

"Footprints" Episode #269

[Previously ...](#)

- Alex was less than pleased to hear of Sally's plans to wed Stan. Yet he refused to interfere, resolving to let his mother make whatever mistakes she will.
- After learning that her new skating partner, Dylan, is gay, Courtney had the idea of setting him up with Alex, who tentatively agreed to the blind date.
- Still refusing to admit to -- or unable to remember -- raping Claire, Stan condemned Ryan's ungrateful attitude.

CHASE HOME

The ceaseless tapping on the window again draws Don's attention away from the canvas before him. He's spent much of the morning attempting to put down in paint the ideas that were circling through his brain before he fell asleep last night. But autumn has chosen today to announce its arrival with what feels by now like a torrential downpour, and it's not making it easy for him to focus on painting.

So when the doorbell rings, it's almost a welcome distraction. At least he doesn't have to stand in the studio without an actual reason for not getting any work done.

Briskly he makes his way through the house to the front door. A quick flip of his hand undoes the lock -- as he realizes that he's still holding his brush -- and he pulls the door open.

"Hi," he says uncertainly, not sure what to make of the sight that greets his eyes. In front of him, wearing a broad smile against the ominous gray background of the rainy day, is Sally.

"Hi!" she responds, nearly making up for his lack of enthusiasm with her own. "You're not busy, are you?"

He shoots a sideways glance at the brush. "No, I guess not. What can I do for you?"

"I need to talk to you."

After a moment of hesitation, he steps to the side. "Come on in."

"It's really ugly out there," she notes as she removes her rain-splattered coat and hangs it on one of the pegs by the door without even asking.

"Yeah, it looks like a mess."

"I guess fall's here, huh?" She barely waits for his nod, then switches gears. "Anyway, I didn't drop in to talk about the weather."

"Didn't think so. What are you doing here, Sally?"

"I told you, I need to talk to you. I have big news."

"I know," he says, tempted to scold himself for putting such an abrupt end to her excitement. "Alex was here the other day. He told us."

"Oh." Sally attempts to regroup, obviously not having expected this twist.

Only Sally would completely overlook the possibility that Alex might have happened to come by here sometime in the span of a week, Don thinks, doing a mental roll of the eyes.

"I guess congratulations are in order," he says somewhat half-heartedly. He's not entirely sure that he should be offering such a sentiment, especially considering Alex's misgivings about the entire situation, but it's what Sally expects and it's polite.

Clearly his doubts are lost on her; she eats the accolade right up. "Thank you. You're right, though, that is why I came by. I wanted to deliver something in person."

"What's that?"

"An invitation," she says, reaching into her purse and withdrawing a small white envelope. "I want you -- and Helen -- to be there, Don. It's time that we all put the past behind us."

He's tempted to say that he thought they did that almost three years ago when Helen and Courtney forced him to allow Sally and Alex to spend Christmas with them. Sally was more than apologetic for her schemes to split up Don and Helen, and it seemed as though some semblance of peace had been reached. For some time Don had feared that Sally might be lying and that she'd soon be back in action, but she kept her word and left them alone.

"What's left to resolve?" he asks, his tone almost accusatory. Is she getting at something here? "You apologized for everything you did. You realized you were wrong. I don't see what more can be done."

She folds her arms in front of her and stands that way for several seconds, not moving and not speaking, just staring up towards the top of the staircase. "I don't know," she

says at last. "I hate this, Don. I hate that there are still hard feelings, even if we don't talk about them. I know they're there."

"We can't just erase everything that happened."

"No, but ... I realize that I made a lot of mistakes. But we had something special a long time ago."

"Yeah, we did. Times change, Sally. People change. Obviously we've both moved on." In a way he feels bad taking such a firm stand with her, but he knows that he has to be final about it.

"Will you at least come to the wedding?" she asks. She sounds as though she's grasping for straws now. "It would mean a lot to have you and Helen there."

"Fine," he finds himself answering. "But Sally--"

"What?"

"Don't make this entirely about yourself. There's someone else who's very important in all of this, in case you're forgetting."

"I'm not making it about myself--"

"Just don't forget about Alex," Don says in a much calmer voice than he's envisioned using when he's thought of having this talk with her. "Have you talked to him much about this?"

"He's doesn't like it," she says quickly. "I don't think he even wants me to be happy, I swear."

"Or maybe he *does* want you to be happy. Are you sure that this marriage is a good decision?"

