

"Footprints" Episode #246

Previously ...

- Paula and Sarah rushed to the hospital to wait with Claire for news about Diane and Samantha's conditions.
- Ryan became infuriated when he learned that Stan had gone to see Claire again, and he took off in a mad rush.
- After witnessing the confusion over Stan's visit, Katherine demanded to know the truth about everything that Nick has been keeping from her.
- Courtney and Jason reconciled and made love -- but then she was shocked to read about his encounter with Alex when she sat down at the computer!

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Sarah tosses another sideways glance over at Paula, who is sitting beside her in an identical waiting-room chair. Her mother's fingers are still clasped together nervously, and they are still holding her attention as they have been for nearly as long as they have been waiting here. Sarah suspects that if Paula weren't working so hard to focus on something, even something as trivial as her hands, she would be falling apart right now.

Sarah herself is perilously close to doing so, far closer than she thought she would be in this situation. Waiting for news of Samantha's condition -- and imagining herself in Claire's shoes, were it Victoria in the same position as Sam -- is quickly draining her, and she can only imagine how Claire must feel right now. Not to mention that Diane is in there as well, possibly fighting for her life ...

Claire's sudden appearance at the entrance to the room seems at first like a mirage to Sarah. She's looked up so many times, hoping to see Claire returning with some news, that for a moment she doesn't even believe it.

"What's going on?" Paula asks, snapping herself from her frozen state as Claire hurries towards them.

"Samantha is fine," Claire says. Her breaths are short and ragged, no doubt a result of hurrying all over the hospital in an attempt to get her job done while keeping updated on her daughter's condition.

Paula releases a hefty sigh. "Oh, thank God."

"Aside from some cuts and bruises, she's absolutely okay. Emotionally she's a little banged-up, too, but that's something that we can work on."

Sarah finds herself nodding gratefully. "What about Diane?" she asks once it feels as though the relief over Samantha has set in sufficiently.

Claire grimaces before she even opens her mouth. "Not so good."

Somehow Sarah knew that was going to be her response. "What's wrong?"

"Head injury. They're still figuring it out ... She's unconscious, though."

Sarah sees the brief flicker of interest that flies between Claire and Paula. No doubt they are baffled by her sudden concern for Diane. But right now that's not the topic of primary interest -- thank goodness.

"Can we go see Samantha?" Paula asks.

"Yeah, follow me," Claire says, already turning to lead the way. Paula and Sarah waste no time in falling into step behind her.

FISHER HOME

Every word that her eyes drink in from the computer screen makes Courtney's body grow a little more tense. Her fingers clutch the mouse more firmly, her jaw clenches together more tightly ...

And then she sees his reflection in the monitor. Him -- the one who just professed his love to her, who just held her in his arms and joined his body to hers in a way that made her believe that nothing could ever come between them again. Now she shudders at the thought of his lying flesh meeting hers.

"Court?" he calls out, momentarily oblivious to the collision of worlds that Courtney has just experienced. She stares coldly at the likeness of him in the monitor, transposed partly over the small window that has just shattered -- or perhaps illuminated -- her reality.

"Court," he says again when she does not respond or turn around. Now there is a greater sense of urgency in his tone. He is realizing what has happened. She hears his footfalls on the floor, thudding against the somber air; she sees his reflection coming closer. But he stops midway.

"Courtney?" he asks. Desperation. He's looking for her to tell him that no, she didn't read his conversation with Alex, and yes, he did close that window before she came over. But

she can offer no such reassurances, and for a moment she takes a kind of spiteful delight in knowing what the waiting must be doing to him.

She turns her head sharply, glaring at him over her shoulder. He is wearing only a pair of basketball shorts, no shirt, but now the sight of his lean frame and toned chest only spur her anger onward.

"It's never gonna stop, is it?" she spits, her tone more accusatory than questioning.

His stare is blank. Maybe he's in shock -- maybe he doesn't want to feel anything. Maybe he knows how badly it would hurt if he could feel half of the rage that Courtney is projecting onto him right now.

Maybe he's feeling it.

"I thought we were through with this!" she cries. She pushes herself to her feet, hands gripping hard on the arms of the chair as she does so. "I thought we were through with all the lying and all the secrets!"

"We are," he says finally, hardly more than a murmur. The bitter irony isn't lost on her -- they are done with the secrets now, at least she is pretty sure they are, only it had to happen in the most roundabout and disheartening way possible.

"Didn't we just get finished saying how much we trust each other? How much we *love* each other? Didn't that mean anything to you?" She narrows her eyes at him, as if daring him to defy what she now knows is the truth.

