



THE BLIND MAN



The School bell rang loudly and clearly. Another school day had ended. The front door of the school opened wide and many boys and girls rushed out. They all wanted to be the first ones on the play ground. It's always good fun on the swings. Some of them simply kicked a ball, while others stood talking and laughing. Three big boys from grade seven did not hang around, however.

They never stayed long. They always disappeared as quickly as possible. They were always together. The tallest boy's name was John. He always had a packet of smokes in his pocket. Every day after school they hide behind some trees to have a smoke. They know that smoking is bad for them. Their parents have told them often enough. And the teachers at school have often warned them, too, about the dangers of smoking. "Smoking kills", it says on each packet of cigarettes. But these boys don't care. They are disobedient. They don't want to listen to their parents and teachers. They think they know better.

This time, too, the other two boys from grade seven follow " Big John", as they call him. He is big, tough and daring. And this afternoon again these three naughty and wicked boys are heading for their usual place where nobody can see what they are up to. They did not notice that Gerald, one of the grade six boys, was following them at a safe distance. Gerald had always wondered where these boys were going after school. He had a fair idea that these boys always smoked after school. You could smell it on their clothes and you could tell from their breath. Their fingers, too, were brown from the nicotine. Nicotine is the poison in the cigarettes, he had



learned at school. The teacher had always reminded the children that once you started smoking it will be very, very, hard to stop. Smoking is very addictive, his parents had said.

Look, the three boys were going into a side track towards the forest. And sure enough Gerald saw that Big John, when they thought that nobody could see them, handed out some cigarettes to the other boys. They all lit up. Two of the boys suddenly started to cough and splutter. Big John was already quite used to smoking. He did not cough any more. He had been smoking for a long time already. At least, so he said.

All of a sudden the three boys were aware that somebody was watching them. It did not take them long to notice Gerald hiding not so far from them. They did not seem upset. In fact they invited him to join them. Big John even offered him a smoke, too. Gerald hesitated. He had never smoked in his whole life. But the boys urged him to give it a try. "You'll like it", they all said. Then Gerald had his first puff, and before long he was also coughing like the others. "You'll get used to it", they convinced him. He wondered if that was true. He had his doubts, though. He certainly did not like this cigarette and as soon as he thought nobody was watching he threw it away on the side of the road.

After that the boys walked back in the direction of the village. Gerald followed them closely as he was becoming more and more confident. When they entered the main street they noticed a blind man with a white stick. Big John deliberately bumped into him which visibly upset the blind man. He was so sure he had been careful and with his stick usually managed to avoid bumping into people. Next Big John stuck out his foot right in front of the blind man so that he tripped. He fell right on his face which caused quite a big bruise near his right eye. All the boys laughed and thought it was very funny. Gerald, too, laughed because he was too frightened of the other boys if he didn't laugh.



The poor man groped around for his walking stick and got up very stiffly. Then he tried to find his way home.

That night Gerald could not sleep. The blind man was constantly on his mind. He felt sorry for the poor man. He also felt very guilty. He had also laughed just like the other boys. Even though he himself had not tripped the blind man he had been responsible, too, he thought. He tossed and turned in his bed and the next morning was very tired. His Mum noticed that something was wrong and asked him what the matter was. Then he confessed all that had happened the previous day including his first puff on that filthy cigarette.

He promised that he would never smoke again. His Mum also told him not mix with that sort of company again. It gets you into trouble, she said.

That evening at the dining table Dad said that he thought he knew where that blind man lived. "Why don't you go and see the poor man and apologize to him? Don't you think that is what the Lord would want you to do"?, Dad said. "Yes, that will be an excellent idea", Mum thought. "Maybe you can help him with something", she suggested.

Next Saturday Dad dropped Gerald off at the blind man's house. Gerald knocked on the door and after a while the door was opened by a little old lady with a walking stick. She was very, very old. Her back was crooked, her face was very wrinkled and she could hardly walk, even with the walking stick. And there at the dining table was the poor blind man. His face was all bandaged up. Surely he was not so badly hurt, Gerald thought. But unfortunately, he was very badly hurt when that wicked boy tripped him. That same night he had been unable to sleep because of the severe pain in his head and face. So the next day he went to see the doctor. An X-



ray was taken and it was discovered that his jawbone was broken. Gerald was ashamed of himself. How could he have laughed about this?

So he plucked up the courage and told the blind man, whose name was Sam, that he was one of those boys. He then sincerely apologized to Sam. Sam was quite good about it. "If you are sorry", he said, "then I will forgive you for that is what the Lord has taught us".

Gerald noticed how cold it was in the room, so he asked why the wood heater was not on. "Neither of us can chop wood, my boy", said the old lady. The last time I tried it, I hurt myself so much with the axe because I loose my balance without my walking stick. And I can't hold my stick and chop wood at the same time. "What a wonderful opportunity", Gerald thought, "to be able to do something for these poor people". So he found the axe in the shed and chopped a big supply of wood for the fire. He took some of the wood inside and even lit the fire for them. And before long there was a lovely fire burning in the fire place.



Sam had such a content and happy look on his face now. And the old lady, too, seemed very happy and thankful. The room was warm and cozy now. And Gerald too had a warm happy feeling. He had not looked forward to seeing these people for he always finds it very hard to apologize. But he was very glad he did what had to be done.

"Isn't it amazing", Sam said, "how the Lord has turned something bad into a blessing for us?" Gerald wholeheartedly agreed and promised to come back every Saturday to see them and to chop more wood for the fire.

When he left his heart was full of joy.