

Flush Study Guide

Flush by Carl Hiaasen

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Plot Summary

Flush by Carl Hiaasen is the story of Noah Underwood, a youngster who lives in the Florida Keys with his mother, father and younger sister. Life is carefree for young Noah spending his days fishing, snorkeling, boating and hanging with friends and sister in the warm Floridian surf and sun. But things change when suddenly his father, Paine, winds up in jail.

Noah visits his father and is at first confused why his good and loving father is in jail. He learns that Paine sunk the gambling boat, the Coral Queen, that was moored in a local marina because it was dumping sewage—including human waste—into the pristine waters of the marina. Once Noah fully understands the danger of this practice, he is on board with his father.

Noah loves both his parents and has to play the peacemaker between them. His father is a nature lover and had a rather impulsive personality. He doesn't think before he speaks. Donna, Noah's mother, loves her husband dearly but she is at the end of her rope with his antics. He's been guilty of erratic behavior in the past and Donna's reached her boiling point. She loves the beautiful water and beaches just as much as her husband does but she has her children to think of and her mortgage to pay.

Noah and his younger sister, Abbey, decide to investigate the Coral Queen themselves, which had been refloated, cleaned and put back into operation. The kids do some surveillance work and confirm that the owner is still dumping sewage into the water. On the suggestion of Paine, the kids recruit the help of Lice, a sleazy guy who used to work on the boat. When Lice mysteriously goes missing, his girlfriend, Shelly, offers to help. She knows the owner and gets a job as a bartender on the boat so that she can have access to the boat's daily operations.

Noah, Abbey and Shelly plot to expose the boat's owner once and for all. Noah and Abbey pool all their money together and buy dozens of vials of bright pink food dye. Shelly sneaks Noah on the boat and the two of them split the dye bottles between them and squeeze the thick fuchsia gel into the toilets of the gambling boat. With each bottle of dye they drop into the toilet system, they flush the toilets until they run clear. The next morning, an aerial observation by the Coast Guard confirms that the bright pink stream coming from the Coral Queen is evidence of their continued pollution of the pristine waters of the marina.

Along the way, Noah and Abbey must deal with the boat owner's hateful son and his friend and his Moroccan thuggish bodyguard. Miraculously, Noah's long-lost grandfather, Grandpa Bobby, reappears on the scene to help his son and grandchildren. In the end, the ship is finally put out of operation in a most unexpected way. The authorities are finally on to the criminal activities of the owner and the Underwood family survives it all in one piece. Noah is able to resume the life of a young boy and return to his carefree life on the surf and sands of his Florida Keys home.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

It was Father's Day when Noah Underwood visited his father, Paine, in jail. The deputy had him empty his pockets of everything, including a few coins and a stick of bubble gum. He was led into the room where his father was waiting. Noah wished his father a happy Father's Day. His father smiled and hugged him. His father was dressed in street clothes—not the normal jail jumpsuit. He asked why he didn't let his mother bail him out. His father said it was important for him to be in jail at that moment, he was proud of what he had done. He wasn't about to apologize for it. It was quite an accomplishment sinking Dusty Muleman's boat—a seventy-three-footer. Noah's mother, Donna, was still angry at her husband. His father had been in jail before but hadn't visited him then because he was too young. Now Noah was old enough to visit and, in Paine's judgment, to hear his father's explanation of what had taken place.

Noah's father was born in Florida where his dad, Grandpa Bobby, ran a charter boat company out of Haulover Marina in Miami Beach. Grandpa Bobby took his boat south one day and just disappeared. Some say he was sick and others that he was hurt. The federal authorities came to the house one day and informed the family that Grandpa Bobby's body was found buried in Colombia. Noah's mom and dad had married six weeks after they met in a line at the court house waiting to pay speeding tickets. They eventually moved to the Florida Keys. Noah was born in the back of the family car while his dad was trying to rush from Key Largo to the hospital. Abbey was born three years later. Unlike many boys, Noah liked his sister.

When Noah returned from the jail, he told his mother and sister that his dad looked fine and wasn't even wearing handcuffs. His mother was worried that visiting his dad in jail would upset Noah. Abbey wanted to know why he didn't plea guilty. His mom had softened a bit from her initial anger saying that Paine should have a lawyer. Abbey sensed that there was more to the story that Noah was letting on. Noah whispered that they'd go for a ride a little later.

Noah's father had sunk the Coral Queen, a gambling boat. It had gone down stern-first in twelve feet of water. Noah and Abbey rode to the site on Noah's bike. A few years before, Dusty Muleman had persuaded some wealthy Indians to buy the marina and make it part of their reservation so he could moor his gambling boat there. Dusty ultimately became very rich. At 3 am on the morning of the sinking after the last of the crew had left the boat, his dad had sneaked aboard, scuttled the boat and sank it. The reason he sunk the boat was that Muleman was illegally dumping waste from the toilets into the water. Dusty was too cheap to have the sewage hauled away as required by the law. His dad figured that Dusty was bribing the authorities to look the other way. It was dangerous and unhealthy. Kids swim in that water all the time. Abbey was nauseated and beginning to understand her father's actions. Noah's dad asked him to help nail Dusty. Abbey agreed not to tell their mother.



Chapter 1 Analysis

Young Noah Underwood's father, Paine, is in jail. At first the reader does not know the reason but there are enough hints that Paine was arrested and jailed for what he considered a noble cause. There is tension in the home over Paine's incarceration. It is Father's Day and Noah's mother is naturally concerned that Noah is upset because he visited his father in jail. Abbey, Noah's younger sister, acts out from the anger she feels over her father's situation by making disparaging remarks about him. But deep down, she is hurt that her father is not home with them. Noah's mother is hurt and concerned about her husband but wants to keep the family together and mentions getting him an attorney. She has worries about supporting her family while her husband is in jail.

Paine seems to only be concerned with the cause he was arrested for. He apparently got no sympathy from his wife. He draws Noah into the cause by asking him to help him continue the fight while he is still in jail. He feels his son is mature enough to be part of his activism. Is Paine really thinking of what's best for his son? It seems as though he is putting his cause before his child.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

All the kids in their small town knew that Noah's father was in the slammer for sinking the boat. The kid he didn't want to deal with was Jasper Muleman, Jr., Dusty's son. Unfortunately, he ran right into him when he arrived at the salvage site. The boat was being hoisted up from underwater. Jasper called Noah a few names and shoved him a few times. Noah sucked it up and told Jasper he was sorry. He had come by to see if he could help. Dusty was across the basin and angrily ordered Jasper to stay away from Noah.

Abbey showed up and watched the salvage operation with Noah. Abbey was disgusted—Muleman would have his boat up and running again she told Noah. Just two years before, Noah's father and Dusty had both been fishing guides, working out of the same marina. Now Muleman was a millionaire. He claimed he inherited a huge amount of money which allowed him to buy the boat. Noah's mother didn't believe it.

When Noah visited Lice Peeking at his trailer, his girlfriend, Shelly, told him that Lice was still sleeping but that she'd wake him up. He smelled of BO and booze. He focused on Noah and demanded to know who he was and why he woke him up. He was Noah Underwood, Paine's son. He was there at his father's request and it involved Mr. Muleman. Noah told Lice that the Coral Queen had been dumping sewage in the marina. His father had sunk the boat, was arrested and in jail. Lice found the news very funny.

Paine had told Noah to see Lice. Lice would help him. He told Lice how the sewage was washing up on the shore where the kids play and the turtles hatch their eggs. Lice didn't care about any of that. If he was going to help, he wanted money or something of value. He had worked for Muleman until he was fired for stealing away Shelly from him. Noah said he'd find out from his father what they'd be able to pay him.

Noah's mother had been to see Paine but he refused to be bailed out. She had called Paine's older brother and sister, Sandy and Del, and asked them to call him to try to talk some sense into him. There was tension between the siblings ever since a huge amount of money was discovered in a safety deposit box that belonged to Grandpa Bobby. He left instructions for the money to be split evenly between his three children but Paine had refused to take any of the money. He figured it was dirty money since it would have been impossible for a charter boat captain to save that kind of money.

Noah's mother was upset with Paine. He was sitting in jail to prove a point, to be a martyr while his family suffered. She had to feed her kids and pay the mortgage which would be impossible on the money she earned from her part-time job. Noah tried to tell her that everything would be okay but she wouldn't listen. He really got scared when he saw that her suitcase was packed and laying on her bed.



