No Trespassing- That Means You!

Amy Poniatowski
Gravel crunched beneath the rotating wheels of the blue mini-van as it thundered into the driveway. Screeching to a halt, the tired brakes moaned in exhaustion. Stevie’s mother jumped out from its interior and hurried to the passenger side of the dusty vehicle. A gnarled hand extended itself to grip the frame of the opened door as a pair of feeble legs swung around to rest lightly upon the bits of rocks. Finally, leaning heavily upon the woman’s slender shoulder, the intruder stepped out into the scorching heat of the summer afternoon.

From atop his perch, couched within the foliage of the massive oak lining the drive, Stevie viewed the scene below. Step by step, the elderly man shuffled along the sidewalk leading to the entrance of the tiny blue house. Stevie leaned precariously from an outstretched limb in order to view the man’s retreating figure.

The door slammed shut and he dropped to the ground. His brown glasses clung crookedly to his slightly turned out ears. Bleached hair was a mass of honey traveling the circumference of his head. His narrow lips sputtered, rejecting the bitter taste of dirt from his fall. Bare knees skinned and slender limbs bronzed, he wiped dirtied hands on plaid shorts and then strode purposely into the house.

"Mom!" he called loudly. "What’s Grandpa doing here?"

Diane turned away from her father-in-law seated in the high-backed chair of the livingroom.

"He had a stroke, Stevie, and now Zip’s going to live with us for awhile."

"Where’s he going to sleep?" Stevie asked, his hands upon his hips. "Not in my room!"

"No, not in your room," Diane placated her six-year-old son. "That’s why we bought this couch. A bed is hidden inside."

"He’s sleeping in the livingroom?" Stevie asked incredulously. "Where am I gonna watch cartoons?"

"You’ll manage," she replied as she walked past him and descended the stairs leading to the walk-out basement.

Stevie glanced about curiously, viewing his grandfather’s belongings. In the hall closet, clothes, smelling of age, replaced family members’ coats and as-
sorted jackets in storage. On the shelf above, snapshots and scrapbooks made room for baseball caps and moth-eaten scarves reserved for the winter months. While on the floor rested heavy leather shoes, scuffed from the dragging motion of weakened feet. A buffet within the dining-room, containing an assortment of clothes and personal items, further cramped the kitchen area and a basket full of pills joined the family pharmacy on top of the refrigerator.

"Grandpa's taking up all of our space!" Stevie pouted. "Wait till I tell Kathy and Jenny when they come home from college! They won't like it! I know it! This house only holds seven people and one plus seven equals eight! Grandpa goes!"

Stevie then whirled suddenly about and faced his grandfather. Slowly he circled the plush velvet chair like an animal stalking its prey, wrinkling his upturned nose as the smell of Ben-Gay permeated its sensitive membranes. When again he stood before him, golden eyes locked with the clouded gaze of watery brown. With a long searching look, Stevie absorbed the haggard appearance of his grandfather whom he hadn't seen for two months.

A thatch of charcoal-gray hair covered his head, objecting defiantly to the stroking motions of a comb or brush. Heavy squared frames rested precariously upon the tip of his sloped nose while colorless lips were drawn in due to the lack of healthy teeth. This in turn created a permanent frown which drooped to his whiskered chin. Lines of stubbornness and hardships marred sagging cheeks and upon closer inspection, relinquishing itself to skin cancer, was a portion of his right ear.

The chair seemed to swallow his slumped form whole as his hands clamped in a steely grip like that of a poacher's trap. Unstable legs crossed to reveal an expanse of white skin, a pattern of veins and arteries upon its surface.

Stevie's traveling eyes ceased their piercing scrutiny and returned to those of the unwelcome trespasser. Drawing nearer, he closed in tightly upon his nemesis. The wrinkles of age encountered the smooth, unblemished planes of blissful youth. Zip's eyes grew round with wonderment. The air sizzled with restrained emotions: resentment, anger and jealousy.

Now, almost nose to nose, Stevie gritted his teeth in what he hoped would produce an intimidating expression as well as a harsh tone in his boyish voice.

Pausing deliberately after each pronounced word he grated, "I...don't...like...you!" He then stuck out his tongue and fled on nimble legs to his bedroom in the back of the house.

Zip's face cracked into an impish grin as his narrow chest, a violent storm, rumbled with deep laughter. To him the situation proved amusing, a variation from his uneventful existence. Stevie's actions did not seem to foreshadow the gravity of the events yet to come.
"Stevie!" Diane called the next day from the livingroom window overlooking the lake. "Lunch is ready!"

