

## "Footprints" Episode #286

### [Previously ...](#)

- In her search for investors for her new company, Camille called up an old friend -- Nick Moriani. He agreed to consider investing.
- Claire attempted to convince Molly and Brent to stop worrying about her relationship with Ryan, while Ryan grew nervous over his plans to break free of Nick's business.
- As Alex relayed his apprehensions over his new relationship with Dylan to Jason, Dylan beamed to Courtney about how well things are going with Alex.
- Lauren convinced Courtney to attend the party and encouraged her to pursue Trevor.

## WINDMILLS

"It really is lovely to see you again," Camille says, her long, elegant fingers holding the wine glass just millimeters from her lips.

Nick observes her quietly for a moment. The deep red of the wine stands in sharp contrast to the light, natural shade of her lipstick; the contrast, so simple, speaks volumes about Camille. The years have done nothing but enhance the sophistication with which she seems to have been born.

"I'm glad you called me," he says. "It's so easy to lose track of people. It's a pleasure to be able to sit down and talk with you again."

Finally she brings the wine to her lips, and a crimson trail passes through. As she sets the glass down, she says, "We seem to do much better with the occasional meeting than with constant contact."

Nick has to laugh a little. He knows exactly what she means.

"I think we'd have killed each other if we'd even tried to make things work between us," Camille muses, matching Nick's laugh with one of her own.

"We came close a few times, if I remember correctly."

"You do." Camille's fingers dance lightly along the stem of her glass. "Things certainly worked out for the best, even if it didn't seem as though that was happening at the time."

"They did. They tend to." Nick finds his mind drifting away on the tail of his statement, but he reins himself back in. "So aside from this business ... What is your life like these days?"

She lifts her eyebrows and her lips crawl out into a teasing grin. "Thrilling, as always."

"I expect nothing less."

"Perhaps you should," she says. Nick thinks that he detects a note of wistfulness, but it is gone before he has a chance to grab onto it. "Work is my main focus these days, to be honest. This business -- it's always been my dream. You know that. I want nothing more than to bring it to life."

"I have no doubt that you'll be able to do it," he says.

"Thank you. I ... well, it will happen. I'll see to that. But it certainly has become the dominant force in my life."

"Are you happy about that?"

"I suppose so."

Nick waits for more to come, but it doesn't, at least not in the form he expected.

"Things are going well with Katherine, though?" Camille asks abruptly.

"Very well, yes." Nick nods his head slowly, realizing that the answer is truthful. In spite of the chaos that marked their engagement and the first few months of their marriage, they've finally settled into an easy, comfortable life. Or at least something resembling one.

"Good. She seemed like a lovely woman at the wedding."

"She is," Nick says with the same slow, almost methodical, rhythm.

"Then we've each found what we wanted. What more could we ask?" She takes another sip of wine, but this time the glass's move from the table to her mouth is a blur, a quick, sharp motion.

"Those were good days, though," she says.

Nick nods in agreement.

"At least some of them," she adds with a chuckle. "Your son. How is he? I didn't get to see him at your wedding."

"He wasn't there," Nick says, wishing Camille hadn't dragged him back to the madness of that night. "He had another engagement he had to be at."

"That's a shame." Camille's words bear a definite curiosity, but thankfully it goes unvoiced. "How's he doing?"

"That depends on who you ask, I suppose." Seeing her questioning look, he continues, "Ryan seems to think that he's doing just fine. But from a father's perspective ... He's being consumed by some very foolish pursuits. And if I don't make him realize that soon, he's going to wind up in very significant trouble."

## **FISHER HOME**

Normally, the mess of toys that has exploded across the floor of the Fishers' living room would be enough to send Claire into a cleaning frenzy. But tonight, as she watches from the couch while Ryan sits amongst the clutter with Travis and Samantha, the mess isn't bothering her one bit.

Samantha takes one of her Barbies out of Ryan's hand and places it in a neon pink Jeep. Very seriously, she says to him, "Now they have to go to the hospital."

Ryan and Claire exchange a look, smiling at Sam's mispronunciation. Claire knows that it's not worth correcting right now.

"Bam!" Travis roars. Ryan's attention snaps back to the miniature racetrack and the tiny car that has just slammed into a wall.

