

ZOINKS!
Part 3. The Break-In

CASPER

Zoinks! contains mature language and themes of addiction and neglect and is only intended for my grandmother, who - upon hearing I was going to school for playwriting - made me promise I would never write anything with the F-word in it because “there are so many other beautiful words.”

Hi Grandmother. I love you.

NOLAN

Grandma Julie... what do you know about the Stratemeyers?

CASPER

It was late and a light crackle of murder was coming from the bug zapper on the porch.

Grandma Julie took a long pull on her cigarette.

NOLAN

We rocked back and forth in an old metal glider, the three of us staked out on the wraparound deck. Night settled in and the neighborhood grew quiet.

Lightning bugs came out and Casper lost his mind.

CASPER

Am I the only one seeing this shit?

NOLAN

Grandma Julie was never in bed before midnight, never up before noon. Conversations moved at a nocturnal pace, coming in slow waves between drags.

CASPER

<< You stay out of that house. >>

NOLAN

Sitting out on the deck was Grandma Julie’s nightly vigil, keeping a keen - or at least, gossipy - watch over the neighborhood.

CASPER

Grandma Julie could remember a time when neighborhood children were looked after by the neighborhood, when it wasn’t uncommon for a child to knock on your back door and ask for a glass of lemonade, when attending a middle school play or high school basketball game was the

CASPER (cont.)

highlight of a social calendar. Now, she spent her evenings staring at empty sidewalks and dormant front porches.

NOLAN

She licked the salt rim on her evening cocktail. A traditional daiquiri is rum, lime and sugar, but Grandma Julie says at a certain age, you have to start watching your blood sugar.

CASPER

<< You can barely taste the Sweet'n Low. >>

Grandma Julie's slippers sat unoccupied on the deck. They had a rich, rounded smell of sports equipment with a hint of beef jerky.

(CASPER starts gnawing on Grandma Julie's slippers.)

NOLAN

Casper, leave it alone. No!

I wasn't really thinking about the house, I was just kinda interested in the family.

CASPER

<< Well I don't see what's so interesting. >>

NOLAN

And what kind of sense does that make? We spent two days talking about a mattress wrapped up in plastic on the side street behind the house.

CASPER

<< Ms. Barrington says the city was supposed to pick that up on Thursday. Can you believe that? Thursday. >>

NOLAN

Uh. Yeah, I can believe that.

But I want to know about a house that sits at the intersection of What-the-Fuck and Did-You-Hear Grandma Julie doesn't see what's so interesting?

CASPER

We'll move on to the second slipper now, but remember the flavor profiles are going to get more complex. You'll notice that this one has delicate notes of leaky garbage juice and cut grass.

(more gnawing.)

NOLAN

Casper, no. Stop.

I was asking around, and supposedly, Mrs. Stratemeyer had a whole bunch of husbands and they -

CASPER

<< Nolan, there ain't nothing about that house that concerns you. Just leave it alone. >>

NOLAN

The cordless phone rang and Grandma Julie jumped up. It was one of the other single, old women who lived in the neighborhood, who all looked after one another..

The Widow Wire, she called it.

CASPER

<< Now Edith, you know I can't understand you when you don't have your teeth in. >>

NOLAN

Two doors down, Ms. Barrington was standing on her front step, relaying an argument that she could hear, taking place further down the block. An actual game of telephone! - which like, sure, if we're not wearing teeth, the game makes a lot more sense...

CASPER

<< Where are they? Hold on, I can't see them. Nolan, hand me my slippers. >>

NOLAN

Casper, let go. No.

(CASPER gnaws, growls, whines, all in sequence.)

CASPER

Nolan helped Grandma Julie into her slippers and then held her arm as she took the three steps off the porch.

NOLAN

Grandma Julie moved down the driveway, to a spot she knew was the furthest her old cordless phone would allow, repeating herself two and three times to the octogenarian sentry on the other end of the line.

CASPER

Nolan and I stood guard, staring off at things we wanted but knew we couldn't have: a pair of slippers, a house hidden beneath a tree canopy at the top of a hill.

CASPER (cont.)

Is there any phrase more enticing than “don’t touch that?” Is there anything more dangerous than a bored teenager?

NOLAN

This is *Zoinks!*

That chant you learned at summer camp that none of your back home friends thought was cool when you tried to teach it to them in the fall for teen detectives and their dogs.

(THEME SONG)

(CASPER is growling.)

I’m sorry, pal, but you gotta stay out here.

(CASPER paws at a glass door.)

No, you can’t go in there.

(whining now...)

Because there’s a big sign in the window that says, “No Dogs Allowed.”

Come on. Sit. Good boy. I won’t be long. Okay?

(NOLAN opens the door and goes inside. CASPER starts whining. A moment and the door opens again.)