Chapter 2 Analysis

Noah is close to his sister and confesses to her that he plans to help his father. Abbey at first is not on board but is convinced when she learns that her father sank a boat because it was dumping sewage in the marina. Since Abbey is appalled by the pollution of the marina, it is obvious that she plans to help her brother. Since Noah and Abbey agree not to tell their mother about their plans, they apparently sense that their mother would be upset and object to their helping their father. The children feel forced to be dishonest with her.

But Noah is the main character and will lead in the cause to keep the gambling boat from going back into operation again. Noah is a gutsy youngster. He is forced to deal with the sleazy Lice Peeking and scrap with Jasper, the gambling boat owner's son. Noah is sophisticated enough to avoid a real confrontation with Jasper and pretends that he wants to help them. He's using this ploy so that they don't suspect that he may be plotting to sabotage the resurrection of the gambling boat. But Noah's goal is to prevent the boat from continuing the illegal dumping of sewage into the marina which Paine and Noah both fear it will do if it is allowed to resume operations.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

By the time Noah visited his father again, he had to tell him the bad news that the Coral Queen was ready to resume operations. Noah described his visit to Lice Peeking at the trailer park. Paine told Noah to offer Lice his bonefish skiff which was worth around ten grand. Noah didn't say anything but he was disappointed. He had hoped to get that skiff for himself one day. Paine explained that Shelly was either Dusty's second or third wife. One day she decided she was fed up with Dusty and moved in with Lice. Noah asked Paine to let his mother bail him out. She missed him. Paine was touched but was dedicated to the cause and had to remain jailed in order to make the most impact. Noah had been relieved when his mother unpacked her suitcase but he didn't know when her patience would run out. Paine told Noah that a reporter from the Island Examiner was going to drop by the house and interview Noah about Paine's situation.

Noah and his friend, Thom and Rado, went down to Thunder Beach to see how badly it was being polluted. There were no pollution warnings posted as yet. The three boys watched a big loggerhead turtle crawl ashore, probably preparing to lay her eggs. After they left, Noah made his way to Lice's trailer park again. Lice was passed out drunk but Shelly insisted Noah come in and have a soda. He finally worked up the nerve to ask her if she knew about Dusty and his illegal dumping of sewage off the Coral Queen. She had been the bartender there and didn't know about the sewage dump.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Noah is learning that being an activist means developing the ability and willingness to sacrifice. He must offer up his father's skiff to Lice—something that he hoped to inherit. But Noah remains silent and doesn't complain to his father which demonstrates his loyalty to his father and his cause. It is revealed that the sewage has not yet caused the beach to be badly polluted. However, if the gambling boat is allowed to operate again and dump its sewage, it won't be long before the beach is polluted which will be harmful to people and animals.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Paine's lawyer, Mr. Shine, stopped by the next day. He had been hired to get his father out of several other scrapes in the past. Noah and Abbey left because their mother wanted to talk to Mr. Shine alone. Noah decided to go fishing on Snake Creek under the bridge. Suddenly, there was the noise of a motorboat and, much to his dismay, he saw that Jasper, Jr., and his friend, Bull, were on the boat. When they saw Noah they veered toward shore. Soon they were tying up their boat and heading on shore. Jasper charged at Noah and punched him right in the eye and spit in his face. Noah felt like striking back but kept his cool. He remembered his father's words that people who fight can't win with their brains.

As Jasper and Bull sped off, Noah cast his rod and caught Jasper right in the back of his shirt. He panicked, screaming at Bull to cut him loose. Bull grabbed a knife and rushed to Jasper putting too much weight on the stern. Soon the boat was taking on water and sinking. They both jumped out of the boat while Noah reeled his line in and, since the fish had all been scared away, headed home.

After he told Abbey what happened, she warned him not to go anywhere without Thom and Rado. Noah's mother was angry and wanted to call Dusty but Noah convinced her that it would only make things worse. She was still angry when she told him that a reporter was waiting to see him in the living room. The reporter's name was Miles Umlatt. The reporter asked if this was the first time that Paine had been in trouble. Noah admitted there were a few other incidents.

The reporter asked him about the Carmichael incident that occurred a few years before. When the Carmichaels first came to Florida, they parked their huge motor home along the highway. Paine happened to spot them and saw that Mr. Carmichael was beating his dogs. Paine went into action and flattened every tire on the motor home and took the dogs to safety. He found the dogs a safe home but wouldn't say who had them. He was arrested and spent two days in jail. In another incident, Paine had chased down Derek Mays for illegally casting gill nets because they killed everything from sharks to turtles that got snarled up in the net. Unfortunately, Paine was considered a danger to the public and lost his captain's license. Noah assured Miles that he was never afraid of his father who sometimes just got out of control.

Miles told Noah that Dusty was threatening to sue Paine for slander because he claimed he never dumped sewage into the marina. Noah said his father never lied and that he was proud of him. After the reporter left, Noah stopped by Abbey's room. She was sobbing. She overheard her mother talking to Mr. Shine about a divorce.



Chapter 4 Analysis

Noah is learning that being the man of the family is not easy. He has many things on his mind. He has to act like a grown up and must suppress his instincts to get into a childish fight with Jasper, Jr. He has to be interviewed by a reporter about his father and hear and discuss some things about his father that makes him feel uncomfortable. But he follows through because he believes in his father and is proud of him. He also has worries about his parents' relationship. He doesn't want his father's cause to destroy their relationship. He tries to keep a balance between keeping his mother from washing her hands of his father and supporting his him. Noah is burdened with yet another problem and another person to try to comfort—his sister. Abbey overheard her mother talk to the lawyer, Mr. Shine, about a divorce. Abbey is destroyed but Noah has to stay strong for her.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Noah wanted to warn his father that his mother was thinking about divorce. Maybe that would shake him up enough to agree to being bailed out. But he didn't get to see his father because he was being interviewed by a TV station from Miami. Noah went to see Lice and told him that his father would give him his skiff if he agreed to help. After checking out the skiff, Lice agreed to the deal. Noah told Lice that he had to sign a statement that when he worked at Coral Queen, Dusty had instructed him and other workers to dump the sewage in the water.

They passed by Jasper, Jr., and Bull on their way back to the trailer. Jasper hurled some insulting names their way. Lice stopped and confronted Jasper who was obviously terrified. He told him he wasn't calling him names, he meant them for Noah. Lice told Jasper he sounded like his father. He warned Jasper not to call his friend, Noah, any names either. He shoved Jasper over just to make his point.

That night at midnight after his mother was asleep, Noah and Abbey sneaked out of the house. They got on their bikes and headed to the marina. They hid in the brush until they saw some of the crewmen on the Coral Queen wield a large hose. It was the sewage hose. To their dismay, the men hooked it to a container on the shore. They were getting rid of their sewage in the required legal manner. What if their dad had been wrong?

Chapter 5 Analysis

Noah, ever supportive of his father, makes a deal with Lice even though it was difficult for him to give away the skiff he wanted. But he is taking on the role of an adult while his father was in jail. Another problem hits young Noah when he watches the Coral Queen crew dispose of the sewage in the legal way. Now he has to wonder if his father was wrong all along and had made a terrible mistake. How will the youngster handle this revelation?



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Noah and Abbey were caught hiding in the bushes. When one of the guys grabbed Abbey, he was very sorry. She'd been a biter from way back. She chomped down on the man's arm and wouldn't let go. The guy, who was bald-headed and had a big crooked nose, screamed and howled and finally let go of her. He was about to sock her when Noah stopped him with a punch to the face. They hit the dock and ran to their bikes. They had never pedaled their bikes so fast in their lives. They were afraid their mother was awake and had discovered that they were gone. But they sneaked in and went to bed with their mother apparently none the wiser.

The next morning, the story about Paine sinking the gambling book was on page one of the newspaper. Paine was apparently comparing himself to Nelson Mandela and was toying with the idea of a hunger strike. The article wasn't completely negative. Miles had written that Paine was passionate about the environment. Noah felt he was misquoted a bit but his mother assured him that it was obvious that he loved his father and had taken up for him.

