

"Footprints" Episode #242

[Previously ...](#)

-Sarah agreed to help Paula locate her other son.

-Jason convinced Courtney to come to the rink for skating practice.

-Nick and Katherine celebrated their first anniversary, and he hoped that his troubles in 2001 could be forgotten.

KING'S BAY ICE ARENA

The slender metal blade skids sideways across the ice. Specks of snow fly up and cover the tip of Jason's black boot as he comes to a stop.

"That was better," Sandy is saying as he pulls up beside her. "You've got to remember to bring your right arm around, otherwise you throw yourself completely off-balance."

"Yeah, I know. Same old stupid mistake." He pushes up the sleeves of his thin, black Nike shirt and walks through the motions of the jump again, purposely trying to avoid the mistake that he has been making.

Sandy glances up at the clock. "Let's see one more."

Jason checks the time -- as he has been doing for the entire session anyway -- and hesitates. "She said she was gonna come in."

"She does what she wants, we know that," Sandy shrugs. Jason is sure that she is hiding a great deal of annoyance in the name of professionalism.

"Yeah, I guess so."

Awkwardness hovers over them, but Sandy dissolves it. "All right, one more double Axel."

He takes off and builds up some speed, then sets up for the jump. He makes a conscious effort to place his right arm in the correct position before he jumps, but the timing is off, and a moment later he is on the ground, just as he knew he would be from the moment his foot left the ice.

He pulls himself to his feet sloppily, and by the time he is fully up, Sandy has skated over to him.

He shakes his head. "Sorry. I'm just ... off this morning."

"It's understandable. Why don't we call it a day--"

The opening and closing of the heavy arena doors grabs both of their attention. Just as he has been doing in response to that sound all morning, Jason looks to see if it is her. This time, Sandy looks, too -- and they are greeted by the sight of Courtney entering the arena.

"So here she is," Sandy mutters. She skates over to the entrance of the ice. Jason lags behind, wanting to be involved but not sure if he should lay low for now.

"Good to see you again," Sandy says with a hint of sarcasm.

"Yeah." Courtney brushes a loose strand of black hair out of her face. "Sorry about that ... but I'm here now."

"And you're ready to work?"

Courtney nods her head.

"Good. Then get those skates on and get out here."

Courtney disappears into the skaters' room and Sandy turns back to Jason.

"So it looks like you have a partner after all," she says.

"I hope so," he says quietly. The fact that Courtney even showed up is a good sign, but he knows how important skating is to her. Hopefully this move is about more than just skating.

FISHER HOME

Sarah settles in at the kitchen table, a hot cup of coffee waiting in front of her. Paula takes a seat across from her, and Sarah can see the anxiety written all over her mother's face.

"How have things been?" Paula asks. "You and Matt seemed quite happy on Christmas and New Year's ..."

"It was nice to have him here," Sarah says, diverting her eyes a little bit. "You know, it

was good for Victoria, and ... it was nice to be able to spend the holidays with him."

"Well, he's welcome here anytime."

Sarah is genuinely pleased to hear her mother say that. "He and Dad seem to be getting along really well."

"Your father really seems to be enjoying working with him, yes." Paula seems to be searching for something to prolong this leg of the conversation. "So, you and Matt -- is there something developing there?"

Sarah's mouth opens to respond, but all that comes out is a small laugh. "I--Mom, we're just friends."

"Friends who share a daughter."

"Well, yeah."

"You just all looked awfully like a family," Paula says. "I was thinking that maybe ..."

"Enough about that," Sarah interrupts, though she's actually enjoying that line of questioning a bit. She straightens herself and then says, "All right, I went yesterday and figured out the whole procedure for ... what you asked me to do."

"You do quick work," Paula smiles uncomfortably. Her fingers are moving around in a ballet of awkwardness, dancing from the rim of her coffee cup to the saucer to the table and all over again.

"I didn't exactly want to drag this out," Sarah says. "But it turns out that there isn't that much I can do, anyway."

Paula's face loses a few shades of color, but Sarah is certain that she detects a simultaneous hint of relief. "You can't find him?"

"I can't," Sarah clarifies. "The way it works is this -- either the natural parent or a relative can petition the court to locate the adopted child. So I can get that taken care of."

"Okay. So then what happens?"

"The court appoints an intermediary to conduct the search. That person finds the person we're looking for, then contacts him and lets him know that he's being searched for. At that point, we're still anonymous. If he agrees, the intermediary releases the information

to us."

Paula folds her hands together and sighs. "There isn't very much that we can actually do, then?"

"Not really. We have to sit and wait." She falls quiet for a moment, dreading even having to bring what she knows she must. "Mom, there are just some things you need to be prepared for."

"Well, yes, they may not be able to find him."

"True." Sarah pauses and takes a deep breath. "Or he may not be--he may be dead, which they'll tell us. But there's also the possibility that he will be found and he won't want us to be able to contact him or even know anything about him."

