

"Footprints" Episode #245

[Previously ...](#)

- Stan ignored Ryan's warning and went to see Claire again, even getting a little violent with her in his demands.
- Katherine contemplated her life and her marriage to Nick.
- Jason awaited a visit from Courtney, hoping it would be the pathway to reconciliation. She expressed similar optimism to Lauren.
- A distracted Diane crashed her car -- with Samantha in it -- during a snowstorm.

SARAH TAYLOR'S APARTMENT

"Sarah, dear, hi," Paula says briskly as she bustles inside the apartment. The knowledge that there is news of some sort awaiting her is almost too much to bear, and her composed, middle-aged countenance is at battle with a typhoon of anxiety and excitement.

Sarah steps out of the way to allow her mother entrance -- partly fearing that she might be bowled over as well -- and closes the door. "Hi. You made it over here quickly."

"I couldn't help it," Paula says. Sarah sees the faintest hint of a blush pass over her mother's cheeks.

"Well, I didn't want to tell you over the phone ... although maybe it would have been easier."

"No, no, it's better to deal with this in person." She pauses only long enough to give Sarah a chance to begin speaking and then blurts out, "So, what new information do you have?"

"It's not anything huge," Sarah begins carefully. When Paula announced that she wanted to come over to discuss this, Sarah almost felt bad getting her so excited for such anticlimactic news, but then she figured that perhaps Bill was around and Paula didn't want to discuss it over the phone with him there.

"The whole process is in gear now," she says. "The court is searching for him ... for your son."

"Oh." Paula feels herself filling with a peculiar combination of uncertain exhilaration and outright disappointment. It was foolish to think that there would be major news so soon -- or that he would have been found so quickly -- but her hopes were raised nonetheless.

Even so, it is a bit of a relief not to have to face that all right now ...

That confusing jumble of thoughts is interrupted by a sharp ringing. It's her cell phone, she realizes as her hands begin scrambling for her purse.

"Hello?" she answers rapidly. Not many people have this number, so it must be of some importance.

"Paula!" comes the cry from the other end.

"Claire?"

"Yeah. I, uh, I called the house, but Jason answered and said you were out, so--"

"Claire, what is it? What's the matter?" The edge in the younger woman's voice has sent Paula's heart racing.

The same frantic horror that seems to be coming over the line is quickly spreading to Paula, Sarah can tell as she watches her mother listen to the call. Whatever Claire is calling about, it must be something really serious.

"I'll be right there, don't worry," Paula says assuringly -- despite her own wide-eyed worry. She hangs up and fumbles to replace the phone in her purse.

"What's going on?" Sarah asks the moment her mother's ear is free.

"That was Claire," Paula says through heavy breaths. "There was an accident -- Samantha and Diane -- they were just brought into the hospital."

"Oh my God."

Paula makes a beeline for the door. "I'm going to go over there to be with Claire."

"I'm coming with you," Sarah says without hesitation, grabbing her coat as she falls into step behind Paula.

FISHER HOME

"Who was that?" Courtney asks, leaning against the doorframe with her arms folded in front of her chest.

"Claire," Jason says as he hangs up the phone hesitantly. As frenzied as Claire sounds, he feels like he should be doing something about it. But she said she would call Paula's cell phone, so that's probably all there is to it. "She needed to talk to my mom."

"Oh." The subject drops away and is replaced by a thick, undeniable awkwardness.

"I don't know what to say now," Jason admits, his shoulders slumping. He'd had so much built up in his head and was ready to go with it the moment Courtney walked in, but then the phone rang and he was completely derailed.

"I was talking to Lauren before," Courtney says quietly, but only after the awkwardness returns and something must be done to get rid of it. "And maybe ... I don't know, maybe you did have a point with what you said at the rink."

One corner of Jason's mouth hooks upward with self-satisfaction, but he catches it before she notices it. "I hope I did. I mean, I hope that there still is some hope for us."

"Come here," he says, patting a spot on the bed beside him. He sees her hesitate but then she does come over and seat herself just inches away from him.

"So was I wrong?" he leads finally, when it seems as though she is not going to continue the conversation.

"No," comes the sudden reply, but then a lengthy pause ensues. Her focus down in her lap, where her hands are folded together, she adds, "There is hope. I--Jay, maybe I did overreact a little bit. But come on, you have to understand that this whole thing raised a lot of questions for me. I was really torn ..."

"Lauren got hurt, I know that. I feel terrible about it. But I had a certain responsibility to Alex, too."

"I know." To Jason's ears, her admission sounds forced -- not dishonest, but extracted with great difficulty.

"I know," she repeats, this time with more ease, as if to solidify it as truth. "And I'm sorry I held that against you so much. It was just hard seeing Lauren get hurt like that--"

"It was hard for me, too. And if I had to do the whole thing over again ... who knows? Maybe it would have been too much seeing her go through all of that, I don't know." The familiar stabs of pain strike him as he reviews for the millionth time all the times that he covered for Alex, despite what was happening to Lauren.

