

"Footprints"

Episode #177

[The Day After #176, Afternoon]

[Previously ...](#)

*Nick vowed to Ryan that his marriage to Katherine would allow him access to the money necessary to pay off their debt to the mob.

*Courtney argued with Don and Helen about the direction of her career.

*Matt gave a sample for baby Victoria's paternity test. Sarah confided in Andy about her fear of losing Brent.

TEASER

FITCH MANSION-

"It's so nice to see you," Katherine beams. She slides her arm inside Nick's elbow and leads him out of the foyer.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything," Nick says. "I usually don't drop in unexpectedly like this, but I was in the area, and-well, I wanted to see you."

"I don't mind one bit," she responds with twinkling eyes.

"So what have you been up to?"

"Frustrating myself," she sighs. She leads him a few steps further, up to the entry of the study, and nods her head in the direction of the desk. It is covered in papers, bills, notepads, and more. "I'm trying to get my finances in order. Everything is such a mess, though. And now that Andrew is gone, I have to sort it out by myself."

Nick tries not to look too curious as he asks, "Whatever became of the joint accounts? Does Andrew still have access to them?"

"I suppose," Katherine says. "After I cut him off and then gave him access again, he moved a substantial amount of it into his own account."

A flash of panic hits Nick. "How much did he take?"

"Not an enormous amount. Enough for him to live on comfortably, I guess. But he still has access to the joint account, so he can take what he needs when he needs it. That's how his father left things."

"I see." Nick strokes his mustache thoughtfully. "You're having trouble keeping everything in order?"

"To some degree, yes. There are so many technicalities involved, thanks to my late husband's will." She steps inside the study and makes her way over to the desk, staring at the pile of paperwork. "Andrew always took care of these things."

"I'm here to help you," Nick says, placing an arm around her. "If you want me to take a look at things ..."

Hesitation is at once evident in Katherine's expression.

ICE ARENA-

"I'm so taking a nap when I get home," Jason says as he drops down onto the bench.

"I know what you mean," Courtney agrees wearily, moving her equipment bag onto the floor so she can sit beside him. "I'm exhausted."

Jason leans over and begins untying his skates. "That wasn't a bad practice at all, though, especially for being as tired as I am. That's the best short program we've had in weeks."

"Mm-hmm." Courtney doesn't even look up from her skates.

"I didn't think I was gonna land the triple toe, though. I sorta just threw myself into it. I got lucky, I guess."

"Yeah."

Jason pulls his right skate off and gets to work on the left one. "Oh, well, whatever. I landed it."

This time there isn't even a response.

Jason stops untying his skate and sits up. "Is something wrong? You're not very talkative today."

"It's nothing," Courtney says hurriedly, working quite intently on her skate - so much so that she doesn't even lift her eyes.

"Riiiiight."

The sarcastic response at least gets her to look at him.

"I can tell something's bothering you," he says, his voice softening. "Is it anything you wanna talk about?"

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT-

The doorbell's ring sends Sarah shuffling to finish changing the baby's diaper. She secures the sticky tabs and airlifts Victoria over to the bassinette. The doorbell sounds again, and tempted though she is to call out for the visitor to hold on, she gets the baby settled in first. Then she scrambles out into the hallway and towards the front door, shouting "Coming!" as the bell calls out one more time.

She rushes to the door, her heartbeat and breathing escalating as hope swells inside of her. Brent's here - he wants to work everything out ... But the fantasy - that's what it is, Sarah is perfectly aware - comes to an abrupt halt when she pulls the door open.

She and Matt stare at each other in silence for an extended moment.

"Hi," he says finally.

Sarah's mouth opens, closes, and then opens again. "Hi."

"Are you, uh, are you busy?"

"Not really, no," she says tentatively. "Why?"

"I just-" He pauses, suddenly hit by the awkwardness of the situation. "I wanna see the baby," he finishes.

"I don't think that's a good idea," Sarah blurts out. She isn't even sure why she says it, but it goes along with something in her gut.

"What do you mean, you don't think that's a good idea?"

"It just isn't, okay?"

He draws a deep breath and then releases it, crossing his arms in front of his chest. "I know what you're trying to do."

ACT ONE

ICE ARENA-

"I don't know," Courtney says after a heavy pause.

"Court, if anything is bothering you - anything at all - I'm here for you to talk to." Jason strokes her long, dark hair slowly. "C'mon, lemme have it."

"Yesterday-" But she stops. Remembering the argument with her parents, the matter-of-factness that Don used in telling her that she'll have to quit skating, she just can't continue.

"C'mon, Court ... What is it?"

"It's nothing." She quickly pulls off both of her untied skates and stands as she stuffs them into her equipment bag.

Jason follows suit, standing with only his left skate on. As he balances himself against the wall, he asks, "Is it something I did? I'm sor-"

"No, it's not something you did!" she snaps, still not looking at him. "Everything isn't about you, okay?"

Jason steps back, unsure of how to handle the situation now. Luckily, Courtney softens visibly and finally looks at him.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I didn't mean to blow up at you like that. I'm just kinda overwhelmed ..."

