

A PERFECT SIGHT!

by

Henk de Beijer

The sketches in this booklet were originally written in Papiamentu and shortly afterwards translated into Dutch. The English translation was made before publication in this form. Both translations were made by the author. The titles in Papiamentu and Dutch are, respectively:

N' TA KOI MIRA!

and:

GEEN GEZICHT!

The revenues, which will hopefully proceed from this publication, will all be destined for the realization of the ideals of Shon Janchi, i.e. for the services to the blind and visually impaired of the FAVI — the Aruban Foundation of the Visually Handicapped — and the FALPA — the Aruban Foundation for Talking and Adapted Reading-matter.

Publication of the three booklets was made possible by the cooperation of the

Foundation for Graphic Communication in Curaçao and was realized with financial aid from the Gift Fund Queen Beatrix.

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WHO IS SHON JANCHI?

The original Shon Janchi is the brain-child of Mrs. Denise Koolman-Arends, who, in June 1978, wrote three columns for the weekly talking magazine SINTA, a talking magazine, giving a selection of newspaper articles in Papiamentu, the local language of the three leeward islands of the Netherlands Antilles. In the first two of her columns she presented the readers with a certain Mr. Shon Janchi whom she had shaped from the many experiences she had had up to then, as a social worker for the FAVI, the Aruban Foundation of the Visually Handicapped.

Shon Janchi did not only immediately become the favourite of the readers of the talking magazine, but the permanent author of the weekly information column for the visually handicapped in SINTA, also took such a liking to him, that he decided to adopt Shon Janchi, though, at the same time, he changed his character a little, by not only using him as an example of a fully rehabilitated blind man in a typically Aruban setting, but also as a spokesman for the basic ideas and philosophy that he wanted to pass on to the blind and visually impaired population of Aruba.

Even so, we still cannot speak of one single author for all the other chapters in this booklet. The author, whose name is printed on the title page is no more than a sort of ghost-writer for the ideas and suggestions he got from others. Most of the suggestions came from Mrs. Tinie Pronk, treasurer of the board of the FAVI, administrator for the foundation and coordinator for the handicraft rehabilitation program for adult and elderly visually handicapped persons. Many times, some casual experience of hers in that handicraft circle, would be enough to make her grab the phone to draw a new, oral picture of Shon Janchi in a new situation, saying important things in a simple way. Quite often, her portrayals were so vivid that she didn't leave much more for the author to do than put a sheet of paper into his typewriter and type out the story in little or no time

at all.

Another one of the co-authors, whom we would do great injustice if we didn't mention her name, though she herself would certainly appreciate its omission, is Mrs. Willie Flanegin, long time home-teacher of the FAVI's, whose descriptions of her experiences, always anonymously told, were so full of humour and candour, that the author could use them as a mold in which to cast several situations that Shon Janchi found himself in. Those molds have not yet been exhausted with this booklet.

The first two sketches, as written by Mrs. Denise Koolman have been adapted and combined into the first chapter, so that they would not deviate too much from the style of the principal author. And, after this explanation, let's have a look at the life, the experiences, the ideas and the philosophy of SHON JANCHI.

ARUBA, October 1982.

Shon Janchi tells his story

SHON JANCHI felt quite nervous. It was the first time that he had to face an audience to deliver an address, as they call this sort of thing. He was going to talk about his own life as a blind man. He was quite a handsome looking fellow of slim build; his skin was brown and his lank hair was the red indian type, which, in spite of his age — he was in his early fifties — was still fairly dark; a typical Aruban, with beautiful grey eyes, which were however dark as they say in Aruba. His lips were slightly parted and somewhat pouted, giving the impression that he was laughing and fully at ease. Actually, rather ironically, he was laughing at himself. Nothing in his life, prior to this, could have led to the expectation, that one day, he, a blind man, would have to face an audience. He wasn't a shy man; he never had been, but nevertheless, on this first occasion, he felt rather ill at ease. His fingers rested on some sheets of braille paper on which he had made some notes, in order not to lose track of what he wanted to say and thereby run the risk of saying a lot of incoherent nonsense.

"You can talk freely about your own experiences." the man from the FAVI had said when he approached him with the request to participate in an information evening in the community centre. "A few simple examples, of what you are confronted with in your daily life will better illustrate your situation than a high-brow lecture, with a lot of big words in it."

"I lost my sight seven years ago," said Shon Janchi, in his own, amicable way of speaking. In spite of his nervousness, he was quite sure of himself. "I had never had to worry about having to care for myself before, as I was living with a sister of mine. It was a terrible blow to me when my sister died, four years ago and, as I had never married, I was now all alone. When I look back on those days now, and remember how a couple of friendly neighbours had to look after me, had to see to it that I got something to eat and that my house was tidied up a bit, I often can't help thinking to myself: how my life has changed."

He remained silent for a brief moment, suddenly realizing that he didn't feel nervous any more. He had listened to his own voice, as though he himself were in audience. His fingers slid over his notes as he continued:

"Let's have a look at an ordinary day in my life. Just like you, I also get up every morning. I don't need anybody's help, to put my feet on the floor A few people in the audience started to laugh, but most of them didn't react, he noted. He acted as if he were looking around the room, his face showing a trace of a smile, knowing that they didn't dare to laugh. "Just like all of you," he went on, "I have a bath, I brush my teeth, I shave although I must confess that I too, never had realized before, that a man doesn't need sight to do all these petty things and a lot more. I assure you that you too can all do all sort of chores like these, without looking. Sighted people are the slaves of light; they think that nothing can be done without light. That is of course not the case."

"Sure, it goes without saying that, when you lose your sight you have to learn how to do all these things anew, in a different way,- without seeing, like all the activities of daily living. To that end, the FAVI has its home-teacher. Such a home-teacher, or whatever name you want to give a person like that, has herself learnt all the little tricks a blind man needs, while blind-folded, in order to be able to teach them afterwards to the blind; to shave oneself, for instance, one doesn't really need a mirror; by feeling with your fingers, you can shave your face perfectly smooth."

"So, as I said, I get up in the morning, I have my bath, brush my teeth, shave, get dressed, just like everyone else. I boil water for my cup of coffee, because I must have coffee for breakfast. Sometimes I boil an egg, with the aid of a special timer, on which every minute is indicated by one dot and every five minutes by two dots which one can feel with one's fingers. I butter my two slices of bread and every now and then also my fingers, but that's nothing, because, as my home-teacher told me, when you are blind, you should always have paper napkins at hand. However, to tell you the truth, I find that paper napkins are far too expensive, for me, at least. So let me tell you a little secret, but please, don't tell my home-teacher. You see, I always have a roll of toilet paper on my table and a waste-paper basket behind me. It's a perfect sight, of course but as long as I am alone, who cares!"

This time, more people couldn't resist laughing. He could sense that everyone was looking at him

intently. He continued: "Every Monday morning, after I have finished my breakfast, I grab hold of my white cane and leave the house, to go and do my weekly shopping in a neighbourhood shop. How do I do that, you're probably asking yourself. Well, nowadays, that's not too difficult for me any more, because I was taught cane-walking by the FAVI home-teacher. She taught me to orient myself completely in and around the house, so I don't run the risk of bumping into things, or falling off the steps. She also taught me to walk all the way to the local shop, so I don't have to depend any more on others to get the things I need.

"However, that doesn't mean that every time I leave my house it's all plain sailing. For instance, last Monday, I went off with my shopping list written out in braille. Braille is a reading and writing system which you can feel with your fingers, when you can't read or write any more. That too is something that the FAVI home-teacher can teach a person.

"Anyway, last Monday, I went off for the shop and to get there, I have to cross a main road. My home-teacher taught me, that on arrival at an intersection, I should first check the height of the pavement with my cane. Next, I listen very carefully for the on coming traffic to determine in which direction the traffic is moving. If I don't hear anything, I raise my cane into the air and try to cross the street as quickly as I can, dropping the cane again, when I know I'm almost there, to pick up the edge of the sidewalk on the other side. The raised cane is necessary, to warn every vehicle which one might not have heard, because the white cane is also the international symbol for blindness, which should immediately warn all drivers of vehicles that you are a visually handicapped person.

"So, what do you think happened last Monday? As I was just about to step off the pavement, two strong hands grabbed my shoulders and pushed me onto the street. Hey, Wait a minute! I called out. What's happening? But before I knew, I was on the other side of the road. Well what had happened? Simply this: Someone, who had noticed that I was blind, wanted to help me, but he did so, without asking me, or even warning me of his intentions. To tell you the truth, it often happens that sighted people want to help a visually handicapped person, that is, the blind and partially sighted, but they do so without asking you if you want or need help. What can a man do in a case like that? I'll tell you what I did. I tried to explain to my unexpected assistant, that if I had wanted help, I'd have asked for it, or that if he thought I needed help, he should have asked me first, because this sort of unexpected help scares the hell out of a man. After all, if you can't see, you don't know what's going on. As I said, this sort of unsolicited and unannounced assistance, by well-meaning people is a regular experience of the visually handicapped.

"After this incident, I continued my way to the shop, but just as I was almost at my destination, I heard a woman's voice call out to me: 'Hey, Shon Janchi! How are you?' I stopped dead on the spot, because cane-walking requires a lot of concentration in order not to lose one's sense of direction. I simply can't walk and talk at the same time. I replied to the unknown voice: 'I'm fine, thank you' and at the same time I felt a hand slap me on my shoulders, accompanied by the same voice, calling out loud: 'Isn't awful! I feel so sorry for you! You still can't see anything? What are you doing alone in the street for heaven's sake! It must be terribly dangerous.'

"I was simply unable to suppress a sudden rush of anger. Nevertheless I managed to keep my tone reasonably quiet and asked: 'I'm sorry. Who are you?' The lady again called out: 'But Shon Janchi! Don't you recognize my voice? Guess who ... !' That did it! That made me real

mad, you know. What sort of stupid game does this woman want to play? I thought. Let me see if I can teach her a lesson once and for all. And so I asked: 'Are you the queen, perhaps?'" Almost

"everyone in the audience started to laugh now, so that Shon Janchi knew for certain that his message had struck home. With a big smile on his face, he went on to say: "The lady hadn't expected that sort of an answer and in a very surprised tone she asked: 'What do you mean?' I said: 'Look here, lady, I can't see and if I knew who you were, I'd have addressed you by your name. I'm not in the habit of guessing people's name in the middle of the street.'

"The woman was quite taken aback and said in a frightened tone: 'I'm Shon Nini.' To show her, that her behaviour had been somewhat ridiculous, I greeted her again and exchanged a few courteous remarks. Again, I am forced to repeat, all blind people have to face this sort of stupid behaviour regularly. As a blind man, you have to use your head and try to show these people that their attitude is not acceptable and simply shows lack of respect for you as a person.

"After that strange encounter in the street, I went on to do my shopping. The shopkeeper always helps me to find the things I need. I learned to do my own shopping together with my home-teacher. In that way, the lady in the shop also learned how to assist me.

"Now let's have a look at my situation at home" Shon Janchi said. He felt quite at ease now. He was fully aware of the fact, that he was trying to show this group of people that a blind man, in spite of his problems was as worthy a human being as they themselves were and because he knew that his audience consisted mainly of ordinary people with mainly a basic level education, he also realized that he had to use simple words and clear examples.

