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Theme: Anger

Introduction:

This story is set in a school in New York. It deals with a young student who finds it hard to control his temper. He is often the target of provocation, but he has to learn some new strategies for anger management.

Toby was angry. He was often angry. Sometimes very angry.

It didn't take much to get him worked up.

Justin, who was in his class, knew this and he would use it to good effect.

"Loser," Justin whispered after Toby answered incorrectly.

Toby jumped up and dashed towards Justin, fists clenched, teeth tight and fire in his chest.

"Toby, sit down at once!" cried Mr Newman, as he stepped promptly across to the incident.

It was all Toby could do to control himself and not let fly with a punch to wipe that smug smile off Justin's face.

Toby looked at his teacher through watery eyes. He felt like crying and swearing all at once but did neither and returned to his desk.

Toby's school was in New York in The United States of America. It was a large school. A good school with fine teachers and many eager students. Toby really liked it, but he was getting in to more and more trouble because of his temper and that blistering anger inside him which was so ready to erupt.

The thing was, there was nobody he could talk to about his feelings. His mum was under pressure. Dad wasn't there any more, Toby only saw him during the long vacation and Pete, his big brother, was working in Washington now and only came home to collect things or have a meal.

Down in the gym the boys were playing indoor baseball. Toby saw Justin across the room. The throb of annoyance started to well up. Justin was bound to say something. Perhaps Toby should get in there first. But no, he was invited to bat and his attention and energies were soon put into the game.

His team won and they all squatted in the corner sharing a coke, laughing about the result.

Toby didn't notice Justin come up behind him and wasn't prepared for the shove in the back that Justin delivered with significant force. Toby fell sprawling on the wooden floor. Justin cackled and in a sarcastic voice said, "At least you can hit a ball, Dopey Toby, pity you can't hit a good score in maths."

A pain shot through Toby's head and blurred his vision. Not a pain from the blow but from the power of the anger. Toby bounced up and grabbed Justin by the collar, pushed him back against the wall bars and lifted his hand to strike him. The rest of his team reacted swiftly and intervened, grabbing Toby by the shoulders, shouting at Justin for his provocation. Mr Newman had witnessed the scene from the door. He walked briskly across.

"Toby, report to my office during afternoon recess. I'm not going to tolerate any more of your outbursts," the teacher announced with authority and a hint of exasperation.

Toby shook himself free from his team mates, looked at them accusingly but could not make eye contact with his enemy, Justin. He stormed from the gym and went to find a solitary corner.

He waited outside Mr Newman's office, impatiently rocking from one foot to the other. The door opened and Mr Newman beckoned the guilty boy inside.

"Sit down Toby," the teacher's voice was gentle. Toby appreciated this and felt a little more secure. "Toby, nearly every day you lose your temper with somebody. Justin Skinner seems to be your latest target," Mr Newman confirmed.

"But Sir, he's winding me up. Always having a go. I just can't stop myself when he starts," insisted Toby, his temperature rising again.

"It's no good Toby, you've got to get some self control. This could end in you being expelled," the teacher continued, "there are a few tricks for anger that might help."

Mr Newman moved across to the whiteboard, picked up a pen and wrote the numbers one to five in a vertical column.

"Here we go," thought Toby, "the count to ten and take deep breaths speech."

Mr Newman lifted the pen and said, "When you feel like you're going to lose your temper and hit Justin, try these. Number one. Say excuse me." Mr Newman wrote the words 'excuse me' in capitals on the board. "Number two. Breathe slowly through your nose and number three, turn and walk away."

'I knew it,' thought Toby.

"Number four," continued the teacher, "as you're walking begin counting and do not stop walking or counting until you reach twenty five."

Toby rolled his eyes and wished he could leave.

“And here’s the real trick,” Mr Newman enthused, “as you’re walking imagine Principal Johnson sitting behind his desk wearing a pink ballet dress and a diamond tiara.”

Toby looked up at his teacher not sure whether he had heard him correctly. A smile spread across the man’s face.

“Yes that’s right, imagine your headteacher in a ballet dress. That will soon make you smile and distract you from Justin Skinner’s taunts.”

Toby laughed out loud. It was good to laugh, he hadn’t done that for a long time. “Oh Sir. I’ll try it. And I will try not to lose it,” Toby assured this kind man.

Toby politely said goodbye and closed the door behind him.

It was only a day later when Justin tried to wind him up again.

“Second hand trainers today Toby,” smirked Justin in the cloakroom.

A flush of fury swept across Toby. He stood square up to Justin. And then he remembered.

“Excuse me, I’ve got to go,” Toby coughed.

He breathed deeply, turned and walked out towards the corridor. He began the slow count, whispering under his breath. A picture started to form in his mind. He saw the usually serious headmaster stand up from his large oak desk. He was wearing a voluminous pink dress and dainty ballet shoes. The music started in Toby’s mind and in his daydream Principal Johnson began singing, arms stretched out, smiling mouth wide open. “Tomorrow, Tomorrow, I love you Tomorrow. You’re only a day away,” sang the principal.

The image faded and Toby found himself at the other end of the corridor, leaning against the wall. Laughing with real gusto.

“Glad to see you’re enjoying yourself Toby,” said Mr Newman as he walked past.

The anger was gone.

Thought/Prayer

God of the World,

At some time or other everyone feels angry. It is quite natural. Sometimes we are angry because something has happened to annoy us. At other times we can lose our temper easily because we are not happy with some things in our lives.

May we think deeply about our anger and learn to control our strong feelings. May we use our emotions and energy to make the world around us a more peaceful place.

These are our thoughts and this is our prayer.