Noah visited his father in jail and told him that the crew of the Coral Queen was disposing of the sewage legally. Paine figured it was just a temporary ploy in case the authorities were watching the ship. Paine was pleased to hear that Lice was on board. After he turned the skiff over to Lice, Noah would have to figure out how to explain to his mother why it was missing. He and Abbey were sitting in the skiff in their backyard waiting for Lice to show up. After a while, Noah became concerned and sped over the Lice's trailer on his bike. Shelly was home and didn't know where Lice was. He took her Jeep the night before. The cops found her car abandoned that morning. Some bald-headed guy with a crooked nose and a foreign accent stopped by to see Lice just before he took off. Noah thought to himself that the description matched the guy that grabbed Abbey. Shelly forced Noah to tell her what was going on between Lice and Paine. Noah was shocked when Shelly told him she could help him.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The stakes are getting higher for Noah. There apparently is a dangerous criminal element that is part of the Coral Queen operation. They had almost captured Abbey and Noah and may have abducted Lice. Who these men are remains a mystery but they will figure into the outcome of the story. Shelly, Lice's girlfriend, potentially may represent the help that Noah was seeking from Lice. The introduction of the mysterious thugs adds dimension to the story and intrigue to the plot. Donna is again considering divorce despite the best diversionary tactics of Noah and Abbey. Noah was careful not to mention that Donna had been thinking about a divorce because he didn't want to hurt

his father's feelings. But now that Donna is again considering the possibility, Noah may be forced to tell his father the hard facts about how his activism is impacting his family.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Donna Underwood was born in Kissimmee, Florida, near Orlando. She was briefly married when she was in college to a guy she referred to as a knucklehead. She married Paine the day after her divorce from her first husband was final.

Mr. Shine met with Donna again. He recommended that they have Paine declared mentally incompetent as a strategy to get him out of jail. The good news was she wasn't talking divorce with Mr. Shine. But Noah and Abbey were worried that if she saw the TV interview with Paine in her jail cell, she would be talking divorce. The kids came up with a plot to prevent that. While Abbey screamed at the top of her lungs pretending to have hurt herself when she fell out of bed, Noah climbed up on the roof and disconnected the TV antenna. The screen was blank when Donna clicked on the TV to watch the news that night. But a friend had taped Paine's interview and dropped it off to Donna later. Late that night, after watching the interview, Noah overheard Donna talking to her mother on the phone discussing the subject of divorce.

It was one in the morning but Noah felt like getting away. He rode his bike down to the marina. He spotted the bald guy sitting guard outside Dusty's ticket office. When Noah saw that the guy was asleep, he sneaked past him and onto the Coral Queen. He looked through the crew's log and files and for any scrap of evidence that could help his father. He looked down on the desk and saw that the bald guy was awake. He wouldn't be able to leave the boat without passing him.

Noah found a rack of chips and walked up to the top deck and unceremoniously dumped them over. They made quite a racket and drew the immediate attention of the bald guy. As the bald guy raced up the aft stairs, Noah raced down the stern stairs and onto the deck. He ran for his bike but then saw a police car coming his way. He jumped in his hiding place behind the bushes. In doing so, he banged his head on the sewage tank. It really hurt. Although his head was throbbing, he had discovered something very important. The tank was empty. He checked it out further and discovered that it was rusted out on the bottom. It was a decoy, a complete sham.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Noah is continuing his Sherlock Holmes ways. He feels relieved in a way that the Coral Queen is still dumping its sewage—it proves his father was right. The reader learns a little more about Donna, Noah's mother. She was married briefly before she married Paine. Although she is upset with Paine's behavior she loves him and probably does not want to go through another divorce especially because she has two children with him. But it is understandable that she has conflicts about him and is undergoing a period of uncertainty.

When Noah eludes the bald-headed thug, he demonstrates his quick wit and his ability to think on his feet. His accidental discovery that the sewage tank is empty when he accidentally banged it with his head adds a comedic touch to the story.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

While Donna was out shopping, Noah watched the TV interview. It wasn't as bad as he thought. His lawyer appeared with him and described Paine as a "pillar of the community." (83) Mr. Shine dropped by to see Donna. He wouldn't tell Noah what he wanted to talk to Donna about and wouldn't confirm whether Donna was seeking a divorce. All he would tell Noah was that he had some good news for his mother. After the lawyer left, Shelly came speeding up in her Jeep and ordered Noah to get in. He was afraid not too but more afraid when he saw a gun lying on the counsel. Shelly had her sunglasses on but Noah could tell she'd been crying. She told him that blood was found in the interior of the Jeep. She thinks that whoever kidnapped Lice probably killed him and that it involved Paine and the Coral Queen.

Shelly told Noah to relax. The gun was really a lighter. She explained that Dusty netted \$10,000 each night. If Dusty got word that Lice was going to help Paine put him out of business, he'd have good reason to knock Lice off. Shelly told Noah that she still planned to help him, especially now that Lice was missing. She had charmed Dusty into giving her old bartending job back and she was scheduled to start the next night. She'd be going undercover to nail Dusty. Noah was afraid she'd be in danger but Shelly assured Noah she'd be fine—she knew how to handle Dusty.

That night Noah had a horrible dream. He was fishing and was caught up in a monster wave. But suddenly it wasn't a dream and someone was holding on to him. It was his father. He was in his orange jumpsuit. He told Noah he had no choice but to escape. Noah told him that he'd better try out his story on Noah before he told his mother.

Chapter 8 Analysis

But the danger for Noah and his sister is escalating when Shelly reveals that she thinks Lice may have been murdered. It is becoming apparent that things are getting to be too much for a youngster to handle. There is no way a young boy like Noah could battle kidnapers and murderers. With that in mind, Shelly comes to the rescue. The author brings Shelly in as a capable adult who will be able to help young Noah. The chapter ends in several cliffhangers. The reader doesn't know if Lice has been murdered and doesn't yet know what dangers will face Noah and Shelly and how she will be able to help him.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Paine had slept on the floor next to Noah's bed that night and surprised Donna the first thing in the morning. She cried at first and they hugged a lot. He apologized for all the grief he caused everyone. He explained that after he had his TV interview, Dusty complained to the sheriff and basically gagged him—he wouldn't be allowed to talk to anyone else in the media. There were a bunch of requests for interviews. He had been stripped of his constitutional rights. After they served him dinner there was a bad accident on the highway and all the deputies ran out. They forgot to lock his cell and he just left. Donna told him that Dusty would drop all charges if Paine agreed to stop spreading lies about him and if he underwent psychological counseling. The sheriff had planned to release Paine that morning. He didn't have to escape but now he was a fugitive.

Donna wanted him to turn himself in. Just then a car door slammed and Abbey saw that it was a cop. Paine ran out the back door. As it turned out, the cop was just returning his belongings. Apparently, the sheriff was glad that he was gone. Noah found his dad on Thunder Beach. He told him that he had confirmed that the Coral Queen was still dumping sewage in the marina. Noah told his father that Lice was missing and that Shelly thought he might have been murdered.

Noah tried to coax Paine into coming home but he was afraid that it was a set-up. Noah finally had to lower the boom and tell him that Donna was thinking about divorcing him. That upset him and he promised to come home. Noah got on his bike and headed home but his trip was interrupted. He was assaulted by Jasper, Jr., and Bull who beat him up. When Noah collapsed on the ground, Jasper, Jr., kicked him.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Paine escaped from jail but didn't have to go to the trouble because he was going to be released. Paine is not presenting the best role model for his children, especially for Noah. Although he's acting out of principle, he's not teaching his son that to make a difference, one has to go about making changes in the right way—not by breaking the law. Paine still has a chance to redeem himself in Noah's eyes. When he hears that Lice might be dead, he takes responsibility for it. If Lice is alive, perhaps Paine can save him and win the respect and admiration of his wife and children.



Chapters 10 and 11

Chapters 10 and 11 Summary

Chapter 10

Noah hid his bruises from his parents. Paine was placed under house arrest until the Coral Queen case was settled. He wore an electronic ankle bracelet so they could keep track of him. Someone was always home with Paine to make sure he didn't try to cut his bracelet out. Shelly dropped by one afternoon. She said the boat was at it again—dumping the waste right in the marina. They didn't even try to disguise it. The big bald-headed thug was from Morocco and named Luno and he was Dusty's head security guy. She told Paine not to sink the boat again especially if she's on it.

Later that night Paine promised Donna he'd call the cab company to make sure they were holding his job for him. Noah and Paine told Donna that Dusty was flushing his toilets in the marina again. Donna said that someone will eventually catch him but that somebody wouldn't be anyone in her household. Noah got up the nerve to ask if she was serious about divorcing his dad. She was serious. She loved Paine but he needed to grow up. Abbey was feeling ill earlier that night so Donna went into check on her. Suddenly, Noah heard Donna, sounding very upset, calling for Paine. Paine and Noah both ran to see what was wrong.

