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When Mrs. White Defended Freddie

by Evangeline H. Carr

The eighth-grade pupils of the public school stood outside enjoying what little sunshine peeped through the dull-gray clouds of a late-autumn morning. A horse and buggy paused at the gate long enough for a young girl to get out. She ran to join her schoolmates and breathlessly held up a finger.

"Just see what Father and Mother gave me for my birthday," she said. "Mother had the most wonderful dinner ready for me last night when I got home, and then they gave me this ring with my birthstone in it. I think it's beautiful."

The class crowded close to admire Delia's birthday gift.

"May I try it on, Delia?" asked her friend Freddie.

Reluctantly Delia slipped the ring on her friend's finger.

"It's just a little large, but I think it's lovely on me," laughed Freddie.

Then the bell rang, and that meant no more conversation as the pupils silently filed into the schoolhouse. Wanting her ring back, Delia extended her hand behind her, palm up, toward the teasing Freddie, who quietly ignored it.

As soon as the pupils were seated, Delia raised her hand. "Please, may I speak to Freddie?" she asked, without waiting for the teacher's usual smile and nod.

"No, Delia," reproved Miss Wade, "you may wait until after the opening exercises."

Delia cast an impatient glance over her shoulder, but the laughing eyes of Freddie were fixed on the teacher. She didn't seem to notice the hand thrust under Delia's left arm and resting, palm up, on the top of Freddie's desk.

"Hands folded," reminded the teacher, and almost angrily Delia withdrew her hand.

At last Miss Wade looked at Delia. "Now, what was it you wanted to say to Freddie?"

"I want my ring back, Miss Wade. Freddie had it on when the bell rang. May I get it?"

"Certainly," replied the teacher.

Delia turned and in a loud whisper demanded, "Give me my ring."

"Why, of course I will, Delia," answered Freddie, raising the hands that had been folded in her lap. But her rosy face paled as she looked at the bare finger that had been encircled by Delia's ring.

"It must have slipped off my finger!" gasped Freddie.

Miss Wade readily granted permission for both girls to look for the ring, but they soon returned empty-handed. Freddie's usual vivacious good cheer and fun were gone; her face was very white. Delia's face was flushed with suppressed anger.

Neither girl did very well at recitation or study that morning. The eighth grade spent the morning recess and most of the noon hour looking for Delia's ring. Snow had begun to fall, and that made the task harder. By afternoon recess the first snow of the season was rapidly covering everything.

After school a few of the pupils lingered about the porch, scuffing the snow away with their overshoes.

"It's no use looking for the missing ring any more today. It's getting colder, and it's snowing harder. You had better all get home as soon as you can," said Miss Wade.

"You just wait till I tell my father," Delia flung over her shoulder to Freddie as she hurried home.

It was a very quiet Freddie who greeted Mr. King as he came in from doing the chores that evening. Freddie's mother had become a Seventh-day Adventist a few years before. Her father was not an Adventist, but he was anxious that the children should have the best education possible. The school near their home was not good enough to please him, so he had sent Freddie away from home to this public school because Miss Wade was such an excellent

teacher. At that time there was only one Seventh-day Adventist school, and it was impossible for Freddie to go to it.

Freddie had not yet decided that she wanted to be a Christian, and her mother was thankful to have her daughter in the home of Mr. and Mrs. King, where getting ready to meet the Lord was the main aim in life.

Mother King was a good woman, a fine housekeeper, and a splendid cook. But it was Father King who took the trouble to make the girl feel at home. It was he who talked things over with her and helped her with any homework that was difficult. So it was Father King who noticed that Freddie was much too quiet and was not doing justice to her supper that evening.

"What is the trouble, Freddie?" he asked in his kindly way, but before she could answer there was a knock at the door. Mrs. King opened it to Delia's parents.

The greeting between the neighbors was not as friendly as usual, and Delia's father soon came to the point of their visit. "We want Delia's ring, Mr. King, and we mean to get it."

"Delia's ring?" asked the bewildered Father King. "I don't understand."

"Perhaps not," said the visitor. "She probably would not tell you, so I will."

Then the Kings heard about the birthday ring and how it was last seen on Freddie's finger at school.

"Now, Mr. King, my wife will go with Mrs. King to Freddie's room, and they will search the room and the girl's person."

"But I am sure you are mistaken if you think Freddie has Delia's ring," said Father King. "I know she would give it to you if she had it."

Freddie gave Father King a grateful look as she followed the two women upstairs. They went through everything in the room, and Delia's mother combed through every brown curl on the girl's head, remarking that a ring could easily be hidden in her thick hair.

After the callers were gone, Father King called Freddie down for worship. "Before we read the Word, tell me all about it, Freddie," he invited. Soon he had the whole story.

"Father King, they think I *stole* Delia's ring," said the girl.