"What do you say we get outta here? Go get coffee or something? Would you wanna sit down and talk then?"

She considers the offer for just a moment. "Sounds good."

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APT.-

"You're still trying to fool yourself!" Matt exclaims with an acerbic laugh. "You figure if you keep me out of the baby's life completely, then you can just have everything your way. You can go on pretending Brent is the dad and live in your happy little fantasy world, right?"

Sarah's angry protest trips over her tongue and never makes it out. She stutters a bit before snapping, "Just come in, okay?"

He obliges. She resists the impulse to slam the door and instead closes it normally, exerting extra effort to do so.

"Follow me," she barks, starting on her way down the hallway. They stop in front of the open bedroom door. "She might be sleeping," Sarah says in a lighter tone, "so be quiet."

She heads over to the bassinette and sees that Victoria is still awake. She turns to tell Matt this and finds that he is still standing by the door.

"You coming in?"

He hesitates briefly and then crosses the room. He assumes a spot by Sarah's side and peers into the bassinette at the little girl.

"She already looks bigger than she did at the hospital," he says.

"Yeah." Sarah's eyes remain fixed upon her daughter.

"This is amazing," Matt says, reaching a hand down gently towards the baby. Her tiny hand grabs for his fingers. "So what name did you decide on?"

"Victoria. Victoria Skyler."

It immediately sounds good to Matt, as if the infant always has been a Victoria Skyler. His gaze rests upon the baby. "This is so strange ... to think that I'm standing here looking at my daughter."

The peaceful feel of the air suddenly becomes heavy and unpleasant. Out of the corner, Matt sees Sarah turn to him sharply.

"Don't say that!" she cries.

ACT TWO

FITCH MANSION-

"What's the matter?" Nick asks, trying to sound as innocent as possible.

"It's nothing," Katherine hedges.

"Do you not want me seeing those kinds of documents?" Nick pushes.

"No ..." Katherine's hands come together and her fingers intertwine. "Maybe it's not such a good idea for you to get involved in this type of thing."

Nick covers the nervousness with a look of offense. "Is it that you don't trust me?"

"No, no," she assures him, placing a hand on his shoulder. "These are personal matters, you understand?"

He sighs mournfully. "I thought you trusted me the way I trust you."

"I do - I'd trust you with my life."

Nick cringes inwardly.

"But it still doesn't seem right," Katherine says. "I appreciate the offer, I really do. But still ..."

"Why not? Katherine, if we're going to be married, we're going to have to share these kinds of things. I want to help you. And I can - just let me have a look at your records."

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

Courtney inhales deeply. The rich steam of the vanilla mocha that she is holding just inches from her nose seeps inside her head. Something about it - whether it's the warmth, the flavor, or something else, she's not sure - brings an odd calm over her.

"So tell me, what's got you so out of it?" Jason asks before taking a deep sip of his own coffee.

"It's really ..." She wants to say complex, but that isn't the right word. "It's really random."

"How so?"

"Well, yesterday Lauren came over to tell me that she got a job."

"A real job?"

Courtney can't help cracking a smile at the way Jason phrases the question. "Yes, a real job," she says. "At Willis Advertising."

"Where Molly works?"

"Yep."

"Wow, exciting ..." He goes back in for another sip of coffee.

"So anyway," Courtney says with a sigh, "my mom and dad come in as I'm congratulating Lauren, and my dad's all, 'What are you gonna do with that degree of yours?' Like out of nowhere."

Jason sets his coffee cup down. "I'm assuming this then turned into a major fight."

"But of course. He started getting in on me about getting a job-"

"Uh-oh."

"Yeah. So to make a long story short, he basically wants me to quit skating after this season."

Jason can practically feel some invisible fist crashing into his stomach, knocking the wind out of him. He isn't sure how to respond.

"I tried to reason with him but he wouldn't listen," Courtney says. "So I just ran upstairs. I haven't been in the same room as either of them long enough to get into it again."

"Your mom's siding with him?"

"I think so, yeah."

Jason's voice begins escalating with outrage. "Why does he want you to do this? Where did this come from?"

"Of course the money's a big deal," she says. "And he says I've been mooching off them for too long and it's time I got out in the world."

"I can see his point, but still ..." Jason drops his head into his hands. "This is like the worst timing ever! If we do well at Nationals this year, we can move up and maybe finally hit it big."

"I know. That's what I tried to tell him."

"Jeez." Jason exhales heavily. "So what are we gonna do now?"

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APT.-

Matt freezes. "What?"

"Don't call her your daughter," Sarah says. The intensity in her voice is great enough to unnerve Matt.

Yet suddenly he sees what is going on. "You're doing it again, Sarah! You're trying to pretend like this situation doesn't exist!"

"I-" She begins before stopping abruptly. He is expecting her to say something further, but she just reaches into the bassinette and scoops up the baby.

"You can't do this," Matt says. "I might be Victoria's father - don't act like that's not a possibility."

Sarah strokes the infant's cheek with the tip of her index finger. She looks up at Matt and asks slowly, "And what if you are? What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm gonna be part of her life! God, why are you acting like I could never possibly be a father?"

