

"Footprints" Episode #308

[Previously ...](#)

- Jason expressed interest in finding a new skating partner for completing his testing, so Sandy began searching for potential women.
- Paula and Ryan had lunch together, which he later told Sarah went very well.
- Brent warned Claire that Stan Lincoln was spotted in a nearby town, but he added that there were no other leads.

KING'S BAY ICE ARENA

The short young woman stands with her hands behind her back and a smile bursting off her face, her dark complexion and even darker hair contrasting sharply with the pristine white of the ice surface.

"Jason, this is Hannah Geller," Sandy James says as she slides insulated black gloves onto her bare hands.

Jason Fisher extends his hand. "Nice to meet you."

Hannah's hand meets his for a surprisingly firm -- and vigorous -- shake. Just when Jason suspects it might be over, it renews itself and lasts for what has to be another ten seconds.

"Hannah's from Portland," Sandy explains.

"Have you competed much?" Jason asks. She must not have; otherwise he'd have encountered her in competition at some point throughout the years.

She shakes her head energetically. "No, I only decided to take my pairs tests a few years ago. I skated freestyle before that. I've also been a dancer for several years -- modern, mostly." And then, without prompting, her body begins moving. Jason isn't sure what exactly to call it. He has a feeling that it might fall under the heading of "modern dance," but it looks most like some kind of exotic seizure.

Jason fiddles with the zipper of his fleece jacket while Hannah pulls herself up off the ice. "So, uh, is skating kind of a whim for you? I mean, something you just thought you might like to do?" he asks.

"No, it's more than that," Hannah says, and her ponytail bounces around behind her head. "I showed that I could be successful in the dance world. Now I want to show the

figure skating world that I can do the same."

Jason tries to catch Sandy's eye. This girl has got to be a joke.

"Why don't we try some stroking and crossovers to get started?" Sandy proposes.

How can this not be a joke? Jason wonders as he tentatively reaches out for Hannah's hand to begin skating.

As they push off down the ice, he catches sight of Courtney and Dylan, taking a break from practicing a spin at one corner of the rink to watch Jason and Hannah skate. And suddenly Hannah's oddness doesn't matter much; Jason starts pushing with every ounce of energy that he has.

MORIANI HOME

With as much care as he can conjure, Ryan Moriani slides his key into the lock and turns it. The lock clicks, and the door slips open. Ryan ducks inside and closes the door as painstakingly as he just opened it.

He finds himself holding his breath as he moves noiselessly up the stairs. There was only one car in the driveway, so he is hoping that Nick and Katherine both went out and will be gone long enough for him to get in and out. All he needs is to find a few phone numbers, and that will be much easier without any distractions.

He makes it all the way to the study upstairs before he knows for certain that someone didn't go out.

"Funny running into you here," comes Nick's voice from behind him.

Ryan starts. It shouldn't be a shock to encounter Nick in his own home, and it isn't, exactly -- more of an unfortunate incident. He doesn't want to deal with the conversation that he knows is coming.

"I need a couple of phone numbers from the file cabinet," Ryan says, as if that somehow frees him from being confronted by his father.

"You could have called."

"I didn't want to bother you."

Nick steps in front of him and opens the study door. "So you sneak into my house instead."

"I do have this," Ryan says, holding up his key. "I didn't exactly break in."

Nick pauses, and for a moment Ryan gets the impression that he is going to reach out and snatch the key away.

Instead, he leads Ryan into the study and asks, "Dare I ask, how are things going with your new family?"

There is a snideness to the remark that Ryan wants to rebut, though he is uncertain of how to do that without seeming overly defensive.

"Things are fine," he answers. "Moving slowly, but nicely."

"Oh." Another pause, and then: "Well, go ahead, find your numbers."

Ryan goes to the closer of the two file cabinets -- the only one that he's ever been permitted to look through -- and searches quietly for the files that he needs. It takes him only a minute or so to find the few numbers and jot them down on a notecard that he takes from Nick's desk.

"Thanks," he says, folding the card and placing it in his pocket. "I, uh, I'll see you later."

