

"Footprints" Episode #294

[Previously ...](#)

- Nick attended an investors' meeting for Camille's new company. He was accompanied by Ryan, who also decided to invest but warned Nick that he would still have no part in the Moriani business dealings.
- Though Ryan and Claire celebrated his moving out of Nick's home, Claire continued to fret about the upcoming hearing to decide Samantha's custody.
- Unable to hold the conflict inside any longer, Paula confessed to Bill that she conducted a search for her missing son behind his back -- and he stormed out of the house, furious.

MORIANI HOME

"That smells wonderful," Nick Moriani says as he enters the dining room.

Katherine looks up from the silverware she's setting out and smiles. "It does. Virginia was very excited for us to try what she prepared for tonight."

Nick sets his brandy down on the table and examines the dishes that have been laid out: a sizable piece of ahi tuna, grilled, with some sort of glaze to the side, along with a plate of asparagus. "She's been doing an excellent job. Much better than that Valerie girl."

His wife nods, looking almost weary at the recollection of their last cook.

"Have a seat," she says. Nick does, and she follows suit a moment later, once the cutlery has been arranged to her satisfaction.

Nick serves the ahi, first to Katherine and then to himself. The glaze, he observes as he drizzles it over the fish and then the asparagus, appears to be a honey one.

"Ryan won't be coming by to eat tonight?" Katherine asks.

"I offered, but he assured me that he has everything in order and was more than capable of feeding himself." He sees that his description of Ryan's reaction has annoyed Katherine, even though she's biting her tongue, so he adds, "He was his usual, obnoxious self about telling me this, of course."

Katherine nods, seemingly relieved that Nick found Ryan's response irritating. "He's really determined to strike out on his own, isn't he?"

"Very determined."

"I suppose I can understand that, what with him having spent so much time living with you," she says once she has finished chewing a piece of the asparagus. "But he's certainly had an attitude about it lately."

Nick sighs. "You know how it is. They find a woman to cling to, they begin organizing their lives around her ..."

"You really do think this is all because of Claire, don't you?"

"Yes," Nick says forcefully. "I do. You should understand. It was the same thing with Andrew--"

"I know. I do understand."

Nick sips thoughtfully on his brandy for a moment. "He's going to see that I was right. One day, she's going to destroy his life, just like she did her father, and her husband."

"I've offered before," Katherine says, "to help you separate them before it goes that far. You know that you have my assistance if you want it."

The usual reluctance stirs within Nick. He knows that he and Katherine probably could separate Ryan and Claire if they really attempted to, but ... dragging Katherine so deeply into the situation would put her in close proximity to a lot of other truths from which Nick would prefer to keep her.

Except, of course, if Ryan decides to switch sides and do something with all the information he possesses anyway. That's something that has been bothering Nick ever since the first time Ryan suggested that he might want to pursue a career outside of the family business.

Nick nods, very slowly, very carefully. There has to be a way to make this all work.

"I would love your help," he says, smiling at his wife.

VISION PUBLISHING

Ryan Moriani folds his hands in front of him to wait as the auburn-haired young lady presses a button on the telephone set and leans forward to speak.

"Ms. Bishop," she says, "there's a Mr. Moriani here to see you."

The reaction from the other end comes just a second later, first a rush of fuzz that announces someone is answering the call, then a voice.

"What's it about?" the voice, a little raspy and a little bothered, asks.

The young woman casts one eye up at Ryan, as if to tell him that this is what she meant -- Diane doesn't like to take visitors who just drop by.

"He says it's personal," she answers.

There is a pause, followed by more dead air on the other end. Ryan waits patiently, hands held in front of him, offering the faintest hint of a pleasant smile to the young woman.

"Send him in," the voice says with an authority that Ryan is certain is intended for his ears.

Looking a little surprised, the young woman waves Ryan by. He moves quickly, not wanting to allow any chance for the decision to be reversed.