Casper. No.

(NOLAN leaves again.)

CASPER

I don’t want to sound like some conspiracy nut, but sometimes I think Nolan just says there are signs that read “No Dogs Allowed.” I mean really, no dogs allowed? What, is this place run by the gazpacho? Whatever that is.

(Inside.)

NOLAN

In the third grade, I started spending most afternoons in my elementary school’s library. I was always one of the last kids to be picked up on any given day, not because mom was working but because she often forgot or fell asleep.

NOLAN (cont.)

Sometimes an aunt of an uncle would come to collect me, sometimes it was Miss Shelly, my Mom's best friend, or maybe a neighbor.

Eventually, out of neglect or embarrassment, school officials quit acting "and who are you?" and simply let me leave with the first person to write "Blackwell" on a paper plate and stick it in the windshield.

Most of the kids who weren't picked up right at three spent time on the PE field playing touch football or capture the flag. At the time, I would have told you that I didn't like getting sweaty after school, but that wasn't the case. In truth, I was in love with Ms. Barnes, the librarian.

She would start with the easy questions:

CASPER

<< Did you have a good day? Any homework? Anything funny happen in class? >>

NOLAN

And then she would pivot to more searing questions:

CASPER

<< Do you think you could swim in a pool full of macaroni and cheese? >>

NOLAN

Powdered or real cheese?

CASPER

<< Powdered. >>

NOLAN

And:

CASPER

<< Do you think mermaids sleep in waterbeds? >>

NOLAN

I think maybe they sleep in landbeds and they're full of dirt.

CASPER

<< Oh, I think you're right. >>

NOLAN

I'd have done anything for the normal cadence of those afternoons, and so, for two years, I became deeply acquainted with Mr. Dewey... and his Decimals.

(The past.)

CASPER

<< Alright Nolan, I've got a stack for reshelving, pop quiz! >>

NOLAN

Go for it.

CASPER

<< "The Ultimate Book of Family Card Games" >>

NOLAN

Games of chance: 790 ... 795!

CASPER

<< Good job! Here's a tough one: "Emily Post's Teen Etiquette" >>

NOLAN

395!

CASPER

<< I'm impressed. "101 Dinosaur - " >>

NOLAN

567 - that was easy.

CASPER

<< Nope. >>

NOLAN

Yes it is!

CASPER

<< "101 Dinosaur Jokes" >>

NOLAN

Aww, you set me up!

818.

CASPER

<< Ok, last one. This one's easy. "Amelia Earhart" >>

NOLAN

000.

CASPER

<< Nolan! Biography, 921! >>

NOLAN

Ms. Barnes! Unexplained Phenomenon: UFO Abductions, Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, 000!

CASPER

<< Well, now I know where your head is at! >>

NOLAN

And then I quit living with mom and that school became “too long a drive.”

“Not like it matters,” I overheard Uncle Terry one night on the phone. “Not like that school was doing her any favors.”

(Back in the present.)

CASPER

<< Do you need help? >>

NOLAN

Uh. Library card.

CASPER

<< Excuse me? >>

NOLAN

I’d like a library card.

CASPER

<< Hold on. I need some information. Do you have an ID? >>

NOLAN

I’m 14.

CASPER

<< Some kids use their pass to the Pool or the Recreation Center. >>

NOLAN

Uh... no. I think I’ve got my school ID.

CASPER

<< Okay. >>

(NOLAN fishes around in her satchel.)

NOLAN

Is this okay?

CASPER

<< Where is this? >>

NOLAN

It's my school.

CASPER

<< You don't go here? >>

NOLAN

I just moved here.

CASPER

<< What's your address? >>

NOLAN

I don't know.

CASPER

<< You don't know your address? Well, tell your mother - >>

NOLAN

My grandmother.

CASPER

<< - that you need an ID, with your picture if it's not state-issued, or a piece of mail with your name on it. >>

<< Or she can sign you up under her card. >>

NOLAN

Can I use her card today?

CASPER

<< Can you check out books with your grandmother's card? We don't usually let... Yeah, we could do that. What's her number? >>

NOLAN

Oh. I don't... Can I just read the books here?

CASPER

<< We're open til six. >>

NOLAN

Thank you.

(NOLAN walks away from the desk.)

Definitely not Ms. Barnes.

The Mars Majestic Public Library was hot - as if the building were saying, "shit, we still check out VHS tapes, you expect us to have AC?"

A window was open in the back of the reference section, a tall oscillating fan converting the outside misery to inside misery and pushing it around.

It took about ten minutes to comb thru the 970s, North American History. Before long, I had a table in the back piled high with a dozen or so books.

(NOLAN sits, unslings her satchel.)

Note cards. Pencil bag. Lip balm.

(NOLAN opens the metal tin, smearing lip balm, putting the lid back on.)