Abbey was gone. Her window was open and she was gone. It wasn't a kidnapper Noah said, trying to calm his mother. A kidnapper wouldn't have carefully opened the screen and set it against the wall. He figured where she had probably gone but he kept it to himself. Paine cut the electronic device off his ankle and told Donna and Noah that the video camera was gone. Paine and Noah started to head for the door to look for Abbey. Donna followed them, saying they wouldn't be going without her.

Chapter 11

Donna drove and when they got to the marina, Paine started shining his light on the mangroves but only saw racoons and a heron. When they got to the dock, they stuck together and walked toward the boats. Noah spotted Dusty's long black limo and hushed the others. They hid behind the tank and suddenly heard a man's laughter coming from the ticket office. Donna didn't mess around. She barged into the ticket office and confronted Dusty who was sitting there counting the night's proceeds. Dusty hadn't seen Abbey. He said he'd check with Luno.

Donna forced Paine to apologize to Dusty, per the conditions of his release. Dusty insisted that Noah apologize for giving Jasper, Jr., a hard time. Noah was tempted to say what had really happened but apparently Jasper, Jr., had lied to his father and claimed that it was Noah who had attacked him. Noah saw the look on his mother's face



and knew he had to suck it up. He told Dusty it would never happen again. Luno came barging in. Dusty asked if he'd seen a little girl hanging around that night.

The family and Luno went outside to look for Abbey. Luno scanned the area and said the girl wasn't there and that they should leave the premises. Paine offered a not so subtle warning for Luna and Dusty about Abbey. He'd be back if they had anything to do with her being missing. The family decided to go home. Maybe Abbey was already back there. On the ride home, they saw Abbey wearing her backpack walking toward home. They stopped and everyone laughed. She asked if they were going her way.

Chapters 10 and 11 Analysis

Chapter 10

Paine once again breaks the law by escaping from jail. The incident turns out to be anti-climatic because the sheriff was anxious to get rid of him. He was probably tired of the media attention that Paine was drawing to the jailhouse. The chase is on once again when Shelly confirms that the Coral Queen is blatantly breaking the law and dumping their sewage into the marina. Luna, the bald-headed thug, is identified as a Moroccan which adds to his mystique.

Noah musters up the nerve to ask his mother if she is really considering divorcing Paine. Donna knew that Noah was upset by the possibility but she didn't want to lie to him. She explained her position. She loved her husband but he needed to grow up.

Chapter 11

Donna is determined not to get involved in the controversy but she changes her tune when Abbey is at risk. Donna demonstrates that she is not afraid to confront Dusty when she thinks her daughter is in danger and that he may be behind it. She may soon join Paine, Noah, Abbey and Shelly in their quest to rout the community of Dusty and his gambling boat.

Donna is trying to get things back to normal. She wants to make peace with Dusty because he is a rich and powerful person and could hurt her family. She forces Paine to apologize to Dusty. Noah shows his maturity and understanding of the situation by apologizing for assaulting Jasper, Jr. - which of course didn't happen. But Noah is focused on more important things like where his sister is, what happened to Lice and how to stop the illegal operation of the Coral Queen.



Chapters 12 and 13

Chapters 12 and 13 Summary

Chapter 12

Paine and Donna were so relieved to see Abbey that she wasn't punished. The next morning, Abbey played the video tape she made showing the crew dumping the sewage in the marina. Unfortunately, the film was so blurry and shaky that it was difficult to make out exactly what was taking place. A deputy stopped by and Paine and Noah rushed to the bedroom to clamp Paine's ankle bracelet back on. They got the bracelet back on just in the nick of time. But the deputy asked Paine to come with him.

Paine got his job back at the cab company but he wouldn't be able to start right away. He was back in jail. He was charged with tampering with the court-ordered monitoring device - his ankle bracelet. Either the bracelet sent a signal or Dusty ratted on him—either way he was back in the slammer. Noah visited Paine who wasn't in a very good mood. He'd only have to stay 48 hours but he wasn't happy to be back there. Paine told Noah he was done with Dusty and the Coral Queen. All he wanted was to be home and have at least a semi-normal existence. Abbey's little adventure had convinced him.

Noah and Abbey had a picnic lunch on Thunder Beach. A bright red speed boat was coming their way. As the boat neared the shore, the woman—Shelly—bopped the guy that was driving the boat in the head with a beer can. She hopped on the beach and explained that the driver had sort of asked her for a date but needed to be a bit more mannerly about it. Noah waded out to get the floating beer can. When he returned, he wreaked from the dirty water. Shelly told the kids the water was being polluted by the Coral Queen's sewage. Shelly said that a civilian worker at the Coast Guard station, Billy Babcock, had a gambling addiction and owed a lot of money to Dusty. Instead of repaying him, he was tipping him off every time a complaint was registered against him and an inspection was planned.

Just then a Parks Department truck drove up. The officer exited his car carrying some signs and a hammer. He told the kids not to go in the water. He was posting signs warning that the water was contaminated from human waste. Noah and Abbey decided not to tell their mother or father. They planned to handle this on their own.

Chapter 13

When Paine got out of jail, he was hired on by Tropical Rescue, a company that towed in tourists who ran out of gas or were otherwise stranded. It wasn't his thing but he got to use a twenty-four-foot outboard with a powerful engine—which is what drew him to the job. The dumb tourists who got stranded irritated him but the job was far superior to driving a cab. Noah and Abbey went to see Shelly, reminding her that she offered to help them. She was afraid that if they killed Lice, they might kill her and the two kids.



But Noah and Abbey were adamant. They were determined to put Dusty out of business and they needed her. They explained their plans and that all she had to do was flush and flush and flush again.

On the way back, Noah and Abbey were attacked by Jasper, Jr., and Bull. Jasper, Jr., shoved Noah onto the ground. But Bull was very sorry he was involved because Abbey chomped down on his earlobe and wouldn't let go. Jasper, Jr. put Noah in a headlock, promising to break his neck unless Abbey let go. Then a man's voice was heard ordering Jasper, Jr., to let go of Noah. It was a stranger, an old man with silver hair who looked like a pirate. He told Abbey to let go of Bull's ear and warned Jasper, Jr., to never bother the two kids again. The stranger told Noah and Abbey to get home. He had more to say to Jasper, Jr., and Bull.

Chapters 12 and 13 Analysis

Chapter 12

The plot thickens. With new evidence that the Coral Queen is polluting the marina, Noah and Abbey decide they have to deal with the problem on their own. Their father is in jail and the news would be upsetting to their mother. The subject of a gambling addiction is now an issue in the story. A worker at the Coast Guard is so addicted to gambling that he's run up a tab he can't pay. Dusty agrees to forgive the debt in exchange for heads-up from the man as to planned inspections by the Coast Guard. It's a lesson for young readers to understand the impact that addictions can have on people and their lives and even their communities. The kids feel compelled to stop the gambling boat's operation because the sewage has become a real threat. Paine showed where his heart really is. When Paine's little daughter was in danger, the pollution problem was no longer his top priority.

Chapter 13

Another mysterious character is introduced in this chapter. The man came to the rescue of Noah and Abbey. The man wouldn't identify himself. Perhaps he's an activist. He apparently is on the side of the Underwoods. Could he even be the long-missing Grandfather Bobby? Noah and Abbey have a plan to shut down the Coral Queen. They haven't revealed what it is only that Shelly's role is to flush a lot. The reader must assume that the kids want Shelly to keep flushing the toilets on the boat so that Dusty can be caught in the act.



Chapters 14 and 15

Chapters 14 and 15 Summary

Chapter 14

Noah and Abbey combined all their money and came up with fifty-seven dollars and sixteen cents which they would spend all on dye. They decided to buy fuchsia dye, perfect for Operation Royal Flush. They would buy food dye because it wouldn't be harmful to the animals. When they left the store, Bull was standing outside. They were frightened at first, but he said he just came by to say he was sorry and that he and Jasper, Jr., were wrong all the times they had hassled Noah. Apparently, the old stranger had scared him into apologizing.

The kids went to see Shelly to firm up final plans for that night. They showed her the 34 bottles of dye they had purchased. She warned them that the squeeze bottles would take quite a bit of time to empty into the toilets and flush away. Noah suggested that she hide him on the boat somewhere so he could help squeeze the dye into the toilets. Since Abbey contributed to the money for the dye, she insisted on being part of the plans.

