

**ZOINKS!**  
**Chapter 4. Puzzle Pieces**

**NOLAN**

*Zoinks!* contains mature language and themes of addiction and neglect and is intended for people who have had to ask, “wait, when did I become the fucking parent?”

There is a balance to the natural world: summer and winter, infancy and old age. If evenings are accentuated with lightning bugs and cicadas, then morning must be accompanied with -

**CASPER**

[outside:] << You say you love me, but you also say you love your wife! >>

**NOLAN**

- just absolute bullshit.

**CASPER**

<< ... said you were staying in last night. I guess that was a lie too. >>

**NOLAN**

The window in Grandma Julie’s guest room faces the street and without opening my eyes, I know it’s close to lunchtime. The Arguing Couple passes our house at this time every day, on their way to the gas station with the hot plate buffet - a phrase which recently took the gold medal for the saddest thing I’ve ever heard.

Casper is in bed next to me, burrowed deep under covers. It would be adorable if...

If there wasn’t a dog butt on my pillow.

Casper, move!

(CASPER wags his tail.)

Stop. Your tail is hitting me in the face.

(NOLAN is up, wrenching back covers.)

Alright, let’s get up.

(CASPER isn’t having it.)

Lazy bones! Up! Let’s go outside.

(Uh... no.)

**NOLAN (cont.)**

I will roll you out of this [pushing:] get up.

(CASPER drops down to the floor. CASPER nuzzles against NOLAN, pushing her back onto the bed.)

Okay... I love you too. Stop. Let's go outside.

(CASPER barks.)

Hush. Downstairs.

(CASPER runs downstairs to the kitchen door, feet clicking on hardwood and tile. NOLAN, trudges behind him, slowly waking.)

(The back door slides opens.)

Go.

(CASPER runs into the backyard.)

[calling:] Grandma Julie?

(NOLAN finds her door, knocks.)

Grandma Julie?

**CASPER**

<< Mmm? >>

**NOLAN**

Just seeing if you were up.

**CASPER**

<< I'm up. I'm just resting my eyes. >>

**NOLAN**

You want me to start the coffee?

**CASPER**

<< Noooooo. >>

(NOLAN moves on. The living room.)

**NOLAN**

Staring at Grandma Julie's living room was like a reverse Easter Egg hunt: missing and broken items sticking out like fluorescent colors in an unkempt yard.

The absent television above the entertainment center.  
A crack in the plaster running down the wall like a lightning bolt.  
The broken hallway mirror, set outside for pickup.

Grandma Julie must have come in silently while I stared, her hands on my shoulders as she says those words that every kid hears, but most doubt.

**CASPER**

<< It could be worse. >>

**NOLAN**

And I'd like to meet the person who first coined that phrase and ask, "did you really think you were consoling anybody?"

Of course things could be worse. Just give it some time and it will be.

Angela's Ashes.

Sophie's Choice.

Becky's Gas Station Hot Plate Buffet.

(THEME SONG.)

This is *Zoinks!*

A note passed in class, written in a cipher only the two you can read for teen detectives and their dogs.

(CASPER sits, alone, outside a Pawn Shop.)

**CASPER**

There's this piece of gum stuck to the sidewalk and I'm this close to getting all of it.

Now, if you're new at getting gum off the sidewalk, you might think, "eh, I'll just lick at it until it comes up."

Amateur move. You gotta pull your lips back so your front teeth can get at it and gnaw.

(CASPER demonstrates.)

**CASPER**

Nolan and Grandma Julie are in there. They've been in there awhile now.

**NOLAN**

I'd never been in a Pawn Shop before ... they seemed cheerier on TV.

It didn't take long to spot her television. But that's not what Grandma Julie is interested in.

At the back of the store, under glass, is a ring that Grandma Julie vowed to keep for richer or poorer, until death do they part.

[The Pawn Broker:] << I'm not allowed to sell stolen merchandise. >>

Clearly rehearsed.

<< I legally have to give it back, just as soon as you press charges. 2>>

**CASPER**

Update: the gum is starting to pull up.

**NOLAN**

Grandma Julie sends me outside.

**CASPER**

Nolan's coming. I sit, like a good boy, with the gum between my front two paws. I don't want Nolan to see it, she'll reach right into your mouth if you have something she wants... it's her worst quality.

(NOLAN stands next to CASPER, rubbing his head. He nuzzles into her and looks up.)

I nuzzle up against her – and it's one of those powerful moments where you know you're thinking the same thing at the same time.

**NOLAN**

You always know when I need cheering up.

**CASPER**

[during:] Leashes suck!

(NOLAN'S cellphone rings. NOLAN sighs, answers it.)