"One of the things you are surely asking yourselves," he went on to say "is, who is cooking for Shon Janchi? And, what will his house look like? Very dirty? Because, after all, I am living all alone and have nobody to take care of me. Well, there was a time that my house was indeed full of dust and very dirty and that a caring lady in the neighbourhood had to see to it that I got something to eat three times a day. I couldn't even make myself a cup of coffee, let alone a sandwich. You can imagine that the kind of help this friendly lady had to provide for me, was extremely inconvenient for her and although I will always remain very grateful to her, it was also very inconvenient for me, as I was completely dependent upon her, for every little thing.

"One day, someone suggested to me that I should get in touch with the social worker of the FAVI, to see if there was anything that could be done about the way I was living. Very reluctantly and without really expecting anything at all, I took that step and in my first conversation with that young lady, I learned about the FAVI home-teaching program. The first thing I wanted to learn, after they had told me about it, was how to read and write braille and the first lessons that I got, were indeed completely dedicated to learning braille. But after a few weeks I myself suggested to cut the time allotted to that lesson, in half so that we could use the other half for learning to cook and tidy up my own place. The first thing I learned was, how to make myself a cup of coffee and a cheese sandwich. You can't possibly imagine how proud and happy I felt that day. Gradually I learned to find my way around the kitchen and I even learned how to cook a meal for myself. Of course, the lady who had cooked for me until then, couldn't believe that I had undergone such a radical change and she used to be very worried about me, working with the gas-stove. Several times, in the beginning, after my home- teacher no longer returned, she would come in and tell me: 'Don't worry about your meals, I'll see that you get what you need. It's far too dangerous for someone who can't see to meddle around with a gas stove. If you are not careful, you might burn your fingers or even set the house on fire.' Thank goodness, I didn't give in to her, I always told her 'Don't worry, I know what I'm doing. I want to be able to do things myself. I don't want to be dependent upon others for my daily meals and all the little things I need. What will I do, if some day, you are no longer here? I really want to learn to help myself.'

"You would never have expected an answer like that from me, seven years ago. "Well, that's how it goes and as I said, apart from braille and cooking, I also learned to clean my house, the bathroom, the kitchen, the living-room and so on, so that I could be sure I hadn't left any dust around anywhere. I learned how to wash my own clothes and to make a long story short, all the household chores a man must be able to do, if he wants to lead a normal, independent life. It goes without saying, of course, that every now and then, I have to call in the assistance of someone for certain things I can't do myself. For instance, when I get my mail, I can't read it myself and in such a case, I just ask one of the neighbours to come and read it for me.

"All these things, like reading and writing braille and like touch typing

on a normal typewriter, weren't all easy for me to learn, but I hated the idea of having to remain dependent for every thing on other people for the rest of my life. There will always be enough things that will keep me to some extent dependent upon sighted people, because you simply cannot do everything yourself if you are blind. "It doesn't really bother me, if on some day, things don't work out, as I wanted them to, because I know all too well, that everybody else every now and then also has a bad day, in which all things seems to go wrong. It isn't only because I am blind that I have to face and cope with certain problems. There are even days that I am fed up with the household chores I have to do, but at such moments, I always remind myself of my life of seven years ago. Then, I can't help thinking: how my life has changed! How could I ever have been so dependent on everybody around me! I must have been a terrible burden for them and a very annoying one too, because I couldn't even pour out a glass of water for myself! I now know, that those who live a life, feeling sorry for themselves, can never be worthy human beings, until they themselves decide that they have to accept their blindness, if they want to lead fruitful and conscious lives. One must take that step towards independence oneself. Others may assist you, but it is you, yourself, who will have to do it."

Shon Janchi remained silent for a moment. He felt the tension of the audience and all the eyes directed towards him. Then, he laughed and concluded: "Thank you very much for your attention."

A long and loud applause was his reward.

SHON JANCHI DECIDES TO GO TO TOWN

"But Uncle Janchi, why don't you come to town with me?" Shon Janchi leant back in his chair and didn't answer at first. He had asked his niece Clarita to come and make up a list of clothing he needed, which he couldn't get in his own neighbourhood. During the past few years, as he was gradually becoming more and more independent, his young niece had often helped him out, by shopping for him in town, without ever having once complained. In spite of the fact that he had to live on a very low allowance, he had always managed to scrape a guilder or two together to slip into her hand as a token of appreciation for her assistance. And now, that same young thing, hardly twenty-one years of age, all of a sudden had come up with the idea that he, her uncle, who was in his fifties, should accompany her to town, instead of just taking the order as she used to do.

His thoughts flashed back to the days, seven years ago, after he had lost his sight and had become utterly dependent upon his only sister Chita. In those days, he hadn't even been able to pour out a glass of water for himself. He had simply refused to believe that he would ever be able to do anything for himself again or that he would ever be able again, to get around by himself. He was blind and that was that. He had lost the will to go on living. He would do absolutely nothing, nothing, other than get out of bed late in the morning and sit in a chair and have his sister take care of his every little need, until late in the evening, when he would get out of his chair, drop into bed again.

Then, four years ago, a second, devastating blow rocked his life: his sister suddenly died and he remained all alone with few relatives or relatives who lived far away Fortunately, a couple of charitable ladies in the neighbourhood adopted him, so to speak, or else, he would have starved

to death in a house, crawling with vermin.

"But Uncle Janchi, why don't you come to town with me?" His niece's words were still echoing in his mind and they reminded him of the words of

another young girl who had visited him, several years ago and who had said something similar:

"Why don't you let us help you to learn to get around a little by yourself?" That had been the voice of the FAVI social worker, who, at long last, he had reluctantly allowed to visit him, mainly to please an acquaintance of his, who had been very insistent that he do so. How his life had changed since that day, he admitted to himself and replied to his niece:

"Yes, Clarita! Why not?" He stood up and added: "Wait a moment, so I can change into something decent." A few minutes later he returned from his bedroom, neatly dressed, his white cane in his hand, a small braille slate in his shirt-pocket, with some braille paper and his stylus in order to make some notes, if necessary. He checked his wallet, to see if he had enough money on him and, it was a pity he couldn't see the look of great admiration on Clarita's face. She knew it wouldn't be easy to fool her uncle with money. She knew that he always folded his paper money in such a way, that he could always immediately tell which one was a one hundred guilder bill, which one fifty guilders, which one twenty-five which one ten and which one five guilders. His wallet had two compartments and if he had a hundred guilder bill he would put it in the back compartment without folding it. Any bills of fifty would also go into here, folded for one quarter part. The twenty-five bills would go in the same place, but folded double. A ten guilder bill would go, unfolded, into the first compartment, so would a five guilder bill, which would be folded double. The only things that caused him trouble even now and then, when he was in a hurry, were the coins, because there were coins of one and of two-and-a-half cent with and without milled edges. The problem was that the milled two-and-a-half cent piece was only very slightly bigger than the quarter, which was also milled. However, if he took his time, they too failed to confuse him because the cent and two and-a-half cent piece were not only slightly bigger than the ten cents coin and quarter respectively, but also slightly thinner.

"They ought to make paper money of different sizes," he once said to his home-teacher, who taught him to read and write braille, cooking, cane walking, house cleaning, touch typing and so on. "You know," the home-teacher had replied, "If I'm not mistaken, one of the board members of the FAVI did talk about this matter once with the minister of finance, but you know how things go if the government has to work at it: the mills of government grind slowly."

Anyway, Shon Janchi learned to manage reasonably well with the coins and paper money as they are and on several occasions, while shopping in his neighbourhood store, he had had a good laugh at the expense of other shoppers who would stare at him in utter amazement. The shopkeeper herself had become quite accustomed to him, but others never cease to admire him, when he puts his shopping-list, made out in braille, on the counter and reads aloud the items as his fingers pass over the paper, when he opens up his wallet to pay or when he checks change, each coin separately with his fingers. When handing him paper money back, the shopkeeper always tells him the value of each separate bill, so that he can fold it on the spot, in order to be able to recognize it again afterwards.

"Who taught you that?" someone once asked him in admiration. "Nobody, as a matter of fact," Shon Janchi replied. "My home-teacher just told me once to fold the banknotes in some way, so I could recognize them afterwards and then I developed my own system. Perhaps other blind people do it in a different way. That doesn't really matter. You know what I like most about the FAVI people? They don't tell you to do things in this or that way, they just try to help you to find out which method is best for you. Of course, if"

it is learning to read and write braille, then one has to learn the symbols as they are and if one wants to learn touch typing, one has to do so in the correct manner. But, as for matters such as cooking, or cleaning the house, find one's way about with the cane, or arranging one's clothing so that one always knows what goes together with what, and what does not, for such things, they never prescribe any specific way to you, but try to help you to discover which method is best for you."

All these thoughts flashed through his mind like a movie at a fast speed as he came back from his bedroom, changed into something decent, to go to town with his niece Clarita. "Well," he asked, with a grin on his face:

"Do I look smart enough to go out on a date with my pretty niece?"

"Wow!" Clarita said, "You'd better look out! Someone might fall in love with you! Come on, let's get going!"

SHON JANCHI GOES TO TOWN.

"Do you see what I mean?" Shon Janchi said after he and Clarita had got off the mini-bus that had taken them into town. "You see what I mean? That's why a man gets sick of going any place at all!"

He was referring to what had happened when the little bus had stopped to pick them up at the side of the road, where they had stood waiting for it. Clarita had wanted to take his arm when they had left the house, but her uncle held her back and said, in a friendly tone:

"No, Clarita. Let me take you by your arm or by your shoulder; that's a much more comfortable way for me to walk with you. Do you know why?"

"No, I don't." Clarita replied, a little surprised.

"Because in that way, I can feel exactly what you are doing. Whether you're making a turn and in what direction; whether you are going up or down; whether you are quickening your pace or more slowing down. When you stop and when you start to walk. It enables me to adjust to whatever you are doing without you having to call my attention to every move you make, or are about to make. The only thing I need to be told, is when I have to step on or off a pavement or a step."

When the mini-bus had stopped for them, one of the passengers, who had apparently recognized Shon Janchi, jumped out as if shot from a gun and grabbed him with both arms, as if he wanted to lift him off the ground, while at the same time shouting at him, at the top of his voice: "Head down! Head down!" as though, besides being blind, he was also stone deaf. Shonjanchi became furious and forcefully resisted this ridiculous behaviour. Fortunately his niece Clarita was not in the least shy and very intelligent and in a very quiet, but very decisive tone she said:

"Look here, Mister, I am guiding my uncle and I know perfectly well how to do so."

The unwanted assistant let go of Shon Janchi with a start and muttered:

"I only wanted to help the poor fellow I only wanted to help the poor fellow!"

"My Uncle is any thing but poor," Clarita snapped at the stranger and placed Shon Janchi's left hand on the roof of the car and made him touch the open door with his right hand, so that he could get in by himself, without any problem whatsoever .

"Well, you know," Clarita said now that they had got off the bus. "These people aren't used to seeing a blind person. They almost never meet one, let alone get to know one. So when they see one they get excited and act strangely, because they want to help, but just don't know how to. I guess you'll have to get accustomed to this sort of ridiculous attitude. We simply can't change the world from one day to the next ..."

"You're too smart for your age," Shon Janchi replied, giving his niece a friendly pinch in the elbow.

"Where's your cane?" Clarita asked, to change the subject.

"Folded in my pocket," Shon Janchi said. "You are a far better mobility aid than a cane."