"Because - I don't know, it doesn't seem like something you'd be interested in."

"You make it sound like a side hobby." He sniggers sarcastically. "And you've got me wrong. If she is my daughter - and I don't know how to explain this, but I'm hoping more and more that she is - then I would be more than willing to take on the responsibility. The idea ... I don't know ... it's actually kind of exciting."

"I never pictured you being into this," Sarah says, softly returning Victoria to the bassinette.

"Maybe that's 'cause you never gave me the chance to accept it as a reality," he spits under his breath.

The jab hits Sarah squarely. "I'm sorry," she mutters after a long pause.

Matt doesn't say anything.

Finally she looks back up at him. "So you'd really be willing to give the whole parenting thing a shot?"

"Definitely."

"You do realize that that would mean you'd have to work with me on it, don't you?"

"Well ... yeah ..."

"Do you think you could do that?" she asks, leading him. "Do you think maybe we could get back to being friends if we had to raise Victoria together?"

ACT THREE

FITCH MANSION-

Nick sees the muscles in Katherine's face relax in submission and he knows the answer before she even opens her mouth. But when she does, she says, "Go ahead."

"Are you sure you want me to?" Nick asks.

"Yes. You're right - if you're going to be my husband, I need to share these types of things with you. Especially if you can help me." She stretches upward to plant a kiss upon his cheek.

Nick tries to accept the warmth of her lips but cannot help bristling at the touch. He eases away from her, smiling, and says, "I might as well get started on this if it's as much of a mess as you say, right?"

Katherine nods appreciatively.

As Nick settles in behind the desk, documents blanketing the surface in front of him, he realizes how vital an opportunity this is. I never should have assumed she has the money I need. What if she doesn't? What if this whole thing is-

But he cuts himself off mentally. So what? I'm going to marry her regardless. I love her ...

Yet he cannot shake the thought that without this money, it's all over for him and Ryan.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

"I have no idea," Courtney says with a sad shake of the head. "I'm gonna try to reason with them, I guess. I need them to see how important skating is, especially now that we're at this level."

Jason runs his hands around the sides of his almost-forgotten coffee cup. "So you're hoping they'll just cave and agree to let you keep skating?"

Courtney shrugs. "I guess that's what I'm hoping, yeah."

"This really sucks, Court."

"I know," she sighs. "I mean, maybe ... I don't know. Maybe it's time I just moved out and started paying for everything myself."

"But how are you gonna find time to work enough to pay for living and skating and still actually skate?"

She tosses up her hands and leans back in her chair. "Jason ... What the hell am I gonna do?"

"I don't know." He pauses, taking a substantial drink of the now-much cooler coffee. "I think you're gonna need to compromise with them. Otherwise ..."

"What?"

Jason leans back in his chair, too, and folds his arms. "Otherwise this really could be the end of skating together."

BRENT & SARAH TAYLOR'S APT.-

Matt gives Sarah a cockeyed look. "How am I supposed to answer that?"

Sarah's mouth moves but there is no sound. "I'm just wondering-"

"No, you're trying to make everything all neat again," he says. "You're trying to get me to say everything is okay between us so you can just sweep that part of this whole mess under the rug." He shakes his head. "It's not gonna work."

"I'm trying, Matt. I really am." She grips her head with both hands, sending her hair askew. "I know I screwed up. I know I hurt everyone. I know that more than anyone! I'm the one who has to feel like I can't even face my family anymore. I'm the one who has to lie in bed every night alone thinking about how I probably threw away everything I had!"

She swings around so that her back is facing Matt. He stands in silence, his gaze fixed upon her. No words are said, no movements made. Slowly, though, Matt becomes aware of some slight movement on Sarah's part. Her back is heaving up and down and her shoulders appear to be trembling. He hears a sniff.

"Sarah ..." He takes a step forward and reaches out a hand. It comes to rest upon her shoulder.

She wipes a tear's slippery trail from her cheek and sniffs again. "What?"

"Look at me." He turns her around quickly, too quickly for her to fight it. And he throws his arms around her, wrapping her up. "Everything is gonna be alright," he says softly. "I promise."

"You don't know that ..."

"Yeah, I do," he says, rubbing her shaking back lightly. "You're a strong woman. I've seen that time after time. No matter what happens, you're gonna make it, whether you've got Brent or you're alone."

"I don't want to be alone!" she whimpers, her face crushing into his chest.

Her sob fills Matt's ears. Instinctively he unfolds her from his embrace and takes a step backward.

"I need to go," he says hurriedly, already moving for the door.

Sarah reaches out a hand for him. "Don't, please. I need to know that you understand me ... I need to know that I've got a friend."

"I do understand why you did what you did," he says. "But ..." He glances at the doorway again. "I need to go."

Before Sarah can bring herself to say anything else, Matt is gone. She stands by the side of the bassinette, listening to his fading footsteps and the opening and closing of the front door.

And as her vision goes hazy with the return of the tears, she lifts up Victoria and holds her tight, both of them rocking slowly in the otherwise empty apartment.

END OF EPISODE #177

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