

Chapter 18

Looking out of the window at the back, they could see in the distance a small figure on a buggy, head down, scarf flying out from under a black helmet, on two wheels as she chased the bus round the corner.

They rounded another corner, more slowly, and pulled into the bus stop at the MegaMart. A few seconds later, the lady on the buggy shot past them, drove through a crowd of shoppers, scattering shopping and children either side of her as she went, and disappeared into a door that (luckily) happened to be open. The door was marked *'Warehouse Staff only'*. They heard a small thud and a distant cry of *'...now listen to me, young man...'*

Clara and Freddy each grabbed a trolley from outside the store. Freddy pushed his a few metres, realised that it had a wheel that was not running true, then took it back and selected a newer model.

'OK, sis, where's the list?', he asked Clara, as they pushed their way through the crowded entrance, past the newspaper section where every front page featured Thierry Henry's stunning goal against the *Galacticos* on Tuesday evening.

'The list...', Clara reached down into her jacket pocket. Nothing. She searched the pockets of her jeans, she looked all around her. No list.

'Great', said Freddy sarcastically, trying to remember what they needed.

'Whoaaah!'

They turned round to see their great friend Wil approaching them from the back of the store, clinging fast to an empty trolley. He was standing with both legs on the base of the trolley, which seemed to be moving under its own power.

He blew past them, grabbing at things on the shelves as he went, trying to slow down. All he succeeded in doing was pulling items off the shelves which either went in his trolley, or flew off the shelf at some innocent shopper. Small children scattered in all directions.

As he headed off to the back of the store, Clara turned to her brother with a smile.

'I'm having some of that,' she shouted, and put one foot aboard her own trolley. She gave a little push with her free leg, and the trolley accelerated wildly away, skewing this way and that, until it found a straight course in pursuit of Wil. Freddy did the same and gave chase.

The three of them motored up through the greeting cards section to the back of the store, scattering cards and paper as they went. When they got to the back of the store, they noticed that the old lady who had been on the bus (the one with the walking stick) was standing at the

end of one of the long aisles that ran the length of the store, slightly stooped but with stick held high.

‘Chocs away!’, she yelled demonically, and brought her stick down with a mighty crack onto the floor.

They needed no second invitation. Wil, who was in front, manouevred his trolley down the furthest aisle, Clara turned into the long aisle next to the stick-lady, and Freddy pirouetted smartly into the nearest walkway to him. With a quick push on the floor from his right leg, he sped off down the aisle.

He gathered speed rapidly, shooting past childrens’ toys, babycare, and health and beauty. As he came towards the bakery section, he glanced up one of the transverse aisles to see Clara riding her trolley like a chariot, in a crouching position but with her right arm high in the air like a rodeo rider.

‘Whooo-hooo!’, she yelped as she caught sight of her brother. She was laughing hysterically.

As he passed, Freddy could see Wil in the far distance, who had slowed down almost to a stop under a hail of missiles from a group of children who had clearly prepared themselves with a battery of doughnuts, bread rolls, and muffins. These were raining down on Wil as he passed. As Freddy zoomed by at the other end of the section, they turned their attention to him, and he narrowly missed being assaulted by a well-aimed French stick, thrown javelin-style from distance.

The race was really on now. Clara, in the middle lane, was slightly ahead, and could not see the other two on either flank. Wil had caught up some lost time, and was close behind her, approaching the drinks and sweets section of the store. Freddy was being held up by an altercation at one of the checkouts, involving a young assistant, and an old lady in a red buggy. He ground to a halt.

Wil could see the end wall of the huge superstore in the distance. Standing there, arms crossed, was the bent old lady with the zimmer frame. She looked determined, and was clearly not going to move.

Clara, in turn, glanced across from her position, to where zimmer lady was standing. She was close now, only two or three more aisles to cross and she would win.

She could see Wil closing fast on the finish line as well. He had just taken out a sweet counter, and the contents were rolling, fast, right to where Clara was heading. Both of them were part-rolling on their trolleys, part sliding along on the assortment of sweets, chocolates, and candies that had spilled onto the floor.

Freddy, meanwhile, had enlisted the help of buggy-lady. She had appeared beside him at the checkout, and he had grabbed hold of the handle of the little cart she carried at the back of the buggy. He was now being pulled along at a startling rate as the supercharged buggy raced through the store. Buggy-lady was still cackling, waving her arms around, steering with her knees, and jabbing the horn with her left foot.

As they rounded the last aisle, they saw Wil and Clara. And they saw what was about to happen.

Wil had his head down, only glancing across at the action across the aisle. Although Clara was more aware of where he was, she was too busy trying to stay upright. Aniseed balls from the sweet counter were all around her, and her trolley was swaying wildly from side to side as the wheels struggled to grip on the shifting surface.

To reach the point where zimmer lady was standing, her frame now raised in the air ready to acclaim the winner, Wil would have to make a half-turn to the right as he reached the end of the aisle. Gripping the handlebar tightly, he shifted his weight from left to right, leaning out over the right-hand side and bringing his head down to the level of the top of the trolley.

Then he hit the bread truck.

An innocent teenage shelf-filler was just emerging from the stockroom, just behind where zimmer lady was standing, pushing his huge wheelie-crate full of the finest sliced white bread. He was whistling contentedly to himself. Not a care in the world.

He was certainly not expecting a teenager on an out-of-control trolley to cut across his path at high speed, but that is exactly what hit him.

It was a full-on blow, such that Wil was thrown from the trolley, whose wheels made contact with the base of the truck, into the soft wall of massed loaves.

As the trolley stopped, Wil just carried on.

In the split second he had to contemplate his fate, Wil actually thought that he ran the risk of suffocating in the huge doughy mass in front of him, but in fact the effect of hitting it was the opposite. He was enveloped briefly by the bread, but then the elasticity of the mass meant that having gone in, he was now being catapulted back out again.

He tried to grab something, but there was nothing to hold. He was flung upwards and backwards, out of control. Flying. Through the air.

Just as Clara was passing.

Clara was at the end of her crazy, wild zig-zag down aisle three.

She arrived at the end where zimmer-lady was standing just as Wil fell to earth. There was a loud rattling noise as he landed straight in the trolley, his legs and arms flailing wildly, sticking out of the top. He looked stunned as zimmer-lady brought her frame down with a flourish to greet the winner (or winners). But Clara couldn't stop.

About five metres behind them were buggy-lady, with Freddy still hanging on for his life. Buggy-lady was shouting and cursing as the others shot past the finish, and put on a final spurt

of speed. They passed zimmer-lady at full tilt. But they weren't stopping.

There was a large open door from where the bread truck had emerged, which led to the storeroom. It was large enough to let the wheeled trucks come and go.

Both vehicles shot straight through the door into the stockroom, followed by zimmer-lady who had turned and was now using her frame to half-run, half-vault her way through the door.

'Live fast, die young!' she screamed as she came through the door.

As they all ground to a halt in the large, dark, slightly damp room, the doors slowly swung shut with a gentle *crump* noise. The room went almost completely dark.

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.
