ROOM 22
By Mrs. Paul E. King
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Dan stood at the curb waiting for the bus, books in one arm, his trombone in the other hand.

"Hey, don't you ever get tired of playing that thing?" Patrick Jenski asked with a half-sneer. "I don't care for band," he added.

"I do," Dan replied softly and truthfully.

"Sissy stuff," Patrick ejaculated mockingly. Changing the subject quickly, he said, "What's this about your lessons? Almost failing, aren't you?"
It was like a whip lash. Dan felt its sting; its meaning. "Better spend time on those lessons, Dan, and not so much on that cow-sounding thing," Patrick declared meaningfully.

Cow-sounding thing! Well, whatever Pat may dub his trombone, he liked it. In fact, it was like a best friend in many ways, Dan thought, wondering why Patrick should be so concerned over something that was no concern of his. Oh, well, he reasoned kindly, it took all kinds of people to make up the world.

Irvin Bancar appeared just then.

"Hey, Irv, what do you think of music boy?" Patrick asked with a snicker.

"I think that's his business, Pat. After all, he isn't doing us any harm. And I hear he's the number 1 player in band. That's something neither of us can brag about,"

"But his lessons, Irv! I'd be embarrassed if I made grades as poorly as he."

Looking at Dan, Irvin said, "Show him what you can do, Dan. Huh?"

"Lexie offered him her papers to copy," Patrick went on, "but he refused. He's a goon, a square. Just think how that would have brought his marks up!"

"And my self-esteem and God-consciousness down!" Dan exclaimed. "No, Pat, when my grades come up, it will be because, finally, I have done it all on my own, with God's help, of course."

"Why do you bring God into everything?" Patrick asked, irritated.

"Because He is the center of my life."

"Come on now," Pat remarked, "you can't make me believe that a guy as young as you and I can really mean that. You lead the stuffiest, more boring kind of life I've ever seen."
Dan laughed. "That's because you don't understand what being a Christian is all about. Far from being stuffy and boring, it's the most wonderful life I've ever lived. If you'd just get saved and live with Christ in your heart, you'd know that everything I'm telling you is the truth."

Patrick started to talk again but clamped his lips together, when he saw the school bus turn around the corner. The bus squeaked its way to a halt and the boys got on.

"Still not fixed," Patrick said to Mr. Emmons, the bus driver. "Squeaky as ever."

Mr. Emmons laughed. "Yes. Sure is, Pat," the jovial driver agreed. "You can hear me coming a block or two away, can't you?"

"We sure know you're coming!" Irvin said, laughing and flopping down in a seat next to the window.

The bus rattled away, stopping every so often to pick up more students.

Dan was busy with his thoughts when he heard someone say, "You need any help in math today?"

Turning, he saw Patsy Kliner. "I'm finished with the assignment," he said. "It wasn't nearly so hard as I thought it would be."

"I was going to let you copy my answers, Dan, if you hadn't finished."

Dan sat up in his seat. "Thanks, Patsy, but I couldn't do that. It would be cheating, and I don't cheat."

"Well, I merely meant to help. Thought it would be better than turning in a half-finished assignment."

"Thanks," Dan said again. "But I'd rather turn in a blank sheet and keep a conscience void of offence toward God and man than to turn in a completed assignment gotten by cheating."

"Everybody does it, Dan," Patsy defended.
"Not everybody, Patsy; I'm somebody, and I don't do it. In God's sight, cheating's every bit as sinful and evil as are coveting and lying and sterling."

"OK. OK!" Patsy exclaimed, throwing her hands in the air in total exasperation. "So you don't cheat . . . you won't cheat! Don't consign the rest of us to the pit for doing it. After all, it's a way of life around Murphy High."

"What good does it do anybody?" Dan asked quickly. "Why bother with education if you don't plan on learning? True, math is difficult for me; but I intend to hang right in there until I master these hard problems. There's a sense of achievement and a feeling of true accomplishment when one masters his difficulties and emerges a victor over them."

"You're an oddball, Dan; did anyone ever tell you this before?"

Dan smiled. "Not in so many words," he answered, smiling. "I'm really quite a regular fellow, who'd rather please God than man."

"And fail in your grades?" Patsy asked, incredulously.

"I'm not planning on failing," came Dan's reply. "Not so long as I have a brain left in my head and can go to God for wisdom and help."

"I still say you're odd," Patsy declared with a shrug of her slender shoulder. "It's just that I want our class to beat Dave's; the losing class throws a party for the winners, and one lug-head can ruin everything for a class. We need teamwork, Dan. Please, may I look over your answers to see how many are wrong and then correct them?"

Dan remained adament. "Sorry. Patsy, I can't do that. I have an obligation to God and to myself."

Patsy turned away in disgust just as the bus squeaked to a halt in front of the school.

Dan gathered his belongings together and hurried inside. He could scarcely wait for band practice. Mr. Tillings was the greatest teacher a fellow could ever have, he thought, putting the trombone in his locker and hurrying away to his first class, history. History wasn't difficult at all for him. In fact, he really enjoyed it. If only he could learn the basics of math better, he
soliloquized painfully. Then a sudden thought shot through his brain: Mr. Tillings! Would he be able to help him with the tricky math problems? Well, there was only one way to find out and that was to ask him.