Ok. Time to get to work.

(CASPER wiggles backwards, pulling out of his collar with a grunt and a POP!)

CASPER

Now don't get me wrong, sitting next to doors is usually a pretty sweet life. There's always a variety of crotches coming by and four year olds have very sticky hands.

But this place is like a ghost town. So I move on, around the building and into a clump of bushes.

NOLAN

There was at least one Stratemeyer entry in the index of every book:

Stratemeyer Lumber. Stratemeyer Textiles. The Civic Center was named after them, so was the high school gymnasium.

NOLAN (cont.)

There was a Stratemeyer beautification award given out by the Mars Majestic Garden Club

And at least two mayors

God, these people must have owned the whole planet at some point.

(NOLAN thumbs her stack of note cards, sighs.)

It's gonna take all day to summarize this...

CASPER

I thought I'd found a pile of groundhog shit to roll around in, but it was just mud. I kept slinking thru the bushes, around the next corner and down the side of the building.

NOLAN

I was the only other person in the library, down at the far end of the building, next to the open window. You couldn't see this corner of the library from the circulation desk.

CASPER

I found a bag of chippies, but something had already gotten to the crumbs.

They were mesquite barbecue anyway, so no big loss. I kept my nose down though, hoping that something still might show up.

NOLAN

If Ms. Barnes was here, she'd probably say, "Nolan, it's important to put books back where they go so the next person has the same opportunities to learn that you do."

And then I think Ms. Barnes would say, "of course a book is happiest when it's being read," and, "there's nothing more important than the pursuit of knowledge."

And then I think Ms. Barnes would say, "Don't put words in my mouth, there's nothing worse than a book thief."

But then, that Ms. Barnes is cut off by a different Ms. Barnes who says, "Nolan, the only way to move Amelia Earhart from Unexplained Phenomena 000 to Biography 921 is for someone to step in and solve the mystery."

So I walk over to the window and casually... whoop.

(NOLAN takes her book and drops it out the library window.)

(Onto a dog's head.)

CASPER

Now I'm minding my own business when this books comes out of nowhere and hits me on the head. Which is just fine with me, moldy paper being one of the finer things in life.

Except this one smells like ... [sniff] rose and mint.

Nolan's gotta see this.

NOLAN

I grab the next book, double check the index and then - FWOOP.
(NOLAN drops the book out of the window.)

CASPER

I make it back around, and there's another book smelling like her.

NOLAN

And now I'm grabbing them two at time and -

CASPER

And where are these things coming from!

NOLAN

Only three more books to smuggle out, I was starting to wonder if I hadn't been too greedy, if I would even be able to carry all this back to Grandma Julie's -

CASPER

<< Excuse me, these books can't leave the library. >>

NOLAN

What? .. I mean... I'm sorry?

CASPER

<< Can you come with me? >>

NOLAN

Um. Sure, but. I thought you said I could read here?

And there, in a pile outside the front door of the library, underneath a muddy paw, were my books.

(NOLAN opens the glass door.)

Casper ...

CASPER

Didn't I do good?

(That night. Grandma Julie's kitchen.)

<< Nolan, too much dry vermouth will destroy a martini. >>

NOLAN

Grandma Julie had taken to teaching me how to make her evening cocktail.

She enjoyed having her own personal barkeep. She also seemed to love downing my mistakes.

CASPER

<< You're making what we call, "a double." >>

NOLAN

Grandma Julie wasn't my grandmother by birth. But she was my grandfather's ex-wife who liked my mother best. She hadn't kept the wedding band, but she did keep – and still wear – the giant diamond-studded ring that had been an anniversary present.

CASPER

<< I ran the damn race. Might as well wear the medal. >>

NOLAN

At night, she would place it in a dish by the bathroom sink, so she could put on her "creams."

CASPER

<< Nolan, how'd that dog get that limp? >>

NOLAN

What?

CASPER

<< What happened to his leg? >>

NOLAN

I don't know. He's always had it.

CASPER

Oh ... [drinking:] This is good.

NOLAN

And then it was back to the porch for more passing gossip along the Widow Wire.

NOLAN (cont.)

I didn't join her. I had a little light reading to do.

I make my way upstairs.

There are two types of guestrooms: the after-thought and the shrine. Neither are inviting. Underneath all these sewing projects, there may be a bed. These sheets aren't soft, but they're clean. Here are all the photos I didn't want in the rest of the house.

A daybed under a small window. A lamp with a short in the cord. And, hanging on the wall, a photo of Mom and me. Some forgotten vacation. Smiles I don't recognize.

Casper hadn't managed to fish all of the library books out of the bushes. I made it home with two, an history of the town called, "We were Majestic" and a little something for me I found in the teen section.

