

"Footprints" Episode #305

[Previously ...](#)

- After watching Courtney and Dylan training for competition, Jason admitted to Sandy that he misses that sort of hard work. Later, he made an attempt to talk with Courtney, but she rebuffed him with a snide comment.
- Diane assured Brian that she can convince Sarah not to let the courtroom debacle ruin their friendship.
- Ryan received a mixed reception into the Fisher family. Paula tried her best to be welcoming, while Jason flatly rejected his new brother.
- Bill and Paula faced off with Nick and Katherine, who were acting very territorial over Ryan.

KING'S BAY ICE ARENA

Jason Fisher sits somewhat uneasily slouched in his coach's office, eyeing the various photos, certificates, and posters on the wall of the cramped but uncluttered little room and trying in vain to forget about everything that has been going on in his life lately -- problems with Courtney and Lauren, the bombshell his family dropped on him just days earlier about Ryan Moriani, and now the state of his skating career.

He's been hoping to suppress some of his worries by concentrating on his skating, as he has many times before when life had become too difficult to deal with. But this is different. Sandy rarely, if ever, calls him at home and asks him to meet at the rink to discuss things in person. And he isn't sure he can handle one more sobering conversation about the last facet of his life that hasn't completely fallen apart.

His gaze shifts out the window of the office. He sees Sandy talking with a younger student, one that Jason actually spent the better part of yesterday morning working with to improve her double Salchow. In a moment, however, Sandy places a gentle hand on the girl's shoulder, offers a smile, and the two part ways. Jason is inexplicably nervous as his coach of many years enters the office, closes the door, and takes a seat behind her desk.

Sandy James hasn't changed much since Jason began taking lessons from her years ago, yet he senses a shift in her demeanor as she begins. "Jason, I'm really thrilled you could make it down here this morning. I know I probably should've caught you before you left yesterday, but I've been so busy preparing everyone for Sectionals. And I've really appreciated your help around here. Justine Murray couldn't wait to show me her double Sal this morning."

"Sure," Jason answers quietly. "I haven't really had a specific goal over the last few

months, so I've kinda welcomed the additional responsibility." He knows it's coming.

"That's sort of what I really wanted to talk to you about this morning -- where you're headed right now."

"Oh." He pauses, then decides there's no use beating around the bush any longer. "Well, I've been thinking about, you know, maybe getting a new partner and competing together next fall. Next season, I mean. We'd have more than enough time to put two really solid programs together, I think."

Sandy purses her lips but doesn't say anything for a beat, as if her words are tangled in a mess of inarticulate disagreement and outright concern for one of her oldest students. She finally says, "Are you certain you're not just trying to keep pace with Courtney? Honestly?"

"Of course I am, yeah." His reply is a little too quick, and he finds his face getting hotter as his instructor's dark brown eyes meet his and hold them for just a moment. He sighs inwardly.

"Jase, why don't you set your sights on your senior pairs test instead? It would be your final test, and if you still want to compete after that, you still can. But I can't warn you strongly enough to not push yourself too hard. You shouldn't be basing any of your decisions on what Courtney is pursuing. Not anymore."

"I understand." He swallows hard, gathering his thoughts. "Look, Sandy, I don't come here six days a week because I'm worried that my ex-girlfriend is going to outshine me, okay? Seriously. I'm here because I love all of this, and I feel like I need to take it to the next level." The discussion isn't going as well as he'd like -- in fact, he hadn't intended to raise to issue of competition for another few weeks -- but it isn't necessarily awful, either. And he does love skating. He needs it right now, perhaps more than ever before.

"All right," Sandy agrees. "We'll look for a female for you to train with over the course of the next few weeks. And you two can prepare for your test."

"Yeah, sure," he answers, standing and heading out of her office. "Thanks for calling me in here today. I'm glad we got to talk about this."

"Me, too," she replies. Before she can ask if there's been anything else on his mind lately, Jason is out the door.

FISHER HOME

Paula Fisher steps back and examines the setup on the kitchen table. She's been worried about striking the proper balance: She wants Ryan to know that she's put some effort

into preparing something special, but she also doesn't want it to appear that she is trying too hard.

But now she is concerned that she's fallen on the side of being too relaxed. From what she can tell, Ryan has been raised in a fairly upper-crust environment, and she feels a distinct need to match that level in entertaining him.

