

ZOINKS!
Chapter 5. Do Not Enter

CASPER

Zoinks! contains mature language and themes of addiction and neglect and is intended for first-borns who are like, “oh, you’ve also got problems ... go ahead.”

NOLAN

The setting sun brings a golden glow to my room - the sky aflame in tangerine and coral.

The page in my hand shines, scrawled messages set back in light contrast.

“It’s all true.”

“Stay away.”

Two separate messages in different handwriting.

I can feel myself expanding: eyes widening, jaw dropping, lips pulling back in an open smile, rising up onto my tiptoes. It’s as if these messages are filling me with a buoyant lightness - threatening to lift me off the ground at any moment.

What was “all true?” Something that was written on this page? Or is there some common lore to this house, something that had to be affirmed in writing.

“Stay away” or what?

And then ... a third message, I suppose. The torn-out page itself. Three different people with knowledge of this house that they felt compelled to share or to hide.

Imagine for a moment that solving a case is like eating a big dinner, courses coming together to form a meal.

Some clues are an appetizer, just there to peak your interest. Other clues might be a bread basket, meant to tide you over while you wait. Entrees are hearty, sides meant to fill in and support.

This clue - the shadow of messages scribbled on a missing page from an old book - is little more than dessert. It’s all sweetness, no sustenance.

For what have I actually learned? Nothing. It’s just a burst of sugar and the desire to get up and run around the table.

But what kid hasn’t asked, “Can we start with dessert?”

(AUNT LIZ pulls up outside in the driveway.)

NOLAN (cont.)

Outside my window, Aunt Liz turns into the driveway.

She pulls up in this overstuffed SUV, because some people need a third row for all the extra bullshit they carry around with 'em.

I open the bedroom door and let in the conversation from the kitchen:

CASPER

[GRANDMA JULIE:] << Elizabeth, I don't want to involve the police. >>

[AUNT LIZ:] << Little late for that, don't you think? You should have called them last night. >>

[GRANDMA JULIE:] << I just want to go thru insurance. >>

[AUNT LIZ:] << Insurance isn't going to pay you if you're not pressing charges. They'll think you gave it to her. >>

<< No, you gonna have to go down in the morning and file a report. >>

[GRANDMA JULIE:] << And what? Have her arrested? >>

[AUNT LIZ:] << Well actions have consequences. I'm sorry, that's just what I believe. >>

[GRANDMA JULIE:] << It's her mother, Elizabeth. >>

(AUNT LIZ SIGHS. A moment.)

<< I made sun tea. >>

[AUNT LIZ:] << I got a coke in the car. >>

NOLAN

I grab my satchel and throw it on. I'm done listening to this. I consider going out the window but ...

(CASPER is panting.)

Okay. Go.

In Nancy Drew #2 The Hidden Staircase, Nancy learns how to creep from floor to floor without making a sound - memorizing where to place her foot on each step:

NOLAN (cont.)

Right side, right side, center, skip.

But Casper can't even give a hi five without leaving eager scratch marks down your arm ...

(CASPER barrels down the stairs.)

CASPER

[AUNTLIZ:] << Down. No. Get down. Okay, you've said hi. Enough. >>

(NOLAN enters.)

<< Have you talked to your Mom? >>

<< I don't suppose you would tell me if you had. >>

NOLAN

I was gonna take Casper on a walk.

And Aunt Liz is staring at me like she knows I just want out, like I'm disrupting the family meeting she came here to have. She gives me that, "you're not going out" look that she seems to have perfected.

He hasn't pooped since this morning.

It was diarrhea.

CASPER

[GRANDMA JULIE:] << Well, we'd all hate to miss that. >>

NOLAN

I hunt around the living room for my sneakers. Pull them on and move to the front door. From the kitchen, I can hear the argument kicking back into full gear, like Aunt Liz needs me to hear where this is headed.

There's more than one way for a house to be haunted, for some ever-present spectre to loom over you. Casper and I leave. I could tell you where we were headed, but I think you know.

