

**ZOINKS!**  
**Part 2. Stratemeyer**

**NOLAN**

*Zoinks!* contains mature language and themes of addiction and neglect and is intended for thirty-somethings who are just now starting to realize, "Oh yeah, my childhood was kinda fucked."

**CASPER**

Have you ever been walking in the woods when you happen upon a tree you think you've already passed?

Don't worry. Nolan Blackwell -

**NOLAN**

Teen Sleuth - Girl Detective

**CASPER**

And Casper -

**NOLAN**

Her dog

**CASPER**

Are not in these woods.

**NOLAN**

They're somewhere else.

**CASPER**

This is a story. An explanation

You're in the woods and you pass a tree that feels familiar

It spooks you in the same way a friend spooks you when they come up behind you but you've got your headphones on.

I mean, it startles you, but you're fine now. Nothing's wrong. Calm down.

Also, it's probably not the same fucking tree anyway. You keep walking.

**NOLAN**

You weren't paying close attention before.

**CASPER**

That's true. But you are now. You're keyed in, you're alert. You are aware of your surroundings and you are sticking to the path.

**NOLAN**

Not really a path.

**CASPER**

It's path-enough. It's path-like.

**NOLAN**

Doesn't look like anyone else has been by this way.

**CASPER**

But it also doesn't look like you've been this way before, which is a pretty good sign given your current -

**NOLAN**

There's that tree again.

**CASPER**

Ok, sure. It looks like you're back at the tree again.

But what are you, a fucking tree doctor now? You study trees?

There's like, I dunno, hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of trees in these woods. A lot of trees look alike.

**NOLAN**

Pretty big tree. Bigger than most the other ones you've passed by.

**CASPER**

Yeah, fine, it's a big ol' tree.

**NOLAN**

Really distinctive too, the way it splits into two large trunks at just above head height, the broken limb hanging precariously, the wide strip of bare trunk where the bark has been flayed off.

**CASPER**

But that doesn't matter because there are ways to navigate in the woods.

Moss.

The moss, right? People are always talking about moss.

Moss only grows on one side of the tree. So just remember what side that is ...

You're running now.

**NOLAN**

There's no point in running.

**CASPER**

Fine, you're not running. You're moving quickly, and you're going in a straight line.

**NOLAN**

It's not possible to go in a straight line.

**CASPER**

Impressively-straight line, I mean like Jim Lovell - Apollo 13 - keep the Earth in the Window straight line.

Whatever, you'll dodge around a tree that's in your way or jog a little to the right to follow a creek bed, but still straight. You better start writing that acceptance speech because you are getting an award for your -

**NOLAN**

You're back at the tree.

**CASPER**

Gawd-dahmit!

(a moment.)

**NOLAN**

You can't see the sun, you're so deep in the woods, but it does feel like it's getting darker.

**CASPER**

Here's what you're gonna do. You're gonna turn around. You're gonna start walking backwards.

**NOLAN**

That's a terrible idea.

**CASPER**

You're gonna keep that tree in your sight the whole time. You'll be going slower, it'll take longer, but you're gonna make sure you can see that tree getting smaller and smaller until it is swallowed up by the deep forest you are leaving.

**NOLAN**

You back into something. hard.

**CASPER**

It knocks the wind out of you for a second. You wish it was your friend sneaking up behind you and you had your headphones on. But it's not your friend. You know that if you were to look up, directly above you, pointing down at your throat... you'd find a broken limb, hanging precariously.

Because no matter what you do. You always end back up at the tree.

**NOLAN**

Circling back to some forbidding place for the second, the third, the ninth time can be a tell-tale sign that you are desperately out of bounds.

But not always.

Sometimes it's the world's way of telling you: don't panic. stay awhile. come inside.

You've arrived.

This is *Zoinks!*

A torn up valentine that you later taped back together for teen detectives and their dogs

(THEME SONG)

**CASPER**

The town of Mars Majestic. The first of August and blistering hot. Y'all, it's so hot even the wind can't be bothered to get up and fuck about.

Nolan Blackwell stands at an intersection. A crosswalk leads across four lanes of blacktop and into a ... quaint(?) downtown district.

**NOLAN**

I can feel the heat lifting off the pavement.

(CASPER ha-rumphs.)

The little white dog with the limp can too. No no, it's okay pal. We'll go fast.

(They run, CASPER wincing as they go.)

Oo! Go go! Hot-hot-hot-hot-hot! Go go go!

(They make it to the other side. CASPER dives into NOLAN, knocking her down, licking.)

**NOLAN (cont.)**

“Little” is a subjective term. Okay! Enough, enough, no more kisses.

(NOLAN stands, wiping herself off.)

You know how you can always tell when an adult was once a real cute kid? This little stretch of downtown is like that. Rewind the hard times and the bad luck, and you’d have something pretty enough to be on a postcard. A line of vacant parking meters stand like placeholders for what should be shoppers carrying parcels.

