

Cambridge Discovery Readers

Level 6

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Freddie's War

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What am I doing here?

France, August 1936

It was early morning in Paris and shopkeepers were opening up. Freddie bought a long stick of bread. The day heated up as he wandered around the breathless city. He went inside the cool cave-like space of the great cathedral of Notre Dame, where he saw old men sleeping and two old ladies eating breakfast.

Towards lunchtime Freddie climbed up a hill to the artists' quarter and looked down over the city. The atmosphere in Paris was electric, as if it was plugged in. He looked into artists' studios and saw a world that wasn't like his. Still in dressing gowns at midday, artists laughed and joked with their stylish models. One woman smiled at the innocent, open-mouthed country boy standing at the door. Freddie had never felt so alive.

By one o'clock Freddie was starving. He found himself on a long avenue, where the wide pavements were filled with cafés. He chose a table almost out of sight and ordered a coffee. The tiny cup of strong black coffee arrived almost immediately. Nobody drank black coffee in Yorkshire. Freddie would have liked some milk with it, but he had no idea what the French for 'milk' was.

He took out a postcard and started to write, as the sun bounced off the shiny round table. He'd chosen a picture of the Eiffel Tower.

'Dear Mum,' he wrote, 'Don't worry – I'm in Paris and I'm safe. I'm on my way to Spain. Lots of foreign volunteers are going to the war and I'm going with them. I'm sorry I didn't say goodbye properly, but I didn't want Dad to stop me. I want to have a go at being a journalist and I hope one day Dad will be proud of me. Mum, you'll love Paris – I'll bring you here one day! Your son, Freddie'

He didn't want to leave the café. He couldn't afford another coffee, so he hoped the waiter wouldn't notice him. The place had filled up now with clerks and shop assistants ordering lunch. Freddie tried not to look at the plates of food arriving on tables all around him.

'Can I sit here?' a man asked. He was wearing a black beret on his head and a striped jumper. Freddie smiled and made room for him. The man ordered lunch. Freddie glanced at him several times and wrote a description of him in his notebook. His face was generous and his warm eyes were sharp and questioning. Once the man had finished his lunch, he took more interest in Freddie. He looked at the postcard lying on the table.

'Ah!' said the man in French. 'You're English – you look German. Do you like Paris?'

'I'm afraid I don't speak French,' Freddie said in English. The man looked at him blankly.

Freddie tried Spanish. '*Habla usted español?*'

'Yes, yes,' replied the man in Spanish, with a wide smile. 'I'm from Spain myself. So, do you like Paris?'

'Yes, sir,' said Freddie. 'It's very different from Yorkshire, where I come from!'

'And you are here ... on holiday?'

'No,' said Freddie, 'I'm going to Spain. I'm a ... I mean, I want to be a journalist. I want to write about the war.'

The man called the waiter over and ordered more food and coffee.

'Are you a Communist?' he asked.

'No,' said Freddie, 'but I want the world to be a fairer place. People should be able to choose their own governments. Are you going back to fight?'

'I fight with my paintings – they are weapons. I don't paint pictures to put on the walls of houses,' said the artist. 'But I think

perhaps I'm too old to fight with guns. I'm not a soldier. I only know about painting – I can't do anything else.'

'Paintings – posters can be very powerful,' said Freddie.

The waiter returned and placed an omelette and a piece of apple tart in front of Freddie.

'Oh no,' said Freddie. 'I didn't order anything—'

The artist said something to the waiter.

'*Bon appétit*,' the waiter said to Freddie and left them.

'I'm buying you lunch, young man,' said the artist. 'You can't go to war on an empty stomach.'

While Freddie ate, the artist took out a pencil and a small book and started to draw.



'You're very young,' said the artist, when Freddie had finished. 'Do you work for a newspaper?'

'I'm 18,' lied Freddie. 'I'm going to write for the *Yorkshire Evening Post*.'

'The world needs to know about this war,' said the artist. 'Britain, France – they must help the Spanish Republic.'

The artist called the waiter over and paid the bill.

'And now I have work to do,' he said.

'Thank you, sir,' said Freddie.

'For you,' said the artist, pulling a page from his sketchbook and handing it to Freddie.

'And in return here is my description of you,' said Freddie, tearing a page from his notebook and offering it to the artist.

'Thank you, young man,' he said. 'Please sign it. When you're a famous writer, I will remember this lunch.'

At the post office Freddie bought an envelope and sent the postcard and the drawing to his mother. Then he found the railway station and looked for trains going south. A train for Perpignan, near the Spanish border, was leaving in an hour or so. He hung around the station, watching other volunteers boarding. Just as the train was about to leave, he ran for it. A ticket inspector called to him, but Freddie carried on running, pointing to his bag.