The morning classes were soon over and it was time for band practice. Dan was the first to enter Room 22. As usual, Mr. Tillings was sitting on a chair up front sorting through the arrangements he had prepared for his pupils; his students.

"Hi," Dan greeted casually. If there was one person in all the world he could relax around, it was his music teacher.

"Hi, yourself, old chap," Mr. Tillings replied with a smile. "You all ready to play that new piece I gave you, Dan?"

"Ready, and rarin' to go, as they say," Dan answered. Then, quickly, he said, "Mr. Tillings, I want to ask you a question."

"What about?"

"Math."

"Math? Oh, I see; you're having problems, aren't you, Dan?"

"Sure am."

"So I heard. Your father was in to see me this morning. Said all you wanted to do was practice on the trombone."

"Not quite; I do get my lessons. But this new math's clear off beam for me. I try to get it, Mr. Tillings. Honest, I do. But it's like quick-silver: It eludes me."

"Have you talked it over with God, Dan?"

"Many times. This is the first time I've ever made poor grades in math and it troubles me. But I simply can't understand it."

Mr. Tillings scratched his partially-bald head and pushed his horn-rimmed glasses back on the bridge of his nose. "Let's see," he said, thinking
out loud, "I have tomorrow night free. Could you come over to the house around quarter till six, Dan? Mrs. Tillings was a tremendous math teacher in her day. Between the two of us, I believe we can help you."

"Thanks, Mr. Tillings," Dan said with a great sigh of relief. "I'm sure I'll get to understand it now. Mr. Spartan assigns the problems to us without much explanation on how to solve them; this is why so many of us aren't getting the answers."

Mr. Tillings walked over to where Dan stood, polishing and oiling his trombone. Slapping him congenially on his shoulders, he said, "My number one trombone player's going to surprise his father and be the number one math student. See if he doesn't, and isn't!"

Something inside Dan caught the spark of enthusiasm; the thrust of encouragement and confidence. "God helping me," he remarked, "I'll master that mind-boggling, elusive math yet."

"Know what? I believe you will," came the challenging, positive reply from the band-master.

If only math came as easy and as simply for him as his music did! Dan thought, fitting his lips to the mouthpiece of the silver trombone and hitting one of the highest notes he'd ever hit before.

"Great, Dan! Great!" Mr. Tillings exclaimed, looking at Dan in amazement. "You'll go places in the music world, see if I'm not right."

"It will all be for the glory of God, Mr. Tillings. I promised Him my life, my love, my talents, if I have any, and my all."

"You won't be sorry you made this commitment. God has a great field of work for you."

Long after school was over for the day, Dan pondered Mr. Tillings' words. Then he settled down to his math, praying and asking God for understanding in solving the problems. He was amazed and thankful, when
he noticed that he had finished the day's assignment in half the time it ordinarily took him, and with the Tillings' help, he soon mastered and conquered the thing that once had had the mastery over him.

"Congratulations!" Patsy exclaimed some few weeks later. "You're really a math whiz, Dan. In fact, you've got most of us 'running' to keep up with you and those fabulous A's and A + 's you're making. Remember I mentioned that our class was in a contest with Dave's; that the losing class gave a party for the winning class. Well, you're invited to the party. Dave's having it over at his house. His folks are gone for a week. Dave said the house is all ours. We'll have a time! No one to tell us what to do or what not to do."

Dan looked at Patsy's flushed, excited face. "Do our teachers know what's planned, Patsy?"

"Oh, my no! Don't you mention a thing to anybody. This is just something we kids got up ourself. Furthermore, it's nobody's business what we do after school. We're not juveniles any longer, and I think it's a great idea . . . seeing which class could make the best grades in this six-week period, then throwing a celebration party."

Dan stood looking at the fair, auburn-haired girl before him. "Look Patsy," he said, "my advise to you is, don't go to that party. You may be sorry. Dave's dad's quite a heavy drinker."

"So what! That doesn't mean we'll be having drinks."

"If I know Dave, you will. He thinks it's great to get into his dad's booze. And really, Pat, I don't see how you, nor anyone else who cheated, can even think of yourself as being on the winning side. You're not; you're on the losing side. Anything gotten by unfair or unjust means is never gain; it's always a loss."

"Okay, so you won't come... this, in essence, is what you're saying... don't spoil things for the rest of us by giving us guilty feelings. I was sent here with a message to tell you to come to the party, not to be preached at."

"Did it sound like a sermon, Patsy? I didn't mean for it to. But my answer is no; I won't be coming. If I have any celebrating to do, or any thanks
to offer, it must all go to my wonderful, wonderful Lord. He alone has opened my understanding to those tricky math problems. I'll give Him all the praise and all credit."

But Patsy didn't wait to listen. With a shrug of her shoulders, she hurried away.

The school year slipped by quickly and graduation day arrived. Dan, receiving his diploma and special recognition for his excellent grades, looked down at Mr. and Mrs. Tillings. Every honor conferred upon him, he thought, should have gone to the Tillings. But for them, and the encouragement he received in Room 22, he would well have failed.

Tears welled up in his eyes. They were tears of thankfulness and triumph.