Stevie scrambled from the sandbox near the patio just as droplets of rain began to splatter the cement. During the cool morning, the clouds overhead were grumpy old men, threatening to shower the earth with acid insults and complaints. Stubbornly, they did not allow any light through to warm the trembling earth. He ran up the hill to the front door and burst into the kitchen.

"What's for lunch?" he asked.
"Macaroni and cheese," his mother replied as the aroma filled the air.
"Good!" Stevie exclaimed. "Can I have some?"
"Sure," Diane answered, "but first I have to feed your Grandpa so you're going to have to wait a few minutes. Don't worry. It won't be long."

Stevie pulled a chair out from the table, and angrily plopped onto it. Across from him, at the head of the table, sat his grandfather. A brooding expression transformed his face at the moment a steaming plate arrived before his adversary.

"It isn't fair," he thought with eyebrows knitted. "I was here first. Why did he have to come and live with us?"

They ate lunch in silence except for the slurping sounds of Zip drinking bitter coffee. When everyone finished, Stevie asked, "Mom, will you play a game with me downstairs?"

"Sorry, honey," she apologized, lines of regret showing in her forehead. "Someone has to watch Grandpa while your father's at work."

Stevie stomped loudly into the livingroom and catapulted his gangly body into the cushion of the single chair.

"Stevie!" his mother drawled warningly.
"What!" he shot back insolently.
"Don't you dare talk to me that way, little boy!" Diane scolded angrily. "Once more and you'll be in your room the rest of the day!"

"Don't you dare talk to me that way!" mimicked Stevie under his breath.
"What did you say," she asked, challenging Stevie to usurp her authority.
"Nothing," he muttered.

"Good," his mother retorted. "Now let Grandpa sit there. The Tiger game is on and he wants to watch it."

Stevie slipped to the floor in front of the television as Zip shuffled to the cobalt-blue upholstered chair. Grabbing each arm, he slowly began to ease himself down into it as if it were a steamy bath. At the last possible moment, Stevie lunged for the seat, just as the elderly man coaxed his creaking bones to bend and sit.
"Help!" a muffled voice cried from beneath polyester pants. "Mom! Get this fatso off of me!"

Diane bounded into the livingroom, in her haste, knocking over the wooden chair she sat upon.

"Get up, Zip!" she ordered her father-in-law.

"What?" he asked bewildered and a little hard of hearing.

"Oh, damn!" she cursed as she pulled him off her screaming son. "Why did you do that, Stevie?"

Stevie accused, "It was his fault! He didn’t watch where he was going to sit!"

"Don’t give me that!" she scoffed. "Get to your room and don’t come out until I tell you to!"

Stevie grudgingly obeyed, at least for the time being, and walked sulkily into his bedroom. His door slammed forcefully against stained mouldings, causing the frame of the house to shake and window panes to rattle as if it were an earthquake.

Inside his domain, Stevie was a violent storm, causing destruction and chaos. Ernie and Bert smashed ruthlessly against the papered walls. He shredded coloring books in his rolltop desk and ripped the Sesame Street bedding from his boxspring in the center of the room. He became Godzilla, crushing Legoland with the treads of G.I. Joe tennis shoes, while he subjected his innocent goldfish, Cobra, to a frightening manmade whirlpool. The closet, brimming with clothes, toys, and gadgets, was the only thing that survived the cyclone, but a second wind of fury soon gutted it.

When the dust of destruction finally settled, Stevie lay exhausted upon the cluttered floor.

Repeating over and over again, he exclaimed, "Why did he have to come? Everything was fine until he came! Everyone had time for me! Why did he have to ruin everything?"

Twisting his head, he spied a painted picture of a Western cowboy upon his wall. It planted an evil seed in the fertile young soil of his mind as he quietly opened the bedroom door. Into his parent’s room he went, groping under the queen-sized bed, reappearing moments later with the urgently sought object. Carefully he exited and began to stealthily walk the length of the hallway. Seeing that his mother occupied herself in the kitchen, he continued to stalk his victim, rounding the chair on which he sat in the livingroom;

The rain stopped after lunchtime and yellow shafts of light began to penetrate the blanket of fluffy white clouds, illuminating the house once again.
Stevie stood before his grandfather with legs apart and arms outstretched. In his trembling hands he held the answer to his many problems.