'My ticket,' he shouted in English, 'it's at the bottom.'

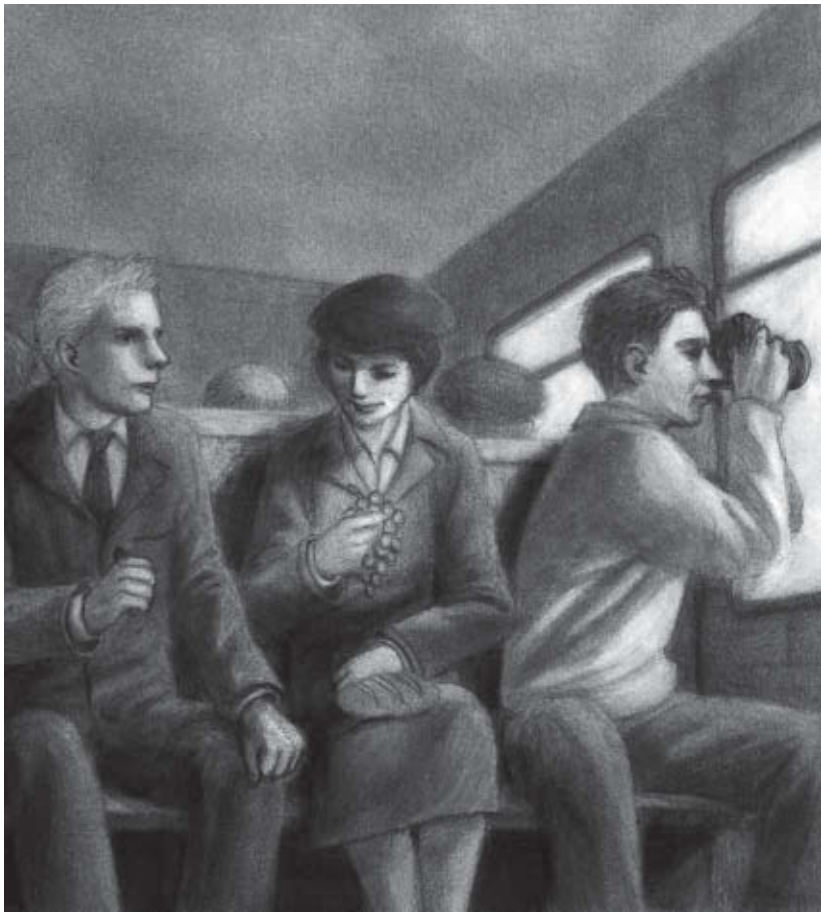
The train was moving now and he ran alongside, opened a carriage door and jumped in. The carriage was nearly full but he squeezed into a seat next to a young couple. The man had short dark hair and wore a grey suit. The woman wore a stylish hat and had red hair and a warm smile. Darkness began to fall over the French countryside and in the carriage. The rhythm of the train and the murmur of different languages soon sent Freddie to sleep.

Some hours later Freddie woke and rubbed his neck. Daylight flooded through the windows and, further down the carriage,

some men were singing. The couple next to him were talking quietly in a strange language.

Lines of trees and big open spaces went by, then thick forest. As the sun came up, it got hotter inside the train. The smell of unwashed bodies competed with the smell of garlic⁶ sausage and cheese, as the travellers began to eat their breakfasts.

‘Would you like something to eat?’ asked the woman in the hat. She spoke in English and offered Freddie some bread and grapes.



‘Thank you,’ said Freddie. She asked where he was from and where he was going. They were going to Barcelona, she said, to photograph the war. The man’s name was Endre and she was called Gerda.

‘Where are you from?’ Freddie asked.

‘Endre is Hungarian,’ said Gerda. ‘And I’m German. We met in Paris.’

‘There’s going to be fighting all over Europe – it’s just starting in Spain,’ Gerda said. ‘There won’t be any escape. Why are you going?’

‘I’m kind of running away,’ said Freddie. ‘Life at home ... well, it was like living in a cage.’

‘Ah, a young adventurer!’ said Gerda, smiling.

‘I want to fight too,’ said Freddie.

Freddie chatted to Gerda and Endre for the rest of the journey.

‘We’re nearly there,’ said Endre, looking out of the window. ‘I can see Perpignan in the distance.’

‘I’ll go and take a look,’ said Freddie.

He picked up his bag and walked through the carriage to the door. The last of the open countryside was flying by and the border was up ahead.