Plywood sheets cover storefront windows. If a place happens to be open for business it’s almost certainly empty. Well. Except for the pawn shop.

**CASPER**

Nolan stares thru a display window, at an assortment of objects, an acoustic guitar, a gas-powered weed eater, all priced to sell.

**NOLAN**

It was as if the town had been abducted and replaced with its evil twin: a deadringer if you don’t look too close:

A diner barely open long enough to cover breakfast and the lunch rush, a beauty salon with only one active station, the marquee is blank at the old two-screen cinema, a vinyl banner strung up above its door: “Payday Cash Advance” with the all-caps after thought “ID Required” scribbled in sharpie.

Casper and I roam the streets with nothing to do:

An old-timey ice cream parlor.

**CASPER**

<< Junior Vanilla cone is \$1.75. >>

**NOLAN**

The public pool.

**CASPER**

<< \$2.25 a day. No dogs. >>

**NOLAN**

A comic book shop.

**CASPER**

<< You gonna pay for that comic book or not? This ain't a library. >>

(CASPER jumps up, barking and licking.)

<< You sure this is a service animal? >>

**NOLAN**

Bobbsey Twin Rd. leads us thru the center of town as we start to trek uphill. Up at the top I can see -

**CASPER**

It's hot.

**NOLAN**

Spires cutting above treetops -

**CASPER**

I'm hungry and it's hot.

**NOLAN**

Empty lots on either side, like the rest of the neighborhood decided to give it some space.

**CASPER**

I'm hungry, it's hot and I'm bored.

**NOLAN**

A gigantic, abandoned house, seemingly floating there on a cloud of weeds and vines and brambles. In the middle there's this massive bay window.

It immediately makes me think of Twin Elms, from *Nancy Drew #2 The Hidden Staircase*.

No. Better yet. *Nancy Drew #9 The Sign of the Twisted Candles*.

That house. Loose floorboards, concealed room, secret messages hidden in wallpaper patterns.

Casper, wouldn't you love to live there?

**CASPER**

Blech!

**NOLAN**

I can picture myself standing in this window, looking out over all of Mars Majestic.

(A car passes by, slowly. A window rolls down.)

**CASPER**

<< Excuse me. That dog's supposed to be on a leash! >>

**NOLAN**

He's not bothering anybody.

**CASPER**

<< I'm calling the city. >>

(The car passes, speeding away.)

**NOLAN**

[calling after them:] Oh yeah, well I'm calling the Solar System and telling them you're a jerk!

Come on, Casper.

We walk for fifteen or twenty minutes, making random turns. Eventually...

huh.

We end back up at the house.

I let Casper lead.

**CASPER**

We go this way for a bit and I find this great place to pee. Then we turn and go this way for a bit. I pee again. And then we turn and go this way. And I don't really have to pee anymore...

I pee anyway.

**NOLAN**

And again...

**CASPER**

Ugh... here again?

**NOLAN**

Bay window...

I leave the sidewalk, feeling weeds brush against my legs, walking towards the porch.

**CASPER**

<< Better stay away from there. That house is haunted. >>

**NOLAN**

He's leaning out of an old truck, *Mars Majestic Cemetery* written on the side. The back is full of shovels and a rusted wheelbarrow. Just some old grave digger, a hat pulled down deep over his face, shouting ominous phrases.

I don't believe in ghosts.

**CASPER**

<< Not a great excuse for trespassing? >>

**NOLAN**

Oh. I didn't... It doesn't look like anyone lives here.

**CASPER**

<<< That don't make it yours, does it? >>

**NOLAN**

I walk away from the house, towards the truck. This seems to make him uncomfortable. I hardly see any of his face under the brim of the hat.

What do you mean haunted?

(A tense moment, and then:)

**CASPER**

There's this tabby cat sitting down there on a porch – and he's making faces at me like he's got something on his mind.

Now, I may put up with a lot but I ain't taking sass from no goddam tabby cat.

[calling out:] You ain't nothing but just a tiger that evolved in the wrong direction you short, round, orange fuck.

Rahrr-ra-ra-ra-ra!

(CASPER, barking, takes off in a limping run.)

**NOLAN**

Casper, no!



**NOLAN (cont.)**

Even with his limp, Casper's way faster than me. It takes a full ten minutes to find him again and when I do...

(CASPER walks back slowly with a MAN. He's holding CASPER by the scruff of his neck.)

I guess that lady did call the city. And the city... they called Dudley the Dogcatcher

**CASPER**

<< This your dog? >>

**NOLAN**

Casper!

**CASPER**

<< City's got a leash ordinance. >>

**NOLAN**

Sorry. I didn't know. Casper, down.

**CASPER**

<< I catch him loose again, I'm taking him to the pound. >>

**NOLAN**

He hands me a piece of rope from his truck and I tie it around Casper's collar.

