HOW MUCH CHANGE CAN ONE KID TAKE?

FREDDIE IN THE SHADE

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TURN THE PAGE to read this story.
Freddie walked down Main Street in a suburb of Minneapolis wearing black wraparound sunglasses. Lately, he never took them off, indoors or outdoors.

His mom had died before he could remember, so it had been Freddie and Dad for years, the two of them against the world. And they’d done fine. Just fine. Then Dad met Maggie. She was nice enough, but things changed last year after Dad and Maggie got married. A few months later, Maggie announced she was going to have a baby, and Dad began to talk about moving away from San Diego.

A month after school ended, Dad accepted a job in Minneapolis. “It will be great,” Dad had said. “It means a house instead of an apartment, with a yard and a basketball hoop. It means that Maggie will be close to her family. And you’ll have a brother or sister!”

Freddie had known the truth. It meant that the summer before ninth grade, he had to leave the only neighborhood he’d ever known and all of his friends. It meant that on the first day of school, he’d be the new kid, the different kid. He had no interest in Minneapolis or anyone who lived there.

The sunglasses went on and stayed on.

He stopped in front of a clothing store and considered the black hooded sweatshirt in the window. A customer came out of the shop next door, and the smell of cinnamon and butter-cream frosting followed. Freddie turned and looked into the window of Snickerdoodle’s Bakery.

A toddler clutched at her skirt. As the mother approached the door, trying to manage the cradle and bit into the sweet goodness. As he savored the custard-filled pastry, he glanced down at a card beside the cash register.

“Thank you! Could I bother you to open my car door too?”

She nodded toward a minivan parked nearby.

Freddie darted to open the door, took the box from her, and placed it onto the seat. When he turned back toward the bakery, he saw the red-headed man smiling. He signaled for Freddie to come inside.

“’Tis Mr. Fieldstone,” the baker said, as Freddie stood in front of the counter. “Éclair or a cream puff? As payment for helping my customer.”

“Éclair, I guess. Thanks,” said Freddie.

Mr. Fieldstone handed him a chocolate éclair. Freddie lifted it out of its white paper cradle and bit into the sweet goodness. As he savored the custard-filled pastry, he glanced down at a card beside the cash register. Help Wanted.

Mr. Fieldstone nodded toward the sign. “You interested? I’m looking for someone every afternoon. It’s mostly cleanup.”

For weeks, Freddie had been hibernating in his room, trying to avoid Dad and Maggie, who tried to include him in every preparation for the baby. School didn’t start for another six weeks.

He nodded to Mr. Fieldstone, and, by the time Freddie left the bakery, he had a part-time job and a bag of éclairs for dessert.

The next day, Mr. Fieldstone handed Freddie an apron and led him into the kitchen, where a girl stood over a large bowl, stirring cookie dough. Even the smudges of flour on her face couldn’t conceal her freckles.

“Freddie, this is my daughter, Amy,” said Mr. Fieldstone. He handed Freddie a broom.

“I’ve got to work the counter. You can start by sweeping the kitchen. Amy will tell you the rest of your responsibilities.”

As Freddie started to sweep, Amy asked, “Chocolate chips or raisins?”

“What?”

“In the cookie dough,” she said.

“Uh . . . just chocolate chips.”

“Oh, you’re the type who doesn’t like things too complicated, right?”

Freddie smirked. “I guess.”

“Where do you live? And what grade are you in?”

“Maple Street,” said Freddie. “Going into ninth.”

“Me too,” said Amy. “I mean about ninth grade. We live on Alder—a few streets away. These cookies are for my cousins. I can’t bake for the customers yet, but maybe someday. Do you have any brothers or sisters, especially sisters?”

“Sorry,” said Freddie. “It’s just me and a baby on the way.”

“I’ve always wanted a sister,” she said. “All I’ve got is a bunch of boy cousins on both sides of the family. Babies are a lot of work. I know, because I baby-sit. But they’re really cute. And they love you. I mean, they really love you. You’re lucky.”

“Yeah, a red-headed man all right,” Freddie muttered.

“I can’t tell if you’re kidding or not with those glasses on,” said Amy.

“Precisely,” said Freddie.

Amy handed him a clean cloth and pointed to the baker’s racks. “Those are next,” she said. “And by the way, sunglasses are for outside—you know, to protect your eyes from glare.”

Freddie smirked. “Really! I didn’t know.”