"So are we cool now?" he asks, snapping himself from his own troublesome thoughts.

She nods. "Yeah. We both goofed a little, we can admit that, right? Let's not forget what a mess this was, though."

"No, let's not. No need to be making the same mistakes again." His smile breaks through. "Although hopefully we won't *have* to ..."

"Yeah, hopefully not." And then, for the first time in weeks, he sees her smile as well. It's not just any smile, but that same perfect, airy smile to which he has grown so accustomed. And she's smiling it for him, at him.

Silently he raises his index finger to her lips. He drags it slowly over them, savoring the feel of every inch of the soft flesh.

His hand drops slowly as he brings his own lips to hers, no longer able to keep himself from tasting her. It feels so good to be back here, with her in this place that only the two of them share.

Her hands make their way to his torso and slither underneath his shirt ... giving him goosebumps as their cool tips graze over his skin ...

He is lost in her completely as her hands go to work on his belt buckle.

MORIANI HOME

Nick's loafers cut a deliberate path over the wood floor of the foyer as the doorbell cries out again, demanding urgent attention. He stops in front of the door and snaps open the deadbolt and the two other locks.

"What the hell do you want?" he asks, practically groaning at the sight of Stan.

"No more crap," Stan says forcefully. "What's goin' on with Ryan and Claire? Why are the two of 'em acting so weird?"

"Ah, yes, my favorite broken record."

"Cut it, Nick. Just tell me what the hell this is all about."

"Trying to make up for what, twenty years of half-assed parenting? I've said it before, Stan -- too little, too late." Nick taps his foot against the wood floor, a not-so-subtle hint that Stan has already worn out his welcome.

"Shut up," comes the instantaneous reply. "Is Ry here? Lemme talk to him."

"Can't you take a hint? Go slither back under whatever rock you came from and leave us all the hell alone!"

Fire sparks anew in Stan's eyes and for the briefest instant, Nick is a little bit afraid of what this loose cannon might do. But he can always be overpowered ...

"Get out, Stan."

"No! I'm not leaving until I get an answer about what's going on! There is something no one's tellin' me!"

Nick's lips part to spit out the usual refrain, but then a thought flashes through his mind: *Maybe it's time for him to know the truth. Maybe if I jogged his idiotic memory about what really happened with Claire, he'd slink back out of town with his tail between his legs before he does any real damage.*

The temptation is enough to give him pause.

KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

"Claire!" Paula calls out across the waiting room as soon as the elevator doors part. She and Sarah beat a hasty path over the linoleum to the spot against the wall where Claire is standing, arms folded protectively in front of herself. She looks up at them with a face drained of nearly all color; her cheeks are drawn in tightly, leaving no room for anything but sharp worry.

"Is there any news?" Paula asks. The words come in between breaths as she tries to settle herself from the rush to get here.

"Not yet, no." Claire shakes her head sadly. Paula can see how much this situation is hurting her, having to be at the whim of circumstance once again, like she has been so often in the past year. It's not something she has ever known Claire to be comfortable with and now, seeing it happen all over again, it's apparent how great an effect all of this has had on Claire.

"What happened?" Sarah asks, piping in from outside the semi-circle that Paula and Claire have formed. "Did they get hit, or--"

"No, it was only Diane's car," Claire says. "With the snow and everything ..."

Sarah nods. "It was a little bit ugly getting over here."

"I'm sure Diane was busy with something else and wasn't paying attention to the road. How typical!"

"You don't know that," Sarah cuts in. "This may not have been Diane's fault."

Two pairs of eyes turn squarely towards her.

"I'm just saying, don't put the blame on her immediately," Sarah says defensively.

Paula and Claire are still looking at her a little oddly, but then Paula changes the focus by asking, "How long will we have to wait?"

"I don't know," Claire says. "Hopefully they'll be out in a couple of minutes to tell us what's going on."

"You can't go back there?"

"They didn't want me in there right now. Didn't think it was a good idea." There is a bitter edge to Claire's voice that strikes the other two women into silence.

So they stand there, waiting in near absolute silence for some word.

MORIANI HOME

The full story -- the rape, Ryan's cover-up, all of it -- is boiling on the tip of Nick's tongue. But remembering all that Ryan has done to avoid facing this point, he can't do it. Or rather, he knows he shouldn't do it. It takes every ounce of his strength to clamp his jaw shut and slam the door instead.

Almost immediately the heavy fire of fists on the wooden door begins. A round of angry knocks sound, then it is quiet for a moment as Stan's distorted face appears in the frosted glass panel beside the door. Then comes another barrage of bangs on the door.

Nick is about to rip it open and lay into Stan again when the pounding stops. He waits, holding in his breath, until he hears the opening and closing of a car door and the sounds of the old junker starting and rattling away.

Almost simultaneously two pairs of intrigued footsteps make their way into the foyer. He turns to face Ryan and Katherine.

"What was that?" Ryan demands, though his expression makes it apparent that he already has a pretty good idea who was causing the ruckus.