Chatting cheerfully about this, that and the other, they walked, along at a leisurely pace and turned into the main street, occasionally swerving from their path to avoid the crowds that didn't pay any attention to them. As they entered the first store, Shon Janchi

stepped behind his niece, his hand on her shoulder, in order to move more easily through the narrow aisles. He needed a couple of new trousers and at the clothes' rack where they were hanging, he touched them with his fingers, to determine the thickness of the material and what fabric they were made of. Clarita told him what colour they were, what size and what their prices were. After he had made an initial choice of three pairs, Clarita took him to the fitting cubicle, where she remained waiting for him outside. Each time he had tried on one of the pairs of trousers, he opened the curtain of the cubicle, so that Clarita could tell him how it fitted. After he had chosen two pairs, they went to get two pairs of socks and two shirts, which would match with the trousers.

"How will you be able to tell at home, which matches with which?" Clarita asked curiously.

"For the socks," her uncle explained, "I have three plastic boxes, which I have marked in braille. I only buy brown, blue and grey socks. Do you know why?"

"No, I don't," Clarita said, expecting a simple explanation.

"Because otherwise," her uncle replied, pinching her arm once again, "I'd need too many boxes."

For one instant, Clarita didn't react. Then, she looked at her uncle's face and burst out laughing, but stopped abruptly, when she noted that others shoppers were staring at them. Her uncle went on to explain:

"You don't have to mark them in braille, though. Someone who cannot read braille can use anything else for marking them. For instance: a little circle for brown, a little square for blue and a little triangle for grey. You can do the same thing with your clothes, if you want to; you just pin some sort of marker on them with a safety pin, so you can take it out for washing. But, in most cases that isn't even necessary, because quite often not only the colours are different, but also the fabric and the design ."

When they had finally got what Shon Janchi wanted, they went to the checkout counter. to have things wrapped and to pay the bill. Here, once again, Shon Janchi had to undergo a humiliating experience, because when he asked the cashier how much he had to pay, the girl didn't answer him but instead, handed Clarita the cash slip and said to her:

"Tell him he has to pay sixty-eight guilders and twenty-five cents."

Clarita snapped back at her: "Why don't you tell him yourself? His ears are perfect, you know!"

SHON JANCHI WENT TO A PARTY

"Why aren't you saying anything?" Titichi asked when they arrived back at Shon Janchi's home at one o'clock in the night. Shon Janchi had invited Titichi, a fifty year old widow, whom he had known for all his life, to accompany him to his brother Buchi's birthday party, because Titichi had also known Buchi from childhood. She had borrowed her son's car to take him there.

"Won't you come in for a moment?" he said in reply to her question, after having unlocked his front door. "We're late anyway and a few minutes more or less won't make any difference."

"Look," he said, when they had both sat down on opposite sides of the sitting-room table. "This was the second time I went to a party, since I lost my sight. On the one hand, I must admit, I quite enjoyed myself. I'm really glad I've come so far that I don't stay home any more just because I can't see. The first few years after I had gone blind, I didn't go anywhere at all. I was simply too embarrassed and afraid of facing people. I felt so ashamed, I didn't dare to show myself. A ridiculous attitude of course, but that's how it was. Thank God that time has gone by. On the other hand, however, I must confess I understand perfectly well, that there are blind and partially sighted people, who don't want to go any place."

"Did something happen?" Titichi asked in a surprised voice, which at the same time expressed

curiosity.

"In the first place," Shon Janchi tried to explain to her, "It's the noise. The noise is horrible. You feel entirely lost in the noise. That music I don't say it's not nice music, but it's so terribly loud. And, because the music is played so terribly loud, everybody tends to speak loud too. You feel like you are floating in the middle of an ocean of noise; you hear lots and lots of voices all around you mingled with the sound of the music. You tend to become disoriented; you don't know left from right; you don't know whether the voice nearest to you is speaking to you or to somebody else. You, Titichi, who can see, you recognize people from a distance; you greet

them, you go to them, you chat with them. If someone wants to talk to you, you can see that he is directing himself to you. I, at times, feel like a stupid ass. I hear a voice, but I don't know if it is speaking to me or to somebody else. If the person doesn't mention my name, or touch me, I simply don't dare to answer, for fear of making a fool of myself ... That's point number one. I did enjoy myself, mind you. Don't get me wrong, I met a lot of old acquaintances, who came over to talk to me, but there were also long lapses that I felt completely lost in a sea of noise."

"Yes, I guess I can understand that," Titichi said, "especially when I left you alone every now and then to talk to somebody else, I suppose ..."

"Exactly," Shon Janchi replied.

"And point number two?" Titichi asked, sincerely wanting to understand him better now.

"Point two," Shon Janchi said, laughing on the other side of his face. "Point two, are the insufferable people, who think they have to come to you to give a demonstration of their pity for you with such stupid questions as whether doctor so and so can't do anything any more for you and how on earth did you go blind. But the most stupid one, was a woman who came to me to tell me, that I must surely receive a very good government allowance and who then asked me whether they didn't have a room for me yet in the old people's home. Damn it! I'm sorry, Titichi, I don't want to degrade myself by resorting to bad language. But what would you have said, Titichi, if someone had said to you, with your fifty years that they ought to find room for you in a home for the aged, just because you're a widow? And as if that wasn't enough, the creature came up with the splendid idea that a special centre ought to be built where all blind people could live together." Shonjanchi laughed bitterly. "And she said it in such a loud voice," he went on to say, "so that everybody could admire her benevolence. I had to restrain myself from saying something very unpleasant... "

Titichi began to laugh and bending across the table she prodded him in his ribs, saying: "Don't get excited. Shonjanchi. Why didn't you ask her. whether they hadn't got room for her in Monte cristo*?"

"I should have, shouldn't I?" Shonjanchi replied. "If a thing like that happens again, I will."

Monte Cristo, popular former name of psychiatric institute in Curacao

It took some effort for Titichi to suppress her laughter. Then she said, in a serious tone: "Actually, now that I think of it, it doesn't really seem to be such a bad idea to establish a special centre for the blind to live together. They would be able to give you all the help you need and you would be among people who understand each other perfectly well ...

Something like a dark cloud seemed to cover Shon Janchi's face and it took him almost a full minute before he was able to speak again. Then he said, a little hoarsely:

"I'll ask you a question, Titichi, but you'll have to give me an honest reply: Would you want to live together with only widows? Would you want to live outside of normal society, as if you were an alien being, belonging to a special sort of human species who no longer have anything to do with their relatives, their friends, their acquaintances, or with even one's own neighbourhood where they had always lived? I'm sure'. Titichi that you wouldn't want anything like that for yourself. I'm sure you wouldn't want to belong to such a separate human species that has to live apart from the rest of society. All right then: I don't want anything of the kind either. I am, in the first place a human being, same as everybody else. I am not in the first place blind, but human, just as you are not a widow in the first place, not even a mother in the

first place, nor even a woman in the first place, nor I a man in the first place, but a human being ...

"Golly! Shonjanchi!" Titichi exclaimed excitedly, "you're absolutely right. I wish more people would realize this ..."

"Exactly," Shonjanchi continued. "I don't want people to look at me in the first place as belonging to a group of blind people. I don't deny I quite enjoy meeting other blind people from time to time, to exchange experiences and ideas, just as people who have the same profession do. But frankly speaking, I dare to state quite honestly that up to now, my best friends are not blind. My true friends are my old friends, like you. Titichi. I don't say I couldn't become very good friends with other blind people, of course I could, just as you and I are good friends, not because I'm blind and you're a widow but because we understand each other. And I sincerely hope one thing, Titichi. that you aren't treating me well, just because I'm blind."

"Oh, good heavens" Titichi exclaimed with vigour. "That has nothing to do with it."

"All right then," Shonjanchi continued. "In that case you know what I mean,"

"I certainly do" Titichi replied. "I know exactly what you mean now. You're absolutely right. At least something good came out of that birthday party after all. You've opened my eyes to something I'd never given any thought."

"Well," Shonjanchi said, leaning back in his chair. "The party wasn't bad at all. Don't misunderstand me. I really enjoyed myself and I won't stay home just because there are nitwits walking about, who think they know it all and who think they can poke their noses into everybody's business. That sort of people aren't only a nuisance for the blind."

"That's right" Titichi said, laughing while getting up from her chair. "And if we go on talking, there will be others tomorrow who will poke their noses into our business with their gossip. Do you know it's past two o'clock?"

SHON JANCHI TRIES TO SEW

SHON JANCHI just couldn't stop laughing. "You should have seen me!" he said between fits of laughter. "At a given moment, I was lying flat on my belly under the bed, legs and arms outstretched, looking kind of foolish. Slowly I managed to wiggle from where I was. However, at the last moment I also bumped my head hard against the lower edge of the bed."

"Did you laugh just as much then, as you're doing now?" the FAVI home-teacher, who had come to visit him on his request, asked.

"Oh, no! Certainly not" Shonjanchi grinned. "It shouldn't be too difficult to imagine what I said at that moment."

"But how could you do a stupid thing like that? Like sitting on your bed, while trying to sew a button onto your shirt?" the home-teacher laughingly asked. "How did everything come to fall to the ground in the first place?"

"You see," Shonjanchi laughed, "the button accidentally slipped out of my hand and fell on the bed. And, when I tried to find it, I swept off everything that lay on the bed, with my hands. Everything fell to the floor, the reel of thread, the needles, the pins, the scissors, everything. And to make matters worse, I had opened the packet of needles rather roughly, so that they flew in all directions when the package hit the floor. Only one of them didn't fall to the floor. Do you know how I found that one?"

"Tell me" the home-teacher said, unable to hide her curiosity.

"Well, I had gone to bed and I had just dozed off nicely when I was rudely awakened by a nasty prick in one of the softer parts of my body, if you understand what I mean."

The home-teacher exploded with laughter and exclaimed for the second time: "But how could you possibly do a stupid thing like that! Even sighted people shouldn't sit on a bed to sew. This is something you should do at a table."

"Oh, sure, I understand that now," Shon Janchi chuckled. "But now, after having tried to teach myself the hard way, I want a decent lesson from you!"

"All right" said the home-teacher who was still giggling uncontrollably. "Let's start with the fact," she laughed, "that you threw everything to the floor. Normally sighted people also have trouble finding little things like needles, or pins, if they have dropped to the floor. What you could have done, is the same thing that many sighted people do. They take a soft broom and sweep the whole floor, bringing everything to one spot. Once you've done that, the only thing that remains for you to do is to get yourself ten dirty fingers, by picking up your things from the heap of dust. But that's a lot less of a nuisance, I should think than rolling all over the floor. And if you take a little magnet, and move it through the heap of dust, it will pick up all the little metal objects for you, such as your needles and pins and the like."

"Well, I never!" Shon Janchi exclaimed. "I should have thought of that myself!"

"Well, we're all the same, as far as that's concerned," the home-teacher replied. "We usually never think of the simple solution in

the first place. But now, let me show you how you could have sewn on that button. As I said before, when you have to work with small things, the best thing to do is to sit at a table and to arrange things in such a way that you can't miss them or lose them just when you need them. You could use a plate, or a little box to keep all your small articles in. Every good needle-woman will also use a pin-cushion. For you, such a cushion is even more important, because when you have to thread a needle, the best way to do so is with both hands. Well, that's quite simple; you just have to put the pin-cushion in front of you and stick your needle into it, straight up."

"Well I never!" Shon Janchi exclaimed once again. "Another of those things I should have thought of myself: But" he added, "remains the problem of threading that needle."