MORIANI HOME

"Ryan," Nick calls out as he comes into the living room, "I have something that you need to do for me."

It takes Ryan a moment to drag his attention away from the morning re-broadcast of *SportsCenter*. He turns his head slowly towards Nick and takes another slug of his drink. "Yeah, what?"

"I need you to pick something up for me."

Ryan's eyes are already back on the TV. "Fine. What a life ..." He begins to pull himself to his feet. "... doing odd jobs for Daddy. Want me to mow the lawn when I get back?"

Nick scowls disapprovingly. "Are you drunk?"

"No, I'm fine. Just a little ... happy." He rattles the ice that is left in his glass. "Gotta do something to take the edge off, right?"

"Ryan, it's the middle of the morning! What do you think you're doing?"

"Kickin' back. I don't have anything better to do -- well, I didn't until now."

"What has gotten into you? You're acting like some punk eighteen year old!" Nick buries his hands in the pockets of his navy slacks and turns his back.

"Well, maybe if you gave me something other than these stupid Mickey Mouse jobs to do, I might be a little more motivated to, you know, act like a grown-up," Ryan sneers.

"Perhaps I would, if I could trust you to carry them out responsibly."

"That's bull! You don't trust me at all! You treat me like an idiot!"

"Only because you've consistently given me reason to do so!" Nick spins back around and avoids looking directly at Ryan even as he snatches the glass away from him.

Ryan makes a grab for the glass but Nick sets it down on the mahogany bar.

"I thought you weren't that interested in business, anyway," Nick says. "Months ago you were going on and on about wanting to get out and get a 'real' job. Why would I give you more responsibility after that?"

"It's not like this is freaking fulfilling work, running errands for you," Ryan spits through a pained grimace. "And we're always looking over our shoulders worrying that we're gonna get caught!"

"There's also the money, Ryan. Don't take that for granted. This kind of lifestyle doesn't come for free. You should appreciate that you've had it so easy--"

"Blah blah blah. What, you want me to get down on my knees and thank you? Sorry, it all looks a little different when I'm constantly thinking about having to spend a couple years behind bars!"

"We're not going to jail, Ryan, calm down!"

"How do you know that?" Ryan challenges. "How the hell do you know that? Everything that happened this last year, with Katherine and Claire and Tim dying and the fire -- it's all gonna blow up in our faces. You know that, don't you?"

As much as he would like to be able to, Nick is powerless to dismiss Ryan's worries.

KING'S BAY ICE ARENA

"Not bad," Sandy says as Jason and Courtney skate back over to her. "Especially for not having skated together in weeks."

"I'm still not getting all the way extended," Courtney says, looking back at the spot

where they just did the lift as though doing so might offer some insight into fixing the maneuver.

Sandy stretches out her arms and locks them. "You have to let yourself go up there. Push yourself up -- stretch out your whole body."

"I just feel like I'm gonna go spilling over if I do that."

"Jason can hold you up. Trust him."

Even though she doesn't know the specifics of the situation, Sandy immediately realizes her mistake. The air seems to grow thinner between the three of them as Courtney casts a sharp glance over at Jason.

"Well, it used to be a lot easier to do that," she says. "Now I'm not so sure that I can."

Jason stands by in disbelief of her bluntness. He blinks several times rapidly, like he is trying to be sure that this is reality, and then fires back, "Oh yeah, real mature, Court. Real mature."

"It is the truth, isn't it?"

"Maybe, yeah," he manages around a tangled tongue. "But did you even for a *minute* consider that maybe it was more important for me to be loyal to Alex through this thing than it was for me to tell you something that I learned in confidence?"

Putting it that way is a blow to Courtney, and she hesitates in responding. "I'm not saying that you had to go and betray that completely -- but when you saw what was happening--"

"What, I should have stepped in and stopped you from looking like a fool?"

Now he has shocked her into silence.

"That's what this really is, isn't it?" Jason rolls on. "You're mad at me because you think you wound up looking stupid for not seeing it sooner."

"I'm mad because you let this go on as long as it did and Lauren wound up getting hurt as a result!"

"Or maybe it's because you feel responsible for her getting hurt, because you kept pushing them together." He steps back and folds his arms, knowing that he has hit a

nerve. "There, I said it."

Sandy is standing by on the side, ready to step in and break this up at any second. But for some reason, this seems as though it needs to continue.

"I don't know what else to say to you," Jason says. The aggression and confidence in his voice have turned suddenly to a sort of resignation. "I can't keep begging for forgiveness, and if this is going to stay as a totally one-sided thing in your head, then I can't do anything about that. I guess we really better just put ourselves out of our misery and end it now, huh?"

He stares her down for another long moment and then turns to skate away.

"Jason, wait!" Courtney calls out after him. She is louder than necessary, since he has only gotten a few feet away, but her desperation comes through clearly.

He comes to a sharp stop and freezes in his tracks, but he does not turn around.

"You don't want that," she says. "And neither do I."

