

## I SCREAM, YOU SCREAM

by Terry Black

I swear to God, I had no idea what was going to happen. I know I lied and snuck around and maybe even broke the law, but I never would have wrecked the store and got the cops out here and everything if I hadn't been scared for my life.

See, it all started when I was flipping baseball cards at recess with Joey Daniels, he's my next-door next-door neighbor and best friend even though he's kind of a jerk sometimes. I was trying to get his Darryl Strawberry without losing my Sammy Sosa, but Joey he always tries to distract you at the worst possible moment so he goes, "I know something you don't know."

And I said shut up, but Joey he says he heard a secret from one of the big kids and he's not supposed to tell anyone, not even me. So I go, "What is it?" and he goes, "I'm not telling," and I go, "Come on," and finally he says it's about Fenton's Food Mart on Latham Street, where mom always goes shopping because of the double coupons. And Joey says he knows the reason, the *real* reason, why the only flavor of ice cream they ever have at Fenton's is Praline Peach Delight.

Now, me and Charles, he's my brother, we *hate* Praline Peach, it tastes like frozen vomit, and we always wish they'd get some new flavors in. My mom, she said it's because Mr. Fenton accidentally ordered 100 half-gallons instead of 10 half-gallons, and he can't order any more ice cream until the Praline Peach is all used up. Which'll be never, probably, because nobody wants to buy frozen vomit, least of all my mom.

But Joey, he says that's baloney. What *he* heard is, Mr. Fenton keeps all that ice cream that nobody wants because deep down in the dairy case, under all those praline peaches — and here Joey looks around, just to make sure nobody's listening — deep down in the dairy case is somebody's *dead body*.

And I go, "Come on," and he goes, "I swear," and I go, "Who says?" and he goes, "One of the big kids," and I ask who it was, only Joey he can't tell me because he doesn't want to get beat up, and he probably shouldn't have even said anything.

Then he just goes, "Take your turn," and I missed Darryl Strawberry by, like, a mile because I wasn't even thinking about baseball cards anymore. I was thinking about

what was buried in the dairy case at Fenton's Food Mart, under 100 half-gallons of ice cream.

Well, I tried not to think about it, I really did, but every time we went shopping there was all that ice cream not getting bought, and it was weird because they didn't even mark the price down, they just let it sit there forever in aisle six. Once I tried digging through the cartons myself, but before I could get to the bottom my mom goes, "Howie, what are you doing?" and I couldn't say I wanted to see the dead body under all the ice cream, could I, so I figured I'd just have to wait and think of something else.

And I did, too.

See, I told my mom I was staying overnight at Joey's house, and I packed a bag and said good night but I didn't go to Joey's house. Instead I ditched the bag and hung around Fenton's until right before they closed, around about 10:30, when they were busy checking out all the last-minute customers. And I snuck over to where they keep the dry dog food in those big forty-pound bags, and I squeezed in between two of them and pulled another one up over me.

Then I heard them saying things like, "Good night now!" and "Have a good one," and I heard Mr. Fenton and Hal Barlow counting today's money, twice to make sure, and locking it up in the front office. I was afraid they'd find me and call the police or my mom or something, but pretty soon the overhead lights went out and the front door slammed, and I was all alone in the pet food section of Fenton's Food Mart.

I scrambled out from under the Alpo and looked around. It was gloomy but there was enough light to get around in, because they always leave some of the lights on in case of burglars, which come to think of it meant me, sort of. But I figured I'd be out of there in about two minutes.

Only I didn't figure how *scary* it'd be.

I mean, during the daytime the grocery store is about the most *un-scary* place in the world. All you want is for your mom to grab some donuts or Choc-O-Diles or those Pepperidge Farm cakes with the cool white icing, and all she wants is to buy vegetables or chipped beef or some other stuff I hate. My mom, she says someday I'll change my mind but I go yeah, hold your breath on *that* one. Those lima beans are the scariest things in the store.

At least, in the daytime.

But at night when there's no one around, those shelves and boxes and stacked-up cans are really creepy-looking. You'd swear they have claws and fingers and eyes that see in the dark, like ghosts. I almost screamed at this bent-over bug-thing with a giant mouth, till I realized it was only the machine you put the bag under to get fresh-ground coffee.

Then something went "ungh" and I jumped, like, twelve feet before I realized it was only the air conditioning coming on. I backed into a shelf and knocked over a whole box of Hershey bars, the good kind, without almonds. I probably shouldn't have eaten any but I figured I'd pay for it out of all the reward money I got for finding the dead body under the ice cream.