"Right," said the home-teacher, and handed him a thin little thing. It consisted of a flat metal plate from which a thin wire protuded, forming a loop with a sharp point.

"What's that?" he asked in a surprised tone.

"There are a lot of gadgets to help a blind or partially sighted person to thread a needle," the home-teacher explained, "but if you ask me, this little thing is the handiest one. There are also the so-called self-threading needles or calyx eye needles which have a split top with a thin metal spring in the eye. You can press the thread into the split, so that it hooks behind the spring, but many people can't manage this without breaking the thread, or, in many cases, the little spring. There are also plastic gadgets, but this little thing is the oldest and cheapest one, which, moreover, wasn't especially made for the blind at all. You just push the sharp end of the wire loop into the needle's eye, and the loop will close and pass through the eye and open up again on the other side. Well, it's no problem at all to get your thread through the loop and once you've done that, you just pull back the threader and there you are: your thread is passed through the needle's eye.

"Fantastic!" Shon Janchi exclaimed. "I'm going to try that out immediately!"

SHON JANCHI GOES FOR A WALK

SHON JANCHI had plucked up enough courage to take a walk over to Dindin's little place. He wasn't altogether sure that he would find the little house along the sandy road which had little or no distinct orientation points. He had only made the walk once before, under the guidance of the FAVI home-teacher, who wanted Dindin to get to know him. Dindin had only just begun her rehabilitation, after having been inactive for several years, doing nothing but sit in a rocking chair all day long. She was past sixty and the home-teacher thought it would be good for her to get in touch with somebody who had gone through the same sort of experiences as she was going through now. It wasn't very far from Shon Janchi's place to Dindin's, but it was one thing to go somewhere, knowing that the home-teacher was nearby, always ready to describe the environment and point out spots that could be useful to help one to place oneself in one's surroundings, another thing to walk all alone on a sandy road with deep ruts caused by the traffic, which, however, would prevent him from going off track and walking into the cacti alongside the road.

The only thing he had really been afraid of, happened once. When he was almost half way, he suddenly heard a car approaching from behind. He didn't lose his head, however, and made a quarter turn to the right, tapping the ground with his cane but also exploring the air, to make sure he wouldn't walk with his head into a cactus. After he had stepped to the side of the road, he turned around again and raised his cane so that the driver would be sure to see him. The car passed him slowly and the driver blew his horn twice in greeting. He waited until he could hear nothing more, before stepping back into the ruts in the road, mindful of the words of his home-teacher who had said: "When a car has passed you, you should wait a while, to make sure that it isn't followed by another one."

When he arrived at the slight bend in the road, to the west, he

knew he was almost there and he stepped onto the road side and walked until his cane touched the fence of Dindin's yard. He followed the fence until he reached the gate. A little dog started to bark at him and he said:

"Hi, there, Tuti! Is the mamma in?"

"My gosh!" Dindin exclaimed, as Shon Janchi sat down in one of the rocking chairs on her porch. "I have tremendous admiration for you! I'll never dare to do a thing like that!"

"Ah, that's nonsense, Dindin," Shon Janchi said with a grin on his face. "A couple of years ago I said exactly the same thing. What I can do, you can do."

"I don't know," Dindin said. "I don't think so. But the lady who is teaching us, is certainly doing a great job. It's incredible that anyone could be so patient, so good, so charitable, so sweet. A person like that certainly deserves a special place in heaven."

Shon Janchi remained silent for a moment. Then he answered, earnestly: "Listen, Dindin. I'm afraid you're making a big mistake. I won't say the lady isn't a very nice person, don't get me wrong. I'm only afraid, that your attitude towards her will make her feel very uncomfortable. As far as she is concerned, she is doing a job. She is very much involved in her work, but she is also being paid to do this job."

"But of course she's being paid for it!" Dindin exclaimed. "Who would do a job like this for nothing?"

"Well, Dindin," Shon Janchi replied. "If I were you I wouldn't be so emphatic about that. Almost all the people working for the FAVI and for the FALPA are people who are not paid for their work. Only the few workers who are being subsidized by the government receive a full salary for their job. All the others, like the board members, the handicraft instructors, the drivers do all on a voluntary basis and are not paid, except in a few cases where they receive a small compensation to cover personal expenses incurred. They don't really care. They want, that in the long run the government will pay for their work. You mustn't forget that the services we get from the FAVI and the FALPA are really services we have a right to, just as we have a right to receive medical care. The fact that the government is still not paying for all of this doesn't diminish our right to such services. What the FAVI and FALPA people are doing is giving us the thing we have a right to. According to them, what they are doing is no more than their duty, a duty the community as a whole has towards us. That's why they all feel very uncomfortable when we treat them as if they were saints, who are highly elevated above us."

"But eh eh ... " Dindin stammered quite confused, "they are good people, aren't they, if they want to do all that?"

"Of course they are!" Shon Janchi laughed. "But we do not want to be approached with pity, neither do they want to be looked upon with exaggerated admiration, because both these approaches can cause embarrassment to the respective groups."

"Perhaps you're right," Dindin admitted hesitantly. "May I offer you something to drink?"

"Only if you, yourself are going to get it for me," Shon Janchi retorted.

"Oh, my goodness! Another one of those pestering home-teachers in my house.!"

SHON JANCHI HAS A BEER

"Would you like a beer?" Dindin asked, as she stood up from her rocking chair.

"Yes thank you," Shon Janchi replied. "After that long walk and long talk, I think a nice cool glass of beer will certainly do me good."

"Will you have it in the bottle?" It was more of a suggestion than a question and she was hoping that Shon Janchi's reply would be in the affirmative, so that she wouldn't have to pour the beer into a glass. Shon Janchi chuckled to himself, understanding immediately the reason behind Dindin's suggestion.

"No, Dindin," he said. "I prefer a glass. It's more hygienic, you know. And do me a favour and please rinse the glass under the tap. Beer shouldn't be poured out into a dry glass, you know." He heard Dindin sigh as she entered the house, feeling her way through it with her hand along the wall. One moment later, he heard her calling the name of one of her daughters, but before the girl could answer her, he called to her:

"No, Dindin! I want you to do it for me."

"Good, grief!" Dindin exclaimed. "How could I have ever invited such a demanding man to my house!" But a moment later, Dindin came back from her kitchen with a bottle of beer in her right hand, a glass upside down over the bottle-neck, so that her left hand remained free to feel her way. "Here you are!" she said. "I'm not going to pour it out for you because I'm not used to beer froth."

Shon Janchi stretched out his hand and began to feel about for Dindin's hand until they touched, and he took the bottle and glass from her. He immediately poured out the beer, one finger deep down in the glass so he would stop pouring as soon as the froth reached his finger. He remembered only too well, how the first time he had poured out a glass of beer himself all the froth had flowed over the rim of the glass, because he had forgotten to take into account that the froth would keep rising.

"Aren't you having anything yourself?" he asked, putting the bottle on the little porch table beside him and then taking a long draught from his glass of beer.

"No, I'm not," Dindin replied. "I didn't have a long walk in the sun.

Shon Janchi took another long draught emptying the glass almost. The walk in the sun had indeed made him rather thirsty, especially as it had required very intense concentration from him to find Dindin's place.

"You know, Dindin," he said, putting down the empty glass on the table too. "You said that the FAVI and FALPA workers were good people and I fully agree with you, but do you also know that there are blind and visually impaired people who will try to take advantage of their kindness and think nothing of it? We say we don't want people to pity us and to feel sorry for us, but there are blind people, who like nothing better than to be coddled. And when, in such a case, they meet people like the FAVI workers, who refuse to coddle anyone, but want to teach them to take care of themselves, they are not at all happy about it."

"But that's stupid!" Dindin exclaimed. "They should be grateful for that."

"Of course," Shon Janchi agreed, "but the matter isn't all that simple. When a volunteer driver is taking someone on behalf of the FAVI to a FAVI activity and that blind passenger asks to be taken somewhere else, such a volunteer usually doesn't dare refuse. And when someone wants to bring a family member along to a FAVI activity, the volunteers find it difficult to say no to such a person. The other day, I heard about a blind lady, who always brings her daughter along with her, when there is a festive event. The last time I attended such an event, I learned about several such instances, not from the FAVI people, mind you, they don't talk about it. It's precisely the other blind participants who hate the idea that some of their companions take advantage of the kindness of the FAVI volunteers."

"But how can they do a thing like that?" Dindin exclaimed in disgust.

"It's not so strange, you know," Shon Janchi replied. "As I said before, there will always be blind and partially sighted people, who think that the rest of the world should coddle them. They're not at all interested in integration. They don't want to be independent; they want to be treated like children; they don't scream, or stamp their feet in order to have their way; no sir! They do something far worse! They take advantage of their handicap. They know that many people feel sorry for them and so they try to work on these sentiments. They know that people are not inclined to say no to them. If they want to have something done, or if they want to go some place, they just ask one of the FAVI volunteers to do it for them or to take them where they want to go."

"But they have their relatives to do that, haven't they?" Dindin said.

"Sure," Shon Janchi agreed, "but you know just as well as I do that relatives, fortunately, I should say, tend to stop feeling sorry and treat you just like every other relative and that they are not prepared to be at the beck and call of even a blind relative, every moment of the day. And the blind family member, who has become accustomed to the fact that they refuse to run errands where and when it suits him, doesn't ask anything any more, not even if he really needs help. No sir! He'll ask some outsider who is more inclined to pity him and to help him on the spot."

"But they shouldn't do things like that!" Dindin exclaimed quite annoyed by now.

"They certainly shouldn't," Shon Janchi went on. "But it isn't so strange that the volunteers don't dare to refuse. Those who do refuse are often no longer appreciated and yet, it is precisely the latter who treat us as equals."

"But, Shon Janchi," Dindin interrupted him. "We still will need a lot of help, won't we?"

"Oh, but of course," Shon Janchi admitted. "We even have a right to be helped. But what some people seem to forget all too easily is, that apart from rights, we also have duties and our most important duty is not to abuse the kindness of other people, who really feel sorry for us because of our handicap. And now I should like another beer, before I go back home."

"I'll call my daughter," Dindin said.

"Oh no, you won't," Shonjanchi exclaimed very annoyed at her. "What have we just been discussing? Why should you bother your daughter, for what you can do yourself? There will always be lots of things which you cannot do yourself and she will have to do them for you."

Dindin remained seating in her chair without saying anything. She felt very embarrassed in the beginning. Then she started to laugh and said with a touch of admiration in her voice: "Shon Janchi, they ought to appoint you as a social worker." Shon Janchi laughed and with a feeling of satisfaction, he answered:

"And who is going to pay for my car and a private chauffeur?"

SHON JANCHI HAS A VISITOR

SHON JANCHI had a visitor. It was Yonchi the son of Papachi, who is married to Ina, Shon Lee's sister, the husband of the sister-in-law of Buchi's wife, Shon Janchi's elder brother. That's how Yonchi himself explained who he was when Shon Janchi met him for the first time, during a group discussions in the FAVI Activity Centre. It took Shon Janchi quite a while before he finally managed to unravel the intricacies of his link with Yonchi and in the end, he had concluded:
"Well, from whatever angle you look at it, we aren't related."

Though at first he didn't realize why, Shon Janchi thought of him as the kid, perhaps because of his age - he was hardly thirty years old. In spite of his rather curt remark the kid apparently felt that there was some sort of relationship between them, because he had stuck to him during the whole discussion session and had replied in a cheerful tone:
"One of these days I'll come and pay you a visit."

