

"Footprints"

Episode #179

[Immediately After #178]

[Previously ...](#)

\*Ryan pushed away a suspicious Claire.

\*Jason told Courtney to come to a compromise with her parents about working and skating.

\*An uncomfortable Alex pulled away from Lauren.

TEASER

TIM & CLAIRE FISHER'S APARTMENT-

"It still seems so weird," Molly says, setting her cup back in the saucer.

"It really does," Claire agrees. She sips the warm coffee, letting the steam climb to her nose and clear her head. "Sometimes Tim and I just start talking about it and it almost always seems ... surreal."

"Yeah. I don't know, just to think that my mother has another kid out there somewhere - and that she and my father had this whole dimension of their relationship that we never knew about ... It's really odd."

"Hey," Claire grins sarcastically. "Your parents, on their worst days, couldn't possibly top the amazing James Robbins."

"Thank goodness."

Claire is lifting the coffee cup to her mouth again when there is a knock on the door. She sets the cup and saucer down on the coffee table and rises.

"All these visitors!" she says, making her way to the door.

As she reaches for the doorknob, a thought strikes her. What if it's Ryan? Her hand freezes over the doorknob as another knock sounds.

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CHASE HOME-

Courtney closes the front door behind her. She removes her coat, soaked from just the short walk from the car to the front door, and hangs it up. She slips off her equally drenched Adidas shoes and begins walking toward the kitchen.

Her stomach rumbles and she speeds up, hoping that there will be something both quick and appetizing - a difficult combination, it seems - in the refrigerator. As she steps into the kitchen, though, the hunger is immediately forgotten.

Don and Helen look over at her from their seats at the kitchen table. She makes the briefest of eye contact with them before her eyes slink away. She has been trying her hardest to refrain from talking to them since yesterday's brawl over the direction of her career and she does not feel like facing them now, either. She turns on her heel.

"Courtney, wait."

She freezes and slowly turns back around.

"Wait," Don repeats. "We need to talk."

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BROOKS HOME-

Concern fills Lauren's body as she awaits Alex's explanation. She can see it - whatever it is - poised there, on his lips, ready to jump, but it's just not taking the leap.

"Come on, Alex," she says, petting his shoulder. "If something is the matter, you can tell me. I'm here for you. I care about you. I wanna help."

Alex is silent, though his eyes continue to dart around without anything safe upon which they can focus.

"Please," she urges. "Let me help you." When he still fails to take the prompting, she adds a bit more aggressively, "I can tell something is bothering you, Alex!"

"You're right," he answers, his voice little more than a whisper.

Lauren looks at him expectantly.

"There is something," he says. "Something you need to know."

He draws a deep breath ...

ACT ONE

## TIM & CLAIRE FISHER'S APT.-

Claire swallows the fear and turns the doorknob. A wave of relief sweeps over her when she sees Brent, clearly just out of the pouring rain, standing before her.

"Hey," she says warmly.

"Hi. Are you busy?"

"Nope," Claire answers, stepping aside. "Come on in."

Brent comes inside and works his way out of his wet coat. As he hangs it up on one of the pegs next to the door, he says, "Sorry I'm such a mess! It's absolutely pouring out there."

"We could hear it," Claire says. "It sounds nasty."

Brent assumes that we means Claire and Tim, but as he turns around, he realizes that it refers to Claire and Molly. His eyes catch Molly's for just a split-second as hers pull away from him.

He feels himself caught in a net of awkwardness momentarily, though he forces it aside and greets her. "Hey, Mol."

"Hey," she responds, trying to look as casual as she can. She fears she is not being very successful.

The uneasiness is apparent to Claire, who steps up to fill the gap. "What brings you by, Brent?"

"Actually," he says, "I have a favor to ask you."

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## CHASE HOME-

"Please, stay," Helen adds.

Courtney remains frozen in the doorway. As much as she'd like to try and talk this out, she isn't sure that this is the best time - she can still feel hostility towards her parents bubbling just below the surface and she is afraid that it might erupt if given the opportunity.

Still, Jason's words from earlier fill her mind ...

"I think you're gonna need to compromise with them. Otherwise ..."

"What?" she asks, though she is fairly certain of what he is going to say.

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

With a sigh, Courtney crosses over to the kitchen table. She pulls up a seat at the end opposite her parents.

"All right," she says. "Do you guys have anything new to say? Because I've been thinking about this, and I discussed it with Jason, and I really think we need to compromise somehow."

