

The Great Ice Heist

By Carson Cusick

I know I shouldn't have agreed to join the heist, but come on, can you blame me? I bet you would too if the greatest ice-cream recipe of all time was on the line. Darren, Mia, and I stormed forward into the giant, towering house of the cold-hearted ice-cream thieves, a glint of determination sparkling in our eyes.

Okay, now, let's rewind a bit, back to June 4, 1984, to a little town in Florida called Frozen Falls. It was one of those days in the middle of the summer, when it's so hot you feel like your skin could melt right off your body. On days like those, there's only one cure to the disease known as "heat," and it's soft frozen food made with sweetened and flavored milk fat, more commonly known as "ice cream." As I rode my rusty bike home, a delicious bowl of ice cream was living rent-free in my mind.

To get ice cream, most kids would have to buy ice cream from the noisy Icee Conez Inc. truck. But not me, because my great-great-grandpa was Isaac Cremley, the man with the greatest ice-cream recipe ever created in the history of mankind. If you don't believe me, you'd be super wrong. If you'd ever gotten the chance to try that ice cream, you would probably understand why I decided to do just a *little* bit of breaking and entering and just a tad bit of burglary in order to keep it from getting into the wrong hands. But I'll get into that later. For now, let's get back to that hot June afternoon as I rode my rusty, old bike home.

The ice cream was my family's secret recipe, and it had been passed down through our family for generations. And nobody knew the recipe written down in my mother's recipe book other than my own family. My mom always refused to sell it, and always reminded me never to tell it to anybody.

Okay, we're going to need to rewind once more, a few hours earlier, to the morning of June 4, 1984, when I stumbled through the front doors of Lonnie G. Johnson Middle School with a feeling of dread pulsing through my veins, because I was in summer school. Yeah, summer school. Summer was time for endless lazy days of eating chips, not going to school. Unfortunately, that school year was *not* the best for my grades—and that's putting it lightly. I'm not proud of it, but I just hadn't focused on school that year. However, there was one upside to this whole scenario—my two best friends in the entire world, Darren Longman and Mia Helsh, were in summer school with me.

Mia Helsh was an absolute genius—she had gotten straight A's her entire life. You'd think she'd have no reason to be at summer school. You aren't gonna believe this, but she was there because she *wanted* to be. Can you believe that someone would actually be such a nerdy genius that they'd *request* to spend their three months off school doing *extra* schoolwork? Well, that's Mia Helsh for you.

And Darren Longman? Well, Darren...wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed, even compared to me. He couldn't do any math beyond basic multiplication. But there were a few things he knew a lot about, and one of them was loyalty. He had been my best bud since preschool, and he had never turned his back on me. He also knew *a lot* about *Star Wars*. He knew every piece of *Star Wars* trivia there was, down to every plotline of every obscure comic book. Too bad Yoda's words of wisdom couldn't help him in English class.

Since Mr. Leaundry, our math teacher, allowed us to pick out own seats, me, Mia, and Daren were all sitting in the back on the class, right next to each other. Now, if you've ever been to middle school, which I hope you have, you know how the back of class is. In the front of class, you'll get a twenty-minute lecture from the teacher for chewing a stick of gum. In the back of the class, you can eat a full three-course meal and the teacher will take no notice. Why this is, I don't know. My theory is that once you become a teacher, you lose all vision beyond a certain point, and you can't see the back of class.

But that day, me and my friends were sitting in the back of class as usual. It seemed like a normal, boring day. But that's when *she* walked in. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever laid eyes on. Her long brown hair flowed behind her like a chocolaty wave. She wore a fluffy white sweater and shiny brown boots. In her hair was a headband with a little ice-cream cone with a smiley face on top. Little did I know how much I would grow to hate that stupid smiling cone.

But whoever this girl was, she had put me under her spell. As soon as class let out, I immediately rushed over to talk to her. I strutted up to her locker, my confidence faltering. There were so many thoughts flying through my head, I completely forgot to think about the giant yellow "wet floor" sign right in the middle of the hallway. I slipped right on the giant puddle of chocolate milk in the middle of the hallway, and proceeded to get the sticky, brown liquid all over my brand-new jeans.

Then, the new girl shut her locker and made eye contact with me. I was about to run out of the school and go into hiding. Instead of laughing, the new girl sighed, grabbed my hand, and helped me up.

"I'm Lisa Gooden. I'm new here. You seem nice. I saw you talking with your friends in math class. My family moved here from the big city. Do you mind telling me a little bit about Frozen Falls?" I was at a loss for words. Despite my shocked state, I managed to nod.