So I'm going through the store. Aisle three is for soda, beverages, potato chips and snack foods. Aisle four is bread and rolls, hamburger buns, muffins and pastries. Aisle five is spices, condiments, olives, pickles, tomato sauce.

Aisle six is frozen foods.

Jeno's Pizza. Frozen waffles. Peas. Popsicles. Orange juice concentrate. And there on the end, in an unlit corner, in a dairy case that seems to shudder and groan, is 100 half-gallons of Praline Peach Delight ice cream.

I did not want to go there.

Because this wasn't an adventure anymore, it was some awful thing I was stuck doing, about as much fun as homework. I wanted to just take off, but if I came this far and then didn't even look Joey would think I was, like, a total wuss. So I went over to the dairy case and I stood there for about five minutes, thinking, *This better not be a joke, Joey*, and then I reached in and slid the cover open. And boy, was it cold. It was so cold that this fog came out, like in the winter when you can see your breath. Or like in science class, when Mr. Gundry put some dry ice in a bucket of water, only that was actually kind of cool.

So anyway, I reach in and I'm taking out the ice cream. I probably should've brought some gloves, only I forgot, so pretty soon my fingers are all sore and achy and I have to keep blowing on them and rubbing them together. And I'm making, like, this little mountain of ice cream cartons on the floor, and that's when I notice something weird — there's dirt on the floor, like somebody tracked it in or something. I thought maybe it was

me but I looked on the bottom of my shoes and it wasn't me.

So I go, "Oh well," and I keep on pulling out the ice cream. And I was actually getting sort of hungry for ice cream even though it was that Praline Peach Vomit Ripple that me and Charles hate so much, and I thought maybe you could get a banana from the fruit section and some whipped cream and make a banana split or something. And I was so busy thinking about that that I wasn't even paying attention when I pulled up a carton and saw, like, this face looking up at me.

And I go "*Augh!*" and jump back, and I thought maybe I imagined it but I looked back and I didn't imagine it. It was this old guy, he had really gray hair and he was kind of frowning, like he'd got some really bad news right before he kicked off. And you know, up to that moment I wasn't thinking there was really a body, I was thinking I'd go back and tell Joey he's all full of crap because I looked and didn't see anything. So now I'm trying to think what to do, and *get the hell out of there* seems like a really good plan.

But I have to take one last look, just for a second, and this is the part you won't believe even though I swear it really happened. I'm looking at this dead face under the ice cream, it's like really creeping me out, and then all of a sudden, like I wasn't scared enough already, I'm looking down and this dead guy's eyes suddenly *blink*.

Well, I took off. I ran down the aisle toward the front door, only it was locked, so I turned around and ran the other way, and I think I knocked over some Double-Stuf Oreos and I actually stepped on a pack of Fig Newtons, which is no big tragedy as far as I'm concerned. And I'm standing there breathing hard and that's when I hear it: the sound of the dairy case opening up, with a *cre-e-eak* like a coffin-lid getting pushed open.

So now, like, the whole place is locked up and I'm all alone with this dead body that wants to take a little walk. And I hear these footsteps, CLACK CLACK CLACK, and they're coming around the corner. So I run away but I look back and I see this guy, just for a second, before I duck into the aisle with the instant coffee and Kosher foods. And he's, like, out of a movie.

He's really tall, I don't know how he fit under the ice cream, and he's wearing this fancy suit and a big black cape, like he's going to a party or something instead of chasing a nine-year-old around the grocery store. And there's this look in his eyes like he's still dead, you know what I mean, even though he's up and walking around.

And then, this is like the scariest thing all night, I look up into one of those big round mirrors they have because of shoplifters, which I swear I never did that, and I look in the mirror and he's not there. But then I duck my head around and he *is* there. And I'm thinking this is seriously weird, guys, this isn't happening.

So I duck back under the Alpo and I pull a big bag up over me and now I'm just waiting, like forever, I'm trying not to even breathe which is hard when you're really scared. And those footsteps they come right up to me, CLACK CLACK CLACK, and I swear he's gonna get me but then CLACK CLACK CLACK they go away again. So now I've got a minute to think about what's going on.