At the final court settlement, Paine was ordered to pay the entire cost of refloating, cleaning and fixing the Coral Queen. It must have cost a lot because the judge gave Paine five years to pay it off. He also had to agree not to say anything bad about Dusty on TV or to the newspapers.

Chapter 15

That evening, Paine and Donna went on a "date" to celebrate Paine's new job. As soon as they left, Noah and Abbey headed to Rado's house where they borrowed a small dinghy. They drove the boat to the marina and pulled into the mangroves where Noah walked across the thick black roots to the shore. He felt bad leaving Abbey in the boat alone but she said she'd be fine. He'd yell "Geronimo" when he needed her to pick him up.

Noah headed for the docks. He found the two crates that Shelly told him would be there. He pried open the first one. It was full of liquor bottles. The second one was empty. He squeezed inside and pulled the top back in place and waited. He was less than thrilled when he heard Luna's voice coming from nearby. Noah's crate was carried aboard the Coral Queen and plopped down. Twenty long minutes later, Shelly finally showed up and helped Noah climb out and led him to one of the ladies' rooms. She put an "out of order" sign on the door and had him come in. Shelly had half the dye bottles and would deposit them in another restroom. Noah began squeezing the thick gel into the toilet one bottle at a time. After each bottle, he flushed the toilet and cleared the water.



Noah finished emptying all his bottles and was growing tired of waiting for Shelly to get him out. He decided to make a run for it. Just then, an old lady was pounding on the door and pulling on the handle hollering that she had to use the restroom. Noah peeked through the crack in the door and saw the sign on the floor. She spotted him and said if he didn't get out she'd call security. Noah put his shoulder to the door and burst out. The old lady was shouting "catch him" but Noah was short and fast and weaved through the crowd. Two big thugs were suddenly chasing behind him. Noah ran to the top deck and jumped and yelled "Geronimo" as he plunged in the water.

Chapters 14 and 15 Analysis

Chapter 14

The stranger was proving to be a real ally. He had scared Bull into apologizing which was no small feat. Noah and Abbey still had no idea who he was and didn't know if they'd ever see him again. The kids plan to flood the boat's toilet system with bright pink dye and have Shelly flush it into the marina. That way, when the sun comes up the big pink circle around the boat will be evidence that the gambling boat is still dumping sewage. Paine has to pay a big bill for sinking the boat. Hopefully, once Dusty is finally caught for his illegal activities, Paine will be excused from the court-ordered payment.

Chapter 15

Shelly had devised a brilliant way to get Noah on the boat. However, the exit part of the plan was not as well-thought out. After Noah emptied all his food color vials in the toilet and flushed them out, he was stuck in the ladies room. He had to make a run for it. It seems that Shelly was either unable to help him or had left him stranded. Noah's escape from the Coral Queen was true to Murphy's Law which says if something can go wrong it will go wrong. There was no back-up plan for the "out of order" sign that fell off the door which started a sequence of events that led to Noah's exposure. The plan was half-baked and placed Noah in danger.



Chapters 16 and 17

Chapters 16 and 17 Summary

Chapter 16

As Noah swam away, Luno was on the top deck hollering at him to stop. He kept diving underwater to swim, coming up for a breath and looking for Abbey and then diving back down. He was underwater when he hit something that felt like a wall of blubber. He was flung out of the water and saw a massive brown figure pushing away at an incredible pace. It was a manatee. Noah resumed swimming and the thought ran through his mind that sharks also patrol the waters at night. Finally, through his watery, blurry eyes he saw Abbey and the dinghy. He climbed in the boat and tried to re-start the engine which had stalled. As he made repeated attempts to start the engine, Luno spotted them with his flashlight. They were drifting toward the dock where Dusty had joined Luno who was now pointing a gun at them. Noah put his hands up and gave up. He jumped on top of this sister to protect her.

Noah and Abbey waited for the gunshot but it never came. They peeked over the side of the dinghy and saw that there was a third person on the dock who was pounding on Luno. It was the pirate guy who had come to their rescue. The kids took off on the dinghy but mid-way home, the engine threw a piston and conked out. Their timing was bad because a storm was brewing. After a short rain shower, the boat drifted off the coast. Both kids eventually fell asleep.

In the morning, several planes passed overhead but didn't spot the small dinghy. They were in deep water, probably fifty to sixty feet. Soon a boat was heading right at them. As it pulled closer, they could see that it was Paine and the pirate stranger. Paine helped the kids onto the boat. He turned to the pirate and introduced him to Noah and Abbey. It was Grandpa Bobby.

Chapter 17

Noah called the Coast Guard and reported the sewage dumping by the Coral Queen. He told them his name was Paine Underwood and to look for a long purple trail in the water. He called Miles Umlatt at the Island Examiner with the same information. Abbey told Grandpa Bobby that for the last ten years, everyone thought he was dead. Grandpa Bobby explained that he hired on to captain some trips to South America. The first few trips went fine but on the third one, he realized the men who hired him were smuggling emeralds in the cargo. It was a dangerous situation and he had to go underground. The men tried to kill him and stole his fishing boat, the Amanda Rose. Ever since then, he was trying to track the men down and get his boat back.

Another American had stolen Grandpa Bobby's wallet and had it on him when he was killed. That's why the State Department thought Grandpa Bobby was dead. He didn't



want to come back and expose his family to the danger he was in. He didn't call Paine to tell him what happened because Paine was just the type of guy who would drop everything and take off for South America to find him. What made him come back was when he saw Paine's interview on TV in a bar one night. He decided he needed to help his son and stowed away on a yacht heading for Florida.

After he got to Florida, he caught up with the news on his son and decided to follow Noah in case he was impulsive like his father and grandfather. Paine and Donna took off for the marina after their date when they discovered that Noah and Abbey weren't home. On their way down, they ran right into Grandpa Bobby who was running down the middle of the road. After Noah filled everyone in on Operation Royal Flush, the family headed to Thunder Beach.

Chapters 16 and 17 Analysis

Chapter 16

Once again the stranger comes to the rescue of Noah and Abbey. Noah's unplanned departure from the Coral Queen continued to have unexpected consequences. The dinghy totally conked out and the small boat was drifting out to sea. And for the second time within 24 hours, the stranger pirate came to the rescue. Paine and the stranger located the kids in their boat that had been set adrift. Paine tells the kids that the pirate stranger is Grandpa Bobby who everyone thought was dead. From his tale of adventure after leaving Florida, it is obvious where Paine gets his erratic nature from. It seems as though Noah and Abbey have inherited the same genes based on their willingness to take risks for something they believe in.

Chapter 17

The mystery of Grandpa Bobby's absence is explained. It seems as though he has a lot in common with his son as well as his grandchildren. They are all adventurers and risk-takers and people who believe in causes. Just as Paine had given up his cause for the sake of his family, Grandpa Bobby stayed away from the family so he wouldn't involve him in his dangerous situation. Noah shows that same spark in his protectiveness of his sister. Grandpa was compelled to come back and help the family when he discovered that they were in trouble. While they are a family of risk-takers, they are also a very caring family whose top priority is the well-being of one another.



Chapters 18 and 19

Chapters 18 and 19 Summary

Chapter 18

The food coloring wasn't as bright as Noah hoped but it still showed a stream of color from the Coral Queen to Thunder Beach. Donna was upset with the evidence of the sewage dump. She said that Dusty should be stopped and that someday the authorities will catch up with him. After a while, a Coast Guard helicopter was circling over the area. One of the officers on board was video taping the purple stream. Dusty had finally been caught. Noah and Abbey went to visit Shelly to thank her and tell her that the Coast Guard had busted Dusty. Inside the trailer the kids were surprised to see two men passed out on the living room floor. One was Billy Babcock who she got drunk and brought home so he wouldn't warn Dusty and the other man on the floor was Lice.

As it turned out Lice was spooked by Luno. When the thug came to see him, he thought Dusty was on to the deal he made with Paine. Afraid of what they'd do to him, he just took off. When he ran out of money, he realized how much he missed Shelly and came back. When Lice came back and saw Billy on the floor, he went into a jealous rage and Shelly had to conk him on the head to stop him. He apologized for his behavior. He grabbed onto the aquarium when he tried to get up and pulled the entire thing on top of him.