"Alright! Can I come to your house after school? Maybe you can tell me all about it," she said.

"Good" was all I could manage to stutter out. She smiled and walked away.

I grinned. "Smoother than ice cream."

So back to where we started. Later that day, I got home, and soon me and Lisa Gooden, the girl of my dreams, were sitting in my living room. I told her all about Frozen Falls, and while I did so, I decided to make us both a big bowl of my family's vanilla ice cream to eat while we talked. Big mistake.

"You were right! This is the best thing I've ever had!" she said through mouthfuls of ice cream. I grinned. "Do you have the recipe!? I'd love to make this at home!" I froze up. *I know my mom said to never give it to anyone, but this is your chance! This is the girl of your dreams, you can't say no to her!* I then made possibly the most foolish decision of my life. Being the dumb lovestruck teenager I was, I let my feelings cloud my judgment and took out a piece of paper and wrote down my family's top secret ice-cream recipe that I was never, ever supposed to share.

After she left, things went on as normal. A few days later on Saturday, I got up and walked downstairs to grab the newspaper. Then I saw it—printed big and clear on the front page, "*Icee Conez Inc. CEO Freddy Gooden Releases Revolutionary New Ice Cream Recipe! Greatest of All Time! Launching June 11th!*" It didn't click in my head right away, until I read the CEO's last name one more time. *Gooden. Where have I...* Then, I took a glance at the picture, and saw a man standing in front of a sign of a little ice cream cone with a stupid cutesy grin. Yup, it's the same smiling ice cream cone on Lisa's headband. Lisa Gooden. Then the light bulb went off, and I realized that Lisa Gooden was the daughter of the CEO of Icee Conez Inc., the biggest ice-cream company in the world, and she had played me to steal my recipe and give it to her dad to sell.

All because I had a stupid crush, I had given up my family's recipe, which was now being sold as someone else's. This recipe was more than just a recipe—it was all my family had. I couldn't just let some sleazy businessman steal my family's heritage to mass-produce and sell! I had to do something! That's why I called an emergency meeting with Darren and Mia the next day. If I wanted to save that recipe, I was going to need some help from the two people I trusted more than anyone else in the world.

We met up at the local pizza shop and I explained my issue. "Beat her up!" Darren said through cheesy mouthfuls of pizza.

"What?! No! What will that solve?! What if you just...talk to her?" Mia said. I shrugged. "Maybe, but it's too late for that now. She already took the recipe." Mia looked thoughtful, and then she said something I would've never expected a goody two-shoes like her to say. "Okay, don't think I'm crazy, but, you said you have it written down on a piece of paper? What if...we stole it back?"

"What?! Even for me, that's a little crazy! That's breaking and entering. We could go to jail!" I exclaimed to her.

"But we'd be quick, in and out. Grab the recipe, and leave. My dad used to work for that guy and took me over to their house for meetings. I know my way around, and I also know they have a vault room on the top floor that might have the recipe in it. We'd have to do it tonight. You said the new product launches June 11th. That's tomorrow."

I thought about it. "Mia. That seems so insane, so crazy, and so illegal, that it just might work. Alright, I'm in. Darren? What about you?"

Darren looked up from his pizza. "Huh? Uh, okay."

That was good enough. "Mia, are you sure about this?"

She put her hand on my shoulder. "Anything for you. Let's go." The night came quickly, and before we knew it, there we all were.

As we stormed through the damp grass and up to the towering two-story Goodman house, I began to realize the gravity of the situation I was in. I was about to commit an actual crime. Did I really want to follow through? Well, no going back now. Mia beckoned for us to enter through the back window.

She threw a rock at it, shattering it open. I winced, thinking for sure it would wake someone up. Nobody came, so Mia lifted me up into the window. Next came Darren, and then Mia herself swung up into the house.

Darren looked at me. "Hey man, uh, if we go to jail for the rest of our lives, just want you to know that you're like, my best friend." I nodded. "You too, Darren. Thanks for sticking with me."

We crept to the staircase in the back of the room, prepared to go up. I stepped up first, crouching slowly. Then Mia. Darren took a large step onto the staircase, and—slipped on a small action figure of the Icee Conez mascot. These people had this stupid smiling cone on everything! Darren began to slip back. If he fell, we were ruined. Somehow, somehow, my instincts kicked in, and I grabbed Darren's hand. I pulled him back onto the stairs and exhaled.

He stood there, shocked, and then flung his arms around me. "Thank you," he muttered.