**NOLAN**

Hi Aunt Liz.

(NOLAN walks off without CASPER.)

**NOLAN (cont.)**

[on the phone:] No, we've already been to the doctor's office.

**CASPER**

You're mine now, gum.

**NOLAN**

They said some of the prescriptions they could rewrite and some they couldn't.

I don't know which ones.

**CASPER**

The man behind the counter is getting louder:

**NOLAN**

<< The law says I have to wait thirty days. >>

**CASPER**

<< Horseshit! >> Grandma Julie says.

<< We both know she's not coming back in thirty days, Eddie. We both know she's already spent it, Eddie. How much?" >>

**NOLAN**

When you have a mother who is sick, everyone thinks they owe you an explanation.

They think you walk around all day going, "Oh God, if only someone would put it straight for me."

Not an expert – not like a doctor or anybody.

"You know your mother can't control it." -- "It's the doctors. They're the ones who get them started on this stuff."

**CASPER**

She paces when she's on the phone with Aunt Liz. I don't think Nolan is even aware that she does it. She hits the park and I lose sight of her.

**NOLAN**

But stealing from the only people still willing to help you is a new low. So today we're long past, "no one is to blame."

"Sometimes you have to let a person hit rock bottom."

**NOLAN (cont.)**

“Prison would probably save her life.”

**CASPER**

<< Thirty-four hundred dollars! And what did you give her for it, Eddie, A hundred? A hundred and twenty? >>

**NOLAN**

“She has to get better on her own.”

Which puts me in a fucked up position. Because maybe I’d like to process this for myself, because maybe I’m mad too – but I don’t get to be mad. Because you’ve reached the expiration date on your compassion and now the fourteen year old gets to beg for her mom.

**CASPER**

And now just a little bit of the edge of that gum is coming up.

**NOLAN**

Aunt Liz says she knows somebody who knows somebody who beat it because chemical dependency is just an excuse when you’ve got fucking God and a little bit of grit.

And I’m sorry, but if your medical advice is coming from a woman named Gerri you sit next to on Sundays who’s got a brother who beat it because he up and decided to trust the Lord... something in there should be disqualifying.

**CASPER**

<< You think I’m an easy target just because you stole from me before? Going door to door pretending to sell magazine subscriptions! >>

**NOLAN**

<< That was 35 years ago. I was in the fourth grade! >>

**CASPER**

<< Goddammit Eddie - my doctor told me I’m not supposed to get my temper up on this medication - you trying to make me drop dead in here? >>

**NOLAN**

<< Lady, you drop dead in here and the first thing I’m gonna do is pull the fillings out of your teeth and sell ‘em. >>

**CASPER**

<< You just try and touch my dead body and see what I do to you! >>

Around the corner comes a beat up truck, *Mars Majestic Cemetery* written on the side.

**NOLAN**

“You know, your mother was so beautiful when we were younger.”

**CASPER**

It pulls up to the curb and parks. The man in the low ballcap gets out.

**NOLAN**

“When we were kids, she was always the one with good grades. Boys just hung on her.”

**CASPER**

He sees me, tied up in front of the Pawn Shop and ducks into the Hardware Store.

**NOLAN**

She had all this potential. Isn't that great? All you've got to do is Marty McFuck yourself into the past and Carpe Diem that shit.

You tell yourself it's not fair to be mad at Aunt Liz. She packed your lunch every morning this Spring before school.

She just wants your Mom to get better. She's stuck in this too.

Or fuck, maybe it's not that at all.

**CASPER**

And now, most of the gum has come up.

**NOLAN**

Maybe she sees you and thinks, you've got half her genes – let me take this out on you.

**CASPER**

It stretches and stretches.

**NOLAN**

If I can't yell at you, maybe I'll yell at Nolan.

**CASPER**

And then Pop!

**NOLAN**

You know what, Aunt Liz? If you're so fucking done, just be done then.

(NOLAN hangs up the phone. CASPER gnaws on gum.)

**NOLAN (cont.)**

Have you ever spilt coke on a puzzle and then tried to finish it anyway? Pieces bloating and warping. The image blurs and the pieces no longer fit and there you are, shoving with your thumb, mashing them into place.

The truth of the matter is, it's game over. It's not ever going to go together the way the box says. That's just not an option for you anymore. You get an almost picture and soggy pieces, that's what you get.

And maybe you could make an almost picture work.

But you'd hate to look at it. You know you'll just bust it up, put it back in the box.

When I was an infant, there was a car crash. Mom's sitting in the front, a trapped leg and a mangled arm, trying to reach back to a rear-facing car seat. She says I didn't cry, didn't make a sound. She was afraid I was dead.