On the way home, Noah and Abbey encountered Jasper, Jr., and Bull. Abbey wanted no part of them and went on home. But Noah was annoyed by the names that Jasper, Jr., was hurling at him. He stopped and demanded an apology. At first Jasper, Jr., was his old belligerent self until Noah flashed the gold necklace that his grandfather had just given him. Jasper, Jr., and Bull recognized it as the necklace the old pirate was wearing. Jasper, Jr., backed off and begrudgingly apologized to Noah.

Chapter 19

The lead story in the Island Examiner was the revelation about the Coral Queen's pollution violations. The Coast Guard was conducting a probe into the matter and while the investigation was going on, the boat was shut down and could not operate. Paine refused to be interviewed. He really didn't have to be—everyone in town knew that he'd been right all along. Grandpa Bobby stayed a week and did everything with the kids—snorkeled, went crabbing, found coins on the beach with a metal detector. Then he announced he was returning to South America. Everyone wanted him to stay but he said he had some business to clear up but he would be back someday.

Abbey was the most upset. Grandpa Bobby gave her a pair of emerald earrings to remember him by. He told Abbey she was as pretty as her grandmother. He wished she could have known her. Grandpa Bobby got choked up thinking about his late wife. He



darted outside and soon Paine was by his side, comforting him. It was the first time that Noah had thought about what his father had gone through. He lost his mother when he was just a kid. It had to break his heart and made him feel like part of him was missing. Maybe that was why he couldn't stand to see injustice. Then Paine had the news ten years ago that his father was dead. He understood his father right at that moment more than he ever had.

The day before Grandpa Bobby left, he took Noah fishing. He told him he would keep looking for the Amanda Rose until he found her. The thugs who stole it had painted it and changed her name but he'd recognize her. Noah didn't want Grandpa Bobby to leave. Grandpa Bobby assured Noah he'd be back and that he never broke his promises.

Chapters 18 and 19 Analysis

Chapter 18

Donna shows that in spirit she agrees with her husband's strong feelings about the sewage dumped by the Coral Queen. When she sees first hand the bright pink dye coming from the boat and streaming to the beautiful Thunder Beach shore, she feels hurt and anger. She can relate to the feelings of her husband and children but as a mother, her first priority had always been the welfare of her children. With her husband off in jail, she could not afford to join his crusade and abandon her children. But Donna finds the pollution just as deplorable as the others do. Grandpa Robert has far-reaching impact. Even just the sight of his necklace is enough to scare Jasper, Jr., and Bull into better behavior.

Chapter 19

Noah realizes that his grandfather and father have both suffered greatly from loss in their lives. His grandfather lost his wife when Paine was very young. And, of course, Paine lost his mother very early. For the past ten years, Paine thought he had also lost his father. Noah can't imagine what it would be like to lose either of his parents. Noah shows his maturity by the empathy he has for his father and grandfather. He figures his father may have reacted to injustice so strongly because of the early loss of his mother. It wasn't fair for a young boy to lose his mother. It probably caused a hole in his heart and he set out to make other things right—things that he had control over unlike the death of his mother.



Chapters 20 and 21

Chapters 20 and 21 Summary

Chapter 20

Paine received a check from the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary for \$1,000 for reporting the Coral Queen. He hadn't reported it, he told the officials. They said that whoever reported it used his name. They told him to keep the money. He didn't know that Noah had used his name when he called them. A group of fishing guides petitioned the Post Guard to reissue Paine's captain's license. The Coast Guard agreed to return the license to Paine after he finished an anger management course.

But a few weeks later, there was more trouble. Noah came home to find several doors with big holes in them. From the size of the holes, it looked like they had been punched in by his father. Donna told Noah that Paine had gotten some bad news. Noah feared it was bad news about Grandpa Bobby but it was about Dusty. His lawyers worked out a deal with the authorities and he was going to be allowed to open up the Coral Queen that evening. Paine was lying on the couch with his hands in casts. Paine learned that a group of young federal prosecutors had partied on the boat. Dusty took some photos of these guys with some exotic dancers and blackmailed them into turning their heads the other way. Luno was sent back to Morocco in case the Feds were looking for him. Dusty planned to hold a fund-raising dinner for the Save the Reef Foundation. Paine heard all this from Shelly.

In the middle of the night, Noah woke up to the sound of sirens blaring. He ran into the living room to find two detectives interrogating Paine. They asked him for his whereabouts earlier that evening. He said he was home and with two broken hands he was not able to drive anywhere. He was their prime suspect, the cops told him, for arson. The Coral Queen had been burned down.

Chapter 21

A grand reopening party was held on the Coral Queen. The first explosion occurred around 3 am after everyone had left the boat. The boat caught fire and was engulfed in flames in less than an hour. Everything was destroyed. Dusty guessed it was Paine because of their prior history. Paine confirmed to Noah that he had absolutely no involvement in the arson. Noah and Abbey believed him because he may have done whacky, crazy things but he never lied to them.

The cops were going to get a warrant to have Paine's casts taken off. They suspected that his hands weren't broken but rather were burned from the fire he started. Donna showed the cops the statement from the hospital emergency room which indicated he was treated for fractures not burns. And the timing on the statement showed that his



injury occurred sixteen hours before the boat burned down. The cops left and never came back.

On the same day that Paine got his captain's license back, the final report on the fire was issued by the Coast Guard. Jasper, Jr., and Bull sneaked on the boat that night after everyone left. They were going to have their own private celebration with liquor and cigars. Unfortunately, they lit their big cigars in the same place where Dusty stored surplus boxes of fireworks. Jasper, Jr., lit a cigar and started hacking and coughing. The lit cigar flew across the room and landed in the fireworks. One bottle rocket after another began igniting. Soon flames were all over. Jasper, Jr., lied to the cops but Bull told them the whole story. More trouble for Dusty was that the authorities found a lock box that made it through the fire and contained over \$100,000, money he skimmed from his profits and didn't report as income. The IRS was now investigating him.

In September, the Underwoods received a picture of a rain forest and a letter from Grandpa Bobby. He had a hot lead on the Amanda Rose and with any luck he and his boat would be homeward bound soon. The family went fishing on the skiff like they used to. They motored past the area where the Coral Queen had been moored. There were only a few remnants left of the boat most had been towed away. It was obvious that the fish population had increased in the clear blue water of the marina.

Chapters 20 and 21 Analysis

Chapter 20

Noah learns that it's possible to buy your way out of anything—even criminal prosecution. Dusty paid off the federal authorities to look the other way and allow him to continue his polluting ways. Dusty took it a step further by blackmailing a group of federal prosecutors who he photographed with some exotic dancers. Noah is no doubt disillusioned because he worked so hard and took so many risks to see that Dusty's operation was shut down. But all that effort was for nothing because Dusty bribed the officials who should have stopped his operations. The chapter ends in a cliffhanger. Someone burned down the Coral Queen and it wasn't Paine because he's laid up with broken hands and it wasn't Noah or Abbey. Grandpa Bobby is in South America unless he sneaked back but he's not a criminal and probably wouldn't commit arson. Could it be Lice and Shelly? They're a little on the shady side. Luno wouldn't be above committing arson although he was supposedly sent back to Morocco. Donna was very upset about the pollution but would she commit arson? What about Jasper, Jr., and Bull? They're certainly trouble-makers.

Chapter 21

The arsonists were Jasper, Jr., and Bull. Although the fire was started unintentionally, it was their negligence that was to blame. Noah and Abbey felt gratified to finally see that the boat would no longer operate and pollute the beautiful water of the marina. It was a long struggle but finally the truth came out. Dusty was a felon and a tax evader and a



polluter. He will probably not only be paying some hefty fines, but he might have to spend some time in jail. Noah and Abbey feel pride for their father who had been passionate about a good cause and wasn't in it for fame or fortune. He was trying to do the right thing for his community and for the animals of the marina.



Characters

Noah Underwood

Noah Underwood is the young protagonist in the story, "Flush." Living in the Florida Keys, Noah enjoys an outdoor life of fishing, swimming and boating in the marinas and beaches around his small town. He lives with his parents and younger sister and has a fairly carefree life until his father is arrested and jailed for sinking the Coral Queen, a gambling boat that is moored in a nearby marina. Noah is conflicted and confused when he visits his father in the jail. He wants to support his father but he doesn't fully understand his actions.

Noah tries to keep peace between his father and his mother who is upset and on the verge of filing for divorce over her husband's behavior. Noah learns that his father sunk the boat because it was illegally dumping its sewage—including human waste—into the pristine waters of the marina. When Noah realizes the full extent of the damage that this dumping causes to humans and animals alike, he is on board with his father.

