

# Hoot

Novel by Carl Hiaasen

## Meet Carl Hiaasen

Carl Hiaasen (hFPE-sEn) is a Florida native to the core. He began writing about his home state at age six, when his father gave him his first typewriter. Over the years, Hiaasen developed the humorous writing style that has made him famous. He is an award-winning reporter and longtime columnist for the *Miami Herald*, as well as being the author of numerous best-selling mystery novels for adults. *Hoot* is his first young adult novel. Much of Hiaasen's writing reflects his deep love of the outdoors. The heroes in his novels are often fierce protectors of the natural habitats and native species in Florida. The villains represent corporate greed and abuse of the environment. A reviewer once noted that Hiaasen “displays no mercy for anyone perceived as being responsible for defiling his home environment.”

## Try a Mystery Novel

What makes a book a **mystery novel**? First, you need a crime or unexplained event. There will be various clues left behind and possible motives for what happened. Suspense will build as further clues are revealed. Characters in the story will try to solve the mystery, but you, as the reader, might figure it out before they do. You can never be too sure of the answer, though—there might be a plot twist that changes everything.

## Read a Great Book

Roy Eberhardt didn't know what he was in for when his family moved from Bozeman, Montana, to Coconut Cove, Florida. He's getting bullied on the bus, but he's used to that. In fact, since his family moves around a lot, he's encountered enough bullies to consider himself "an expert on the breed." It's the stuff that he isn't used to that makes his new home seem strange. For starters, he spies a barefoot boy sprinting alongside the school bus at a speed that would put track stars in state-of-the-art running shoes to shame. Then there's the big, threatening girl who knows too much about him and won't tell him how. Roy needs to find some answers to his questions, but it won't be easy.

From **HOOT**

"Are there any other schools around here?" Roy asked Garrett.

"Why? You sick of this one already?" Garrett cackled and plunged a spoon into a lump of clammy apple crisp.

"No way. The reason I asked, I saw this weird kid today at one of the bus stops. Except he didn't get on the bus, and he's not here at school," Roy said, "so I figured he must not go to Trace."

"I don't know *anyone* who doesn't go to Trace," Garrett said. "There's a Catholic school up in Fort Myers, but that's a long ways off. Was he wearing a uniform, this kid? Because the nuns make everybody wear uniforms."

"No, he definitely wasn't in a uniform."

"You're sure he was in middle school? Maybe he goes to Graham," Garrett suggested. Graham was the public high school nearest to Coconut Cove.

Roy said, “He didn’t look big enough for high school.”

“Maybe he was a midget.” Garrett grinned and made a funny noise with one of his cheeks.

“I don’t think so,” said Roy.

“You said he was weird.”

“He wasn’t wearing any shoes,” Roy said, “and he was running like crazy.”

“Maybe somebody was after him. Did he look scared?”

“Not really.”

Garrett nodded. “High school kid. Betcha five bucks.”

To Roy, that still didn’t make sense. Classes at Graham High started fifty-five minutes earlier than the classes at Trace; the high school kids were off the streets long before the middle school buses finished their routes.

“So he was skippin’ class. Kids skip all the time,” Garrett said.

“You want your dessert?”

Roy pushed his tray across the table. “You ever skip school?”

“Uh, yeah,” Garrett said sarcastically. “Buncha times.”

“You ever skip alone?”

Garrett thought for a moment. “No. It’s always me and my friends.”

“See. That’s what I mean.”

“So maybe the kid’s just a psycho. Who cares?”

“Or an outlaw,” said Roy.

Garrett looked skeptical. “An outlaw? You mean like Jesse James?”

“No, not exactly,” Roy said, though there *had* been something wild in that kid’s eyes.

Garrett laughed again. “An outlaw—that’s rich, Eberhardt. You got a seriously whacked imagination.”

“Yeah,” said Roy, but already he was thinking about a plan. He was determined to find the running boy.

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**T**he next morning, Roy traded seats on the school bus to be closer to the front door. When the bus turned onto the street where he had seen the running boy, Roy slipped his backpack over his shoulders and

scouted out the window, waiting. Seven rows back, Dana Matherson was tormenting a sixth grader named Louis. Louis was from Haiti and Dana was merciless.

As the bus came to a stop at the intersection, Roy poked his head out the window and checked up and down the street. Nobody was running. Seven kids boarded the bus, but the strange shoeless boy was not among them.