"Courtney," Helen says gently. "We realize how important skating is to you. It would be foolish for us to act like it isn't, because we're the ones who gave the opportunity and encouraged you to keep going."

"I sense a 'but' coming on."

"Well, yes," Helen replies.

Don picks up for you. "But, there are other things to consider. Like the fact that we put you through four years of college while we paid for your skating, and for your physical therapy while you were hurt, and for you to continue living under our roof."

"Just cut to the chase," Courtney says as her returning frustration gives way to impatience. "You're gonna make me quit skating, right?"

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BROOKS HOME-

For a moment everything is okay. The explanation is present in Alex's head and it makes sense. The words are ready to go. Lauren is here, alone, with him, so concerned and so caring. Everything is clear and safe and-

And as suddenly as the feeling appeared, it vanishes. The insecurities, the doubts, the loyalties, everything - it all comes rushing back to him. "Never mind," he hears himself saying. The moment, the window of opportunity, is gone.

"Alex!" Lauren cries. There is a note of genuine concern in her voice, something that makes Alex reconsider, though just for a second.

"It's nothing," he says, backing away.

"No, it's not!" she counters. "Something is the matter. You said it yourself. You can't just say that and then completely pull away-"

"I have to." He opens the front door. "I'm sorry, I just ... I can't. I'm sorry." And with that, he exits, closing the door behind him.

The brief instant in which the door is open lets a rush of cold into the house. Lauren finds herself folding her arms in front of herself to combat the chill.

"Alex ..." she whispers. Her plea floats away into the chilly air, fading into nothing before it reaches anyone or anything.

## ACT TWO

TIM & CLAIRE FISHER'S APT.-

"Okay," Claire says, not sure where this is leading. "Shoot."

"I don't know if you knew this, but Nick Moriani is engaged to Katherine Fitch," Brent explains.

"Yeah," Claire nods. "I did hear that."

"So I'm sure you understand why I'm concerned."

"Of course."

"I warned Andy not to let his mother marry Nick," Brent continues. "I couldn't give him anything concrete to go with, though. So I was wondering ..."

"You want me to talk to him?"

"Yeah."

"I can handle that," Claire says. "I'd be happy to, actually. Anything that'll cause the Morianis trouble is a priority in my book."

"Great, thanks." He pauses. "One thing, though: Don't mention the whole ... investigation, if you can avoid it. I'd rather word not get to Katherine or to Moriani, you know?"

"Yeah, no problem. Besides, I might even have some info of my own to tell Andy."

The comment immediately catches Brent's attention. "What do you mean by that?"

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#### CHASE HOME-

"Actually, no," Don answers.

Courtney's surprise is visible. She feels great relief but quickly catches herself, realizing that the explanation could show that there isn't much to be relieved about after all.

"We realize that we may have jumped the gun a bit in asking that you quit skating to work full-time," Helen says.

A sarcastic response hangs on the end of her tongue but Courtney bites it back.

"We were discussing this before you came in," Helen continues, "and we think we may have a solution."

"Really?"

"Yep," Don says. "We have an agreement that we want you to consider."

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#### CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

Alex sets the steaming cup of cider down on the counter in front of him. He eases his way onto the high chair and places his elbows up on the counter, propping up his chin with his hands and staring into the cider. He didn't even want to buy it - he had thought he could use some coffee, but when he reached the cash register and the girl taking orders, he realized that the mere thought of putting anything in his stomach was making him nauseous. So he wound up settling on the cider just because ... because.

It doesn't make sense. Nothing really does anymore, he realizes as he sighs out loud. But then again, when did it? When he was able to just shove it all so far into the back of his mind that he could go days without even thinking about it, let alone allow it to cause him grief?

"That cider's not gonna drink itself," comes a voice from somewhere around him. With a shiver, Alex turns to his right, where he sees Jason leaning on the counter a mere foot or two away.

"Yeah," Alex responds, thinking to himself that it is a dumb response before he even says it. But what would be a good response? His mind starts drifting off in that direction - eager to slide away, he realizes - but he yanks it back to the present.

"Is everything okay?" Jason asks, settling into the chair beside Alex.

"Oh, uh, yeah. Yeah. I'm just a little ... dazed, I guess."

"Oh."

Alex stares back down into the cider but he can feel Jason's gaze burning into him anyway.

"What happened?"

Alex looks up sharply. "Happened? Nothing ..." But the end of the denial trails off unconvincingly.

