

Chapter 21 - Freddy and Clara go mad!

'Your prize is very simple. You have five minutes in the empty store. You can do exactly what you like.'

Two of the suits looked nervously at each other. Then they smiled again.

The manager stuck his hand out a suit deposited a stopwatch into it.

'Your time starts...NOW!'

They looked at each other.

'Aagghhh!', said Freddy.

'Aaggghhh!', said Wil.

'Oooghgg!', said Clara. 'Trolleys!', said Clara. 'Get trolleys, now!'

They sprinted into the store, which was completely empty, except for a few staff who were dotted about at the end of most of the aisles.

They each picked a trolley from the front of the store, and scooted into the empty space. They stopped. Freddy looked at his watch.

'Four and a half minutes left, let's get busy'.

'Busy with what, though...?' Wil's voice was thin and panicky.

'Come on, just get stuff, things you want, things you need, loads of things, anything. I'm off'. With that, Clara disappeared towards the CDs and books section.

Freddy shot off into fruits and vegetables.

Wil stood there. Numb. He looked around him, desperately. Some of the staff were staring at him as he stood, motionless.

'Go on mate, start moving!', someone shouted.

'Come on love, start here...!' Friendly voices. Trying to help. Still he was rooted to the spot. His lower lip began to tremble. His body started to move, almost involuntarily, first to the left, then to the right, then he pushed his trolley a metre to the front. Then he pulled back again. Unable to move, he grabbed at a packet of nappies which were within his reach. Then he put them back again. No need for those. Another look round. He ran, with his trolley, towards the aisle selling hair care products. He grabbed at a large bottle of shampoo. He started to read the label. *For greasy hair*. 'Is my hair greasy?' He put it back. Picked out one labelled *for frequent use*. 'I don't want to wash my hair every day'. He put it back.

Wil was aware of the commotion going on in other parts of the store. He could hear Freddy racing around the store with his trolley. He could hear Clara, closer to him, methodically placing goods into hers. A regular clicking-clacking sound. The sounds made him even less able to make up his mind about what to do next.

There was a huge crash from the back of the store. More clickety clicking from closer to him. Another crash and a yell from the back. In the distance he saw Freddy come out from the end of an aisle, swinging from the shelving at the end, which gave way as he swung off them, coming smashing to the ground as he passed. A lake of milk formed behind him as he shot up the next aisle.

At the end of four minutes of work, Clara and Wil met up with their hauls, just outside the store.

Clara's trolley was bursting with CDs and DVDs. Despite only having four minutes to load up, she had filled the trolley to the brim with CDs from a section that she liked. She had every title in the Top 100 and another hundred or so titles from the DVD section, including several films which had won awards at the Oscars ceremony the previous night. She sat on top of her trolley in triumph.

Wil was almost crying. In fact he had that look in your eyes that you get when you have cried but the tears have not quite come out of your eye. Full of water, ready to spill out. He just kept control of it and Clara surveyed his trolley from on high.

Three tubes of toothpaste. A child's toothbrush. A girl's hair slide.

'Here, this is for you,' he muttered miserably as he leant down and handed the hair slide to Clara. She smiled. A smile of pity and warmth. He had always been that way, indecisive and naïve. But she liked him for that.

She reached into her trolley and pulled out the first CD that came to hand. *Moodswings*, by Charlotte Church.

Then they realised that Freddy had not yet emerged from the store.

But they could see him in the distance. Or rather closer. Or rather, getting closer. *Quickly*. Or rather they could see his trolley. There was no possibility of seeing Freddy himself as he was hidden behind the most immense mountain of stuff they had ever seen.

Where Wil had been indecisive, where Clara had been precise, well, Freddy had been neither. He had just gone for it. Armfuls of stuff. His trolley was submerged beneath food, bread, rolls and rolls of kitchen paper, a whole tray of large soft drinks, eggs, packets of flour, cereals.

And now he was heading straight for them.

In fact, he had to make a small turn to align himself with the exit, and what had clearly become the end of their five minutes. A suited man with a stopwatch was counting the time down.

'Five, four, three, two, one!', he counted.

On the '*three*' Freddy made to execute the little turn he needed to get out of the store.

There was no way he was ever going to make it.

Well, *he* made it, as he was flung off the back of the trolley through the exit, just as the suit said '*one*'. He slid for several metres along the shiny floor, and ended up at Clara's feet.

But his trolley didn't make it. It just careered straight on. And on. And into the breakfast cereals area. With a mighty crash it exploded into the fragile boxes. Many burst open. The eggs, the flour, everything else he had loaded into, onto and around the trolley piled into the melee. Liquids, solids, mixtures, flew everywhere.

'*Finish!*', said the suit as he clicked his stopwatch to signal the end of the five minutes.

Freddy looked up at them and smiled.

'Let's go home and put on a DVD', he said, looking at Clara.

They laughed. Wil managed a smile. They went home.