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**I**t was the same story the next day, and the day after that. By Friday, Roy had pretty much given up. He was sitting ten rows from the door, reading an X-Man comic, as the bus turned the familiar corner and began to slow down. A movement at the corner of his eye made Roy glance up from his comic book—and there he was on the sidewalk, running again! Same basketball jersey, same grimy shorts, same black-soled feet.

As the brakes of the school bus wheezed, Roy grabbed his backpack off the floor and stood up. At that instant, two big sweaty hands closed around his neck.

“Where ya goin’, cowgirl?”

“Lemme go,” Roy rasped, squirming to break free.

The grip on his throat tightened. He felt Dana’s ashtray breath on his right ear: “How come you don’t got your boots on today? Who ever heard of a cowgirl wearing Air Jordans?”

“They’re Reeboks,” Roy squeaked.

The bus had stopped, and the students were starting to board.

Roy was furious. He had to get to the door fast, before the driver closed it and the bus began to roll.

But Dana wouldn’t let go, digging his fingers into Roy’s windpipe.

Roy was having trouble getting air, and struggling only made it worse.

“Look at you,” Dana chortled from behind, “red as a tomato!”

Roy knew the rules against fighting on the bus, but he couldn’t think of anything else to do. He clenched his right fist and brought it up

blindly over his shoulder, as hard as he could. The punch landed on something moist and rubbery.

There was a gargled cry; then Dana's hands fell away from Roy's neck. Panting, Roy bolted for the door of the bus just as the last student, a tall girl with curly blond hair and red-framed eyeglasses, came up the steps. Roy clumsily edged past her and jumped to the ground.

"Where do you think you're going?" the girl demanded.

"Hey, wait!" the bus driver shouted, but Roy was already a blur.

The running boy was way ahead of him, but Roy figured he could stay close enough to keep him in sight. He knew the kid couldn't go at full speed forever.

He followed him for several blocks—over fences, through shrubbery, weaving through yapping dogs and lawn sprinklers and hot tubs.

Eventually Roy felt himself tiring. This kid is amazing, he thought. Maybe he's practicing for the track team.

Once Roy thought he saw the boy glance over his shoulder, as if he knew he was being pursued, but Roy couldn't be certain. The boy was still far ahead of him, and Roy was gulping like a beached trout. His shirt was soaked and perspiration poured off his forehead, stinging his eyes.

The last house in the subdivision was still under construction, but the shoeless boy dashed heedlessly through the lumber and loose nails. Three men hanging drywall stopped to holler at him, but the boy never broke stride. One of the same workers made a one-armed lunge at Roy but missed.

Suddenly there was grass under his feet again—the greenest, softest grass that Roy had ever seen. He realized that he was on a golf course, and that the blond kid was tearing down the middle of a long, lush fairway.

On one side was a row of tall Australian pines, and on the other side was a milky man-made lake. Roy could see four brightly dressed figures ahead, gesturing at the barefoot boy as he ran by.

Roy gritted his teeth and kept going. His legs felt like wet cement, and his lungs were on fire. A hundred yards ahead, the boy cut sharply

to the right and disappeared into the pine trees. Roy doggedly aimed himself for the woods.

An angry shout echoed, and Roy noticed that the people in the fairway were waving their arms at him, too. He kept right on running. Moments later there was a distant glint of sunlight on metal, followed by a muted *thwack*. Roy didn't actually see the golf ball until it came down six feet in front of him. He had no time to duck or dive out of the way. All he could do was turn his head and brace for the blow.

The bounce caught him squarely above the left ear, and at first it didn't even hurt. Then Roy felt himself swaying and spinning as a brilliant gout of fireworks erupted inside his skull. He felt himself falling for what seemed like a long time, falling as softly as a drop of rain on velvet.

When the golfers ran up and saw Roy facedown in the sand trap, they thought he was dead. Roy heard their frantic cries but he didn't move. The sugar-white sand felt cool against his burning cheeks, and he was very sleepy. \_

### **Keep Reading**

Roy has gone from reading mysteries to being right in the middle of one. But the barefoot boy is just one of the mysteries in Roy's new hometown, where reptile wranglers are listed in the phone book because you just might find an alligator in your toilet. While Roy is trying to find out who the strange boy is, the Coconut Cove Public Safety Department has another mystery on its hands. Someone is sabotaging the construction of a pancake house, and no one knows why. Keep reading to see how the mystery unfolds.