"Yes, I know they *think*, but God *knows* where that ring is. We will ask Him to clear this all up," said the old man before they knelt around the stove in the kitchen.

Freddie listened, and the angels hovered near as Father King told the Lord all about it. Freddie had never experienced the answering of a prayer. She had learned to say her prayers long ago, but she'd never thought about getting a real answer.

That was a cold winter. The first snow did not have time or warmth to melt before another one fell, and soon snow had to be shoveled away from

the windows of the little schoolhouse to let the dim winter light in. A large bobsled brought the children to school and took them home.

But it was not the cold of winter that chilled Freddie's very bones; it was the cooling of friendship in the schoolhouse and everywhere she went. Only Father King seemed the same.

The weeks passed, and again Delia's parents came to see the Kings. This time Delia's father asked to talk to Mr. and Mrs. King alone; Freddie was glad to go to her room while they talked.

"We have all had a great deal of confidence in you, Mr. King," the visitor began, "and we feel that you should know how badly our confidence is shaken by the fact that you give comfort to, and harbor, a thief in your home. If you will send this girl away, well and good, but if you don't, we will ask you to resign as chair of our school board. I might add that we are surprised at your attitude toward this situation."

"Just as you like, neighbor," said Father King, "but I am not quite clear about sending Freddie home, regardless of what you think. She is a good, honest girl, and I hesitate to send her home to her parents with a blackened name. I am sure this will all clear up in time."

"Time!" almost shouted Delia's father. "This has to be attended to *now*."

After this stormy visit Father King sat silently by the stove, while his wife took up her knitting.

Presently she looked up to say, "Maybe we ought to send Freddie home, if she is guilty. Her own mother is the one who should deal with her, and besides, I am tired of being shunned by the neighbors because of her."

"Why, Mother! You surely know as well as I do that Freddie is not guilty. I am just a little surprised at you. No, we will wait awhile before we send Freddie home."

The next night Freddie laid the mail from the box on the table as she came in from school. Father King eagerly looked it over before going out to do the chores. There was the bill for the farm paper, a letter from his brother, the good old *Review and Herald*, and a letter from Freddie's mother that would have the money for her board and room. Then there was a letter from Mrs. Ellen G. White.

"Why, I never had a letter from Sister White before. I wonder why. But the mail can wait until after chores," he said, going out to take advantage of all the daylight there was left.

Later that evening Father King sat down to read his mail. He opened the letter from Sister White first and began to read.

"What is it, Father?" asked his wife, watching her husband's face as he read.

"This settles it, Mother. We are *not* going to send Freddie home."

"What are you talking about? Sister White does not know about Freddie; she does not even know

that we have her here. You have not written her, have you?"

"No," said Father King. "I did not write to her, but she *does* know. Call Freddie, for I want to read this to both of you."

The three of them sat down by the stove while Father King read the letter, part of which read like this:

"Do *not* send the young girl you have in your home to her people. She is not guilty of the charges against her. Patiently teach her the truth and help her find the Lord. She will someday take her place in God's work."

Amazed, Freddie knelt reverently beside the old couple while Father King thanked God for the advice they needed just then. A strange peace seemed to settle over the King household, but the chilly atmosphere at school had not changed.

"Never mind," said Father King. "You know now that God cares, and one of these days everything will clear up, even the weather. Just try to be your happy, sweet self." But that last bit of counsel was hard to live out.

Spring was on the way, the snows of winter were turning into rain, and the drifts around the little schoolhouse were getting smaller by the hour. One day at noon the rain was pouring down.

"Suppose you dash out and get us a bucket of drinking water, Philip," suggested Miss Wade to the largest boy in school.

The rest of the pupils watched Philip through the windows and laughed as he slipped, spilled the water, and slid back down to the well for more. A merry group stood ready to open the door for him, but no one was prepared for his triumphant shout as he reached the porch.

"Hurrah for Freddie! Hurrah for Freddie! She did *not* steal Delia's ring." There it was on Philip's little finger.

For once Miss Wade had a hard time quieting the children and bringing the room to order. Philip had to tell again and again just what crack of which step he found Delia's ring in and how it glistened in the rain to attract his attention.

When the room was finally quiet, Miss Wade spoke. "Remember that I advised you all to consider the ring as missing, not stolen? I hope that all of you, every one of you who has accused Freddie, will ask her forgiveness."

So school had a happy ending that year after all; Delia and Freddie walked home from the closing exercises arm in arm.

Some years later a young minister was introducing his wife to Sister White. "I have wanted to meet you for a long time," said the young woman.

"But we *have* met, I think," said Sister White, looking earnestly into her face.

"No, this is the first time I ever saw you," answered Freddie. "I am the girl who lived in Father King's home one winter."

"Ah, yes, now I remember," said Sister White thoughtfully. "That was when I saw you—at a great distance. May God bless you in His service."

And I know He did, for I know Freddie very well. She was my mother.