She begins to straighten the silverware one more time, but the doorbell's call interrupts her. Giving everything a final glance, she sweeps out of the kitchen and through the living room to the front door. Once she gets there, she pauses, takes a deep breath, and then reaches for the doorknob.

"Hello," she says, as pleasantly as she can. Ryan stands on the porch, dressed in a striped blue dress shirt and a pair of black pants.

His lips spread into a smile as he says, "Hi."

"I'm glad you could make it." She lingers in front of the door for what feels like a moment too long before stepping aside. "Please, come inside."

"I brought these for you," Ryan says, simultaneously taking a step inside the house and extending a gold box toward her.

She takes the box. "You didn't have to--"

"It's my pleasure. Besides, it's appropriate to bring something when someone invites you into their home ..."

The rest of the statement goes unspoken, but the slightly amusing implication is clear to Paula: *This has to be the ultimate case of that.*

She leads the way into the kitchen. All the while, she wracks her brain for something to say; despite all the time she's spent thinking of conversation topics, they all seem too forced now.

"You didn't have to go to all this trouble," Ryan says the instant they step into the kitchen.

Hoping that's a sign that he approves, Paula says, "I wanted to. I want you to feel comfortable here."

Ryan nods his head, still surveying the layout on the table. "I really appreciate that."

She isn't sure how to respond. She has placed Bill and her other children ahead of him

for three and a half decades. The least she can do now is welcome him into her home.

"Have a seat," she says, and he does. But an uncomfortable -- or perhaps merely uncertain -- silence floats through the air as she takes care of pouring drinks for both of them and starts serving the food. By the time she sits down at the table across from him, part of her is worrying that this lunch is going to be a bust.

She's prepared herself for the possibility that she'll bond well with Ryan, and she's tried to prepare for the chance that the dynamic could be hostile and disastrous ... but she isn't sure how to face the thought there could be simply be nothing between them besides a blood tie.

Apparently Ryan is thinking along the same lines. "I'm not really sure what to say," he admits with a chuckle that somehow goes a long way toward taking the edge off the discomfort.

"Me neither," she says. "I ... Well, there are things I'm curious about, but it seems so awkward to ask them."

"Fire away. I don't think there's really a subtle way to deal with a situation like this, you know?"

"I'm starting to realize that." She draws a deep breath before launching into what feels like a checklist of topics. "I've heard some things about your childhood from the court records, but I don't know a thing about the time after that, to be honest. What about college? Where did you go? What did you study?"

Ryan begins talking and she listens attentively. She can tell that he's as uncomfortable providing such a straightforward autobiography as she is asking for it, but hearing him tell it -- about his time studying at Northwestern and how he earned an economics degree despite really wanting to study history and how he joined a fraternity and spent four years second-guessing the choice -- brings a thousand different follow-up questions to her mind. And there are things that she wants to know -- what kind of youth he was, what group he hung out with -- that she can't quite find a way to put into words, at least not now.

A segment of his story draws to a natural end, and in the quiet that follows, Paula hears her own thoughts being spoken out loud: "I'm so sorry that I even have to ask these things."

"It's the only way to learn them," Ryan says. "We have to start somewhere."

"I suppose. But having to ask your own child things like this is very strange. It makes me feel as though--I'm ashamed to have to do it."

Ryan's gaze moves down to the food on his plate for a moment before he says, "You have nothing to be ashamed of."

"I try to tell myself that," she says. "I've tried to tell myself that all these years."

He shakes his head, more emphatically than he ever expected he would when faced with this situation. "Don't do that to yourself. That's--that kind of approach isn't going to get us anywhere."

Surprise registers in Paula's expressions as she nods slowly. "It's just so--it's so bizarre to be going about knowing your own child like this."

"It's a start," Ryan says. "And even if it is a little ... weird, at least we have the chance to do it at all."

SARAH FISHER'S APARTMENT

This isn't how Sarah Fisher wanted to spend her afternoon.

She had barely gotten back from dropping Victoria off at preschool when Diane Bishop turned up at the door and barged inside. Now Diane is in the living room, pleading her case -- or, more accurately, doing something that could only be considered "pleading" in talking about Diane.

"I did what I had to do," Diane says, her dark eyes wide and alive with determination. "I never intended for you to get hurt."