Ms. Barrington gives me the stink eye as I pass by her house. Bobbsey Twin Road exhales trapped heat from the long summer day. We climb the hill towards the peeking spire, standing out against the last remaining tinge of daylight.

The closer we get ... or maybe, the more distance we put on, the more that lightness starts to fill me again.

CASPER

<< They say her fortune is still buried somewhere in that house. >>

NOLAN

<< They say that house was built out of the ruins of a burned-down schoolhouse. >>

Because some haunted houses, you prefer over others.

CASPER

There's a light on inside, shining thru the bay window. Nolan smiles and, as promised, teen detective and her dog brush past the sign that reads

BOTH

"Do Not Enter."

NOLAN

This is Zoinks!, a diary with a flimsy lock left in an obvious place because you secretly hoped someone wanted a peek for teen detectives and their dogs.

(THEME SONG.)

There's an etiquette to haunted houses. You can lock some doors: cellars, astronomer's towers, the occasional closet. But never the front door.

(NOLAN swings open the front door, CASPER provides the *CREAK!*)

Alright gang, let's split up.

CASPER

No!

No. You oughta be ashamed of yourself.

There are three things that come from splitting up: getting kidnapped, getting hogtied, and highly elaborate chase sequences that frankly I don't think we have the production values for.

NOLAN

OK, scaredy cat. Stay close.

From the outside, the Stratemeyer Estate looked large. But from inside, it's absolutely massive.

We move thru the house and – Jesus Fuck – this som' bitch has it all.

A hallway of portraits with deathly gazes.

NOLAN (cont.)

An empty nursery: a bassinet slowly rocking under toxic moonlight.

CASPER

Like, if you were the mom of Frank and Joe Hardy and you were wondering, “Why are your teenage boys taking multiple 30-minute showers every day?” – it’s because they’re thinking about this house.

NOLAN

A library with floor-to-ceiling stacks of old tomes.

The remnants of a burnt letter in an oversized-fireplace.

CASPER

You can’t normally fit a Hellmouth to a Dark Realm inside a half-bath, but they figured it out.

NOLAN

An overgrown greenhouse, vines as thick as my calf snaking across checkered tiles.

Weapons mounted on a wall.

CASPER

Last night, you dreamt you went to Manderley again? Bitch, I’m already there.

NOLAN

And watching over it all, from her perch at the top of the stairs – the painted figure of the widow Stratemeyer.

A tall, full-bodied portrait - gaunt and austere. In the painting, the widow is standing almost exactly where the final portrait was hung, her hand on the balustrade. She’s wearing a long, dark green evening gown, but even this feels a little too colorful and flashy on the woman.

Everything about her is harsh: from her thin lips to the bony knuckles in her hands. But even in the filtered half-light of this room, her gaze is captivating. The way she looks at me ...

She knows I’m an intruder. But she seems pleased at the misfortune of me being in her home.

I can sense Casper and I moving in opposite directions. I’m being pulled towards the staircase and he tip toes away, towards the edges of the large room.

It’s just a picture: paint on canvas, decades old - but the perspective is perfect, the lighting ideal and I can see this woman, standing at the top of a staircase, calling me up towards her.

NOLAN (cont.)

I place my foot on the bottom step. It creaks. Or does it? Maybe that's just the house, letting out a low laugh.

Casper backs into an old player piano.

(Rickety Piano Music. CASPER "Rolfs!" and scurries off.)

Casper wait!

(An eerie light shines on NOLAN'S face.)

CASPER

I run into the next room and see a door standing open, a staircase leading down, which is another way of saying, "not the fuck here."

I take it down, into - aww, shit - more darkness.

NOLAN

I can hear Casper lumbering down a set of stairs leading to what I assume is the basement ...

Casper ... Come on, boy ...

Casper!

Well, great.

CASPER

But before she could follow, something out of the corner of her eye grabs her attention.

(NOLAN turns and walks.)