MORIANI HOME

Ryan ducks his head down toward his chest, managing to shield his face somewhat from the rain's onslaught as he locks the car and hurries to the front door. He keeps his focus down as he bounds up the concrete steps to the small porch area; the pricking of sharp, harsh rain against his neck and shoulders is far more desirable than having them sting his face. The front door key already gripped between his thumb and index finger, he steps up onto the porch -- and nearly falls backward in horror.

"God!" he cries out, struggling to regain his breath. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting. I wanted to see you and nobody was home, so I figured I'd wait," Stan says. He is standing just to the right of the door, cloaked in a damp brown trenchcoat that Ryan is sure has seen years of wear and tear.

"My father and Katherine are out for the afternoon," Ryan explains unnecessarily. His breathing is still ragged and he can feel the residual thumping of his heart against the inside of his chest. "God, you were standing there like a damn ghost--"

"I didn't wanna miss you."

"Yeah, well, you sure got me." Ryan's voice takes on a biting tone as the shock subsides and all the anger of his last encounter with Stan comes rushing back to him.

"Can we talk?" Stan asks as Ryan finally opens the front door and steps inside.

"Talk about what?"

"I have something to tell you."

"What, you actually don't want a favor, for once?" Now in the foyer, Ryan shivers as his body realizes the difference between the warm house and the outdoor chill.

"No." Stan's eyes drop, then bounce back up to Ryan. "Well, kinda."

"I should've known. What is it this time? More money? I'm through with that. I'm through--"

"I don't want money."

Ryan softens just a little bit, folding his arms in front of himself to ward off the cold. He could shut the door, but he's not sure that he wants Stan inside the house, and he's apparently not getting rid of him just yet. "Then what?"

"I-I'm getting married," Stan sputters. "Sally and me, we were talking, and we think you should be there."

A moment of hesitation seizes Ryan before he can speak. "Look, I'm happy for you and all, but I'm not coming. Do you remember anything I said to you the last time we spoke? I'm not going to play this ridiculous game anymore."

"That's why I want you there, Ry. I wanna put all this behind us."

Ryan stands unmoving, his lips held in a thin, tight line.

"There's been a lotta crap," Stan says, "and I think we both just need to suck it up and stop it. Let's start fresh. Come to the wedding."

JASON FISHER & ALEX MARSHALL'S APARTMENT

"I feel so out of the loop," Alex says, slumping down into the sofa. "I don't know what half this stuff is anymore."

"That's because their target audience is like 10 years younger than us!" Jason reaches into the tub of Red Vines on the coffee table and takes another. He's lost count of how many he's eaten, but sitting around pigging out and watching MTV seems like the perfect arrangement for such a lazy, dreary day.

On the screen, Avril Lavigne is rocking out over some "Sk8er Boi." Jason's heard the song enough on the radio to know the tune and some of the words, so he hums along as he chomps on the licorice.

"Hey," Alex says suddenly. "You do realize that you're a figure-skating male, right?"

"Huh?"

"A 'skater boy'! Hahaha!"

"Shut up," Jason says, grinning as he shakes his head.

"I'm gonna have to find ways to insert that into all of our conversations from now on."

"I'm sure Avril would be proud." Jason casts an idle glance out the window into the dull gray day. "Man, I really need to get a job."

"I thought you turned in a bunch of applications," Alex says. Now it's his turn to grab a Red Vine.

"I did. But I haven't heard anything so far. Waiting sucks."

"Just keep hounding them. Something'll turn up." He munches on the Red Vine as he continues, "So what are you gonna do about skating? Are you looking for a new partner?"

The idea has been rattling around in Jason's head for some time, but discussing it with someone else solidifies it in a very uncomfortable way. Sandy has been wise enough not

to push the issue -- yet. "Considering it. There's not much I can do without one. And I'm not holding out hope that it's gonna work with Courtney."

"Good," Alex says, then scrambles to add, "Not about you and Courtney--I meant that it's good you're working on moving on--"

"I know what you mean. You're right, it is good. I have to keep telling myself that. She's skating with Dylan and there's no use wasting my time hoping that things will magically turn around."

He can see something else dangling on the tip of Alex's tongue, ready to be spoken but still being deliberated over.

"What is it?" Jason asks finally.

"I wasn't sure if I should say anything, just 'cuz I know it's sort of a sore point, but ... Guess who Court wants to set me up?"