"He loses," Travis explains very matter-of-factly, holding up the car in question.

"Uh-oh," Ryan says. Claire laughs; she recognizes the tone. He has no idea why Travis's announcement is significant.

Time to come to the rescue. "All right, you clowns," Claire says. "It's dinner time."

Travis doesn't even look up from his cars. "Not right now."

"Yes, right now." She uses a tone just firm enough that he won't be able to protest. She hopes.

Luckily, it works. Travis drops the cars and stands.

"Come on," Ryan says to Samantha, taking control of the Barbies' Jeep from her. "Dinner time."

Sam shakes her head. "I don't want dinner."

"But you need to eat dinner," Claire says.

Another head shake, this one more defiant. "I don't want to eat."

"You have to eat." Claire rises from the couch and takes a few steps toward the blur of pink that is Barbie's home -- which sends Samantha scurrying in the opposite direction.

"It's dinner time," Claire says again, just barely concealing her frustration.

Sam clasps her hands over her ears. "No, no, no, no--"

"Samantha." Ryan jumps to his feet and, with one broad step, catches up with the little girl. "Listen to your mother."

"No--"

"Yes." Ryan scoops her up into his arms.

Samantha's eyes plead with Ryan, but his expression does not change.

"Let's go into the kitchen," he says finally, giving Claire her cue to lead Travis that way.

"What do you two want to eat?" Claire asks once they are in the kitchen.

"Hot dogs!" Travis yells out.

"Yeah, hot dogs!" comes Samantha's echo a split-second later.

Claire looks over at Ryan. Apparently the dinner-resistance movement of a minute ago has been forgotten.

"Hot dogs it is," Claire says as she opens the refrigerator.

"Are you and Daddy eating hot dogs, too?" Samantha asks.

Claire watches as Ryan's mouth opens to speak and then closes as he realizes that Samantha is talking about him.

And the evening comes grinding to a halt.

## **BROOKS HOME**

"I do not get why this CD won't play!" Lauren cries out, stomping her foot down hard on the living room floor.

"Let me see," Jason says. He drops what he's doing -- gathering the Brooks' knick-knacks and anything that appears breakable -- and moves across the room to join her.

The room's appearance is quite different from its usual spaced-out scheme. The furniture has been rearranged, mainly consolidated into one corner, with the dual effect of creating better party seating and opening up space for a makeshift dance floor. And in just a few hours, the place is going to be packed, a far cry from all this empty space with Lauren and Jason bustling around, trying to get things in order. But first things first.

"This has to work!" Lauren's fingers punch frantically at several of the buttons. "We need music. If we don't have music, then no one'll be able to dance, and--"

"Hang on." Jason steps in front of the CD player, essentially forcing her out of the way. He hits play but nothing happens.

"See? It doesn't work."

He opens up the disc tray, trying to stay calm even though he has to admit his pulse is racing just a little bit.

"There you go," he says.

"What?"

"It's just in the wrong slot." He moves the CD to a different spot in the changer, pushes the tray back in, and hits play. The sounds of their carefully constructed party mix fill the room. "We're set now."

"Thanks," Lauren says. "That could've been a disaster."

Jason feels a smirk creeping across his lips. "Yes, you freaking out could've been a huge disaster."

Her eyes widen. "You know that if the music didn't work--"

This time the doorbell interrupts her. She drops her sentence and heads for the front door.

Jason waits to see who it is. He can't imagine why anyone would be here so early.

"Oh, hey," Lauren says with surprise as she opens the door.

"I figured I'd come over and give you a hand, or at least ... hang out," Courtney says as she steps into the house. She's dressed for a party: dark jeans that ride low on her hips and a white halter top that serves as the perfect contrast to her deep tan. She scans the scene, and there is a definite pause -- barely perceptible but certainly there -- when she spots Jason.

"Well, we're almost ready, but it's good to see you." Lauren gives Court a hug, but from what Jason can tell, the timing is just a little bit off with the conversation, and he's pretty sure that the girls are as uncomfortable with it as he is.

"Is it just the two of you?" Courtney asks, still examining the setup. She seems impressed with what they've done, at least, Jason notes.

"Yeah," Lauren says, adding quickly, "Here, come give me a hand in the kitchen."