"And you didn't think that turning my family upside-down in public might hurt me?" Sarah asks.

"I didn't think you even liked them!"

The accusation takes some of the wind out of the sails of Sarah's counter-argument. It's not that she doesn't *like* them. People have conflicts with their families; that's normal.

"It still made a mess of things," she finally manages.

That gives Diane pause, but only for a moment. "And I'm sorry for that, Sarah. That wasn't my goal. I was trying to do whatever was necessary to get custody of my daughter. You have to understand that."

"I do, to a point, but--"

"When the P.I. brought that to us, there was no way we *couldn't* use it in court!"

"You could've mentioned that you knew about it and given us time to deal with it," Sarah says. "It wouldn't have taken away from your case, and it would've saved us all a lot of grief."

She can tell that Diane is holding back some comment about how much more dramatic a courtroom reveal was, or how much fun it was to rock Claire's world that way. Suddenly she's hit by a thought: She can't believe that she ever trusted someone like Diane.

"This is not worth losing our friendship over," Diane says.

She seems to be waiting for Sarah to agree, but that doesn't happen.

Diane's eyes widen a little more, and she plants her hands on her hips. "Come on, Sarah. We've known from the beginning that we might have to, you know, agree to disagree on some things. You knew this custody hearing was coming up and that it might get ugly between Claire and me--"

"Yeah, but I didn't expect you to drag my whole family into it!"

"I told you, this wasn't about your family! It was about Samantha!" Diane fires, and Sarah realizes that they've started shouting. "I didn't do anything that you wouldn't have done to keep Victoria, if push came to shove. God, you went snooping around behind Matt's back for how long in the name of ... what? Protecting Victoria? Protecting yourself?"

Sarah has to use every ounce of strength in her not to reach out and smack Diane across the face.

"Don't even try to compare that to this!" she yells, thankful that Victoria isn't around to hear this. "You really don't understand why this bothers me, do you?"

Diane appears to struggle with a response. Sarah decides not to give her the time to cook one up.

"Forget it," Sarah says. She cuts a quick path to the door and yanks it open. "Get out of here. I don't want to deal with you right now."

For an instant, she thinks that Diane is going to refuse to leave. But after a moment of silent defiance, Diane strides slowly to the door -- keeping her gaze focused on Sarah the entire time.

"I know you," Diane says as she slips out the door, her voice little more than a whisper,

"better than you realize. Don't try to pull this holier-than-thou routine with me. I understand you, Sarah. Don't forget that."

Sarah is still trying to figure out how to respond to that as she watches Diane walk toward the parking lot without a single glance backward.

CASSIE'S COFFEE HOUSE

"I'm speechless," Lauren Brooks declares. "I don't even know what to say, Jason. Oh my God."

"Yeah." A weak reply from across the table. Jason toys with his straw but makes no effort to sip his tall glass of Coke, which has been sitting, untouched, since he started telling her about the Ryan reveal and all of its ramifications for his family. The reality of all of it really set in as he detailed the scandal every step of the way, and now it's beginning to manifest itself as a mix of emotions, most prominently a growing sense of anger. For his mother. For *Tim*.

Lauren, meanwhile, runs a hand through her straight blond hair, resetting it behind her ears on both sides. She still doesn't quite know what to do, much less say. She can't stop fidgeting, and she soon realizes that all she wants to do is take Jason's hand and tell him that everything's going to work itself out.

But, really, will it?

"Maybe you should look on the bright side of this," she suggests, biting her lower lip and attempting to assess his reaction to this prospect before continuing. "Your mother was the one who sought him out. Maybe this all happened for a reason."

"Lauren, he might've had something to do with my brother's death. And he's dating Claire! Don't you see how sick this all is?! The guy's trying to take over Tim's life!"

"Jason, honestly," she says, softening her tone from admonishment to empathy in a heartbeat. "You can't believe that this is all some sort of -- of conspiracy. You have another brother, that's all you know for sure. Why not embrace that?"

"Lauren--"

"Just hear me out," she cuts him off, leaning forward and placing her hand over his for a moment. "This could be really great if you give it a chance."

"I can't believe you," he shoots back tersely, pulling away from her. "After everything I just told you, you're telling me to break bread with this creep?"

"That *creep* is your brother, is all I'm --"

"I don't have to listen to this. And I'm not going to." In one abrupt movement he stands, turns, and begins walking out of Cassie's without another word.