And so it happened, that less than a week later he came walking in through Shon Janchi's wide open living-room door.

"Morning, Shon Janchi! Here I am," he said cheerfully.

"And who is I?" Shon Janchi was caught by surprise. He didn't recognize the voice immediately, as he had only met him once.

"Yonchi, of course!" the kid had laughed. "The son of Papachi, who's married to "

"Okay, okay!" Shon Janchi stopped him. "I've got it. You've got guts man! Don't tell me you came that whole distance on foot!"

"Oh, no. Shonjanchi!" Yonchi replied with a grin. "I'm not mad yet. I got a lift from a cousin of mine, who dropped me in town and from there, I came on foot."

"That's still quite a walk!" Shon Janchi exclaimed in admiration because he knew Yonchi's sight was extremely limited. "Let me get you something to drink. Have a beer?"

Sure, sure! That's just what a man needs!" Yonchi accepted the

offer without hesitation, apparently not at all familiar with the requirements of etiquette.

After Shon Janchi had returned from his kitchen with the bottle of beer and had sat down with his guest at the living-room table, the young man immediately began to talk. He liked to talk a lot and Shon Janchi sat listening to him, interrupting the kid's flow of words only occasionally with a yes or no. But in his mind he was slowly forming a picture of him, as a cheerful young man, who was nevertheless extremely preoccupied with his own personal problems, his own ideas, his own circumstances, which was of course quite understandable, Shon Janchi realized, since Yonchi was far too young to face a life with a future full of uncertainties. He hadn't been working for several years and the idea alone, for a young man of his age, to have to live on *onderstand**, was not a very encouraging one. Deep down in his heart, even though he rejected the basic egocentrism of the kid, Shon Janchi felt a tremendous admiration for him, because he had a natural character tendency to be cheerful and bright and full of energy, though he seemed to lack a strong sense of responsibility for himself and probably suffered from a lack of self-esteem.

onderstand, is the local form of welfare

"Look," Yonchi said, all of a sudden, "I know that there are jobs that I can do, but nobody wants to help me to get a job. Nobody wants to help a person who is half blind. They think you can't do anything anyway."

Shon Janchi straightened his back and stopped the kid's flow of words and, in a quiet tone, asked:

"But Yonchi have you shown what you can do?"

"What do you mean?" Yonchi asked in surprise.

"What I said," Shon Janchi continued, without raising his voice in the least. "Have you shown what you can do, or are you showing what you cannot do?"

"What do you mean?" Yonchi asked again, quite taken aback now.

"Things aren't as simple as we often think they are," Shon Janchi continued, now fully aware that his questions had worked the young man into a corner where he felt quite uncomfortable, because it's always much easier to blame others for one's failures, than it is to accept personal responsibility for one's own destiny. "Look here," Shon Janchi went on to say. "What have you done so far to learn a job that you would be able to do with your handicap? Have you ever asked yourself, or did you ever try to get advice from people who know more than you do, about these things, what sort of work might be appropriate for you? And if you did all that, have you already applied at places where that sort of work is available? Or are you just waiting for others to do it for you? Don't get me wrong, Yonchi; I'm not saying you should not ask for help from other people; you must do that. It's often quite difficult to convince those who call themselves normal, that he or she has lots of capabilities. But the best way to convince them is by demonstrating that you have them by learning, by studying, by getting the necessary certificates for the job you want for yourself. But what is most important of all, is to recognise for yourself what you cannot do. I don't like to use my own case as an example, because I am not you; but at times it may be useful. I have reached an age at which it is virtually impossible for me to get a job again. I'm blind, but in spite of that, I don't want to sit at home all day, doing nothing at all. That's why I learned all sorts of things. I learned to type, I learned to read and write braille, though my fingers are too thick to learn to read at a fast enough pace, but I still use it quite a lot. I brushed up on my Dutch so that I can read Dutch talking books too and my latest idea is, to start breeding a few sheep.

I already requested a loan to buy them. If I were your age, I'd get a typing certificate, I'd try to improve my braille, I'd follow other courses and then, I'd apply for a job by showing my certificates. And, where ever I'd apply, I'd give the FAVI as a reference, not because I want these people to say that I would be a good worker, because they have no means of knowing that either. I would have to still prove that myself, But what they could do, and certainly would do, is to try to convince the potential employer, that my blindness is not a serious impediment to doing the job. At least, assuming, that I seek a job that I can really do. But, unfortunately, I'm too old. I don't feel old, mind You! No, sir! On the contrary. But, the simple truth is, that even a normally sighted person who loses his job at my age, won't find another one very easily. Don't misunderstand me, Yonchi. People, as a rule, don't leave you in the lurch. I'm absolutely sure that everyone who can is willing to help you. But don't forget one thing, son: He, who wants help, has to begin by helping himself."

Yonchi didn't reply immediately. He sat still for a while, then sighed and said:

"I don't know, Shon Janchi I don't know How am I to know exactly what I can do and what I have to learn in order to be able to do it? And, where do I have to apply for a job?"

"All right," Shon Janchi said, now much more decisively. "There you have a couple of questions which you had better discuss with the FAVI people. I'm sure they're quite willing to help you, to find the answers and to find the right ways to solve your problems. But it's you who have to do it."

"Let's go sit on the porch," Shon Janchi suggested his visitor Yonchi, to break the tension of the rat her hard lesson he had just given the young man. "It's cooler out there than in here. The heat is terrible these days, don't you think so too?"

"Yes," Yonchi admitted. "The strong winds have subsided very early this year," and he followed Shon Janchi with his bottle of beer in his hand. He was filled with admiration for Shon Janchi as he saw him walk straight to the open doorway without touching anything, going to an old rocking chair in a shady corner of his porch as if he could see the chair standing there. Yonchi himself, although his sight was very poor, could still see all major obstacles and during the last few years had become so accustomed to his limited sight that he didn't even know any more what normal vision was like.

"Holy smoke! Shon Janchi! You sure do know every little corner in this house, don't you!" he exclaimed in admiration.

"What do you mean by that?" Shon Janchi asked, rather surprised.

"Well, the way you walk, you know. Someone who doesn't know it, would swear that you must be able to see."

Shon Janchi laughed dryly. "Well," he said, "to a certain extent that's thanks to the rehabilitation I got from the FAVI people but let me at the same time add that it is also due to my own initiative and ..."

"I don't quite understand," said Yonchi, rather surprised, as this was the first time that someone did not attribute his success solely to the work of the FAVI. Shon Janchi laughed again and said:

"Look here, Yonchi, rehabilitation is a rather complicated thing. If you ask ten people what the word means to them, you have a good chance, that you may get ten different answers and that's how it should be. Nobody can rehabilitate you if you, yourself, don't want to be rehabilitated. Moreover, it depends entirely upon the individual and his attitudes towards life, what rehabilitation will mean to him. Like the FAVI secretary often put it: if you take it to it's logical conclusion, rehabilitation means that a burglar who has lost his sight, receive all the instruction he needs, to resume breaking into houses even as a blind man."

Yonchi, who at that very moment had the bottle of beer to his mouth, exploded with laughter as a result of which the beer went into the wrong passage and he began coughing and laughing at the same time, almost spraying Shon Janchi with beer in the process.

"Very good!" he exclaimed between a fit of coughing and laughter.

"Okay ... " Shon Janchi was now laughing too. "Normally, such cases will never occur of course, but the example demonstrates very clearly that for each one of us, rehabilitation means

something quite different. If I hardly wrote anything when I could still see, it will not have much sense to teach me how to type, now that I am blind. But it is also possible that, now that I am blind, I have taken a liking to things that I would never have done before. If you ask me, with many people, the problem is that when the FAVI people explain to them the possibilities that exist, they think that they have to learn everything, or that all those things are too difficult for them anyway. But for politeness' sake, they don't dare to say no, so they'll say resignedly: you do what you think is good for me. In other words, they flee their own responsibility, like so many people will continue to do throughout their lives. I for one, am absolutely sure, that the only way in which a rehabilitation program can be fruitful, is for the blind person to decide for himself what he wants.

"Let's take braille, for instance: When the social worker of the FAVI visited me for the first time, she also explained to me what braille was and she immediately added that for a middle-age or elderly person it is rather difficult to learn. During those days I used to sit and think a lot and so decided, that, in spite of what she had told me, I wanted to learn braille. Not in order to be able to read complete books in braille, because I understood from the very beginning that I would never be able to achieve enough reading speed to really enjoy reading a complete book. No, I wanted to know it, to be able to make notes, to write down phone numbers, to make my shopping lists and to mark things. It was I, myself, however, who decided to learn it and that gave me the motivation to persist in the pursuit and to reach the goal I had set for myself. But, on the other hand, an elderly man who has his wife and children with him, doesn't have to go to all that trouble."

"Yes, that's true, that's true " Yonchi said, in a distinctly disinterested tone.

Shon Janchi immediately called on to this and realized that the kid had only interrupted him in order not to remain silent altogether and thus, show a complete lack of interest. So he remained silent for a moment searching for another approach to get across to Yonchi that it was he, himself, who had to take the reins in his hand; it was he, who had to determine his own future. After a short pause, he went on to say:

"When I was a boy, almost nobody got more than a sixth grade education. This applied to me; that was my bad luck. If I had had better education, I wouldn't be sitting here like this now. I would be doing more important things, even though I am a blind man I'd even learn all I needed, even at my age, to either hold a job or to work in some community organization as a volunteer worker. But, even though I lack sufficient education, I have decided I still want to lead a useful life anyway. That's why I have decided to join the church choir. I can learn all the songs by heart from a cassette. I also have the time to sing on weekdays, so I can be of service to the community and make new acquaintances and friends, into the process."

"A very good idea! A real good idea! Yonchi exclaimed with enthusiasm.

"Well, I thought of it myself," Shon Janchi explained, "and I asked the FAVI social worker to accompany me, the first time, to help me explain to the other choir members that my blindness will be no problem."

"A very good idea!" Yonchi repeated admiringly.

Shon Janchi remained silent. He thought to himself: on some other occasion, I'll put some other good ideas into his head.

SHON JANCHI GETS ANGRY

Slowly, but surely, Shon Janchi was becoming angry, though he tried his best not to show it. He hadn't been able to conceal his anger from his niece Clarita though, because when they got back home, she remarked, rather ironically:

"I don't think you fell in love with that lady." He chuckled and gave his niece's arm a friendly squeeze, his anger now completely gone.

That morning, Clarita had come to take him into town to buy a pair of new shoes and to have his hair cut. Because the two things hadn't taken them very long, Shon Janchi directed his niece to a refresheria to treat her, in appreciation of her willingness to help him. They sat down at the bar

and when Clarita ordered a chocolate milkshake he decided to try the same strange concoction and discovered that he rather liked it too. He immediately noted that somebody had sat down on the stool next to his and a moment later, he heard a sharp woman's voice order a long drink.

Clarita whispered in his ear: "The lady beside you is looking you straight in the face."

One moment later, he again heard the sharp voice say: "Do you smoke?" Shon Janchi felt a dig in his waistcoat from Clarita's side indicating that the woman had addressed him, so he answered:

"Sometimes," and he put out his hand, until it touched with a pack of cigarettes, from which he took one. He realized very well, that her unusual behaviour was due to the fact that he was blind. It would never have occurred to this woman to offer a sighted person, who was a complete stranger, a cigarette. But, without giving any indication of his growing annoyance he asked the lady:

"Do I know you?"