On the floor of the next room, tucked into a corner is a cardboard box, "Christmas Ornaments" written across the top of it.

NOLAN

It's the same box from the truck. I scan the room.

CASPER

It doesn't take her long to spot the small figurines and the lamp, the cut glass picture frames.

NOLAN

I bend down to look inside the box.

(NOLAN pulls back cardboard tabs and gasps.)

If this is how he celebrates Christmas, I'd hate to see New Years.

The box is loaded up with dozens and dozens of prescription pill bottles.

(Rustling thru the box, pills rattling.)

Some bottles half empty, some completely full. One bottle looks like it expired years ago, while another was filled just this week. Each bottle written out to a different name.

CASPER

Nolan dug thru the box, examining labels: Oxycontin, Hydrocodone, Percocet.

(There is a soft hum in the room now.)

NOLAN

It takes a moment before I realize that I'm no longer using my flashlight to read labels.

It isn't necessary .

The whole room is now bathed in a soft orange glow.

(The Basement.)

CASPER

I hide between the furnace and the hot water tank - my ears pulled back, my tail tucked.

At the end of the basement is a set of storm doors, the wood rotten, slats missing. Light trickles in, casting long shadows about the room.

(sniffing ...)

Something down here doesn't smell right, but I can't place. If upstairs felt grand and overdone, down here seem so ... ordinary.

A workbench along one wall smelling of sawdust and varnish.

A pile of used, musky sports equipment - bicycles, rollerskates, a pogo stick.

A wheelbarrow full of gardening supplies: shovels rakes.

An old washer dryer set next to a wicker hamper and -

(CASPER knocks over something loud and metal.)

CASPER (cont.)

Yipe!

I knock over an ironing board. It clatters to the floor, scaring the shit out of me. I run to the opposite end of the basement.

To a row of long wooden boxes. Seven in total, all standing up on the ends.

This is where that strange smell is coming from.

(CASPER sniffs aggressively.)

I nose around one and discover -

(CASPER screams.)

And now I'm running, up to a second staircase and up thru that set of rotting storm doors.

NOLAN

On the far side of the room I see the big Bay Window...

Some streetlight outside must have kicked on, because the room is humming in orange light. I can see out to the street below. And floating on top I can make out my reflection.

No. Not quite.

I know it's me, but my reflection feels so much younger.

Between me and the window is a small table. And on the table... a diamond ring.

I move towards the table, reaching out for Grandma Julie's ring when that old man's voice comes back to me:

CASPER

<< They say you can find anything you want in that house. Anything at all. For a price. >>

NOLAN

I stop.

CASPER

<< Take it. >>

(NOLAN screams in shock.)

NOLAN

Hello!

CASPER

<< It's ok. >>

NOLAN

The voice is loud, seeming to come from everywhere. I don't know if it's coming from some other room or from inside my own head. But I'm certain of this -

CASPER

<< You want it. Take it. >>

NOLAN

It's the bay window talking to me.

Where did this come from?

CASPER

<< I can give you so much more. >>

NOLAN

Down on the table, the ring is gone. In its place is a torn sheet of paper: "It's all true" written across it in blue ink. And below it, "Stay away."

I reach out for it and the page folds away until there's nothing left but the empty table.

[to the window:] I don't understand.

CASPER

<< Really? It couldn't be simpler. >>

NOLAN

The glow of the window brightens, blocking out the view of the neighborhood beyond.

And now I'm peering thru the window, into another life:

The woman from the portrait – the widow Stratemeyer – a young, woman.

A line of boys calling on her.

A deal with a window. An evil presence, trapped in a pane of glass, willing to trade life for riches.

NOLAN

The woman, marrying. A smile on his face.

And then the funeral, A woman in mourning clothes with a bored expression.

The house getting nicer, more refined. And now I get it.

A series of husbands, traded in for wealth. The woman growing richer, the window lengthening its life, growing stronger.