Once again speechless, Lauren swallows hard and watches him walk out of the coffee shop, cupping one hand over her lips -- lips that Jason kissed at her party not too long ago. Now, she supposes, their situation is the least of his worries.

FISHER HOME

Ryan sets down his fork and takes a deep breath. "This is really good," he says, hoping that his smile reflects how much he appreciates the work that Paula obviously put into this lunch.

"I'm glad you've enjoyed it," she says. "And I'm glad I've had the opportunity to learn so much about you."

"I feel like I've talked about myself enough! Shouldn't we talk about you for a while?"

She gives a little laugh, and he can tell that she has genuinely enjoyed hearing him tell scattered stories and details about himself. There's something very reassuring about that.

"Oh!" she says suddenly. The exclamation is nearly swallowed by a gasp. "I wouldn't think that you'd have skipped over something like this, but I have to ask ..."

"What?"

"Do I have any other grandchildren out there anywhere?"

"Nope," he says, shaking his head for emphasis. "I'm pretty sure there are none of those." He goes quiet for a moment, unsure of whether he should continue with this train of thought, and then adds, "To tell the truth, I haven't had many serious relationships."

"That doesn't necessarily preclude having children," Paula says knowingly.

"True." He mulls that over for a few seconds, mentally tracking his history with women with a new, momentary concern. "I was married once, very briefly, but that obviously didn't work out too well."

Paula leans forward just a little bit as she asks, "What happened?"

"We never should have gotten married in the first place. It was--God, it was almost twelve years ago--it was something that seemed like a good idea at the time. We were involved pretty intensely, our families really liked the idea ... but it wasn't what a marriage should be. Luckily we realized that before it was too late."

"So it was a fairly clean divorce, then?"

"Sort of. Things got a little ugly for a while there, and then we lost touch, but it wasn't a complete catastrophe, either."

Paula's response gets sucked into thin air by the sound of the front door opening and closing. They both listen as footsteps approach the kitchen -- and freeze as Claire appears in the doorway.

"Hi," Paula says, darting a glance at the clock on the microwave. "I thought your shift lasted another two hours."

"It was supposed to," Claire says, keeping her focus very narrowly on Paula, "but one of the other nurses needed to trade, so she's taking those hours for me today."

Her gaze drifts over to Ryan, but as soon as he meets it, she pulls it away.

"I'm going to go upstairs and lie down for a little bit," she says.

Ryan catches the uncertain glance that Paula offers him.

"All right, dear. Do you still want me to pick up Travis from school, or--"

"No, I'll do it. It'll be exciting for them to have me show up when they're not expecting it."

Claire makes a quick move to the refrigerator, grabs a bottle of water from it, and walks from the room without saying anything else. Ryan watches her go. He has been awaiting this moment for days -- since the day of the calamity at the courthouse, and even more with every phone call that has gone unanswered. To just let her walk away now seems crazy.

"Claire, wait!" he calls out, rising from his chair.

She pauses at the other end of the dining room.

"Can we talk?" he asks after waiting, to no avail, for what seems like hours for her to face him.

He hears a slow, heavy sigh roll from her throat. He can picture the movement even though he can't see it -- the rise and fall of her chest, the slight closing of her eyes as she exhales.

Hope rises within him as Claire turns slowly, but it shatters as soon as she speaks.

"Not now. I'm--I'm not ready."

Something collapses inside him, something that he thought had already fallen as far as it could, and he wants to shout a thousand questions at her: *Why not? When will you be? Are you really going to let this get away just because of who my mother is?*

But instead of yelling -- instead of saying anything -- he simply nods his head slowly.

He feels Claire's stare linger on him a second longer before she bounds from the room and up the stairs. Ryan stands frozen at the entrance to the dining room.

Suddenly he feels a hand on his shoulder.

"Give it time," Paula's voice says from just behind him. "Give her time. She needs to sort this all out. But when she does, if you two are meant to be together, you will be. Have faith in that."

"I'm trying," he says with a sigh, taking as much comfort as he can from Paula's -- his mother's -- touch.

END OF EPISODE #305

What do you think of the developing relationship between Paula and Ryan?

Why is Claire having so much difficulty accepting this situation?

Is Jason letting his family situation cloud his judgment?

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[Next Episode](#)