‘*Billets*,’ called the ticket inspector from the other end of the carriage. ‘Tickets, *billets*.’

Freddie leaned out and saw the station in the distance. The inspector was halfway along the carriage now.

The train began to slow down. The inspector was checking Endre’s ticket. Freddie’s heart was beating fast. The signal up ahead was red and the train was slowing right down now. A group of trees was coming up. As the train blew its whistle, Freddie leaned out of the window and opened the door from the outside. It swung open and he jumped.

‘Hey!’ shouted the inspector.

Freddie ran. He ran along a line of trees and then turned away from the train track into a field of lavender flowers. He heard the train's whistle again as it moved off into the town and he slowed to a walk.

Twenty minutes later he came to a stream running alongside a forest. He jumped across the little river, slipping on the banks in his Sunday shoes and ran into the trees. The trees grew on a steep hill and he ran up. He knew his journey into Spain crossed the Pyrenees mountains, so he had better get used to it. He ran on for some hours until he was exhausted and threw himself down on a bank. Sweat ran off his body as his heart calmed down and he fell asleep.

A branch broke near Freddie's head and he woke. He sat up and looked around.



A small animal stared at him. What was it? It looked like a pig, but it had long hair and stripes. Freddie had never seen anything like it.

The wild boar piglet hesitated for a moment, then turned and ran.

‘What am I doing here?’ Freddie said aloud. He was starving and in a strange land. But he couldn’t go back. Everyone in his home town thought he had left the mine boss to die. It wasn’t true, but he couldn’t blame them for believing it. He had a reputation for being a coward, so they assumed that in a rock fall Ralph would be brave and Freddie would try to run away. That all seemed a long way away now, sitting here on this wild hillside.

‘Never mind the life story,’ he thought, ‘I need food.’

He opened up a map he’d bought in Paris and located his position. A farm was marked about a kilometre ahead. It was early afternoon when he called to the farmer, who was leading a cow across his yard. Freddie did an afternoon’s work for the farmer in exchange for food and a good night’s sleep in the barn.

Setting off early the next morning, he headed for an isolated border town called Puigcerdà, where the Communists on the boat from England had told him it was easy to get into Spain. It took him two more days’ walking before the border crossing came into view.

He waited until night fell, resting under an oak tree and then got ready to cross into Spain.

‘Ow,’ he moaned, as he pulled his shoes back onto his sore feet and thought of his comfortable work boots back at home. He checked his watch and packed up his bag.

But before he could get to his feet, he felt a gun at the back of his head.

LOOKING BACK

- 1 Check your answers to *Before you read* on page 4.

ACTIVITIES

- 2 Underline the correct words in each sentence about Chapter 1.

- 1 Freddie *can't bear / doesn't mind* going down into the mine.
- 2 Ralph *feels sorry for / laughs at* Freddie.
- 3 Freddie's *mother / father* is interested in world news.
- 4 Freddie and his dad have a *good / difficult* relationship.
- 5 Freddie is *popular / a bit of a loner*.
- 6 Freddie and Ralph fight over *the war in Spain / Freddie's sister*.
- 7 Ralph wants to *hurt Freddie / leave Freddie in peace*.

- 3 Put the sentences about Freddie in Chapters 1 and 3 in order.

- 1 An artist buys Freddie lunch in Paris. ☐
- 2 He pulls the boss free from the rocks. ☐
- 3 He crosses to France by boat. ☐
- 4 He decides to run away to Spain. ☐
- 5 He travels across France by train without a ticket. ☐
- 6 Mr Taylor thanks Freddie before falling unconscious. ☐
- 7 Nobody from the town wants to talk to Freddie. ☐
- 8 Ralph takes the credit for saving the boss. ☐
- 9 The boss is trapped by falling rocks. ☐

4 Complete the sentences with the words in the box.

the Republicans (x3)	the Nationalists (x3)
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- 1 The rebel army fought for
- 2 supported the government.
- 3 Most of the Marcos family were in favour of
- 4 The fascists wanted to win the war.
- 5 Franco betrayed
- 6 didn't want a democratic government.

5 Answer the questions about Chapter 2.

- 1 A plane flies over Badajoz. What is it doing?
.....
- 2 Why is Laura's father well known in the town?
.....
- 3 Who is determined to fight for Spain – Laura or Alonso?
.....
- 4 Why doesn't Uncle Ruben want Laura and Alonso to stay?
.....

LOOKING FORWARD



6 What do you think? Answer the questions.

- 1 Somebody bangs on the front door of the Sosa farm? Why?
.....
- 2 Somebody holds something against Freddie's head? What?
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