Along with his younger sister, Abbey, Noah plans and plots a way to expose the owner of the boat who has bribed officials to look the other way allowing him to continue his illegal operation. Noah and an ally on the boat, bartender Shelly, dumps fuchsia dye into the toilet system of the gambling boat. The next morning it is obvious to the Coast Guard from the bright purple stream coming from the Coral Queen that the owner is guilty of polluting the waters and endangering the community and the animals who live in the marina.

Paine Underwood

Paine Underwood lives with his family in a small town in the Florida Keys. He has worked for years in and around the waters of the Keys. He lost his captain's license because of some of his impulsive actions he took to protect the animals and environment of the beautiful Keys. As the story begins, Paine is in jail and is visited by his young son, Noah. He explains to Noah that the gambling boat, the Coral Queen, has been illegally dumping their sewage each night into the clear waters of the marina where it is moored. It is in strict violation of the laws protecting the waters of the Keys and the sewage will eventually cause harm to the environment and to the humans who play in the water and the marine animals that live there. Since it seemed that the gambling boat owner was able to elude the authorities, Paine saw no other recourse than to sink the boat.

Paine is eventually released and part of his legal settlement is the court-ordered repayment to the owner of the boat for refloating and repairing it. The owner claims that he is not dumping sewage. Paine and Noah and his daughter, Abbey, are all of one mind and each in their own ways go about proving that the owner continues to dump



sewage into the marina and by doing so endangers the community and the environment.

Paine has had an on-going problem with controlling his anger and channeling it in a positive way. When he learns that his young daughter is in danger due to her efforts to expose the gambling boat owner's culpability, he realizes that his first priority must be the protection of his son and daughter. He feels guilty for exposing them to danger. In the end, the kids do expose the owner for his illegal practices. Paine tells his family that he is going to cut back on his activist ways and concentrate on his family which is the most important thing in the world to him.

Abbey Underwood

Abbey Underwood is Noah Underwood's younger sister. She helps her brother in a plot to shut down the Coral Queen gambling boat which is polluting the water in the marina where it is moored.

Donna Underwood

Donna Underwood is Noah Underwood's mother. She is torn between her love for her husband and her worry that he is placing his family in jeopardy by his activism.

Grandpa Bobby

Although federal authorities notified Paine that his father was dead ten years before, he suddenly shows up on the scene. He was working under the radar down in South America but returned when he learned his son was in trouble.

Dusty Muleman

Dusty Muleman is the greedy, corrupt owner of the Coral Queen, a gambling boat moored in a local marina. He has ordered his crew to dump sewage from the boat into the marina each night in order to save money.

Lice Peeking

Lice Peeking is an old drunk and former employee of the Coral Queen. Paine tells Noah to contact him to help in the plot to shut down the Coral Queen. But Lice goes missing and is feared dead.



Shelly

Shelly is Lice Peeking's girlfriend. When Lice goes missing, Shelly steps in to help Noah and Abbey in the plot to shut down the Coral Queen.

Jasper, Jr.

Jasper, Jr., is Dusty Muleman's son. He is a hateful bully and is always beating up on Noah. Ironically, it is he and his friend, Bull, who accidentally burn his father's boat down.

Bull

Bull is the best friend of Jasper, Jr. One day, he and Jasper harass Noah and Abbey. He is sorry, however, when Abbey chomps down on his earlobe and refuses to let go.



Objects/Places

County Jail

Noah Underwood visits his father, Paine Underwood, in the county jail. Paine was arrested for sabotaging and sinking the Coral Queen, a local gambling boat.

The Marina

The Coral Queen is moored in a local marina. The boat's crew dumps sewage each night directly into the clear waters of the marina. Eventually, the sewage pollutes the marina and the surrounding waters.

The Underwood Home

The Underwood family lives in a middle-class neighborhood in a small, unnamed town in the Florida Keys.

Lice Peeking's Trailer

Lice Peeking and his girlfriend, Shelly, live in a rundown trailer in a low-class trailer park in the small town where Noah lives.

Coral Queen

The Coral Queen is a gambling boat that is moored in a local marina. The Coral Queen illegally dumps its sewage into the marina each night.

Snake Creek

Noah, his friends and his sister like to fish in Snake Creek. His mother and father sometimes take Noah and Abbey on fishing expeditions in the creek on their small skiff.

Thunder Bay

Noah and Abbey like to spend time on the beautiful surf and sand of Thunder Bay. The bay becomes dangerously polluted from the nightly sewage dump by the Coral Queen.



The Amber Rose

Grandpa Bobby has spent that last ten years in South America. The authorities thought he was dead but he was living undercover, trying to track down the thugs who stole his fishing boat, the Amber Rose.

The Emerald Earrings

Abbey is upset when Grandpa Bobby announces that he's returning to South America. Grandpa Bobby gives Abbey a pair of beautiful emerald earrings to remember him by.

The Fuchsia Dye

Noah and Abbey plot to expose the Coral Queen's sewage dumping by filling the boat's plumbing system with bright pink dye. When the toilets are flushed into the marina, the stream of tell-tale fuchsia dye emanating from the boat provides evidence of their illegal practices.



Themes

Standing Up for Ones Values

Probably the main theme that emerges from the book, "Flush," is the importance of standing up for what you believe in. Although Paine Underwood is a passionate man and does stand up for what he believes in, sometimes his over zealousness gets him into trouble. But the point is that if a person has principles, they are often as important to him as his life and supersede man-made laws and regulations.

Paine was a nature lover all his life and worked in jobs that involved fishing and the waters that surrounded the Florida Keys. The waters were his environment, the world he had known and loved all his life. He loved the clear water and the marine animals that populated it. He was outraged whenever he saw humans damaging or destroying this pristine domain. He felt it was his responsibility to defend the nature he so loved and was willing to sacrifice himself to do so.

It was that spirit that led Paine to sabotage the gambling boat that was dumping sewage—including human waste—into the marina in which it was moored. He could not bear to see the money-grubbing owner of the boat contaminate the water and make it unsafe for man and animal alike. He sunk the boat and proudly sat on the shore, waiting to be arrested. He refused to be bailed out so that he could make his point more emphatically.

Paine taught his son a lot about standing up for one's principles. Although at first Noah was embarrassed by his father's incarceration, in the end he was proud of him and the fact that he had backed a good cause and remained undeterred no matter what the odds.

Anger

The story, "Flush," begins with the protagonist, young Noah Underwood, visiting his father, Paine, in the county jail. It turns out that Paine became enraged with a gambling boat owner who was dumping his sewage—including human waste—into the crystal clear waters of the marina in which the boat was moored. Paine was so angry that he sabotaged the boat and sank it in order to put it out of operation.

When Paine's case is ultimately resolved, part of his punishment is to undergo psychological counseling to control his anger. It seems that the sinking of the gambling boat was not his first brush with the law. Paine was an outdoorsman and a lover of nature. Whenever he observed threats to animals or the environment, his temper was sent over the boiling point. When the Carmichael family moved to Florida, they parked their huge motor home along the highway where Paine spotted Mr. Carmichael beating his dogs. Paine went into action, flattened the tires on the motor home and took the dogs to a shelter. Paine lost it another time when a fisherman was illegally casting gill



nets into the ocean where sea life including turtles and sharks were at risk if caught up in the nets.

When the gambling boat owner bribes the authorities to let him continue operations, Paine is so angry that he punches in every door in his house. He fractures both hands and can't work because his hands are both in casts. The Coast Guard agrees to re-issue his captain's license only if he agrees to attend and complete an anger management course. In the end, Paine learns that anger is only valuable when it is channeled into positive actions that right a wrong without breaking the law.

Understanding Others

Noah Underwood, the young protagonist in the story, "Flush," is naturally upset when his father, Paine, is arrested and incarcerated. He is confused and conflicted and feels a measure of embarrassment because he lives in a small town and everybody will know that his father's in the slammer. It is only natural for Noah to worry about being harassed and teased by other kids about his father. Noah is a sympathetic young boy and is, in some ways, mature for his years. However, he is still a child and is hurt that his father is in trouble.