We start back down the hill, towards Grandma Julie's house. And tho I can't see it, I can feel the house watching us as we descend.

**CASPER**

Grandma Julie relented and shut me in the laundry room with an old ratty blanket for the night. It's hard to sleep in new environments –

I could hear the woman in the next room, clicking and hissing.

**NOLAN**

It was a sleep apnea machine. You could hear it across the whole house.

**CASPER**

We lay in our separate spaces and closed our eyes.

**BOTH**

It's hard to sleep without her/Casper.

**CASPER**

In the morning, we were touring the town again.

**NOLAN**

I wonder what people know about that house.

**CASPER**

We passed a man pushing a lawn mower up and down the street, ringing doorbells, looking for work. He had a deep tan, set into wrinkles and had an ominous voice that was dark and husky.

**NOLAN**

<< They say an whole cult committed suicide in that house.

... took 'em three tries. >>

(CASPER whines, scared.)

[reassuringly:] Ghost stories. Urban Legends... There are two explanations for everything.

**CASPER**

A woman walking home, hunched over, lugging a bag of groceries around each wrist. Her hair was in rollers and she spoke to us in an ominous voice that was dark and husky.

**NOLAN**

<< I wouldn't go in there. They say the Devil himself runs a backgammon game out of that house. >>

(CASPER is beside himself with fear.)

Superstitions. Old Lore. There has to be more to the story than that.

**CASPER**

That next day, there were fewer people willing to talk to us. Maybe word was getting around.

**NOLAN**

We saw that beat up truck again from the cemetery. I couldn't see the driver, just a shadow and a ballcap pulled low. Was it following us? Maybe it's just a small town...

**CASPER**

A small boy in a baseball uniform, pushing a bike with a flat tire. He had red dirt smeared on his face and a voice... that was dark and husky.

**NOLAN**

<< My big brother's friend used to sneak into that house to drink... Until he mysteriously vanished. >>

(CASPER is damn-near catatonic.)

That's some bullshit.

**CASPER**

We couldn't pass by that house without Nolan staring up and getting lost.

**NOLAN**

There was a Do Not Enter sign staked in the yard, mixed in amongst the tall grass. Maybe it had always been there and I just hadn't noticed. It felt newer and out of place, the vines and weeds hadn't had time to reach up and lay claim to it yet.

My favorite cousin, Craig, he's a few years older - he once spent a whole day teaching me how to shoot a perfect middle finger - loose and angry with an aggressive pop!

He would always flip off signs that said "Smile, you're on camera."

**CASPER**

<< You think someone's sitting around watching a camera all day? Ain't no camera there. >>

**NOLAN**

How do you know?

**CASPER**

<< Come on, all those signs are bullshit. "No Exit. Alarm will sound." If you got an alarm, what do you need a sign for? Locks just keep honest people, honest, ya know?"

**NOLAN**

There's something about how Craig didn't give a shit about anything that I find so intoxicating.

I stare at the sign. "Do Not Enter" in bright colors like it was just purchased from the Hardware Store.

But peeking thru a window isn't entering, is it?

A short stack of concrete steps lead up onto the lawn. I step up, leaving the sidewalk -

**CASPER**

<< Beautiful old house. >>

(NOLAN jolts forward, caught off guard.)

**NOLAN**

You scared me.

I hadn't heard him walk up. He didn't look to be coming from anywhere or in any particular hurry. He spoke in a voice that was... well –

**CASPER**

<< I've lived here my whole life. Seen the neighborhood change a dozen times. Shame about this house. Wish the city would take it, clean it back up. >>

**NOLAN**

I turned back and examined the house as the old man spoke.

**CASPER**

<< That's the old Stratemeyer Estate. When I was a kid, you'd always see old lady Stratemeyer working in the garden. Tragic old woman. Musta married five, six times. Then you'd read in the paper where one of 'em would die. She was a collector, a hoarder what'cha call now. Had that house filled with antiques and curios.

They say you can find anything you want in that house. Anything at all. For a priiiice!

(The old man's voice trails off, disappearing into nothing.)

**NOLAN**

Well thank you, mister...

Shit if I didn't like that.

(CASPER whines.)

Yeah, come on, Casper. Let's head back.

(NOLAN and CASPER walk back down Bobbsey Twin Rd, their voices trailing as they go.)

No, you have to stay on lease... Well I don't like it either.

Quit tugging!

(The Bay Window watches them leave. It pulses.)

(end of episode.)

## **CREDITS**

Zoinks! Part two: Stratemeyer

Written by Trey Tatum

Directed by Bridget Leak

Starring Jordan Trovillion as Nolan Blackwell and Trey Tatum as Casper

Zoinks! is produced by Queen City Flash out of Cincinnati, Ohio.

[QueenCityFlash.com](http://QueenCityFlash.com)