He knocks firmly on the lightly colored wood door, and a call to enter follows immediately.

Diane is looking through papers when Ryan enters the office. He closes the door but stands by it, waiting for her to look up. She only does so once she has flipped through the stack of papers and tucked it inside a folder.

"What can I do for you?" she asks. He notices that she begins studying him carefully the moment she lifts her eyes from the folder.

Ryan launches right into the introduction that he's spent hours considering, rehearsing, modifying: "I'm not sure if you recognize me, but we've met. I was having dinner with Claire Fisher--"

"Ah, yes." Diane goes quiet as what Ryan perceives as an amused look spreads over her face. She's a very attractive woman, there's no doubt about that, but it's in a striking, somewhat offbeat way, accentuated even further by the short, trendy haircut and the full lips.

"I do remember you," she says at last.

"Good. Claire has become very important to me in the last year. She's had a lot to cope with, and I can't bear to see her deal with another loss."

Diane leans back in her chair. A grin lingers on her lips, as if urging Ryan to continue so

that she can find the perfect spot to pounce.

"I know there's no love lost between the two of you," Ryan says. "And I have to wonder if, well, if that's part of the driving force behind this custody case."

"I plan on raising my daughter," Diane says firmly.

"I realize that. But Samantha is an invaluable part of Claire's life. She and Tim raised Sam for the first two years of her life. This separation has been really hard on both her and Travis."

Diane's not having any of it. Ryan can tell that she finds his plight -- Claire's plight, really -- entertaining. He's certainly not going to win her over with any sort of emotional plea.

Time to pull out the big guns, then.

He reaches into the inside pocket of his jacket as he says, "That's why I'm prepared to make you an offer -- hopefully one that will be enough to convince you to let this case go and let Claire have primary custody."

His fingers pull out the checkbook fully and hold it out for her to see.

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

"Is everything all right?" Sarah Fisher asks as she opens the door to her mother.

Paula hurries inside the apartment, clutching the strap of her purse tightly between both hands.

"I told him," Paula blurts out. "I told your father."

The admission gives Sarah pause, and she hesitates before closing the front door. "Mom, if I'd known it was something that serious, I would've made time to meet with you earlier."

Paula waves off the suggestion. "No, no, I didn't want you disrupting your workday. Besides, nothing has changed between this morning and now, anyway."

"So how did he react?" Sarah asks.

She knows the answer before Paula says anything.

"Horribly. I should have known he would -- I suppose I did know, and that's why I kept this from him for so long."

"What did he do?"

"He just ... left. He rushed out of the house and didn't come back."

"Not at all?"

"No. I went to bed eventually, but when I woke up this morning, his side of the bed wasn't touched. And I tried his cell phone, but I keep getting his answering service."

Paula looks frenzied, exhausted, wild-eyed. It's a state in which Sarah has seldom seen her mother; the only time she can remember something comparable was when Tim died.

"Maybe he went to Jason's," Sarah says. "Or Molly's." She tries to push aside the thought that their father would go there before coming to her.

"I spoke to both of them," Paula says, shaking her head. "I didn't say anything about what happened. I just made it seem like a regular call, but neither of them said anything about having seen him."

"We could try the hotels ..."

"That's what I was thinking. I left a message for him, so hopefully he'll call me back once he's done at the restaurant tonight."

"Does Claire know what happened?"

This time, Paula's head shakes even more emphatically. "No. Sarah, I didn't even tell him about Ryan."

"You didn't?"

"No. I started by telling him that I'd conducted a search for my son. I didn't even say that I'd found him, though I'm sure he understood that part. But he left before I could explain the entire story!"

"Oh, God ..." Sarah feels her stomach sinking. Maybe she never should have agreed to help her mother with this search. Not if it winds up destroying their family ...