Jason looks him squarely in the face and Alex cannot avert his eyes. "Does this have something to do with Lauren?"

### ACT THREE

#### TIM & CLAIRE FISHER'S APT.-

Immediately, Claire realizes that she has said too much. "Nothing," she covers coolly. "I just meant that I think this investigation is going to open up really soon, and then the Morianis' crimes will be public knowledge."

"Ah." Brent nods, trying to slip back into the normal course of conversation even though his instincts have been triggered.

He doesn't have to struggle with the balance for long. A wail comes up from the back of the apartment.

"I guess Travis is awake," Claire says. "Let me go check on him. I'll be right back." She makes a quick exit.

The discomfort fading, Brent turns to Molly with only a tinge of hesitation. "Did something seem off there?"

"Uh-huh," Molly agrees, nodding. "It was like she was making this big, bold declaration about catching the Morianis and then all of a sudden she retracted it, like too much had slipped out."

"I hope she's not lying," Brent says. "She'd be a fool to mix herself up in all of this. These are dangerous people."

"I know. Which reminds me ... You've told me all of this. Claire knows that. So why are you acting like I don't know any of it?"

"I don't know. I'd rather not acknowledge that I shared the details of a major investigation with someone completely unrelated to the case. Especially since I can't tell Andy about it all."

"Oh." Silence begins to blanket them, and as it falls over them the awkwardness returns.

"So how've you been?" Molly asks, unable to sit there amongst all the quiet.

"Fine. Could be better, obviously, but I'm getting by."

Molly doesn't know how to respond. She casts a glance towards the hallway, hoping to see Claire returning. She doesn't see Claire, but she does notice Brent doing the same thing.

"Have you, um, talked to Sarah or seen the baby or anything?" Molly asks.

"I ran into Sarah at the apartment the other day, when I went to pick up some of my stuff," he says. "We just ... I don't know, we basically just argued some more. We didn't get anywhere, that's for sure. Everything is just so ... up in the air right now."

"Yeah, really," Molly says with the tiniest of sighs. "So do you have any-" But she stops herself.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"No, you said 'do you have any ...'. What were you going to say?"

Molly swallows heavily. "I was gonna ask if ... if you have any idea where you and Sarah are going to wind up."

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CHASE HOME-

"Shoot," Courtney says as anxiety fills her head with possibilities and "what if?"'s.

"We were thinking," Helen says, "that you could be responsible for paying some of the costs of skating. Maybe the ice time, for example."

"So I could work part-time or something?"

"Exactly," Don answers. "You're right - we've all put too much into your skating to just end it now. You deserve the chance to do what you can with it, but you also need to be gaining some work experience."

"How does that sound?" Helen asks.

"Fine," Courtney says, relieved. "I think we can definitely manage this."

"That's what we figured," Don says.

Courtney rises from her chair and goes over to them. She bends down and gives each of them a hug.

"Thank you."

"It's our pleasure," Helen smiles.

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#### CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

"Yeah," Alex concedes. He finds that the drive to lie is gone, replaced by some instinct that is repulsed by the very thought of all the mistruths and half-truths and everything else that seems to have taken over his life.

"Did something happen?" Jason asks, his voice softening.

"No," Alex says. He absently places his palm over the cider, letting the steam warm it to the point of discomfort. "Not really."

"What do you mean, not really?"

"Nothing happened," Alex shrugs. "Nothing out of the ordinary, anyway. She just - I shouldn't say that. It isn't her."

"Then what is it?"

"It's me." Alex draws a deep breath and then lets it roll out slowly. "I don't know what to do."

Jason finds that his stomach is churning. "What do you mean?"

"I guess ..." Alex's features pout. "I guess I'm not sure if I wanna be in this relationship."

Alex is now staring straight ahead and Jason is looking at him sideways. "What makes you think that?" Jason asks calmly.

"It doesn't feel right," Alex says. "I'm just not comfortable with it."

The comment hangs in the air between them. The question burning the tip of Jason's tongue is the single word that could clear the air completely - Why? But he doesn't think he can bring himself to ask it.

## ACT FOUR

### TIM & CLAIRE FISHER'S APT.-

Brent wants to say that he isn't sure, but he knows that is not the complete truth. Yet as he mulls it over in the split-second before he and Molly are interrupted, he comes to the conclusion that maybe he really isn't sure of where he and Sarah are going to end up.

Regardless, the confusion is pushed aside by Claire's return. "And the little monster is out like a light once again," she says as she comes back into the living room.