And I'm kind of adding it up, see, there's this dead guy walking around and he doesn't have a reflection and there's dirt where he sleeps. And I'm thinking about this Dracula movie I saw, and how Dracula has to have, like, Pennsylvanian soil to sleep on or else he'll die. And I'm thinking, suppose you're a vampire and you need a cold dark place to sleep in in the daytime, and maybe you're friends with this guy owns a grocery store like Mr. Fenton. Well, what better hiding place than under 100 half-gallons of ice cream that no one ever gets because it tastes like vomit?

See, it all makes sense. Only that doesn't help me much because sooner or later Dracula he's gonna find me, unless I can figure out a plan. So I'm thinking, *What do I know about vampires?* and I start getting some ideas. Like, they hate garlic, which there's gotta be plenty of in Fenton's Food Mart. And if you make a line out of mustard seeds they can't cross over it, it's like against the law for vampires. And they die if you cut their heads off, though I don't see how that's much help.

So I snuck out of the Alpo again, and I looked around for Dracula but I didn't see him. And I went back over to frozen foods and got some of those garlic sausage pizzas, but I thought I'd better heat 'em up just in case, since Mr. Fenton keeps a microwave up front by the cash register. The only trouble is, when you get to the end of the cooking time it makes this DING! and then Dracula would hear it and he'd know where I was.

Well, luckily, there's these hot dogs you can buy in, like, these foil wrappers. And Mr. Fenton he keeps a little tray over there with ketchup and relish and mustard. So I took some of that mustard and I smeared it on one of those hot dog buns, and I used it to make a little circle around the microwave so Dracula couldn't get me. And then I'm

heating up the pizzas and the microwave goes DING! and Dracula he comes running up only he can't get past that circle of mustard, he just stands there going HISS HISSS with those big ol' vampire teeth so I figure I'm safe. I almost went *NAH NAH nah NAH NAH*, but I figured that'd be pushing it.

So now I'm thinking, all I have to do is sit here until it's daytime again, and then Dracula he'll have to go back into the dairy case or get burnt up like in the movies. And Dracula he must have thought the same thing, because he turns and heads back into the store and I'm going, *Whew, close one*. And I'm thinking I can't wait to tell Joey about all this, he won't even believe it.

But old Dracula, he's trickier than I thought.

See, there's this noise from the back of the store, it's getting closer and closer, it's like something with wheels going RONKA RONKA and I'm like *Uh-oh* and then I see what it is and I just about die. Because Dracula, he's got a big ol' bucket with a mop in it that the janitor uses, and he starts to mop up that mustard from right off the floor!

And I figure, I've only got about twelve seconds before that mustard's all wiped up and I'm, like, Purina Vampire Chow. So I grab one of those garlic sausage pizzas, only it's the wrong kind, it's like Veggie Lover's Pizza and Dracula could care less. And now he's so mad he tries to conk me with his mop, and it snaps right in half against the counter.

And I take off across Fenton's yelling "HELLLP!" which is sort of stupid because who's gonna hear me, anyhow, and I crash into the fruit section, right into that banana crate I was thinking you could make banana splits from.

And Dracula, he's right behind me, and don't ask me why but he's still carrying that broken-off mop. And I'm trying to think how the Lord's Prayer goes because I figure this is it, guys, but all I can remember is "Our father who art in heaven, something-or-other be thy name," and before I can think how it goes, well, Dracula he slips on a banana peel. And he goes right over backwards and somehow he falls on that mop-handle, which is sort of like a wooden stake, I guess, because suddenly it's sticking up out of his chest and he goes "EEEYARGH!", it's like the most horrible scream you ever heard. And then there's this light you can't even look at, it's coming out of his eyes and his mouth and I swear it's bright as daytime, right there in the store.

And then, this is really gross, his whole body it just like melts into this icky mess. You can hardly tell it from the melted ice cream. And I'm thinking, Oh my God, I'm never going to eat any more ice cream as long as I live.

And just then the door busts open and these two cops come in with their guns out and everything, and they're wondering what's going on. I guess somebody must have heard the noise and dialed 911 or something. So here they are, they're looking around, and they see me sitting on the floor in the middle of this giant pile of ice cream, bananas, pizzas, hot dogs, Hershey bars and Fig Newtons even though I don't even *like* Fig Newtons.

And this cop, he looks at me and goes, "You must have been pretty hungry, son."

And I try to explain but no matter what I say, that cop he just won't believe me. And that's why they called you, and that's why we're all here sitting now. But I swear to God, mom, you gotta believe me, I swear that's *exactly what happened*.