He doesn't step in to fill the awkward gap, even though he knows that is what she is expecting of him. She has to do this on her own.

"Maybe you're right," she says finally. The admission sounds almost painful for her. "Maybe I am putting too much of the blame on you."

He lets her hang for several more seconds, and he can practically hear the tightening of her breaths in anxious anticipation. But finally he faces her again.

"Good," he says as he takes a push to return to where she and Sandy are standing. "That's what I needed to hear. Now let's get down to business -- we've got some serious skating to do."

FISHER HOME

Chin cupped in her hand, Paula sits quietly, but it is a silence ripe with possibilities and anxieties.

"Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned that," Sarah says.

"No, I needed to be aware of that." Paula sighs. "It's all part of this process, I suppose."

It's part of what I need to make this decision."

"Make this decision? I thought you already made it when you asked for my help."

"I thought I had, too," Paula says. "But maybe I got ahead of myself."

"What are you saying?" Sarah asks cautiously.

"I don't know. Maybe ... maybe it would be better to let this rest."

Sarah's response is bold and firm. "No way. I'm not letting you give up on this, Mom."

The declaration takes Paula by surprise. "What?"

"This is too important to you. Especially after we lost Tim and now Claire might lose Samantha -- you're not going to be able to rest knowing that you have another son out there and don't have any idea what became of him."

"You're right," Paula admits after more silent deliberation. "I do want--need--to find out where he is, who he is. But on the other hand ..."

"What, you're afraid that he'll reject you? Wouldn't it be better to at least know something than to go on wondering because you're too worried to go after it?"

Paula nods, albeit reluctantly. The first thing that Sarah likens it to is Paula's hesitance to address the real problem between Sarah and Molly in some of the heated encounter they've had recently. Other than that, Sarah has rarely seen her mother back away from any issue.

"Don't put a stop to this just because you're scared," Sarah says. "Whatever comes up, we'll deal with it then. Don't get bogged down by all these 'what if?'s."

"Easier said than done," Paula muses quietly.

The abrupt opening and closing of the front door alerts them that Bill is home. Instinctively both women adjust their posture and try their best to wipe all signs of the conversation from their faces.

"Hey, Sarah," Bill says happily as he enters the kitchen.

"Hi," Sarah answers.

"What are you doing here?"

"I just came by to chat with Mom. Advice and stuff." She smiles, hoping that it looks genuine. She's had enough experience covering up in her work, but it feels very different when she is dealing with her own father.

She and Paula share a concerned look as Bill goes to pour himself a cup of coffee. Keeping this from him -- at least for now -- is going to be some task.

MORIANI HOME

"I have it all under control," Nick finally remarks. The statement is as much for Ryan's benefit as his own. He knows that his hold on control of the situation -- *situations* -- is tenuous at best, at least for the time being.

Ryan's head flops from side to side as he scans the room for his keys. He locates them on a side table and moves to get them as he says, "Well, that's comforting. At least I can sit back and watch the rest of my life go to hell without worrying about jail time."

"Don't be so melodramatic, Ryan."

"Oh, you want melodramatic? You haven't even seen the tip of the iceberg--"

Nick makes a quick move and snatches the keys off the table before Ryan can get them.

"What the hell are you doing?" Ryan demands.

"Keeping you from killing yourself, for one!" Nick pockets the keys. "You're not going anywhere. I'll take care of the pickup myself."

"Oh yeah, I forgot, friends don't let friends drive drunk. Thanks, Dad. My dad, McGruff the crime dog ... and then there's my other dad, the white-trash rapist ..."

"Go lie down," Nick says with disgust. "You're pathetic."

"Yeah, I am pathetic. It's nice to have it confirmed, though! You're a real pal. A real stand-up guy. I bet Katherine would agree, right?"

Nick's response comes through gritted teeth. "Shut up."

"Where is the missus, anyway? We wouldn't want her overhearing any of this--"

"She's out for the morning. She had an appointment and then lunch with friends ... Now get upstairs and lie down. You need to relax."

"I'm perfectly relaxed, Dad. I think you're the one--"

The piercing chime of the doorbell interrupts him.

"I'll get it," Nick says sternly. He leaves Ryan standing in the living room.

But Ryan can hear the action in the foyer. The voices travel clearly to him, even through the fog of the alcohol: "Mr. Moriani ... Is your son home? ... We need some time from the both of you."

Ryan vaguely recognizes the voice. Maybe it's just the official tone of it -- no, he's definitely heard this voice somewhere before.

Brent Taylor. That's who it is.

Before Ryan realizes what is happening, Nick returns to the living room, flanked by Brent and two other officers.

"Mr. Moriani," Brent says, now addressing Ryan, "we need you to come down to the station with us for questioning."

END OF EPISODE #242

Is this it for Nick and Ryan? Should Paula be endangering her marriage by pursuing this search? Are things going to get better between Courtney and Jason? Come share your thoughts on this episode at the Message Forum!

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