Ribbons of sunshine struck the cold steel of the object, emphasizing its massive power. Stevie's small hands struggled with its weight, but held steady. Tiny beads of sweat formed on his brow as he methodically raised the weapon to the intruder's temple. A look of hesitation fleetingly appeared on his face when he momentarily faltered, but was rapidly replaced by renewed determination. Click! He cocked the metallic arm.

"Stick 'em up pardner!" he commanded and with two unsteady fingers he released the trigger.

Bang! The gun fired and kicking like an angry mule, tossed Stevie to crumple in a heap upon the floor.

The setting sun cast a kaleidoscope of color upon the closet door. Hues of brilliant yellow, russet orange and brown filtered through the curtained window, finally giving way to the fiery shade of red. A filmy darkness enveloped the bedroom as a gentle breeze carried the haunting songs of crickets from the field outside.

Beneath the open window, Stevie lay sprawled across his beige bedspread. Stuffed animals on either side of him provided comfort. A navy blue and white afghan covered his knees and calves. He balled his fists tightly against his small chest and squeezed his eyes shut, lengthy eyelashes lightly dusting his tanned cheeks. In his bedroom, he pondered the inevitable. He was a prisoner awaiting trial and punishment, his father the judge. Soon, the gavel would rise and the sentence be handed down.

The door, covered with painted pictures of the Peanut's Gang, inched open, allowing a shaft of light to fall upon Stevie's slender form. Penetrating his delicate eyelids, he awoke to the sight of his mom and dad, towering overhead like massive giants, in the doorjamb. They crept closer; Stevie cringed further.

"Make it quick," he thought. "I can't stand the pain!"

The bed creaked under the heavy weight of his father. Stevie's nose twitched as the smell of cigar smoke entered his nostrils. Silence pierced the air. The tension in the room increased like pressure in an expanding balloon, at any time ready to explode. A raised hand slowly descended towards Stevie.

"This is it," he thought to himself as his eyes closed against the coming blow.

He waited an eternity, then suddenly he flinched. To his amazement, however, it was not a crushing blow but a warm hand resting on his shoulder.

"Stevie," his father asked in a questioning tone, "I found this on Grandpa's forehead. Do you know how it got there?"
Mark, Stevie's father, revealed in his other hand a dart. It consisted of a small suction cup attached to a grooved plastic stick. A toy gun utilized this sort of ammunition.

"No, but I bet my ugly sister Julie did it," Stevie offered innocently, now sitting against the simple headboard.

"Stevie," his father's voice rose slowly with warning.
"It's true!" he insisted vehemently.
"Stevie," his father uttered again, but more forcefully.
"Oh, all right!" exclaimed Stevie, "I did it!"

"Why, Stevie?" his father asked. "Why would you do a thing like this? Didn't I tell you that you couldn't play with your gun until you learned not to shoot people with it?"

"I don't know," Stevie muttered.

"There must have been a reason for what you did. You can tell me. I'll understand," consoled his father.

Stevie spat back jealously, "I don't want Grandpa here! Everyone pays attention to him and not to me! It isn't fair! He deserved it!"

"That's not true," his mother and father interjected.

"Yes it is, and you know it!" Stevie whimpered as he burst into tears.

His mother moved to embrace his shuddering frame while his father questioned, "Is that why you shot him? Because you're jealous?"

"Yes," Stevie sputtered.

"Do you feel better now that you did it?" he asked.

"Yes," Stevie responded.

"Listen, Stevie," his father commanded. "You have nothing to be jealous of. After a few weeks, everything will be in order again. By then, Grandpa will be recovered enough to take care of himself a little bit and we'll be able to play with you and take you anywhere that you want. It's just that everything's been rearranged and we're trying to adjust to a new lifestyle. Understand?"

"Yes," Stevie answered.

"Now, little man, I'm going to need your help," Mark confessed. "Do you think that you could watch Grandpa and keep him out of trouble while I'm at work?"

"Sure," Stevie agreed happily, excited at the prospect of responsibility and a job of importance. His intense jealousy dissipated at the thought of taking charge of his grandfather. He was now the boss; people looked up to him. A silly grin spread across his face.
"That’s great, Stevie! Just remember that we all love you," his mother announced, planting a salty kiss upon his brow. "Now let’s go eat. Dinner is ready and I’m starving!"

"Me too," Stevie shouted. "Come on, Grandpa! I’ll help you fix your plate."

Amy Poniatowski