The girls exit quickly, Lauren leading the way and Courtney following eagerly. Jason busies himself with getting the bar in order, all the while thinking about their quick exit and wondering, *What the hell was that all about?*

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Once they are in the kitchen, Lauren and Courtney take their usual spots around the island, which bears the remnants of an early dinner that still needs to be cleaned up. These are the same posts they've been taking for their Brooks-kitchen-gossip-sessions for as long as they've been having them.

"I assume you were trying to see if Trevor's around," Lauren says with a smile. Her voice is low, conspiratorial, the tone of someone who's watching a plan begin to unfold before her eyes.

Courtney's right there with her. "Yeah. Where is he?"

"He had to run out and grab a couple of things. He'll be back soon."

Court nods, digesting the information quickly. Suddenly she looks up at Lauren with an expression that combines excitement and terror perfectly.

They share the same squeal that they've been sharing for years.

## WINDMILLS

"I'm sure you'll be able to make him see the error of his ways. You've always done an excellent job of keeping him focused," Camille says.

The words send a rush of confidence through Nick, the likes of which he hasn't felt in quite some time. Camille sounds so sincere that she almost makes him believe that he need not worry about Ryan. Almost.

"Thank you," he says at last, realizing that he's been contemplating her words for too long a moment. "I hope you're right. But the last few years have changed Ryan. They've changed our relationship, too."

Camille's gaze surveys the restaurant. Nick watches carefully as her features, so dignified yet somehow so natural at the same time, absorb his vague comments about Ryan and try to figure out how to respond.

"If he's really in as troubling a situation as you seem to think, then I hope you're able to reach him in time," she says. "And if not ... It won't be for lack of trying, that much I know about you."

Nick smiles warmly, accepting the vote of assurance. There's nothing Camille can tell him that he doesn't already know; she certainly can't solve the problem for him. There's no need to concern her about it.

But Camille isn't so prepared to drop it. "He's still living with you, from the sounds of it, yes?"

Nick nods.

"Maybe that's something he needs to address. Everyone needs freedom. Most people don't make it more than twenty years in their parents' homes."

"I know. But Ryan is different. He's stayed under my roof out of choice, not for lack of alternatives."

"That doesn't mean he might not want the freedom."

"True." But, to Nick, that freedom always seems to have something to do with Stan or Claire, and neither of them have done anything positive for Ryan's life.

"Maybe you can find a way for him to have that freedom without causing himself the

harm that you think he's going to cause," Camille says.

Nick clasps his hands together, nodding slowly and thinking about that. Perhaps he was wrong: Camille might be on to something. But he doesn't need to discuss this any further with her. There's no need to say anything more specific.

"Enough about my problems," he says, switching his troubled grimace into a considerate smile. "I do believe there was a specific purpose for this dinner."

"That's true," Camille says. "Let me explain how this is going to work, what an investment will mean, all that sort of thing. You can consider it for a few more weeks if you'd like and get in touch with me about your decision."

Nick listens to her explanation of launching the line, headquartering it in King's Bay instead of Seattle, shopping the clothing to department stores, adding accessories for a later season, and so on. Camille sounds as if she knows exactly how every step will progress, how she will handle every possible curve.

Frankly, it doesn't matter. Nick has every reason to believe that, given the opportunity, she is going to make this business work. Her track record speaks for itself. This is only the next natural step.

"Count me in," he says mere seconds after she concludes.

Camille's face lights up with surprise. "Really?"

"Yes. Mark me down as an investor."

## **FISHER HOME**

Claire's first move is to reach out and take Samantha from Ryan's arms and into her own. Ryan offers no protest.

"Samantha," Claire begins in what Ryan can tell is a very careful tone. She's trying to sound authoritative without scolding, which even Ryan's limited experience with children has shown him is a difficult balance to achieve.

"You know Ryan isn't your daddy," Claire says.

Samantha just stares at her blankly. She looks terribly confused, and despite Claire's care, appears to think that she's done something very wrong.

"Sorry, Mommy," the little girl finally says, her voice quivering along with her lip.



Claire pulls Samantha tighter against her body. "You don't have to be sorry. It's okay. I just want to make sure that you and Travis always remember your daddy."

