

Chapter 19

In the darkness, Freddy could make out his friends. Emerging from the shadows came a bent old lady brandishing a walking stick.

'Ha, ha...got you now!', she cackled wickedly.

There was some basic lighting in the warehouse, but all the doors were shut, so there was no natural light. The effect was a kind of gloomy glow all around, which allowed them to see, but only really to make out shadows. Freddy checked his watch. It read 11.30 p.m. The store outside was dark and empty. They had been there at least four hours, since their capture by the gang of elderly ladies.

Who were still in the warehouse with them!

The warehouse was large, but was divided into sections by the merchandise that was inside. It was arranged in sections, according to the types of goods stored there, with huge towers of boxes and pallets. Although they could not make out the types of stuff stored in each section, in some areas there were brown boxes stacked haphazardly in small piles, whilst in others the stacks and pallets rose right up to the ceiling. In these areas, the stacks cut out the light, making them very dark. They huddled in one of these dark areas contemplating their next move.

The gang of ghastly grannies was hiding in a separate part of the room.

'We've got to get rid of them, or we'll be found out...' said one, quietly.

'Never did like kids', said another in the shadows, with a sour, menacing tone in her voice.

The third lady was busy opening boxes and stuffing items into the bags which she kept inside and on top of her buggy.

Wil and Freddy started discussing their next moves in the darkness.

'They're up to no good, we need to stop them'.

'OK, but where are they?'.

'I don't know, but they must be in here somewhere'.

They listened quietly, intently, for over an hour. All they could hear was a low drone from the generators and deep freezes around them, and the sound of their own movements. Then, a sound. Very soft, distant laughter. A cackle. A brief whirr from an electric motor. No movement. Clara started looking around for things to use as weapons. She stayed close to her brother and to Wil.

After maybe two hours, sitting, listening, Freddy presented his plan.

‘We need to create a blind alley. We need to lure them into the trap somehow, then seal off the aisle with them inside’.

‘Great. So how do we lure them in, and how do we keep them in?’ Wil sounded highly sceptical.

‘I know how we keep them in’.

‘So...?’

Wil gazed at Freddy through the murk. He was pointing behind him, where a large fork lift truck was standing, with a huge pallet of boxes stacked neatly onto its forks.

‘No way!’ said Wil,

‘Shh!’ replied Freddy, ‘we can do it. The keys are inside, it’s like a ready-made door. We can use it’.

‘OK, so how do we get them into the trap?’, whispered Wil, still sceptical.

‘I don’t know, Clara...’

‘No way!’ Clara spat the words out, but at a whisper.

‘What do you think I meant?’, replied Freddy, ‘actually I don’t have much of an idea, I thought you might have...’

Clara was reassured by this trust placed in her.

‘Well, from the sounds of it, they are busy stealing from the store, and they seem to be well practiced at it. What we need to do is to get all three of them to come into the area – the blind alley – that we choose, at the same time. You saw in the store last night that they are quick, they are well organised, and they know the store, and probably this storeroom, better than we do...’

She stopped to draw breath, but they were impressed with her logic so far. As they paused, they heard the whirring sound getting a little closer.

‘*They’re moving...*’, whispered Wil, ‘*listen*’. They listened intently for a few minutes. The ladies were definitely on the move. Clara continued.

‘We have to move fast. What we need to do is to entice them down this alleyway...’,

She pulled them both a few metres forward, to the head of an aisle bordered on both sides by boxes of canned petfood.

‘Look, the end is over there, and it is just a blank wall. The aisle is narrow, it’s ideal. Also, canned food is heavy, they wouldn’t stand a chance’. She shoved hard at one of the boxes

which formed the wall. It didn't budge.

'How we get them over here is the main problem, but here's how we do it. I will be the main decoy...'

'What do you mean the decoy?', interrupted her brother, 'you're not going to confront them, you've seen, they could be dangerous...'