The three of us tiptoed through, or at least tried to. It was kind of difficult, because, I kid you not, Darren wore *tap shoes* to a heist. He said he chose them because they were black and looked stealthy. Thankfully, we managed to tiptoe past with as little noise as possible and came to another door. "Do Not Enter—Vault Inside," Mia quietly inched open the door, and in front of us was the giant metal vault door that was supposedly holding my family's stolen ice-cream recipe. Mia grabbed my hand and pulled me to the vault. Darren soon followed. Next to the vault door was what appeared to be some sort of clunky computer terminal and something appeared on the screen.

Enter 4-Digit Entry Lock

"It needs a code?! We're doomed," Darren said.

"Wow, never would've expected, a vault doesn't just open right up for whoever walks by. 'Here ya go, steal whatever you want!' Of course it has a code, stupid!" Mia said sarcastically. She went to the keyboard and punched in:

1987

The screen then flashed "CORRECT" in large text. "Boom! That was my dad's employee entry code. Guess they never removed it from the system after they fired him," Mia said. But it wouldn't open.

"Uh, it's still closed," Darren said.

"Thank you, I had no idea, Darren." Mia snapped back.

Then I realized a second prompt had appeared on the screen. It read:

"Do or do not, _____"

"Huh?! What does that even mean?" Mia asked in frustration.

I shrugged. "I don't know! Try 1987 again!" She did. The screen flashed "INCORRECT."

"We're doomed. What else do we try?" Mia asked.

Darren began to speak for the first time in a while. "I don't know what you should try. Well, as a wise Jedi once said, 'Do or do not, there is no try!'"

We spun around to look at him. "Wait. say that again?"

Darren looked at us in confusion. "Do or do not, there is no try? Master Yoda said it to Luke in *The Empire Strikes Back*."

Mia grinned. She punched "THERE IS NO TRY" into the computer, and it flashed "CORRECT!"

"Darren, you genius! Your nerdy space movie knowledge actually saved us!"

Then the vault door slowly began to open. Behind that door was what we had planned for.

Behind that door was my recipe, the one I was stupid to give up. The door slowly opened, and behind that door was absolutely nothing.

The vault was completely empty. No recipe in sight. I fell to my knees. The recipe wasn't here. "What?! No, it's supposed to be here! No! We can't fail! NOOOO!" I screamed, a little too loud.

"Hey, that's what Luke Skywalker said when"

"He found out Vader was his father?" interrupted an unfamiliar deep voice, finishing Darren's thought. I turned around to see a tall old man with black hair. Freddy Gooden. By his side was Lisa Gooden, giving me the death stare. "You kids have thirty seconds to explain why you broke into my house at night, woke me and my daughter up, and somehow opened up the old vault that hasn't been used for years."

"Because your scumbag of a daughter stole our friend's recipe and gave it to you to sell at your stupid ice-cream company! Yeah, we know! That new flavor you're selling? It's all stolen!" Darren yelled at the tall man who could put us all in jail with one phone call. I sighed.

Then Lisa spoke. "What?! I didn't give my dad any recipe! Are you talking about the one you gave me yesterday? I threw that out as soon as I got home! I just took it to be nice! The new ice cream was made by my dad! Why would we put an ice-cream recipe in a *vault*?"

We broke into a house, successfully opened a vault, and went against all of our morals to get some ice-cream recipe that wasn't even there.

"Stay here. I'm calling the police to take you all home. You'll stay the night in the station, and I'll make sure they let you off with a few hours of community service." Lisa and her father walked away to call the police, and the three of us sat in the vault.

"Uh, guys, I just wanted to let you know, I'm really sorry. I made a dumb mistake and roped you both into it and made it worse."

Mia and Darren . . . smiled? They weren't mad! Although they had every right to be, they weren't. Because that's what friends do.

"What do you mean? It was my idea!" Darren chimed in. "I know my mom is gonna kill me, but that was the most fun I've ever had! And it was with the coolest people in the world!"

I laughed. Then, sitting on the floor of the dirty, rat-infested vault, we all hugged. Cheesy, I know, but it was the best ending I could've asked for.

Then, Mia leaned over and once again did something I would've never seen coming. She leaned over and planted a kiss on my cheek. That's when I realized that I didn't need Lisa—the perfect girl had been right next to me the entire time. My friends and I had failed, and yet we were happy and together. And that kiss almost made the ride in the dingy, old cop car to the station tolerable. While I don't recommend you commit any crimes in the near future, I'll tell you one thing I learned from that day.

Friendship is a dish more delicious than any ice cream.