"I remember," Travis pipes in, sounding so proud of himself that Ryan nearly laughs.

"Good. Because you know he's with the angels watching over us. He won't ever forget the two of you."

Ryan remembers receiving similar talks about his adoptive mother, but even by that young age, he'd bounced around enough that it wasn't such a big deal in his mind. Just another adult passing through, it seemed. So to think about the job that Claire has for the rest of her life -- to maintain Tim's presence in his kids' lives even though they only knew him in their very early years -- strikes Ryan with great impact.

Claire kneels down and extends one arm to pull Travis into the embrace that she and Samantha are already sharing. He joins gladly. Ryan watches as Claire whispers to them, cementing the story of their father's identity for Travis and Samantha to carry for the rest of their lives.

Suddenly Claire's eyes lift from the kids and meet Ryan's. He feels strangely guilty, as if he's been caught intruding on something very private, but her expression reassures him. This is a touchy subject, but it's nothing that they can't deal with.

Still, he feels as though his presence isn't quite necessary right now, so he tips his head toward the back door and slides out onto the deck. He's sure that neither of the kids even notices.

He moves his hand to flip on the deck lights, but then thinks better of it. Instead, he stands there in the dark, letting the night wrap itself around him, allowing him to fade into it.

He watches through the glass as Claire speaks a few more words to the kids, squeezes them tightly, and then gets up and resumes cooking dinner. As much as he doesn't want to acknowledge it, Ryan knows exactly why he feels like such an intruder when she's discussing Tim with the kids.

The night Tim died, Ryan had Claire trapped in a cellar, pleading his own case while her husband was out on a dock gasping his final breaths. And when they received the news of Tim's death, Ryan couldn't help but feel happy about it, at least somewhere deep down. He's taken advantage of that to get where he is now; if not for Tim's death -- if not for his and Nick's involvement in the whole fiasco that night -- Ryan never would have this chance with Claire. They never would have been able to resurrect this relationship.

Knowing that he's benefitted so much from another man's death, and that Claire can never really know all he knows about what happened that night, makes the glass door seem locked, frozen, indestructible. So he stands out there for a while longer, soaking up the black of the night.

## **BROOKS HOME**

"It looks like you're expecting a lot of people to be here," Courtney says. She steps out from the kitchen into the family room area, which hasn't been altered much except to remove or protect anything that might get destroyed in the course of a party.

"We are. Trevor invited people, I invited people, those people invited people ... Should be fun." Lauren wraps the cord back around the vacuum and shuffles it off to the hallway closet.

Courtney follows her. "Is it gonna be weird for you to see Alex and Dylan here?"

Lauren shrugs as she shuts the closet door. "Kind of. But avoiding the issue isn't gonna do any of us any good. Alex and I probably won't ever be pals again, but you and Jason are both close with him, so I have to deal with it."

"That's a good attitude."

They stroll down the hallway, back to the foyer. Jason is still organizing the bar. The girls observe as he lines up several half-gallon containers of alcohol, steps back to check out his work, and then moves back in to make some minute change, like switching two bottles or rotating one a few degrees.

"How long have you been setting up?" Courtney asks, keeping her voice low enough so that she's speaking only to Lauren.

"I started cleaning at, like, two," Lauren says with a groan. "But it looks good, and I'm not rushing around at the last minute to get ready."

Courtney sits down on one of the living room sofas, taking a strange amount of care considering that people are going to be thrashing around the room in a few hours. "I haven't seen most of these people in so long."

"Yeah, me neither. I think the whole college group is starting to split."

Courtney's pretty sure that the statement was meant in a general way, but as she sees Lauren's gaze wandering over to Jason, she realizes how true it is.

"What about you? You have anyone on your radar for tonight?" Courtney asks, her voice barely above a whisper now.

"I don't know," Lauren says. "We'll see what happens."

"Yeah, we will," Courtney says, running her index finger back and forth along the top of the sofa. "Should be a hell of a night."

## **END OF EPISODE #286**

*What are your predictions for the party? Did Claire and Ryan's evening with the kids give you any new thoughts about their relationship? What did you think about Nick and Camille's first real scenes together? Come share your thoughts over at the Footprints Forum!*

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