I don't know how she managed the pain when I was little. No one's willing to go that far back with me. I know things got bad when I turned ten.

"She has to get better on her own." -- "She has to want to."

But it's not in a teen detective's DNA to sit around and wait.

I can see myself going up to her with a baseball bat.

I see this all the time.

And I just swing. I take this almost image and I bust up all the soggy, bent pieces. I break her until she can't move. Until she winds up in a hospital. Where she's stuck. Where she has to detox. Where she can get clean and healthy again.

(NOLAN'S phone rings.)

I wonder, if I had the chance, would I be able to go thru with it?

No.

Would I be able to stop?

(NOLAN answers her cellphone. She doesn't speak. It takes a moment for AUNT LIZ to realize they're connected.)



**CASPER**

<< Nolan? Did you pick up? >>

<< I just worry about you. They say it's easy for children of addiction to turn out like their parents. >>

**NOLAN**

And you "uh-huh" your way thru the rest of it, until you can hang up.

**CASPER**

Sidewalks are very mysterious. Like sometimes sidewalks are great – they give you gum or hotdog bun or chicken bone. But sidewalks can also take. It's not really our place to question why the great sidewalk acts the way it does.

Right now... Dudley the Dogcatcher is coming down the sidewalk. Fast. With purpose. I try to run but –

(CASPER gets caught on the leash.)

I look for Nolan, but she's still in the park. And now Dudley is almost on me when...

When I see a long, gray, ringless hand grab me by the collar.

Grandma Julie stares at Dudley. He starts to say something but thinks better of it.

That's right! You better run, I got my guard human with me. And she's not friendly with people she doesn't know.

"Hey, can I pet your Grandma?"

You better not. She bites.

**NOLAN**

Walking back towards the Pawn Shop I notice that beat up truck parked on the street. And call it intuition or just "being up to no good," but something compels me to peek inside.

I was expecting cigarette butts in an overflowing ashtray and empty beer cans. I was expecting duck tape patch work and cassette tapes.

On the inside, the truck is immaculate, recently vacuumed and a dust free dash. It looks like the owner is moving. In the floorboard is a box of cut glass picture frames with matching candle holders - small figurines and an expensive-looking lamp.

Another box sits in the passenger seat, "Christmas Ornaments" written across the top.

**NOLAN (cont.)**

In the window's reflection I can see a ball cap pulled low.

(NOLAN spins around, startled.)

Sorry, I was just -

But I don't bother coming up with a back half to the lie. It wouldn't help.

His ball cap is pulled so low that I still can't see his eyes - but his jaw sharpens under clenched teeth. His fists are balled up like he doesn't know where to place his anger. He takes a step towards me.

(CASPER barks.)

**CASPER**

<< Nolan, let's go. >>

**NOLAN**

Grandma Julie is waving at me from across the street and I run off.

(CASPER hollers. NOLAN opens her door.)

I know boy, load up.

(CASPER and NOLAN climb in.)

He's still watching us as Grandma Julie pulls away.

(GRANDMA JULIE'S OLDSMOBILE.)

**CASPER**

We ride home in silence. I'm curled up in Nolan's lap.

And I know what you're thinking: "Seventy pounds, little big to be a lap dog ..."

And you could say that, but you sound ignorant.

**NOLAN**

Grandma Julie sat out on the porch drinking a cup of coffee, her second pot of the day. I could smell her cigarette thru my bedroom window. It's amazing how quickly that smell has become a comfort.

### **NOLAN (cont.)**

“We Were Majestic” was open to the torn and missing page, and I wonder what was so important that someone had to rip it out.

Along the tear is a small, blue smudge. I lean in, looking closer, and realize it’s ink from a pen.

That’s when I feel the raised ridges on the page underneath it.

Someone had written in the book, the pressure from the pen leaving small indentations on the next page. And I know I shouldn’t, but the damage is already done. I tear the next page with the raised edges, run over to the window and hold it up.

The setting sun turns my bedroom window into a light box, revealing a hidden message.

It’s a while before I realize I’m holding my breath.

I’ll never know what the “We Were Majestic” had to say about that house. But I do know how it made one person feel.

There in the middle of the page, in big block letters, is the phrase: “It’s all true.”

And now I’m reconsidering my theory. Maybe the entry wasn’t torn out because someone needed the information.

Maybe they were trying to keep that house a secret.

Because written lower down, in a more frantic handwriting, is a second message. A warning:

“Stay Away.”

### **CREDITS**

Zoinks!

Written by Trey Tatum

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Starring Jordan Trovillion as Nolan Blackwell and Trey Tatum as Casper

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

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More information, including transcripts, can be found at [QueenCityFlash.com](http://QueenCityFlash.com)