"You need to find him," Sarah says, "and make him listen to you. And maybe you just need to admit that it was wrong and agree to forget the whole thing--"

"No!" Paula pauses, looking at Sarah for a moment as though she's crazy. "I can't do that. I won't. I did this because I had to know. I can't let go of it now, especially not with Ryan being so close to us."

The woman must be crazy. Sarah places a hand on each of her mother's shoulders, hoping to bring her back to earth. "But Mom, is that worth ruining the family you already have? Not to mention what it'll do to Claire--"

"I'm not going to choose! I've wondered about that child for too long, and I've waited too long for the day I might be able to find out what happened to him. I can't stop now."

"Then what about Dad?" Sarah asks, almost challenging Paula. "What about the rest of us?"

"We're going to face this together," Paula says. She seems much more focused than she did just a few minutes ago, as if something has clicked inside her head and become much clearer for her. "I'm going to make your father understand why I had to do this, and then we're going to face this as a family."

Sarah nods, unable to think of any other response, but in her head she thinks, *That is, if you can find him and make him listen to you ...*

THE FISHERMAN'S PIER

Bill Fisher closes the locker at the end of the row and steps back from it, taking a deep breath. *You made it through the entire day without incident*, he tells himself, simultaneously proud that he was able to go without drawing attention to his fractured mental state and disgusted that he has to look back on a day of work this way.

He pulls his car keys from his pocket and clutches them tightly in his hand. It's time to get out of here. All he wants is to get back to the hotel, take a hot shower, and try as hard as he can to fall asleep. Nothing else, at least not tonight.

He barely manages one stride in the direction of the door when he sees Matt Gray coming toward him.

"I didn't think I'd see you tonight," Matt says. "What are you still doing here?"

Bill collects himself before speaking. "I had a few things to take care of once I was done in the kitchen. I'm on my way h--out now."

Matt moves over to his own locker and expertly enters his combination. "Any big excitement today?"

"Nothing much, no. You should have an easy time tonight."

"That's what I like to hear." Matt pulls his apron out of the locker and puts his keys inside. "You okay?"

"I'm fine," Bill says, though he's amazed at how weary he sounds, even to his own ears.

"You sure?"

There's no need to play this game, and Bill knows that Matt is going to be persistent after all the times they've been on the flip side of this situation, with Bill trying to get Matt to open up.

"It's been a rough 24 hours," Bill confesses, though he's careful to keep his voice at a volume that will keep this between the two of them.

"Something going on?"

"There is something, yes. It's sort of ... well, it's complicated."

"You know I'm here to listen if you need to talk," Matt says as he slips into the apron.

"Thanks," Bill says, "but this isn't the time. I can't really discuss the situation right now."

Matt accepts that, albeit a bit grudgingly. He moves for the door that leads to the kitchen.

"You're sure you can handle this?" he asks.

"Yeah," Bill says, though it might as well be a bold-faced lie. "Have a good night."

"You too. And good luck."

"Thanks."

Bill heads for the exit but stops before he opens the door. "And Matt--"

"Yeah?" Matt pauses, halfway through the door to the kitchen.

"Don't ever keep things from Sarah," Bill says, unable to keep the thought to himself. "If there's ever anything that you think she should know, just let her know. Dealing with it might seem tough, but it's much easier to do it then than to face it further down the road."

Matt nods, though he looks utterly confused. And before he can ask any questions, Bill exits the restaurant, completely enticed by the prospect of a secluded room and an early night.

MORIANI HOME

"Another woman would be a simple enough plan," Katherine says as she sips at a glass of mineral water. "One indiscretion would surely be enough to destroy Claire's trust in him, no?"

Though Nick nods, he's not convinced. "If we could shatter her trust in him, then yes, that would be enough. But I think Ryan would be the problem there. Claire is all he's wanted for years. He'd never willingly turn his back on her."

"He's certainly devoted to her."

"It's habit. He's conditioned himself to think that she is the ultimate goal. A kind of savior, I suppose."