The clumsiness of the transition in conversations overtakes the three for a moment before Brent speaks up. "I should get out of here," he says. "But I really appreciate you helping out Andy, Claire."

"No thanks necessary," she says, leading him to the door. "I'm glad to help out a friend."

"Great. Well, I guess I'll see the two of you later." Brent crosses the doorway and waves are exchanged. Claire closes the door.

Molly can't help but feel a bit of relief that he is gone. But Claire's situation is troubling her even more at the moment.

"Claire?"

"Yeah?"

"Is there something going on that you're not telling us about?" Molly asks. "With Ryan, I mean? Is he still hounding you?"

"Nope. Actually, he's doing the exact opposite - he's been avoiding me, I think."

"Good!"

"Yeah, in a way. But it proves to me that he and Nick are up to something. There's something that they don't want me to find out about."

It takes Molly a moment to realize the implication of this comment. "Wait - Claire, don't go getting any ideas. Leave it up to Brent and the police to take care of the Morianis."

"I will," Claire says, moving back to the couch. She looks up to find Molly's questioning stare. "Don't worry, Molly. I'm not going to do anything to get myself in trouble."

Molly nods after a moment, standing there with her arms folded over her chest and doubts buzzing in her head.

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## CHASE HOME-

Courtney's fingers dance nimbly over the telephone buttons. She lifts the cordless phone to her ear and plops down on top of her back, allowing her back, neck, and head to sink into the soft pile of pillows as the phone rings in her ear.

Two ... three ... four times. No answer. She switches the phone off and leans back even further before turning it back on and dialing another number. Two rings pass before there is an answer.

"Hello?"

"Hey," Courtney says. "What's up?"

"Nothing ..." Lauren sounds distant. "What's goin' on?"

"Well, I just tried to call Jason on his cell, but he's not picking up, and I've got some good news that I needed to share with someone, so ... I called you."

"What's this good news?" It sounds as though the words are dragging themselves out of Lauren's head and mouth.

"Well-" But Courtney has lost focus on her good news. "Is something wrong? You don't sound good."

"I'm not."

"Why? What's wrong?"

"It's Alex," Lauren sighs. "He was supposed to come over tonight. So when he got here I told him about my job and we hugged and then - he flipped out."

"What do you mean?"

"He looked awful. Like he was gonna cry or something. He said he had something to tell me, but then he just took off."

"Do you have any idea what's going on with him?" Courtney asks, concern for both of her friends swelling up inside her.

"Not a clue." Lauren pauses, and Courtney can picture the distress in her friend's face, in her posture, as clearly as she can hear it in her voice. "Something is off, though, Court," Lauren continues. "And whatever it is - I think this thing with Alex is really over."

Courtney just breathes, unable to think of anything to say. "I'm sorry," she finally offers. "I know how much you wanted this ..."

"Yeah. But even more than that - I'm really worried about Alex. I need to know what's going on with him."

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## CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE-

Jason and Alex sit in silence. The air between them is thick with things spoken and unspoken, done and not done, fears, hopes, questions, and maybe even some answers.

Alex's voice - thin, torn by emotion - breaks the quiet. "What am I gonna do?"

Jason wants to say, "I don't know," but he knows that he can't. He considers the question and all the different directions in which it might be spinning. "I know there's been a lot ... between us. And I want you to know that all of that makes me even more concerned about you and makes me want to help you out. No matter what's happened or what happens, I'm so here for you."

There is no verbal response from Alex yet, and since Jason can't bring himself to look at him, he cannot see a response, either. Without thinking, his left arm goes up and wraps itself over Alex's shoulder.

"Thanks," Alex manages.

"So what you need to do-" Jason stands, moving his hands so that one rests on each of Alex's shoulders. "What you need to do is give some time to yourself. You need to figure out what Alex wants ..." His voice drifts as his mind does the same, but he steers back on-track. "... and just follow that. Stop trying to please everyone else and try to do what makes you happy."

"Okay," Alex nods as tears fill his eyes. He holds them back as best he can.

He feels Jason's hands slide off of him and the heat from Jason's body fade away. He turns and sees his friend walking off, a look of concern shaping his face.

His beautiful face.

Stop it! Alex's mind yells at itself.

The door to the coffee house swings open and Jason passes through. The door comes back and settles into position. And long after Jason has left, long after the door has opened and closed countless times more, Alex continues staring at it, through it.

END OF EPISODE #179

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