He wiped the racks, cleaned the counters, and folded a tower of pink boxes. Later, as he walked home, he thought about what Amy had said about babies. He knew that babies required a lot of attention, but it hadn’t occurred to him he’d be getting any in return.

Every afternoon, Amy had more questions.

“Where did you live before?”

“Why did you come here?”

“Why don’t you want a brother or sister?”

“Why do you wear sunglasses all the time?”

There was something wistful and sincere about Amy’s questions, and, besides that, there was a peculiar feeling of safety in the warm kitchen with the smell of bread baking and the curtains of steam on the windows, as if anything said there would be protected. Freddie found himself telling Amy, bit by bit, the answers to her questions. He even told her that the sunglasses made him feel as if nothing more could upset his life.

Why do you think Pan chose the word “hibernating”? What does it suggest about Freddie’s behavior?

The French word éclair literally means “a flash of lightning” perhaps because these delicious pastries can be eaten in a flash.

We love the many vivid details Pam uses to describe the bakery in this story. Can you find other examples?

We use the many vivid details Pam uses to describe the bakery in this story. Can you find other examples?

Why would Freddie want to hide his face?

What an intriguing way to introduce a protagonist! What does this detail tell you about Freddie?
“Stuff changes all the time,” she said. “How are sunglasses going to stop it? And like I said before, you’re lucky. I mean, your whole family is together all the time. . . .” Her voice trailed off.

At the end of the week, as Freddie left Snickerdoodle’s, Amy hurried after him.

“Hey! Wait up! I’m going to the movies tonight with my cousins. Want to come?” Freddie knew he wouldn’t be able to see a movie while wearing his sunglasses. But he could sneak them off after the lights dimmed and put them back on before the lights came up. He said yes.

At the movies, Amy introduced him to Kyle and Mark. Mark was going to be in ninth grade too. Kyle was a year younger. Afterward, they asked him if he wanted to play on their basketball team at the park on Saturdays.

“Say yes,” said Amy. “I’m on the team too.”

Freddie wavered for a moment, then remembered that he had a strap for his sunglasses that would keep them secure while he played. He agreed.

Freddie was surprised at how much he looked forward to his job at the bakery. He loved opening the door each afternoon and smelling the gingersnaps and snickerdoodles. He loved cleaning the stainless-steel and glass counter that held the muffins and pastries. He liked how Mr. Fieldstone treated his customers—as if they were his best friends. Dad and Maggie began to shop at the bakery. And Mr. Fieldstone always slipped a little something extra into their order, a cream puff or lemon tart.

“We have to fatten up Freddie’s little brother or sister,” he always said.

A few days before school started, Freddie arrived at the bakery and found Amy in the kitchen.

“These are my going-away cookies,” she said. “I’m leaving tomorrow.”

Freddie frowned. “Leaving? For where?”

“For my mom’s. See, I live with my mom during the school year and my dad during the summer and some holidays. I’ll be back in December for two weeks, then a week in the spring, and then next summer.”

Puzzled, Freddie asked, “Why didn’t you mention it before?”

“You never asked. And besides, when I’m here, I like to pretend that I don’t ever have to leave. It’s. . . . you know. . . . hard going back and forth, so I just don’t talk about it.” She stared into the cookie dough.

Freddie thought back over the past weeks. She was right. He’d never once asked her a question about her life or her mother. It had always been Amy being interested in him. She was right about something else too. The sunglasses hadn’t stopped things from changing. Now she was leaving.

He took off the sunglasses and set them on the counter. “So, what’s it like in your town? And what’s your mom like?”

Amy studied his eyes and smiled. “More boy cousins. And my mom is really nice. You’d like her. I’m lucky on one hand because I have lots of people who love me. But it’s like I’m always starting over. When I come here for the summer, everyone already has their friends from school, and when I go back to my mom’s, everyone has their new friends from summer. But I’m sort of used to it.” She shrugged and gave him a half-smile. “Chocolate chips or raisins?” She pointed to the dough in the bowl.

“Both,” said Freddie. “More complicated that way.”

They both laughed.

“So, since you’re the expert on starting over,” said Freddie, “any advice on my first day of school?”

Amy nodded.

“Don’t wear sunglasses inside, or some twelfth-grader might put you in a trash can.”

It turned out that school wasn’t so bad after all. Freddie and Mark were in the same classes, and they played basketball together almost every day after school. Sometimes Freddie still wore his sunglasses, but only on sunny days.

Like the day that December when Amy came back for the holidays, and she and Freddie built a snowman for his new baby sister.