Nick catches the perplexed expression on Katherine's face, but he makes no effort to acknowledge this. All of this is cutting a little too close to the bone for his liking. This business about trust and Ryan seeking redemption and everything else -- it's all lying right on the border of the things that Nick has no intention of sharing with Katherine. The only positive thing about this situation is that Claire seems to care too much for Ryan to worry about incriminating either him or Nick anymore.

"Then we need to destroy that perfect image of her that he has," Katherine declares.

"God knows I've tried," Nick mutters.

"There has to be something for us to capitalize upon ..."

"The woman killed her own father, for God's sakes. You'd think that would be enough to persuade him. But Ryan refuses to see things from that point-of-view."

"She needs to betray him," Katherine says, as if it's the simplest thing in the world.

"Maybe." Nick absently eats some more of the fish, though he's so caught up in thought that he hardly tastes it. "He did come with me to that meeting. I was half-expecting him to spit in my face when I suggested that he invest in Camille's company."

"At least he's still listening to you, then."

"Somewhat. It's a terrific investment opportunity, though; he'd have been a fool not to take my advice. Camille has a very clear vision of how she's going to turn this into a success."

"She sounds wonderful," Katherine says flatly, before moving a bite of food into her mouth. Nick thinks that he detects something bitter in her tone but continues nevertheless.

"She's very talented. And I've always suspected she'd be a terrific businesswoman. There's a lot of potential in this company."

"Sounds like it."

Nick watches Katherine eating and recognizes that he is taking an odd pleasure in her sharp reaction to his praising Camille. He's assured her that his relationship with Camille became strictly platonic years ago, but Katherine's reaction to any mention of the woman remains cool at best and, he's observed, sometimes verges on snarky. He finds the situation strangely comforting.

"We'll come up with something," he says once he feels as though they've been silent long enough. "There has to be some opening that we just haven't recognized yet. But when we do -- goodbye, Claire."

VISION PUBLISHING

Diane's gaze lingers on the checkbook for just a moment before she slaps her hands down on the desk and uses them to push herself to a standing position.

"Do you really think I'm going to let you buy me off?" she snaps. A hand juts out and slaps the checkbook out of his hand. It goes tumbling to the floor.

"Are you?" he challenges, ignoring the fallen checkbook.

"No! This is ridiculous. I'm doing this because I want to raise my daughter. Whatever insignificant sum of money you plan on offering me isn't going to change my intentions."

Her outright refusal to entertain the possibility astounds Ryan. He covers by bending down and picking up the checkbook.

"I wish you'd at least consider my offer," he says.

"And I wish you'd get out of my office and out of my sight. Who's going to get their wish

first?"

The nice guy act isn't working, Ryan can tell, but he knows that becoming overly aggressive with her isn't going to do Claire any favors.

Diane extends a finger toward a button on her phone panel, then pauses to look at him expectantly.

"This is a mistake," he says, reaching for the doorknob.

She just smirks and watches him disappear from the office.

Outside, Ryan gives the young lady another pleasant smile before beating a quick path back to the elevator. Once alone in the elevator, he tries to figure out how that could have gone so badly. He was sure that this would work, even if Diane might have been resistant at first. But she really showed no interest at all.

There has to be something I can do to help Claire, he thinks as the elevator cruises back down to the lobby.

Inside the office, Diane returns to her seat. What a joke. Did he *really* think that getting custody for Claire would be so simple? A little laugh escapes her throat as she thinks about how shocked he was by her refusal.

Little does he realize how much more determined to win he just made her.

She picks up the phone and expertly dials. The number has become second nature over the last few days, anyway.

It only takes one ring before she gets an answer.

"It's Diane," she says. "How are we doing? Is everything in order?"

END OF EPISODE #294

How is the encounter between Ryan and Diane going to impact the custody hearing? What is Diane's phone call all about? And what's in store for Nick/Katherine and Bill/Paula? Visit the Footprints Forum to share your thoughts and see what others have to say!

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