"I can explain--"

"I'm sure you can, the same way you've explained everything else! All right, Jay, I get it. You had an obligation to a friend. *That's* what this was all about. Right, yeah."

"That is what this was about!"

"I believed that, I really did. And I was willing to accept it. I was being kind of a bitch, I know that!" She sighs, her whole body suddenly heavy with the weight of all this. When she speaks again, her voice is lower, as though now she is addressing herself. "Maybe this is what I get for reacting so badly ... maybe I deserve to find out that everything I thought we were sharing really didn't mean a damn thing."

"Don't say that!" He lunges forward and his hands reach out as if to grasp her, but they stop inches away from making contact.

"Then what the hell do you want me to say? You got me good, all right? You really had me convinced that you were so torn over this whole thing, and that you were trying to be a loyal friend to Alex but it was killing you not being able to set the record straight for everyone. And it turns out that the whole time you were just trying to cover up the fact that you messed around with him, huh?"

She watches the color drain from his face, even moreso than it already has. His lips flutter with the weak beginnings of a rebuttal, but they never build enough strength to make it happen.

MORIANI HOME

"Katherine, calm down," Nick says tersely, maintaining tight control over himself in the hope that perhaps she will follow his lead. The last thing he needs right now is for her to throw a fit and be suspicious: He already has enough to worry about, what with Ryan taking off after Stan in a complete rage just moments ago.

Katherine, however, doesn't seem to want to cooperate right now. "No, I will not calm down! Something is going on and I have had more than my fill of being kept in the dark!"

"There is no need for you to be concerned about this."

"When people are running in and out of my home, threatening to do God-knows-what to one another ... I think I have every reason to be concerned!"

"Katherine," he says softly, trying to calm her and perhaps buy himself a little thinking time. It's hard enough maintaining composure, and having her shouting in his face doesn't help. He didn't think it would ever be necessary to explain this situation to her, but now it appears that is his only option.

"I don't know who you think that man was," he begins, "but I promise that this is something Ryan and I will deal with."

Aggression is still simmering inside her, but he can see that he has opened the gate just a little bit already.

"That man -- Stan -- he's Ryan's father."

And that does it. She's so thrown for a loop that her suspicions seem to fade right away.

"His father?" she asks with all the hesitance of one who isn't quite sure what she has just heard. "What? Nick--"

"His biological father. Ryan is adopted."

"Oh ..." He watches the news washing over her. But then comes the inevitable wave of fresh confusion and outrage.

"I'm sorry I never told you about that," he says, anticipating the next question, "but it's very complicated. Stan--he did some horrible things. I didn't think he was a part of our lives anymore, but then he turned up all over again. He's been pestering Ryan for months."

There. Now the tables are turned. Understanding and sympathy, remorse for doubting him, all flood her face.

"I'm sorry," she says finally. "I ... I couldn't imagine why this man would be coming here and causing such a disturbance--"

"It's fine," Nick says. "I know that I should have told you earlier, but I kept hoping that he wouldn't become enough of a problem to make that necessary. Unfortunately it looks as though he hasn't lost his touch for causing trouble."

"Is there anything we can do? Should we try and stop Ryan?"

"I wish I could."

Silence dances between them for a moment and then Katherine reaches out to pull him nearer to her. He moves in gratefully, savoring the warmth of her hands on his back.

Knowing that, for once, Stan actually did him some good.

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Claire strokes the soft skin of Samantha's cheek slowly, painstakingly. She cannot touch the little girl enough -- every little touch is necessary to allay the numbing fear that she could be lost forever, just like Tim was, at the drop of a hat.

"Thank God you're okay," she whispers. The toddler rises and falls gently with the peaceful rhythm of sleep. Every repetition of the familiar, soothing sight is a new reassurance to Claire.

Having Paula and Sarah here to wait with her was a blessing, but now she is glad that they are gone. Now that it's just herself and Samantha in the room, everything feels like

it is wonderfully back to normal.

The sudden opening of the door shatters that feeling of ease in a flash. She jumps back, breath caught in her chest, as she hears the pronouncement: "There you are!"

"What are you doing here?" she asks in disbelief as her eyes settle on Ryan.

"He came to see you again?" Ryan demands, totally ignoring her question.

"What?"

"Stan! What'd he do?"

She doesn't answer, opting instead to turn back to Samantha. Maybe he'll just go away ... "It was nothing."