Something about the attempted exit feels off. Perhaps Nick notices it, too, because the next thing that comes out of his mouth is quite unexpected.

"Ryan. Wait."

KING'S BAY POLICE DEPARTMENT

Brent sits at his desk with the phone held expectantly to his ear, half watching the steam rise from the cup of coffee he's just fixed himself. His brother left a message on his answering machine yesterday, and although it came off initially as more of a brief checkup call, Brent's police instincts picked up on something else.

After four or five rings, Josh picks up, sounding slightly out of breath. "Hello?"

"Hey, Josh." No response. "It's your brother."

"Oh, right," comes the reply from the other end. "What's going on?"

"You tell me," Brent says. "You left a message yesterday."

"Oh, right. I did, didn't I?" Josh pauses again and seems to be whispering to someone.

Brent's fairly certain that he hears a feminine giggle pervade the awkward background silence. Frustrated, he sighs. "Hey, is this a bad time? You seem ... I dunno, really out of it."

"No, it's fine. I just woke up, is all. Mellow out."

"Uh, okay, so what did you need yesterday?" *This is like pulling teeth*, Brent thinks. He doesn't say anything else for the moment, however. His brother lost his job a few weeks ago and seemed to be pretty crushed. He doesn't want to be too forceful, especially because the suspicion that his brother called to ask to borrow some money is starting to sink in.

"I called to tell you the big news," Josh answers finally, as if he'd carefully worded his response. "You're going to be so stoked..." He trails off now, allowing the pause to become pregnant with expectation.

"About what? Josh?" Brent sips his coffee and awaits the "big news." It doesn't come, however, and sibling curiosity is beginning to overcome his police-honed suspicions.

"Hey, I've actually gotta call you back, bro. Later."

Just like that, Josh is gone. And an instant later, Officer Pontius steps through the open doorway of the office.

"Commander, we've got a sighting reported of a suspicious character hanging around J&M Supermarket. Guy matches the description of Stan Lincoln. I was going to send a squad car down, but if--"

"No, I'll check it out," Brent says, standing from his desk and grabbing his coat from the back of his chair. "And if it is Stan Lincoln, he's got a lot of explaining to do..."

KING'S BAY ICE ARENA

"All right," Sandy says as Jason and Hannah skate toward her separately. "That's okay. It's always awkward trying spins with someone new."

Especially when they're completely out of control, Jason thinks, casting a wary glance sideways at Hannah. She is beaming, somehow, as if she's completely oblivious to what a disaster this audition is.

Sandy looks down at the black lid of her travel mug. She ponders it for a long moment, and Jason wonders if this is going to go on much longer. She has to realize that this is worthless.

But when Sandy's eyes come up, they look hopeful. "Why don't we try a lift? Something simple. How about a forward press?"

Jason looks to her desperately. Finally, he manages to catch her eye, but it's only for a split-second, and the expression she throws him in response seems to say, "Suck it up."

Once again, he awkwardly reaches out for Hannah's hand. He braces for the crushing grip that he has noticed every time they've joined up for an exercise. He didn't know that such a small girl could have such brute strength.

They skate down the ice hand-in-hand, Hannah moving in front of Jason as they go. Her leg kicks out wildly on each stroke, and he braces for the kick that he is sure must be coming. Somehow, miraculously, it never does, though only by fractions of an inch.

As they move into the lift position, he sees Courtney and Dylan pass by just a few feet away, skating with ease through their complex footwork sequence.

He reaches for Hannah's other hand. She meets the gesture with her typical force, and Jason gathers his strength for the burst that the lift will require. But as he begins to lift her, he becomes aware of a leg where it shouldn't be.

Seconds later, he is skidding over the ice on his stomach.

"Sorry about that," Hannah coos as she skates up beside him. "I didn't think you were going to do that last crossover."

Groaning, Jason pulls himself to his feet. Sandy skates over to them.

"Toe picks happen," the coach says. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," he says through gritted teeth, trying not to dwell on the pain in his knees.

Sandy watches him regroup silently for a moment before Hannah speaks.