"Oh, no!" the sharp voice replied. "I noticed that you are blind and that's something I'm very interested in."

Shon Janchi pouted his lips but he managed to contain himself and refrained himself from saying something sarcastic. In fact, he didn't say anything at all, but just lit his cigarette.

"Are you already in the FAVI?" the woman asked. That question made it impossible for him to suppress an ironic smile.

"Well," he said, keeping his tone of voice friendly, "I know of the FAVI and I've had a lot of training from them but I don't think one can be in the FAVI."

"Okay, okay!" the woman agreed reluctantly. "I understand, what you mean but it's just a manner of speaking, isn't it?"

"Okay," Shon Janchi agreed to prevent any further discussion of the matter. "I'm glad to hear that you know of the FAVI anyway," he added.

However, the unknown woman ignored that remark and went on to ask:

"Are you also working in the Caiquetio Club?" The question made Shon Janchi a bit desperate.

"I suppose you mean," he said "whether I participate in the handicraft program of the FAVI? As a matter of fact, I only do so every now and then; not every week. I learned what I wanted to learn and from that moment on, the program has become sort of a social gathering place for me. So, I only go there when I feel like having a good chat with other visually handicapped people."

"Oh, but of course!" the woman said, in a high and enthusiastic tone. "But of course! What's the use of going there anyway. You don't earn anything anyway there. I think it's a very bad thing in there!" The voice had become even shriller now and had a distinctly nasty ring to it. "They put all of you to work in there but you aren't even getting a penny out of it."

Shon Janchi's expression changed completely, his ironic smile disappeared altogether and he felt a growing annoyance. He had himself always been a very critical person, not so much with respect to other people, as towards his own attitudes. He remembered very well how he had launched lots of criticism at the policies of the FAVI, at the beginning of his own rehabilitation and time and time again, the social worker and home-teacher had had to explain to him the whys and wherefores of the working methods of the FAVI. In that way, he himself had learned a lot and he was absolutely sure that his critical remarks had reached the board members of the FAVI too and that they had listened to them as well. But at this moment, his instinctive reaction was to champion the cause of the FAVI, as he explained later on to Clarita, somewhat like a pig, who will go backward if you pull its ears and forward if you pull its tail.

Trying to keep his voice down and fighting to hide his feelings of anger, he said:

"I'm afraid you have the wrong conception of what's going on. The handicraft program of the FAVI is not a place where people come to work."

The shrill, nasty voice didn't give him a chance to complete his explanation, and interrupted him saying:

"But you do make things there that are being put up for sale. Yet, you don't receive a penny of the money that comes from this sale."

Shon Janchi made a strong effort to control his temper. He replied:

"Listen, lady, you've got it all completely wrong. The FAVI handicraft program is a program, where volunteer instructors are teaching visually handicapped adult and elderly people a very simple truth they need to know, namely, that they are quite capable of being active human beings. In other words, they are giving a form of rehabilitation. There are even some participants, who have learned a certain handicraft technique so well that they are practicing it at home and when they can sell their products, or the FAVI sells them for them, they get all the money proceeding from such sales, after deducting the cost of the material. But, what happens in the program itself is rehabilitation therapy, and reactivation and lots of material is wasted, which served one purpose: that of learning material. The FAVI doesn't mind a bit that this material is wasted, because you simply cannot learn anything, if you are not allowed to waste materials. If it were one of those sheltered workshops, such as you have abroad, it would have to be run every day, eight hours a day, five days a week with paid personnel and fixed wages for the workers. Well, it isn't and it can't be and I even have my doubts about that sort of institutions. The handicraft program costs the FAVI more or less four thousand guilders annually, after deducting the proceeds from the sale that is held once a year during a so-called Open House. If they had to also pay the twenty-five instructors a salary, the expenses would become very high indeed."

"The volunteers all have a very good income from their husbands," the shrill voice said, showing only complete unwillingness to understand Shon Janchi's arguments. "The blind people are all poor! They need the money."

So there we go again! Shon Janchi thought, his anger approaching the point of explosion. We're all poor! We have to serve as humiliated objects, so that people like this woman can meet their needs to be charitable and can revel in their own benevolence towards us, poor devils!

His voice sounded a little hoarse as he answered:

"In the first place, lady, blindness is not restricted to the poor. I sincerely hope not, but this could happen to you too. I can't deny that many of my fellow blind people, myself included, are living on a very low income, be it understand or the official old age pension. But that doesn't mean we want your sort of charity. We want our rights, not favours nor privileges. We want the right to a reasonable income, the right to work in accordance with one's qualifications, the right to live our own lives, instead of having them lived for us. But for many of us, this is a difficult thing to achieve, either because our age is an obstacle or because we have been inactive for too many years and can't simply step back into a labour routine of eight hours a day, five days a week. Those of us, who are capable and have the will-power to advance ourselves can manage! Certainly with the aid of the FAVI; like some of my fellow blind people, who, like myself have found some way to supplement our income."

"But I know from other blind people," the shrill voice interrupted him, "that they are not at all satisfied that they are not being paid for their work in the Caiquetio Club."

That did it! Shon Janchi lost his temper. He abruptly got up from his bar stool unable to control his anger any longer and said, in a distinctly unfriendly tone:

"But of course, lady!. Those who refuse to take any initiative on themselves and want others to do everything for them. Or maybe, they are under the influence of people like you, who refuse to understand what it means for a blind man, to live an independent life, as a fully worthy and equal individual, with rights and self-respect. All over the world, even in North America and Europe you'll see blind beggars, who have no need to beg at all. Good day, madam!" He grabbed Clarita's arm squeezing it so hard that the girl was forced to give him a dig in his waistcoat.

Caiquetio Club, a community centre in the village of Paradera.

SHON JANCHI STIRS UP A HORNET'S NEST

Shon Janchi had made a blooper by apparently saying the wrong thing, in the wrong place, to the wrong person. The effect was breath-taking. His first reaction was a stifling resignation to the torrent of abusive words which were sure to come from the unknown lady whom he, apparently, had made very angry and which she poured out over him like a heavy rain-shower that had caught him outside by surprise. He couldn't decide whether to laugh or to keep a serious expression on his face. Everybody around him stopped talking and it seemed, as if even the record-player, which moments before was still shattering the air with its noisy music, at the birthday party of a blind acquaintance of his, had also decided to stop and listen to the penetrating high-pitched voice of an angry woman, who spat out a flood of papiamento words with the rhythm of a machine- gun firing.

"You should be ashamed of yourself!" the woman exclaimed at last, in exasperation.

According to himself, he had said nothing unusual. He only tried to break through the barrier of prejudice and pity, demonstrated by this woman, who had approached him with the usual, ridiculous questions that any blind person is accustomed to, when meeting a person who never before was faced with a blind man. This woman, who had finally launched the consolatory remarks, used in the Papiamento speaking communities, had said to him:

"Have patience, Shon Janchi. It is the will of God."

In a certain sense, Shon Janchi's reply had the desired effect, because the barrier of pity crumbled on the spot, as the unknown lady lost her temper completely, so that, apart from the gushing torrent of her words, everybody was absolutely silent. His reply had been quite simple and very logical, according to him. He had said:

"I was never a very patient man, madam and I'm glad about it too, because it helped me to overcome the problems of my handicap. And the God I believe in, doesn't bring things like these on a man."

The lady had jumped to her feet, as if she had been stung by ten wasps at the same time. After her impressive monologue, she fell back onto her chair, accusing Shon Janchi of being ungrateful, a heathen and without a conscience. Shon Janchi straightened his back, took a long draught of his beer and said:

"All right, madam. Now allow me to explain a few things to you very clearly." He raised his voice enough, so that everybody present could hear him. "In the first place why did you tell me to have patience? What should I be patient with? With the fact that I'm blind? If you ask me, the only thing I need in view of my blindness is the will power, the courage and perseverance to ensure that I will not stay put in some corner but that I will live a normal life. If you want to express good wishes to anybody who has to cope with some sort of a handicap, you had better wish them courage, will-power and motivation to participate fully in the society they live in."

"But ... " the woman tried to interrupt him.

"Oh, no!" Shon Janchi stopped her emphatically. "It's my turn now. In the second place you said I was ungrateful. Towards whom, or for what do you want me to be grateful? Grateful for the miserable amount of medical discharge allowance I receive? Grateful for people's pity? But their pity doesn't get me anywhere. On the contrary. It's a great obstacle for me, because it means that people aren't seeing me as a normal human being. Those who are giving us real assistance, the assistance we need, aren't doing so out of pity, but because they want us to be accepted for what we are, with all our human values and dignity."

"But " the woman tried to interrupt him once again, a little more vigorously this time.

"No, madam," Shon Janchi stopped her again. "I haven't finished yet. In the third place, you said that I was a heathen. Don't forget that heathens also believe in God, quite often in a lot of Gods and a lot of ghosts. Well, madam, I only believe in one God, the Father almighty, creator of the heaven and the earth and in His only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, to quote the first words of my creed. What is the will of God? Do you mean, madam that because He knew from

the very beginning that I would lose my sight as a consequence of purely natural causes, that it was His will? And that it was also His will, that because of that I should remain sitting in a chair all day long, without doing anything at all. Do you think, madam, that because God knows from the very beginning all the evil things that happen in the world, it is His will that they happen? If you ask me, it is His will that we shall fight all that evil, that we shall overcome it. If you ask me, it is His will, that I shall do all I can to live as fruitful a life as possible, in whatever circumstances I may find myself. And that, as a matter of fact, goes for all of us."

"But eh "the woman made another effort to interrupt him, but Shon Janchi didn't give her a chance.

"No, madam! You've had your opportunity to pour out a torrent of accusations upon me and I'm not through yet, because you also said I had no conscience. Frankly speaking, I don't see what my conscience has to do with it, so I'll assume You said that, as a way of scolding me in your anger. As a matter of fact, I'm glad you lost your temper and in your anger, said a lot of blatant nonsense, something anybody is liable to do in such a mood. The principle fact is, that you didn't treat me as an equal, as a normal human being, until you got angry with me. Before that, you treated me as a pathetic person, someone inferior to yourself, whom you have to approach with pity. The moment you lost your temper, you didn't look upon me as someone inferior any more. From that moment on, You treated me like an equal. That's why I won't hold it against you, that you said a lot of nonsense, on one condition, however, that from now on, you will approach anybody with some sort of a handicap as your equal."

For a short spell, there was nothing to be heard, only the rustle of the trade winds. The woman didn't dare to say anything anymore. A moment later, his blind acquaintance, whose birthday party this was, called out from another spot in the yard: "Hear! hear!" and he started to clap his hands which was immediately taken over by everybody else so, that Shon Janchi received a thunderous ovation.

SHON JANCHI HAS A PROBLEM

SHON JANCHI was having a hard time. He had been sitting in his old rocking chair all alone for quite some time, thinking about what had happened that morning. The whole experience had been continuously on his mind. It was obvious that he understood perfectly well, that a mother wanted to find help for her child and That morning, an acquaintance of his had taken him to the eye specialist, because his eyes had been smarting for some time. When he came out of the building with a prescription for some eye-drops, a young woman approached him. She was emotionally upset. She had even used some rather coarse language in expressing her opinion about the doctor, she asked Shon Janchi:

"Did that rotten doctor also refuse you to give you a declaration to go to Colombia?"