Until one day, the widow Stratemeyer falling down her own staircase, something essential snapping and a hard thud. Breaths getting shallower, dying under the haunted gaze of her own portrait. Willing to give up all her wealth for more time, but out of life to trade with.

The glow dims. I can make out the street again. And between us, on the small table, Grandma Julie's ring is back.

CASPER

<< Anything you want can be yours. But I am old. You're young. Strong. One year for a ring. Surely a good price, you wouldn't even miss it. >>

<< One year for a ring. >>

(NOLAN considers this for a moment, and then gives the ring back to CASPER.)

NOLAN

I'm not interested.

CASPER

<< Maybe you don't understand what I can do. >>

NOLAN

The image comes to me as if against my will:

A mother that could finally be well. A new life. I don't need all my troubles smoothed out. Just level ground to start on. That couldn't cost too much, could it?

CASPER

<< Ask and find out... >>

NOLAN

My younger reflection changes, breaks apart, multiplies. It stretches out on all sides like those tri-fold mirrors at the mall:

NOLAN (cont.)

My mom, standing next to me, her arm folded in mine. Moving back home. In another, it's Parent-Teacher night and Mom is there, meeting Ms. Barnes, the two of them gushing over me. And now I'm older. Mom teaching me to drive a stick shift. Arguing the way that a teenager and her mother are supposed to. Grandma Julie coming for dinner. Aunt Liz stopping by too.

I see lost vacations and family holidays the way they should have been.

I see Casper, begging at the table. Mom laughing and handing him scraps.

CASPER

<< Ask for it. >>

(Outside the house.)

CASPER

Fuck that basement.

You ever seen 6 dead husbands lined up like mummies?

Dried up, shriveled, like someone Caprisunned all the juice out of them...

Split up, my ass.

Now look – I'm fine with brooding mansions and 1950s B-movie Monster Costumes – but you start lining up actual dead bodies and - UH-UH! - this TV set is tuned to "Murder, She Don't".

I keep going, thru the yard, a frantic run down to the street.

(A Truck brakes suddenly.)

The howl of a set of brakes, the *KUNK!* of a door swinging open. And then a low laugh and the sound of:

<< **tsk tsk tsk** Here boy. >>

Dudley the goddamn dog catcher, on his way home for the night, when fortune smiled.

(The Bay Window.)

(NOLAN thinks on this. Makes up her mind. Shakes her head.)

NOLAN

No. I won't fall for that again. Quick fixes, sure things, long shots. They don't last.

NOLAN (cont.)

With that... the window dimmed, allowing me to peer thru into the yard.

Dudley. Slamming shut the doors in back of his truck.

No!

By the time I reached the yard, the truck was turning the corner.

And now what? Do I just leave here, go back to Grandma Julie's, tell them where I've been.

Or would Aunt Liz just tell me that actions have consequences. That you have to hit rock bottom.

There's a soft, orange glow coming from inside the house. And I think of another solution to this problem.

I walk thru the yard, snatching a wooden stake out of the ground, ripping off the "Do Not Enter" sign.

Back into the house, up to the big, bay window.

(The light hum of the window.)

Alright! I've got a bargain for you. Give me back my dog. Bring Casper back here this instant or I'll shatter you into a thousand pieces!

I move closer, to show the window I mean business. Press the wooden stake against the pane and -

(The Hum grows to a chaotic pitch. Light floods the room.)

CASPER

The window burned, like staring into the sun. Flashes of images danced off retinas in a frenzied pace, the window showing Nolan its full power, the scope of what it is capable of. And then -

(CLANG! The lights dim quickly. NOLAN drops the stake and clutches the back of her head, sinking to her knees.)

Before she passed out, Nolan could make out the shape of a shovel, muddy boots, and a ballcap pulled low.

CREDITS

Zoinks!

Written by Trey Tatum

Directed by Bridget Leak

Starring Jordan Trovillion as Nolan Blackwell and Trey Tatum as Casper

Part five: Do Not Enter 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