"You know," she says, "you really shouldn't try to enter that lift on a curve like that. It's better if you flatten your lobe out--"

He promised himself that he wouldn't do this, that he'd get through this audition and save the complaining for later, but enough is enough.

"You need the curve," he says, fixing a hard stare on the young woman. "Going into it on a flat is, like, a preliminary-level move."

Hannah just shrugs. He can tell she isn't buying it.

"And another thing--" The muscles in his face tighten as he leans closer to her. "--no one in the world swings their free leg around like that going into a spin! I don't even think it's possible to *do* a spin like that!"

Sandy places a hand on his arm. "Jason--"

He pushes her hand away. "Forget it. I'm done here. Thanks for coming out, but I really don't see this working."

He bends over to rub his knees, still smarting from their collision with the ice. To his surprise, Hannah starts skating away.

"Fine," she says, waving a hand. "I didn't come all the way here to be talked down to. Adios, muchachos."

She skates quickly toward the door, her legs flailing behind her as she goes.

Jason turns to Sandy. The guilt is beginning to hit him now.

"I'm sorry for blowing up like that," he says. "This whole thing was just--"

"I know, I know. I should have stopped it. But I was hoping you two might find a rhythm together if you skated for a while."

"I don't think there was a rhythm to find there."

"Unfortunately, I think you're right," Sandy says, shaking her head incredulously.

Jason sighs. "Well, that was a bust. I appreciate you arranging it for me, though."

"Don't get discouraged. We'll find someone for you to skate with."

"Yeah," he says. Over her shoulder, he sees Courtney and Dylan standing by the boards, nearly doubled over in laughter. He can only imagine what's so funny.

"Yeah," he repeats, his gaze still focused past Sandy. "We will."

MORIANI HOME

Ryan freezes in place, halfway out the study door. He turns around cautiously, unsure whether he should expect Nick to burst forward and hug him or be pointing a shotgun at him.

Neither turns out to be the case, but the way that Nick stares at him makes Ryan certain that something significant is coming.

That is why, when Nick speaks, the quietness of his voice takes Ryan by surprise.

"Do you think of her as your mother?" Nick asks slowly.

"She is my mother," Ryan says, realizing at that exact moment that he really doesn't know the answer. Biology aside, Paula Fisher is merely a nice lady with whom he has had some pleasant conversations.

Nick approaches him, taking a few slow, measured steps. "And what about your--what about Rose?"

It sounds strange to hear Nick referring to her that way. Ryan is accustomed to calling her "Mom," if he mentions her at all. She is little more than an abstract concept to him, a memory created by Nick's stories and photographs. He has always felt a certain attachment to the woman because of that, but as he has come to realize in the last few months, she is no more or less his mother than Paula is.

"It's different," is all Ryan can think of to say. "It's a different situation entirely."

"Perhaps." Nick doesn't sound quite convinced, but he lets it slide nevertheless. "She was so attached to you from the day we brought you home. You might as well have been her biological son."

Ryan has no idea how to respond to that.

But Nick speaks again before he has the chance. "Don't forget about her."

Forget what? Ryan wants to ask. That she existed? That she adopted me and then died before I was even old enough to remember her?

Instead he says, "I need to get going."

Surprisingly, Nick doesn't argue with him. Nor does he follow him downstairs and out the front door.

Only once he is outside does Ryan realize that he was holding his breath from the time that he left the study. He can understand the awkwardness, and even Nick's concerns about "losing" him to the Fishers, but ... He got the impression that Nick was talking as much to Rose as he was to Ryan upstairs, and he wonders for a split-second who this is even about.

He forces the thought out of his head as he presses the remote control to unlock his car.

As he is easing into the driver's seat, he pauses, crouched halfway. For a moment he is certain that he saw something moving on the fringes of his field of vision, near the bushes. He narrows his eyes.

But several seconds of careful observation produce nothing else in the least bit suspicious, so he gets inside the car and closes the door, still trying to empty his mind.

END OF EPISODE #308

Is Ryan a Moriani or a Fisher at heart?

Could Stan be back in King's Bay?

And how about that audition?

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