I crawled into bed and opened up a weather-beaten, hardback that hadn't been stamped as checked-out since 1994:

Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators #1: The Secret of Terror Castle.

Teen detectives trying to uncover the secrets of an old, abandoned house? Don't mind if I do. I read until I could barely keep my eyes open.

CASPER

The house settles down for the night and gets... noisy.

NOLAN

He grasped the knob and pulled. With a long scre-e-e-ch that curdled Pete's blood, it opened. Not waiting for their courage to evaporate, the two boys marched into a long dark hall, flashing their torches straight ahead.

CASPER

The scurry of little feet between the walls. The AC kicking on.

NOLAN

They passed open doorways, full of shadows, which seemed to breathe musty air at them.

CASPER

Nearby train tracks. The BZZT! of the bug zapper.

NOLAN

Then they came out into a large hallway with a ceiling two stories high. Jupiter stopped.

CASPER

Cats next door in heat. Drunk neighbors getting into a fight.

NOLAN

"We're here," he said. "This is the main hall. We'll stay one hour. Then we'll leave."

"Leave!" a voice low and eerie whispered in their ears.

CASPER

The backdoor creeping open.

(The sound of a door, slowly opening.)

A long shadow. Heavy breathing. The hairs raise along my back. I pull back my ears, tuck my tail and, instinctively, retreat into the cramped space between the washer and dryer.

(CASPER turns on a flashlight and begins moving slowly thru the house.)

NOLAN

There are footsteps coming from downstairs. I can hear Grandma Julie out on the porch, talking to Edith on the cordless.

Someone is in the house.

Drawers opening in the kitchen. Small objects clattering to the ground. A purse being spilled out on the tile floor.

And now, someone yelling from the living room.

CASPER

<< Get out! >>

<< I'll call the police. >>

NOLAN

And maybe, but I don't know, the deep thud of a body hitting a wall and the shattering of glass.

I'm not here.

I'm not here.

I'm not here.

@CASPER

Then where are you?

NOLAN

I'm on a case.

(Music. Lights. The canned laughter of some old Hanna-Barbera cartoon.)

I'm in some old, abandoned house, creaking and settling.

Haunted, the legend goes. Ghosts, according to eyewitness accounts.

CASPER

Solve the mystery.

NOLAN

I can see Casper and myself standing in a long hallway. Purple lightning flashes at the end of the hallway.

I lay clues for myself to find. Glowing vials in a secret lab – a secret lab accessible only through a false fireplace - a canvas painting on one wall with eyes that follow me.

Secret passageways, allowing swift access to the whole house.

Furniture draped with blankets that come alive like banshees, shrieking and wailing.

A ghost. No, it's just a projector and some fog perhaps. A caretaker in a costume.

CASPER

<< And I would have gotten away with it too, if it weren't for this meddling teen sleuth girl detective! >>

NOLAN

In the end, there's nothing to be scared of.

CASPER

Another mystery solved. And then a soft knock on the door. The intruder is gone. Grandma Julie comes to check in.

The house has been ransacked. But you don't see a broken mirror or a missing television or an empty ring dish by the bathroom sink.

Just another mystery, waiting to be solved.

NOLAN

Because there are two explanations for everything.

Grandma Julie and I cleaned in silence for the better part of an hour.

CASPER

<< There. Good as New. >>

NOLAN

Grandma Julie ...

CASPER

<< We can talk about it in the morning. Why don't you take your dog and run on up to bed. >>

(A pause and then NOLAN hugs GRANDMA JULIE, catching her off guard.)

NOLAN

Goodnight, Grandma Julie.

CASPER

<< Goodnight, Nolan ... now you will keep him off the coverlet? >>

It didn't matter that I was dead tired. What mattered was the house was clean, that I hadn't been scared. That I wasn't alone.

(NOLAN and CASPER jump into bed.)

NOLAN

Ok, off. Let me get under the covers first. Casper, down ... ok, up up.

Extreme exhaustion and a racing mind are a toxic combination and my body shivers as the adrenaline finally drains. I open up "We Were Majestic" and turn to the index. There's all the familiar entries: civic center, mayor, textiles. And then I notice, at the top I notice:

Stratemeyer, Architecture

I turn to the page and recognize the spire at the corner of the house, looking new and freshly painted.

But nothing else.

The rest of the page has been torn out.

CASPER

When you train yourself to see mysteries everywhere – to search for clues in every corner, to see everyone you pass as a suspect, you can't be surprised when you eventually land yourself a real case.

(end of episode.)

CREDITS

Zoinks!

Written by Trey Tatum

Directed by Bridget Leak

Starring Jordan Trovillion as Nolan Blackwell and Trey Tatum as Casper

Part three: The Break-In was recorded by Grayson Halonen

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

More information, including transcripts, can be found at QueenCityFlash.com