"Who?" As soon as the automatic response slips through his lips, it hits him. "Dylan?"

"Yeah. Did you know he's gay?"

"I didn't know, but it doesn't surprise me," Jason muses. "So she wants to set the two of you up on like a blind date?"

"Pretty much, yeah. She said she'd bring a picture over so I could have a look at him. What do you think?"

Jason shrugs. "Can't hurt, I guess. I mean, I don't really know the guy at all. His old skating partner was kind of a bitch, but I don't know much about him."

"So you think I should go for it?"

"If you're comfortable with it, yeah. What's the worst that happens? It winds up being a bad date? You have just as much chance of that with someone you meet yourself."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," Alex says, obviously still working the notion over in his mind.

Grabbing another piece of licorice, Jason lies back in the recliner. This will be good for Alex. Who knows, maybe it'll turn into something really promising. And if not, at least he might have a good time. He's needed this.

And how ironic that Courtney's the one helping him out now. After Jason got so angry at

her for being unsupportive of Alex ... she's doing more to help him out than Jason can even fathom doing.

There's always another twist, Jason thinks with a sigh as his eyes roll up towards the ceiling.

CASSIE'S COFFEEHOUSE

"God, these muffins are sooo good!" Courtney breaks off another piece of the oversized blueberry muffin in front of her and holds it up for Dylan to see before stuffing it into her mouth.

"They probably have like 1,000 calories each," Dylan says, nevertheless watching intently as she downs it.

"We just skated for three hours. I think I can afford it."

"You say that now ..." Smiling, he takes a deep sip of his latte.

"All right, so you know how I had something I wanted to ask you about?"

He nods, still holding the latte right in front of his face.

"Okay, I've got this friend ..." Before he can say anything, she reaches into her purse for the picture that she stashed in there before she left the house this morning. She pulls it out quickly and holds it out for Dylan to see. "Him," she says, pointing to Alex with her index finger.

As Dylan studies the picture, Courtney does the same, even though she's done it so many times before. It's a photo of Alex and Lauren at a party; she's always considered it to be an exceptionally good shot of Alex. For a while it was on her desk in a frame, but it has been replaced by a more recent picture of herself and Lauren.

"Yeah, what about him?"

"Would you be interested in going out with him?"

"You mean, like, a blind date?"

"Well, sort of," she says, a little bit defensively. "It's not, like, a dirty word or something."

"I don't know, Courtney." Another sip of the latte allows him some time to choose his

words. "Blind dates can be a little weird."

"That's because you have no guarantee who or what you're gonna wind up with! I can promise you that Alex is a terrific guy. He's really, really nice, and smart -- he's working on his first novel right now. And come on, look at the picture!"

His gaze has been lingering over it the entire time, anyway. "He's definitely a cutie, I'll give you that."

"There you go. It'll be fun, Dylan."

He holds up the picture, still analyzing it as though the answer might appear in front of him eventually, and she waits by sipping on her Chai tea.

"Count me in," he says finally, looking up and flashing her that same smile that plays so well out on the ice in front of judges and an audience.

"Wise decision, my friend. Wise decision." She takes the photo back and tucks it away in her purse. This is going to be just what Alex needs.

CHASE HOME

"I just can't get through to him," Sally says, abruptly switching the subject and tossing up her hands in what looks to Don to be frighteningly close to defeat.

"Have you really tried?" he challenges, recalling how easy it was to get Alex to open up when he made a concerted effort.

Apparently the idea that she could be the one at fault is appalling. "Yes! Don, what else am I supposed to do?"

"Talk to him! Keep talking to him! He's not going to up and spill everything that might be bothering him in three seconds flat."

"It's just so hard." She sighs heavily. "He doesn't want to talk to me and he doesn't like anything I do. It's like I don't even know him anymore."

"He doesn't hate you, Sally. He's still a kid--"

"Is your kid like that? Does she tell you things?" There is a sudden desperation about her that makes Don take a step back. For the first time in a long time, he feels bad for her -- and not just pity.

"Everyone is different," he says. "Sometimes Courtney doesn't know when to *shut* her mouth. Alex is a good kid. He's turning into a wonderful man. Maybe you just need to make more of an effort."

"By doing what? He moved out on me, just like that!" She snaps her fingers for effect. "I went to see him to tell him about the wedding and he nearly bit my head off."