"Don't say that!" Ryan sounds almost as on-the-edge as she feels. "What'd he do, Claire?"

"He didn't do anything! He just--he knows that something happened. He knows that there is some reason you've turned on him like this."

"I didn't *turn* on him, I just--" He stops midstream, obviously realizing the futility of arguing his side of things with her when Stan is the one who really needs to hear it.

"Ryan, he wants answers. He wants to know what happened. Maybe then he'll go away."

"Yeah, he's not too big on actually facing issues ..." Ryan's gaze wanders over the room, taking it all in for the first time. "What's going on? Is--is she okay?" She nods his head towards Samantha.

The sudden concern takes Claire by surprise, and her response comes after an uncertain delay. "Uh, yeah, she's fine. There was an accident--a car accident--but she's fine, yeah."

"Good." He looks like he's about to add something more but then pulls back. "Claire, listen, if Stan did anything to you -- anything to hurt you, whatever ... Just tell me. He won't get away with it."

She can still recall the feel of Stan's hands grasping her roughly, of how she'd wanted so badly to pick up the phone and have someone go after him. But even that wouldn't obliterate the past.

"What did he do, Claire?" Ryan asks. His tone is a little more frantic. She wonders if he can see the horror in her expression.

"He needs to be stopped," she says raggedly. Weariness washes through her all over again. "He needs to go away."

Ryan turns and pulls the door back open, then looks back at her. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm--yeah, don't worry about me." She doesn't even know why she says it, but the idea of being alone with Samantha now is infinitely appealing.

"All right," he says, already halfway out the door. "I'll come check in with you later. Right now I'm gonna go make sure that Stan is out of both of our lives for good."

She has the idea that she should stop him, hold him back somehow, but part of her wants to see Stan get whatever is coming to him. An enormous part.

Maybe Ryan really will take care of him. Maybe this all will finally be over.

FISHER HOME

The fresh, painful rush of crimson to his cheeks bullies Jason into silence. As much as he wants to defend himself, to make Courtney understand what happened, part of him knows that they're already beyond that.

"I cannot *believe* this!" She tosses her arms into the air and then jams them into the pockets of her jeans as she pushes her way past him. Again his hand reaches out as if to hold her back, but he stops short of actually grabbing her.

"We didn't 'mess around,'" he says finally, unable to hold it in any longer. "It was the night of my 21st birthday, when you threw me that surprise party at Lauren's. You guys tossed Alex and I in that bed 'cuz we were, like, passing out--"

"Spare me the details."

"There *are* no details! Court--" He cuts himself off. The rapid pounding of his heart punctuates the silence in his ears. "Courtney, we were really drunk -- God, I wasn't even conscious, practically. And Alex was just a little ... uninhibited. Nothing happened."

She pushes back her full head of sleek black hair with one hand. "Obviously enough happened for you to figure out that he was more into you than Lauren."

"It was nothing! Jeez, how many more ways can I say that?"

"If you thought it was something you had to keep from me, even after all that talking we did about truth and honesty and trust--then maybe it was more than you want to admit."

That blow strikes him square in the gut, and he has to recover his wind before he can respond. Only when he does, it's far more vitriolic than he would ever allow himself to be under normal circumstances. She's pushed him too hard for him to care about reigning himself in any longer.

"Get the hell out of my face!" he blasts. "Believe whatever the hell you wanna believe -- obviously I'm not important enough for you to make any effort whatsoever to get over this same poor-little-princess act you've been pulling your whole damn life!"

He sees her jaw tighten and her eyes narrow at him, and for an instant he regrets what he's said. But then her mouth opens and the only regret he has left is that he's misplaced so much faith in her for so damn long.

"Keep playing your stupid games!" she fires back. "Go ahead and keep believing that you're always right and that someone else is always to blame. I'm *sorry*, Jason, but do you have any idea what it feels like to hear--"

"You can't even try to be supportive, can you?" He shakes his head in disgust. "Un-freaking-believable."

She looks as though she is going to spit something else, but instead she turns on her heels with a grunt and storms out of the room.

He doesn't even make an effort to follow her, and in a few seconds he hears the creaking of the stairs and the slamming of the front door.

There is a crushing finality to it that he is sure is ringing in Courtney's ears right now, as well. And as much as he wants to be glad that she is gone -- as glad as he is right now not to have to face her anymore -- he can feel a dark cloud of despair settling firmly over him.

END OF EPISODE #246

Is this the end for Jason and Courtney? Is Ryan about to do something he's going to regret? Join us in the Footprints Forum to discuss this episode!

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