The question caught him completely by surprise. A little perplexed, he asked:

"What do you mean, madam?"

"Well, you can't see!" the woman exclaimed. "I can see that you can't see, and I'm sure that the stupid doctor told you he couldn't do anything for you any more and that he also refused to give you a declaration to go to Colombia."

After that remark, Shon Janchi suddenly began to understand more or less, what the problem was. He asked, in as sympathetic a tone as he could muster:

"Do you have eye trouble?"

"Oh, no, not me!" the woman replied in a tone that hid nothing of the rage within her. "It's my little son and I want to go to Colombia with him, so he can be helped, but that rotten doctor doesn't want to give me a declaration, so that the government will pay."

Shon Janchi didn't answer. He had no idea what to say and the young woman took his silence as

an invitation to go on talking. Emotionally upset and in a high pitched voice, she explained that her little boy's eyes were very bad and that the doctor had said, nothing could be done about them, but that she was absolutely sure that there were other doctors, in other places, who could help her child.

Trying his best, not to lose his composure as a result of the woman's story, Shon Janchi asked calmly:

"Did you get in touch with the FAVI yet?"

"The FAVI?" the woman exclaimed disdainfully, "what can the FAVI do for me? Are they going to give me the money to go to Colombia with my child?"

"No, I'm sorry," Shon Janchi replied with a smile. "I'm afraid they won't do that. Even if they would be willing to do so, I'm afraid they won't have the money to do things like that. Moreover, they can't, or rather, they are not allowed to question the decision of a doctor."

"You see!" the woman exclaimed angrily. "They too are good for nothing!"

"Well," Shon Janchi said softly, while struggling to find the right words, so he wouldn't increase the natural concern of this young woman even more.

"At least they could investigate the matter and explain to you what possibilities and opportunities there are for your little boy. And, if indeed, there is no cure for his eye defects, they are able to ensure that he gets the best possible education there is, in spite of his handicap."

"I don't need any explanation at all!" the young woman cried out, tears filling her eyes. "My little boy needs a good doctor to treat him, that's all."

It was no surprise at all to Shon Janchi that the woman was extremely emotionally upset and as a mother, was prepared to travel to the other side of the earth, if need be, to seek a cure for her child's eye trouble. He wondered what he could say to help her and after a moment of silence he said, in a soft tone:

"But, madam, there are certain things that no doctor in the world can do anything about. As you see, I'm blind myself and I know there is no doctor in the whole world who can give me my sight back. I too, didn't want to believe that, until two doctors had explained the matter to me, and the people of the FAVI. It is a very difficult thing to accept. Don't think I'm trying to fool you. It's a very difficult thing, very difficult indeed. One may even say that we, sometimes have too much confidence in the capabilities of doctors. There are lots of things they can do, that's for sure, but it is important that we all realize that there are far more things they cannot do."

"But but ..." The woman began to cry and Shon Janchi had to struggle to keep his emotions under control. "But" the young woman cried out, "what one doctor cannot do, perhaps another one can."

"Oh, yes, that's perfectly true," Shon Janchi admitted. "But if this one doctor can't do anything about it, there is a good chance, that he does know if there are others who can and if he knows, he'll give you the declaration, so the government will pay the costs for you to travel with your child to that other doctor, where ever he may be. We all know that lots of people have been sent abroad in that way, whether to the United States, or to Colombia or to The Netherlands."

As he stopped talking, he could hear, above the sound of the rather high wind that the young woman was trying to swallow her tears. A profound feeling of tenderness filled his heart and before he knew what he was doing, he stretched out his hand and laid it on the young woman's back. She was small and thin, he noted; she had long, lank hair which hung below her shoulders. In his mind's eye, he pictured a young woman with long, dark brown hair and two big pleading eyes which aroused in him a tremendous desire to say something very nice to make her feel less desperate. Thinking hard, to find the right words, he said:

"Madam, don't think that I'm being hard on you, that I too, don't want to understand you. I understand perfectly well, that you want to do all that is within your power to find a cure for your child. However, apart from medical cures, which do not always exist, there are also other cures, which teach a person to live a happy life, in spite of the fact that there is no medical cure. I understand perfectly well that you do not want to accept the opinion of this doctor alone. Neither did I, when I lost my sight. When the first one told me there was nothing he could do about my blindness, I immediately went to another one and when the second one said the same thing, I

tried other people, until at last I got in touch with the FAVI. And these people, of the FAVI, they talk a completely different language than the others. They told me it was a total waste for me, to be sitting in a chair all day, doing absolutely nothing. They told me I wasn't a cripple; they told me I wasn't something pathetic; they told me I didn't have to live a miserable life; they told me I could very well live an active life, a variable and satisfying life. Your child is not inferior because his eyes are so bad. On the contrary."

He asked her for her name and address and the name of her child and noted it all down in braille with his pocket slate and stylus, which he always carried around, where ever he went. He asked her if she would mind, if he sent the FAVI social worker to her and she replied, very hesitantly: "Okay ... it can't hurt to see them."

He knew she just didn't want to say no to him, out of politeness, but he thought her reluctant resignation would do for the time being. However, as he didn't want to leave any doubt as to the purpose of such a visit, he added:

"I don't think they will be able to help you to go abroad with your little boy, because it is not within their power to break the official rules which medical practitioners in Aruba adhere to. But, I'm sure, in the long run, you will understand that they can help you and your child in a much better and more beautiful way."

With deep tenderness and warmth he stretched out his hand and sthook hers. The thin hand immediately produced in his mind's eye the image of a small and rather thin figure, looking up at him with her big eyes full of tears.

Good heavens! Shon Janchi thought afterwards as he sat slowly rocking his chair at home. He could so well understand the anxiety and tears of that young mother and over and over again, a number of questions popped up in his mind: Did I say the right thing? Didn't I increase her anxiety? Did she understand me? Or did she think, I too didn't want to help her? He felt really sorry for the social worker who apparently had had to cope with this sort of problems before, because when he called her from a public phone booth, before returning home, the social worker had replied immediately.

"Oh, yes, I understand. Another one of those nasty cases." Meaning, Shon Janchi thought that this wasn't the first time that she was confronted with this sort of problem. But his experience with the social worker was assurance enough that this nasty case was in good hands.

SHON JANCHI GOES FOR WOOL AND COMES HOME SHORN

SHON JANCHI went to visit Shon Li, a lady in her early forties, who had been a widow for several years and who was now living alone, because her two children had gone abroad for further education. Shon Li was quite well off, financially speaking. Shon Janchi also knew that she hadn't much to occupy herself with, except with keeping her house clean and driving around in her big car, visiting her friends and relatives. Just the sort of person, Shon Janchi thought, who was in a position to give a hand to the FAVI, which was badly in need of volunteers for transportation, for their fund raising drive and to lend a hand in the handicraft program. Anyway, there were lots of ways in which a person like Shon Li could make herself useful. And, because she didn't live very far from him - he just had to go straight up from his house along a quiet road without any dangerous obstacles - he took his cane and set out for a walk to her house.

Shon Li had seen him coming from a distance and came to meet him at the gate of her yard saying:

"My, my! Shon Janchi! I admire you!"

"There's nothing to be admired," Shon Janchi laughed. This road is very easy and there are very few houses alongside it, so it was easy enough to find yours."

Shon Li put him in one of the de-luxe rocking chairs on the large porch of her house and after having spent ten minutes exchanging the usual cordial and courteous questions and answers, enquiring after each others' health, complaining about the heat and Shon Janchi inquiring about Shon Li's children, he finally decided to get to the point.

"You know, Shon Li," he said. I really came here to try and

interest you in the work of the FAVI."

"Me? In the work of the FAVI?" Shon Li replied rather amazed.

"Yes," Shon Janchi said. "They need people like you. They need volunteers for all sorts of things and many times it's difficult to find people. Those who are willing to do something, quite often don't have enough time to do so and those who have enough time, quite often don't want to help. So, knowing that you are a person with a great sense of responsibility, I thought of you. Now that your children are abroad, you might have time to help the FAVI."

Shon Li's reply took Shon Janchi completely by surprise.

"I don't think so," she said and not only the words sounded rather harsh but her tone of voice had a distinct ring of disdain to it. "No, Shon Janchi, I don't think I shall do that."

Shon Janchi didn't know what to say. He began to rock in his chair and after almost a full minute of silence he asked:

"But why, Shon Li? Are you busy with something else at the moment?"

"Oh, no! I'm not," Shon Li said in the same strange tone of voice. "I simply don't like the way those people are working."

"But why?" Shon Janchi asked incredulously.

"Why ... ?" Shon Li retorted with a distinctly nasty, evidently unsympathetic laugh. "Because they don't do anything else but collect a lot of money, so that they themselves can paint the town red, can organize big parties, make expensive trips and pay themselves big salaries. Tell me when they ever brought you something to eat? When did they ever bring you clothing? Why don't they pay to put you in a home where you can be well taken care of? No, Shon Janchi! They won't do that. They want to be able to live in style with the money they are collecting. That's all there is to it, you see!"

Shon Janchi leant back in his chair, making a strong effort to remain calm, while thinking hard to find the right words to explain to this lady how things really were. Keeping his voice down and talking slowly, he said:

"I'm afraid you're making a big mistake, Shon Li. In the first place, all the volunteers of the FAVI and the FALPA are working without receiving even a penny for their work. The board members have been working for years on end, not only without receiving any financial compensation, but even spending money, their own money for the work. It's really ridiculous. It's ridiculous that we should expect people to do a job like this for nothing, dedicating lots of their own time on it, using their own cars, their own telephones and so on, at great financial costs to their own families. Why should social development work, such as this be done for nothing?"

"Because it should be a work of charity," Shon Li replied as if proclaiming an indisputable dogma. "

Which should be done for nothing by others!" Shon Janchi added with unconcealed sarcasm. "No Shon Li, you're wrong," he continued, struggling with himself in order not to sound too unfriendly.

"Oh, no! I'm not wrong at all!" Shon Li insisted. "I follow the commandments of the Bible: Give food to the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick and that's what I do! I, myself, take my own old clothes to the poor, because in that way I can be sure that it gets to the right place."

Shon Janchi began to rock to and fro in his chair. He felt extremely uncomfortable, trying to control the anger that was mounting within him, because he knew, if he didn't keep himself under control, he might say things that he would regret later on.

"The Bible ... "he began, hesitantly, "was written two thousand and more years ago. We are

living in the twentieth century and the words of the Bible must be interpreted in accordance with the Conditions and circumstances in which we live. I don't want anybody to bring me food every day. I was extremely happy on the day that they taught me how to prepare my own meals. I don't want anybody to bring me old clothes, I feel a lot more satisfied, that somehow or other, I always manage to save enough money to buy my own new clothes. I don't want to be stuffed away in some place, where others have to take care of me; I feel very proud of myself, that I learned all the techniques I need, to be able to live my own life and take care of myself. And, this is precisely what the FAVI people are doing. To do this enormous job, they do not only need a lot of money and a lot of people to help them but they also have to keep abreast of all the new developments in this field, that are taking place in the world. Our world stretches beyond the shores of our little island; even if we formerly thought otherwise, we ought to know better by now. We should be fully aware that we run the risk of getting in a rut, if we do not gather all the information we can and seek all the assistance we need and which is available in other places, places, that are more advanced in this field than we are."