"That's what I mean. Don't make it about you! Talk about him. Give him time to open up. When was the last time you read anything that he wrote? He's a very, very talented writer."

"I know that! The teachers always said that--"

"It's been years and years since you had to speak with any of his teachers! Make the effort on your own. Show some genuine interest in him, not just in being a good parent. It will make a difference."

Her only response is to shake her head.

"I'm serious, Sally."

"I know you are! What do you want me to say? Do you want me to admit that I'm a horrible parent? It's been hard. Do you have any idea how hard it's been? You went on and built up this whole wonderful life with Helen and your daughter, and I've struggled the whole way. Don't you think I'm tired of flying all over the country serving food to people? I wish I had the luxury to stay home and paint whenever I wanted!"

The sudden venom -- though he's not sure at whom it's directed -- stuns Don into silence. He can do nothing but study her, really study her, for the first time in years and years. This is probably the first genuine emotion that she's shown him since he divorced her almost a quarter-century ago. When she came back to King's Bay, it was nothing but schemes and lies and seductive games. Now he's seeing her in a different light: a weary woman, a woman who's done her time and yet has never managed to glean enough from those experiences to move beyond them. The realization fills him with a painful flood of anguish.

"I'm tired of making mistakes," she says, her breathing now much harsher. "I want this to last. I want something that I can count on. I don't want to need a back-up plan anymore!"

"Sally--" Her name rolls out of his mouth weakly. He's not even sure where is going with it, other than to attempt to offer what will probably be scant comfort.

"I want this to work out. I'm determined to make it." She grabs her coat off the hook and

scrambles back into the wet material. "Please, Don, come to the wedding. Don't make me think that I'm walking into another dead end."

She pulls the door open, not even waiting for him to respond.

"Sally," he says again. This time it comes out as a choke and he has to clear his throat before he can continue. "Good luck. I mean it."

"Thanks," she says, almost under her breath, as she hurries away from the house and back out into the rain.

MORIANI HOME

"Do you really wanna leave things like this?" Stan continues.

Ryan still doesn't move. What Stan is saying makes sense, in a way. Why leave things like this? Why live the rest of his life remembering what a miserable relationship he had with his biological father? Maybe he's been waiting for a chance like this--

"I'm not only tryin' to hit you up for money," comes the next part of the argument out of Stan's mouth. His words are rushed, as if Ryan's silence is only propelling him to speak faster and say more, to do whatever it takes to convince him. "I won't just be after money, I swear. And you can drop that whole thing about Claire--about saying I ... you know--"

"Absolutely not!" The refusal comes tearing out of Ryan ferociously. What Stan was saying almost made sense. For a moment. The idea of being able to have a peaceful relationship with his father was so appealing -- so much so that he disregarded the real reason for his hatred.

"I am not going to keep lying about that!" he spits right in Stan's face. "And you are not going to be able to cover your ass here!"

Stan shakes his head in a combination of shock and disgust. "You really are Nick Moriani, Jr."

"Better than being Stan Lincoln, Jr." Ryan moves to slam the door, but Stan blocks the effort.

"I didn't touch that girl! You better keep your mouth shut about that, kid."

"I have kept my mouth shut for years and years! I'm through with it. And I have no sympathy for you. You're a miserable old bastard, you know that?"

"I can't believe I thought there might be--"

"Drop the act, Stan! It's not working. It's never going to work again. For once in your life, be a man and own up to what you did."

He sees Stan's teeth gritting and, an instant later, there is a fist flying towards him. He barely manages to block it.

"What, you're gonna try to kick my ass like I'm twelve years old? Don't even think about it. And by the way, Claire is considering pressing charges against you. So get used to reality -- fast." And with that, Ryan manages to slam the door.

One pound follows right away, but then there are no more. He doesn't even bother to look out one of the windows to see if Stan is still waiting out there. It's over.

He wishes he could feel better about that. He should feel better about that.

That bastard raped Claire. He ruined both of their lives. He doesn't deserve forgiveness, especially if he's not willing to claim any sort of responsibility.

Finally Ryan is able to walk away from the door, fury still racing through his veins ... even though he can't quite manage to shake the image of Stan walking away through the driving rain, cut off once and for all from the son to whom he never bothered to be a father.

END OF EPISODE #269

Can Ryan get Stan out of his life? Is it time for Stan to pay for all that he's done? What about Sally's outburst with Don? Join us in the Footprints Forum to make your thoughts heard!

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