Nick's hesitation is only momentary. "Stan."

"What the hell did he want?"

"The same thing he always wants. To make amends for being such a buffoon. I told him it wasn't happening."

Ryan storms over to the door, yanks it open, and stares out at the light covering of snow that has covered the neighborhood. The white blanket is marred only by a few sets of tire tracks, one of which he knows must be the remnants of Stan's latest trek to come find him.

"I told him to back off," Ryan says, turning back to Nick. "Why the hell is he keeping this up?"

"I think he got all riled up again because he went to see Claire--"

The explosion is immediate. "He *what?*"

"He's been hunting around for some explanation." Nick casts a careful glance over at Katherine, then refocuses back on Ryan. "I really think you need to let him know the entire story."

"What I need to do is stop him!" Ryan booms. "Obviously *telling* him isn't enough!" He grabs his leather jacket off one of the pegs beside the staircase and wriggles into it clumsily, already too wound up.

"Where are you going?"

"To put an end to this before he does anymore serious damage," Ryan says as he flies out the door.

Nick steps up to the doorway to call him back but then relents as Ryan climbs into the car and takes off. He's going to do what he's going to do -- hopefully it's not anything too stupid.

Nick's faith in that is not nearly as strong as he'd like it to be.

"Nick," Katherine says shakily. He turns back to her, having nearly forgotten her

presence.

"What?"

"What was that all about? What's going on?"

He sighs. "Katherine, dear, it's nothing to worry yourself over."

"I think it is!" she announces with an assertiveness that chills Nick. "Whatever this latest fiasco is that is turning our lives upside-down -- I think I deserve to know!"

FISHER HOME

"I missed you so much," Courtney sighs, snuggling up against Jason's bare chest and pulling the covers a little tighter over their bodies.

"I missed you, too," he says. His gaze is focused somewhere up near the ceiling, his eyes having taken on a lazy kind of glaze. "I'm glad we worked this out."

"Me, too. Let's not let something like this happen again."

"We won't." Jason's chest rises and falls in the rhythm of a deep breath. He reaches a hand over to Courtney's face and lightly traces the contour of her jawline.

Underneath the covers her leg rubs against the light dusting of hair on his calf.

"No more," he smiles, though the refusal seems reluctant at best. "My mom could be back any minute. We've gotta get cleaned up."

"Yeah, good idea." She begins to ease her way up to a sitting position, holding the covers over herself.

"Hey, guess what?"

"What?"

"We won't have to worry about parents for too much longer ... Alex and I were talking about getting an apartment together. So once that happens, we'll be able to do whatever the hell we want whenever we want."

"Sounds good to me," she says with a grin, moving in to plant a too-quick kiss on his lips.

"All right, all right, I'm getting outta here before you trap me in your web."

She tosses back her thick, shiny black hair. "Oh, so now *I'm* the troublemaker, huh?"

"That's right. Getting me locked up in all your immorality and stuff ..."

"Right, yeah." She slaps him on the backside as he leaps out of the bed. "Get moving."

He wriggles into the pair of boxers that have been discarded beside the bed and begins strolling out of the room. "Be right back."

"Okay," she answers as she slips back into her clothes. Casually she strolls over to the computer. Some music might be nice right now.

She sinks into the comfortable chair and takes hold of the mouse. But before she can swing the cursor over to the music player, which is sitting open on the left side of the screen, an Instant Message box catches her eye.

Before she knows what is happening, she has gotten sucked into the dialogue -- and all the wind has been sucked out of her system.

AMarshall78: Okay, well - are you sure you'd be comfortable with the whole thing?

BeastieBoy1108: dude--I've told you a million times that I totally support you and everything. we're pals, end of story

AMarshall78: thanks

AMarshall78: but still - like, it's one thing to be friends and it's another to live together. There was that whole thing that happened at your birthday party ...

BeastieBoy1108: Alex, that was forever ago! I think we've come a long way since then

AMarshall78: I think so, too ... I'm probably just being dumb, worrying so much.

AMarshall78: But I don't want it to be awkward for you

BeastieBoy1108: it won't be, I promise

AMarshall78: okay, cool

AMarshall78: You know, I'm amazed at how cool you've been with this whole thing. Especially after the way you found out

BeastieBoy1108: I told you, it was a long time ago! we've come a long way

AMarshall78: Yeah ... not that many guys would be so okay living with a guy they'd had that kind of ... experience with.

BeastieBoy1108: it was a one-time thing, I know that

BeastieBoy1108: and you were drunk, and I was probably drunker than you! so whatever... I was hung up on it for a while, I'll be honest, but we are cool now, I swear

She re-reads that segment of the conversation over and over, waiting for Jason to come back but at the same time hoping that he has just vanished into thin air.

END OF EPISODE #245

What did you think of this episode? What happens now for Jason and Courtney? Are the Morianis all in for trouble, thanks to Stan? And what will happen in the wake of Diane and Samantha's accident? Come to the Forum to share your thoughts!

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