'Don't interrupt', she replied tartly, '*I'm* doing this. Bro, you are going to drive the forklift. Go over there and work it out. You will need to move quickly, but you cannot go anywhere until they are inside. Wil, you need to sing.

'*Sing!*', Wil almost screamed, although, aware of the situation, he did so quietly,

'*Sing!*', he said again, quieter this time.

Singing was not a problem in itself to Wilis, in fact he had a superb voice, and he knew it. It was just that in the middle of the night, in this situation, in the dark...well, it just wasn't right for singing. Clara carried on urgently.

'You need to sing to attract their attention. Then you need to sing to make them come over, and then you need to sing to mesmerise them'.

'Wow, thanks Clara,' he said mockingly, 'you think it'll work?'.

For the next hour, Clara was a woman on a mission, directing her two helpers to their task. Freddy was quite enjoying it now, listening to the ladies rummaging about in the distance, occasionally stopping whilst they wondered if the noises were getting closer. He had opened one of the boxes nearest them, and they were drinking Coke and eating crisps as they prepared.

'Ok, go,' instructed Clara, motioning Freddy towards the fork lift.

'Now, Wil, this is your chance, as we discussed'.

Wil started to let out a high pitched warble, which slowly morphed into a song,

'You're beautiful,

You're beautiful,

You're beautiful,

It's true'

He stopped and they listened for a moment. Lots of scrabbling about in the distance. The

singing seemed to bounce around the huge warehouse.

'What was that?

I don't know?

A whirring noise from the buggy. Getting closer.

Wil continued,

I saw your face,

In a crowded place

And I don't know what to do

'Cause I'll never be with you

'Ooh, young man', cried a distant, ancient voice.

Wil carried on singing the song, and started climbing on top of the boxes which formed their dead-end alleyway. Clara moved towards the entrance. The whirring from the buggy and the steady *clump clump* from either stick or zimmer frame got closer still.

'We'll get you, you little blighters', squeaked a croaky old voice, *'we'll find you'.*

'Not far away now, keep going', instructed Clara to Wil.

'You're beautiful,

You're beautiful,

You're beautiful,

It's true'

'Oh, thank you son', muttered one of the murderous old grannies. The three of them were moving steadily towards the sound of the voice, which was now perched on top of the boxes, towards the end of the aisle-trap they had set. Freddy started the engine on the forklift.

'Now, change!', Clara whispered through the gloom.

'You're just a devil woman,

With evil on your mind

Beware the devil woman

She's gonna get ya!

The change of easy listening artist had the desired effect.

'Oh, Cliff Richards, my favourite,' said a voice, much closer now,

'Ooh, mine too, Phyllis, so handsome, so young!'

'Come on, baby, light my fire!', added the third voice.

From her vantage point, Clara could see the three hags approaching the entrance to their aisle. She signalled to Freddy, who started to move the huge pallet into position, ready to seal the entrance.

'There's one of them! Get her!', cried zimmer-lady as she caught sight of Clara. Hitching her skirt up she sprinted towards Clara, closely pursued by the other two. As they entered the alleyway, Wilis crooned,

'We're gonna get ya!'

As they raced down the alley, Wil jumped down off his boxes to the ground outside the line of boxes, and helped Clara through the hole they had made by removing one of the boxes from the wall. As she scrambled through, he picked up the box they had pulled out and shoved it with all his might back into the hole. He just glimpsed the buggy scream to a halt as he sealed the escape route. They could see back up the corridor that Freddy had done his bit. After a triumphant toot of the horn, he sat astride the pallet of boxes that he had used to seal the entrance, avoiding the blows and the insults from below.

It would not be possible to print here what was said that evening. Suffice it to say that three spirited old ladies, living long lives of crime and misdemeanours, were able to spend the next two hours swearing, shouting, and mouthing abuse at the three teenagers.

As one of them was finally making a spirited attempt at escape by standing on top of the buggy and trying to use the zimmer as a kind of climbing frame, the shutters on the stockroom door clattered open, and a shaft of light fell upon them. It was 7.00 a.m.
