

The New York Times Bestseller

Carl Hiaasen



FLUSH

ONE

The deputy told me to empty my pockets: two quarters, a penny, a stick of bubble gum, and a roll of grip tape for my skateboard. It was pitiful.

“Go on inside. He’s waiting for you,” the deputy said.

My dad was sitting alone at a bare metal table. He looked pretty good, all things considered. He wasn’t even handcuffed.

“Happy Father’s Day,” I said.

He stood up and gave me a hug. “Thanks, Noah,” he said.

In the room there was another deputy—a broad, jowly bear standing next to the door that led to the jail cells. I guess his job was to make sure I wasn’t smuggling a hacksaw to my father so that he could break out.

“It’s good they let you keep your own clothes,” I said to Dad. “I figured they’d make you put on one of those dorky uniforms.”

“I’m sure they will, sooner or later.” He shrugged. “You doing okay?”

“How come you won’t let Mom bail you out?” I asked.

“Because it’s important for me to be here right now.”

“Important how? She says you’ll lose your job if you stay locked up.”

“She’s probably right,” my dad admitted.

He’d been driving a taxi for the past year and a half. Before that he was a fishing guide—a good one, too, until the Coast Guard took away his captain’s license.

He said, “Noah, it’s not like I robbed a bank or something.”

“I know, Dad.”

“Did you go see what I did?”

“Not yet,” I said.

He gave me a wink. “It’s impressive.”

“Yeah, I bet.”

He was in a surprisingly good mood. I’d never been to a jail before, though honestly it wasn’t much of a jail. Two holding cells, my dad told me. The main county lockup was miles away in Key West.

“Mom wants to know if she should call the lawyer,” I said.

“I suppose.”

“The same one from last time? She wasn’t sure.”

“Yeah, he’s all right,” my father said.

His clothes were rumpled and he looked tired, but he said the food was decent and the police were treating him fine.

“Dad, what if you just said you’re sorry and offered to pay for what you did?”

“But I’m *not* sorry for what I did, Noah. The only thing I’m sorry about is that you’ve got to see me locked up like an ax murderer.”

The other times my dad had gotten in trouble, they wouldn't let me come to the jail because I was too young.

"I'm not a common criminal." Dad reached across and put a hand on my arm. "I know right from wrong. Good from bad. Sometimes I just get carried away."

"Nobody thinks you're a criminal."

"Dusty Muleman sure does."

"That's because you sunk his boat," I pointed out. "If you just paid to get it fixed, maybe then—"

"That's a seventy-three-footer," my dad cut in. "You've got to know what you're doing to sink one of those pigs. You ought to go have a look."

"Maybe later," I said.

The deputy standing by the door made a grunting noise and held up five chubby fingers, which was the number of minutes left before he took my father back to the cell.

"Is your mom still ticked off at me?" Dad asked.

"What do you think?"

"I tried to explain it to her, but she wouldn't listen."

"Then maybe you can explain it to me," I said. "I'm old enough to understand."

Dad smiled. "I believe you are, Noah."

My father was born and raised here in Florida, so he grew up on the water. His dad—my Grandpa Bobby—ran a charter boat out of Haulover Marina on Miami Beach. Grandpa Bobby passed away when I was little, so I honestly didn't

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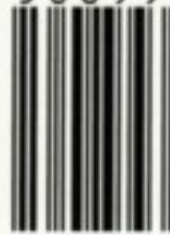
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