed her mind, however, she knows it won't leave easily. Not that it ever really leaves: Despite her best insistences even to herself, she knows that she thinks about him or about what happened at least daily.

For a moment she attempts to shove the thought aside, filing it into the 'things to do tomorrow' category, but she's always been like this. Once she gets one thing accomplished, she is usually more motivated to do another. When an idea hits her, she likes to run with it. Even an idea as generally unappealing as addressing her time in L.A. seems a little more manageable right now ...

She glances at the phone uncertainly. Can she really handle hearing his voice -- or, rather, the things that she is pretty sure it is going to say? What would she say in response? Or to begin, for that matter? They're all questions that she has pondered time and time again, but definitive answers never become any clearer.

Her hand reaches out and picks up the receiver, then drops it back into its cradle almost instantly. She goes into the top drawer and emerges with an address book. Flipping to the H's, she finds Brian's number, then sees that it is exactly the same as she thought it was. She never realized that she'd memorized it.

Tucking the phone between her ear and shoulder, she sets her index finger to work dialing, first very slowly and then very quickly. As she listens to the phone begin to ring on the other end, she brings her thumb nail to her teeth, but drops it before she can do any damage.

Two rings ... three ... four ... and the machine.

The machine. Dammit. She hangs up before the beep, having no intention of leaving a message. She doesn't want this out there hanging. She doesn't want to be on edge all the time that he might return her call whenever he feels like it.

She doesn't want the ball in his court.

That's how this whole mess got started, she recalls bitterly as she replaces the address book in the top drawer. It never would have gotten so ugly if he hadn't been the one to push that damned Serena Scott in the first place.

She only did what she felt she had to do. It wouldn't have been a big deal had Brian not

found out the way he did.

You can't change the past, her mind asserts boldly. Agreeing with it, she rises and begins gathering her things, hoping to leave the unsuccessful phone call attempt here at the office and have a relaxing night at home.

CASCADE RIDGE APARTMENTS

"Guess you're right," Jason says as he shuts the closet's sliding doors. "Court's made her decision. I've gotta live with it one way or another."

"That's right." Alex studies his friend, who has leaned against one of the bare walls and is staring off at some point on the ceiling. "Hey, Jason -- I know she didn't go about this whole thing the best way she could have, and that has to hurt, too. Right now she's playing a lot of games, it sounds like. But it won't be like that forever."

Jason lifts one shoulder in half a shrug. "With Courtney? I don't know about that."

"There's more to her than that, you know that," Alex counters. "You care about her for a reason. She's just still acting out of hurt right now, I think."

"Yeah, I know, I get it, I screwed up." Jason clasps his palms to his face and lets out a weary sigh. "When do we get to move past that?"

"We are moving past it. Maybe you don't see it yet, but we are. Everybody's getting on with their lives, wounds are healing ..." He trails off, caught up in a tangle of thoughts. "Jeez, it's so weird to think about how all of this shook out. When this whole thing blew up, I didn't think Lauren would be the one helping you through it. And with the way Courtney reacted to you, I never thought she'd turn around and be so supportive of me."

"Yeah, you said she took you out clubbing. How'd that go?" Jason's words carry a definite sense of wanting to move away from the present topic and Alex is happy to oblige the silent request.

"It was good, I mean, we had fun and everything."

"You meet anyone?"

Alex can feel his cheeks start to burn a little bit, although he's not entirely sure why. Instinct, probably. "Um, I danced with this guy--Jeremy--for a little while and we talked. Nothing really big there ..."

"And?"

"And what?"

"Well, I get the impression that something at least a little bit exciting happened," Jason goads him, with a playful grin that makes Alex want to share the most intriguing -- and baffling -- part of the night.

"Nothing, really," he finds himself shrugging. He can feel a familiar battle playing out inside himself: Part of him wants to spill all, but the other part is shaking and ready to curl up into a ball and drop the entire thing.

"And by nothing you mean something, I'm guessing?"

Somehow Alex manages to push the timid part of himself aside long enough to begin recounting the story, and once he begins, it flows with increasing speed and ease. "Okay, so a couple weeks ago, I had this little run-in with this guy at Cassie's -- nothing big, he just grabbed my drink and thought it was his and he was kind of an asshole, actually. But, like, I swear to God there was this weird moment where our eyes caught or something."

Abruptly he stops, as the words have made their way from his mouth to his ear and a sharp pang of self-consciousness strikes him.

"And does that connect at *all* to what we were talking about a minute ago?" Jason asks. Alex knows it's more of a prod than a question, because obviously Jason knows that it does connect.

"Well, yeah, I just--I dunno, it sounds kind of stupid. I mean, nothing really happened or anything."

"Yeah, but there's some kinda point to the story, right?"

Alex concedes that much with a shrug, then forces himself to go on. "So the point was, I guess, that while I was dancing with that Jeremy guy at the club, I saw the guy from the coffeehouse there. We made eye contact for, like, a split-second, but I looked away and when I looked back, he was gone. Couldn't find him anywhere the rest of the night."

"Weird." Jason folds his arms and leans with his shoulder against the nearest wall. "Maybe you just caught him on the way out or something."

"Maybe, yeah. But it was pretty early. Who knows?"

"So when you saw him at Cassie's -- was it like he was interested?" Jason asks. Alex thinks he detects a note of cautiousness in his friend's voice, not that he necessarily

blames him. The conversation is pretty much uncharted territory for both of them. Nothing wrong with moving slowly.

"I don't know about 'interested.' I mean, it was like ten seconds, and it wasn't like a friendly moment."

"You think he was checking you out, though?"

Alex shrugs; his shoulders seem extra-heavy, as though his body is resisting all participation in this strange, new arena of discussion. But he glances up from the carpet and sees Jason grinning again, that same goofy grin that he almost always wears. It's not mocking or threatening, Alex knows that. It's accepting, maybe a little awkward but ultimately just excited for Alex.

A wave of tingly excitement floods through Alex as he admits, "Maybe, yeah."

"So you had him pegged, at least."

"Yeah," Alex laughs.

"Maybe you should go back there next week and see if he's there again. You never know ..."

"Guess not." Alex steps aside as Jason makes his way out of the bedroom and begins walking back down the hallway.

"Let's get out of here," Jason says. "I wanna go fill my parents in on this deal."

"I should go tell my mom, too," Alex says, taking his first steps down the hallway as Jason reaches the front door and opens it. He can't help sprouting a smile that he knows must look completely dopey, but he doesn't care and even allows it to linger for a moment. Maybe something exciting -- and *good* -- really is going to happen.

END OF EPISODE #262

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