This story is part mystery and part adventure but it also enters into relationship issues. Noah's realization that his father had suffered great loss as a youngster is an important part of the story. His mother died from an illness when Paine was just a young kid. When Noah stops and absorbs how her death had to impact his father, he has greater insight into his father's character and motivations behind his actions. Noah tries to imagine what it would be like to lose one of his parents. He can barely even think about it. His father must have gone through life feeling like a part of himself was missing. Perhaps that's why his father had always been so concerned with justice. He was unable to do anything to save his mother. But by fighting for justice in other matters, matters which he might have some control over, in some way may make up for the injustice of growing up without a mother.

When Paine learned ten years before that his father might be dead, it only added to Paine's agony. He sees the same sorrow in his grandfather who lost his wife, Paine's mother, when he was a young man. Noah's father and grandfather were both strong men who, in the opinion of some, behaved erratically. Realizing the suffering they experienced enabled Noah to have a great understanding and appreciation of both of them.



Style

Point of View

"Flush" by Carl Hiaasen is written in the first person narrative. Noah Underwood is the juvenile protagonist of the story and the story is written from his perspective. By writing from Noah's point of view, the reader has the advantage of knowing how some very adult issues are seen through the filter of adolescence.

Noah is forced to be the peace-keeping arbiter between his father and mother both of whom he loves and he hopes and prays stay together. His parents love each other, but Donna, his mother, is getting fed up with Paine's impulsive nature and over zealousness in the causes that are dear to him and that most recently landed him in the slammer. Noah tells the reader through his thoughts that he, too, is hurt and disappointed and confused about his father's incarceration.

Noah doesn't vocalize his concern because he doesn't want to hurt his father's feelings. He tries to encourage his father to agree to let his mother bail him out but holds back the information that she's thinking about a divorce. But Paine wants to stay in jail to make his point more emphatically and bring publicity to his cause. This youngster is caught in between two people he loves. Noah, whose exact age is not mentioned, appears to be a pre-teen or young teen and the reader can glean from his thoughts that way too much worry and responsibility had been wrought upon him by the adults in his life.

The author chose a perspective that was both interesting and informative. It would appeal to youthful readers as well as their parents who could have some insight into what it's like for a child when he is over-burdened with adult problems.

Setting

"Flush" by Carl Hiaasen takes place in a small unnamed town in the Florida Keys. The protagonist, Noah Underwood, and his family live in what appears to be in a modest, middle class neighborhood. He and his friends and sister spend a lot of time fishing at Snake Creek and snorkeling along the Atlantic shore and swimming in the local marinas where sea life is varied and robust. One of the family's favorite places to picnic is on Thunder Beach. Later, this locale becomes dangerously polluted from sewage washed ashore from the the illegal disposal of sewage into the marina by a gambling boat that is moored there.

The county jail is also a setting in this story. In fact, the story begins with Noah visiting his father, Paine, in the jail. Paine had been arrested for sinking the gambling boat, the Coral Queen, for its illegal sewage dumping practices. Paine recruits his son to help him defeat the gambling boat owner by asking him to contact a sleazy fellow who formerly



worked on the boat. Noah finds the man, Lice Peeking, at his rundown trailer in a local trailer park.

The Coral Queen is a large gambling boat that is the focus of much of the story. The boat is first sunk by Paine and later burned down by the owner's own son. Noah sneaks on the boat and helps expose the owner's illegal operation. The boat is a large three-decker and is moored in the marina. Noah and an ally commandeered several of the boat's restrooms so they can dump and flush bright pink dye into the boat's plumbing system in order to prove that the owner is disposing of his waste in the pristine waters of the marina.

Language and Meaning

Since the book, "Flush" by Carl Hiaasen, is written in the first person and narrated by the protagonist, young Nathan Underwood, there are words and thoughts that are indicative of an adolescent boy. Following are some examples. When Nathan is trying to convince his younger sister that pollution in the marina from raw sewage can make people sick, he tells her: "What Dusty's doing can make you real sick at both ends." (10) When his mother is being overly polite to someone who doesn't deserve it, Nathan thinks to himself, "I felt like sticking my finger down my throat. Mom flashed her fake-polite smile." (44)

Shelly, who helped Noah and Abbey in their plot to expose the illegal sewage dumping, had her own way of speaking. She was a big, brassy blond who had been married multiple times and lived in a trailer park. She was a kind of caricature of a low-class woman who had a difficult history with men in her time and her language matched that image. For example, "That's why history books are full of so much heartache and tragedy. Politicians, dictators, kings, phony-baloney preachers—most of 'em are men, and most of 'em lie like rugs." (32)

The setting of the story is in the Florida Keys. Paine Underwood, Noah's father, has worked jobs involving the ocean and fishing his entire life. The kids go snorkeling and swimming and picnic on the beach. There are quite a few words that are indicative of the area or are of a nautical nature including such terms as: charter boat, manatee, mangrove, mullet, muttonfish, aft, stern, tamarind, mangrove and many more.

Structure

"Flush," by Carl Hiaasen is a medium-sized book that is divided into twenty-one small to medium-sized chapters. The structure of the story is a chronological one and is told in a straight-forward manner. The author uses literary devices such as foreshadowing and cliffhangers that add intrigue and drama to the story. The story begins when the protagonist, Noah Underwood, is visiting his father, Paine Underwood, in jail. The author does not immediately explain why Paine is in jail, allowing for a little interest and curiosity to build among the readers.



The story unfolds as part adventure and mystery. The first fourth of the book explains what Paine was arrested for and why he took the actions he did. This sections shows the struggle that Noah and his younger sister, Abbey, have with their father being in trouble with the law. A period of discovery for Noah and Abbey is featured in the next fourth of the book as they begin to believe in their father and go about trying to prove that their father was right to take the actions that he did.

The last portions of the book describe the operation that the kids implement to stop the illegal operation of the Coral Queen and just as important to prove that their father was right in his claims about the illegal activities of the boat's owner. In the end, the children help expose the owner of the gambling boat as a polluter and tax evader.



Quotes

"She says he's got a tendency to get over-excited, which is the understatement of the century." (Chapter 1, page 5)

"He was a well-known jerk, which I partly blamed on the fact that his parents had named him Jasper. That would be enough to make anybody mean and mad at the world." (Chapter 2, page 12)

"My mother says that being married to my father is like having another child to watch after, one who's too big and unpredictable to put in time-out." (Chapter 2, page 20)

"My father's a large man, very strong, but he says fighting is for people who can't win with their brains." (Chapter 4, page 38)

"I wasn't proud that my dad was sitting in jail, but I knew he was a good person. Even when he flies off the handle, at least he's fighting for something close to his heart." (Chapter 4, page 46)

"My momma used to say, 'Keep your friends close, girl, but keep your enemies closer.'" (Chapter 8, page 91)

"But they've got supercool ways to enlarge the image and make it [video tape] crystal clear. The FBI and CIA do it all the time—they can count the zits on a terrorist's nose from a mile off." (Chapter 12, page 130)

"Gradually the sun changed from gold to blazing pink and seemed to turn liquid as it dimpled the horizon. None of us said a word because we didn't want the moment to end." (Chapter 13, page 157)

"Next thing I remember was me spinning like a top—then shooting upward, launched by some invisible brute force. Flying out of the water, I opened my eyes just in time to see an enormous brown shape, mossy and slick, pushing away at an incredible speed. . .I'd crashed into a sleeping manatee." (Chapter 16, page 188)

"Either that's a ghost, or the government's given us some bad information." (Chapter 17, page 212)

"Being a bartender in the Keys is like being a roofer in hurricane season. You're never out of work for long." (Chapter 18, page 227)

"In the distance, somewhere beyond the Gulf of Mexico, the sun was dropping through a coppery and cloudless heaven. None of us dared to say a word, everything seemed to crystal-still and perfect." (Chapter 21, page 263)



Topics for Discussion

Why did Paine Underwood sink the Coral Queen? What would have been a better way to make his point?

What reparations did Paine have to make for sinking the Coral Queen? Was it fair or unfair and why?

Why did Donna Underwood consider divorcing Paine? What stopped her? How did talk of divorce impact Noah and Abbey?

Why did the authorities think Grandpa Bobby was dead? What was he doing for the ten years he was gone? Why did he return?

What is poetic justice? Why was it poetic justice that Jasper, Jr., and Bull were the ones who burned the Coral Queen down? What other violations of the law by Dusty were revealed after the fire?

What dangers were created by the dumping of sewage into the marina by the Coral Queen? What living things were impacted by this practice?

Why were Shelly and Lice interesting characters? Why was Lice missing? How did Shelly help Noah and Abbey?