"That sounds all very nice," Shon Li answered in the same unpleasant tone. "But do you really believe these people are like that? Nonsense! I know that kind of people. They won't do anything for nothing. They'll organize expensive parties for themselves, saying that it's for you; they'll waste a lot of money on eating and drinking; when they have their so-called meetings, they'll spend a lot of time talking a lot of nonsense, instead of working, while filling themselves with liquor, with the money they should be spending on you. Let them divide the money among you, so that you yourselves can do with it what you want. That would be really charity."

"And put an instant stop to the work of helping to make people independent and teaching them to live a worthy life." Shon Janchi retorted and his tone was decidedly sarcastic now. He was at the brink of losing his temper. "Just let's suppose for a moment that they do such things," he went on. "Let's suppose they have a hundred thousand guilders. Okay. There are about two hundred visually handicapped people in Aruba. If they should divide the money among them, how much would they each get? Five hundred guilders. So they could all buy some clothes, they could eat reasonable well for less than a month, they could get drunk for a few days and that would be it. No more money, no more work. I don't even think they have a hundred thousand guilders and what they get from the annual fund raising drive is certainly a lot less. Don't you see, nobody would give a damn thing for your stupid solution!" he exclaimed, really mad now. He didn't even realize he had stopped trying to be polite.

He got up out of his chair, said: "Good day!" and left, hitting the ground hard with his cane, his face a picture of fury, more convinced than ever before that the FAVI should continue its campaign to change such stupid attitudes, which were certainly not limited to this woman alone.

SHON JANCHI DOTS HIS I'S AND CROSSES HIS T'S

"Yonchi, the son of Papachi, who's married to Ina ..."

"Okay, okay!" Shon Janchi laughed, pleasantly surprised to hear the voice of the kid once again, who, after quite some time, had decided to come and pay him another visit. "I know, I know!". he said putting his arm around the thin shoulders of the young man, who, in spite of his thirty years still gave him the impression of being an adolescent. "How are you, lad? Long time no see! Did you come on foot again?"

"I came on foot from town," Yonchi admitted, "but it's becoming more and more difficult as my sight is getting worse."

"Why don't you use a cane, man?" Shon Janchi asked.

"For Pete's sake!" the kid exclaimed, horrified. "Everybody doesn't have to know that I'm almost blind!"

Shon Janchi pushed him to a chair and went himself into the kitchen to get his guest a bottle of

beer. As he returned with it, he asked:

"Do you think they don't notice now?" He sat down at the other side of the table and went on: "And why don't you want people to notice?"

"Well," Yonchi said, in an uncertain tone. "I don't know ..."

"I understand your problem perfectly well," Shon Janchi went on, not paying any attention to Yonchi's lack of self-confidence. "We all have the same problem, but for a completely blind person like me, it's less difficult, simply because we can't pretend that we can still see. For you, who can still see, even though very little, it's much more difficult. You want to hang on to the fantasy that you're normal; you don't want people to notice that you're different. Why? Do you think you have less value as a human being, because your sight is so bad?"

"Oh, no!" Yonchi exclaimed. "of course not!"

"You know something," Shon Janchi went on, "we, you and I, know very well that we are not inferior to others. On the contrary. Same as a black man in a white community must be aware, that he is not inferior, though he is different, of course. That's not the problem. The problem is, that that white community looks upon that black man as inferior, just because he's different. In somewhat the same way, the sighted community looks upon us, the blind and the partially sighted as very pathetic objects and many of them even tell you so. I feel sorry for you they may tell you, or even worse than that, they are capable of telling you, that if a thing like that happened to them, they'd kill themselves."

"Yeah, yeah!" Yonchi admitted. "Someone said that to me, not SO long ago."

"And what did you tell him?" Shon Janchi asked. "Well, nothing, really," Yonchi admitted.

"Nothing, huh?" Shon Janchi said in a soft tone. "I suppose you just laughed, without saying anything at all. If they ever say a thing like that to you again, tell them to go jump into the lake."

Yonchi laughed and said: "Yes, you're right! That's what we ought to tell these people. But you know, whenever they say things like that to me, I can never think of a good answer."

"Yeah, that's true," Shon Janchi agreed. "We Arubans, we are too peace-loving. On the one hand, that's not a bad trait we have, but on the other hand, a little more of an aggressive attitude would get us a lot further in life. We Arubans always try to avoid conflicts, but there are times when a conflict can solve a problem a lot faster than an attitude of resignation. And, because we try to avoid conflicts, we gossip like mad behind people's backs, because in some way or other we have to unburden ourselves. But, avoiding confrontations and then talking behind people's backs doesn't solve anything at all."

"You're absolutely right there," Yonchi agreed. "If you speak frankly with a person, you often discover that the problem doesn't even exist."

"Exactly," Shon Janchi said. "And the same thing goes for society as a whole. Many of the problems we have are sometimes even created by the press, by television, radio and newspaper, which want to publish every little thing we do as something extraordinary. Why should every little party of a group of handicapped people have to be shown on television and with photographs in the newspapers?"

"Well, ..." Yonchi interrupted him with his favourite introductory word. "In that way, people can see that we are also normal people."

"No, Yonchi," Shon Janchi replied, more forcefully. "They don't see it as something normal. Normal things don't reach the press. They show it as something exceptional, so that all viewers, sitting in their chairs can say: Oh, isn't it terrible! Those poor people! Such things don't change anything in the attitudes of people, on the contrary. If we want to change the attitudes of people, we have to go out and participate in the normal activities of the community in which we live. Like a few years ago, one, or two blind men, if I'm not mistaken, here in Aruba participated for the first time in the Calypso Contest for the carnival. That first time, their pictures were printed in all the newspapers as something very extraordinary. A good piece of advocacy, that's for sure! But have you noted something? One of the blind musicians later participated several more times in the same event but he never made the newspapers again. It had become something normal and that's as it should be."

"That's true, that's true!" Yonchi exclaimed excitedly. "It's the same as when you're learning to type. I'm getting typing lessons now but even my parents and my brothers are quite amazed that I can, and yet, everyone should know, that every good typist with normal sight must learn to type without looking at the keys."

"Exactly," Shon Janchi said. "If we want to change people's attitude towards us, we have to

show them that we are not pathetic, because we are different. To show people that a blind man can also drink a cup of coffee, and that he can also find his mouth with his fork and doesn't stuff his food into his ears is plain stupid."

Yonchi exploded with laughter, slapping his hand on his knee.

"Would you like another beer?" Shon Janchi asked, dryly.

"Yeah, sure!" Yonchi laughed. "Then I'll try to pour it into my ears."

SHON JANCHI FALLS IN LOVE

It had been more than a week already that Shon Janchi couldn't sleep well. On and on, in his mind's eye, he saw that beautiful face. It was Titichi's face. Titichi, who so often came to visit him and help him with so many little chores, that he himself couldn't do, or which were difficult for him to do. After he had invited Titichi to accompany him to his elder brother Buchi's birthday party, her visits had gradually become more frequent and there were times that they sat talking together for hours on end, about all sort of things, About Shon Janchi's problems as a blind man, about Titichi's two children, who had been married for quite some time, about politics and, of late, Titichi used to bring newspapers and magazines to read those articles to him that he had special interest in. And so, at long last, he was unable to hide the truth from himself; there could only be one explanation for what was going on in his mind: he had fallen in love with Titichi, a fifty year old widow whom he had known almost all his life.

However, deep down in his heart he did not want to give in to this inescapable fact. He had never been married before and if he honestly had to admit to himself the reason why he had never been able to unite with a woman, he knew, the reason probably lay in his youth, when, as an adolescent, he had been head over heels in love with a girl, who, after some years, had gone to the Netherlands together with her parents. Though he had never heard from her again, she nevertheless had remained buried in his heart all these years, as his only true love. That was the way he was. It was all, or nothing at all. He for one, had never been able to stand the womanizing type of man. Whatever relation he had, it was always a person to person one, never just a physical relationship, never a relationship as towards an object.

And now, he could no longer escape the truth, the real truth, the truth of his heart. He loved Titichi very much. He had always liked her very much, as a dear friend, not just because she was a woman but because she was a human being with whom he had developed a friendship which posed no demands on either side.

But he also realized very well that he was blind; that he didn't have a job; that his income was very low; that he had virtually nothing to offer Titichi apart from his friendship, his love. Moreover, deep down in his heart, there was a gnawing feeling of fear; the fear, that if he should propose to Titichi, she might refuse him, even reject him because of his blindness. Or, something that was also a possibility, that she might accept him, but only out of pity. Both these alternatives were absolutely intolerable for him.

For hours on end, he lay turning and tossing in his bed, thinking and talking; talking in his imagination to himself and to Titichi; explaining to her; hearing Titichi's beautiful voice in his imagination; dreaming while fully awake, unable to decide what to do. He didn't want to use Titichi as a refuge because he was blind and needed help for lots of little things. If he was going to propose to Titichi, the only motivation had to be love, love for her, his desire to offer himself to her, his heart, his whole being, his companionship, his friendship, his help. He had to be absolutely sure that his motivation came not from a desire for protection for himself, for a good life for himself, with somebody who was going to help him in every little thing, because he was blind.

But, he had nothing to offer Titichi, nothing but his little house - Titichi's place was much bigger

than this - the few head of sheep he was breeding to sell their meat, the medical discharge allowance that he received for an income and that was hardly enough to make ends meet, let alone, to maintain a wife.

And yet, Titichi came to visit him so often during the last few months, that he was almost absolutely certain that she felt the same towards him and perhaps Titichi was afraid to show him her feelings more openly, because he was blind and she didn't want him to think that she was so attached to him out of pity for him. Or it could be precisely her feelings of pity that made her come so often!

Why did such things have to be so immensely difficult? Why couldn't he just believe that Titichi loved him? Why did he have to be so suspicious about Titichi's motives? Why did he have to examine his own conscience, to be absolutely sure of himself that his own motives were sincere and not false? But it wasn't protection that he sought for himself.

After another sleepless night of turning and tossing in his bed, he decided to go and have an honest talk with Titichi. He dressed as, neatly as he could. He shaved his face as smooth as he could and finally grabbed his cane and set out for Titichi's place. It wasn't very far, but he had only made the walk twice before, because of course, it was much easier for Titichi to come to his place. Taking his time and paying special attention to the traffic which was rather busy on this road at this hour, he at last found the house, and as he reached the gate to the yard around Titichi's house, she saw him and came running towards the gate, calling out with a voice full of joy and at the same time with a touch of worry: "Shon Janchi!" She grabbed his hand and for one, single short moment he felt her fingers squeeze his hand with tremendous tenderness. A fraction of a second later, the fingers loosened their grip again as if startled by what they had done and her voice sounded a little strange, a bit excited, when she went on:

"Why didn't you say that you wanted to come? I'd have come to meet you!"

Shon Janchi put his hand on her shoulder and noted she was still in her night-gown. At that moment, he realized he was very early and that Titichi hadn't been up for very long. The touch of his hand on the bare skin of her shoulder made his heart jump and his voice trembled a little, as he replied:

"It wasn't until this morning that I decided to come and talk to you. Titichi guided him into her house and a little later they were sitting opposite each other at the dining table and Titichi said:

"I was just having my breakfast. Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"Yes, Titichi," he replied, "if you've made it, I should like it very much indeed."

"Hear him!" Titichi laughed, still with that excited tone in her voice.

"Titichi," Shon Janchi said, nervously, after Titichi had poured out a cup of coffee for him.

"Yes, Shon Janchi?" Titichi's clear voice was filled with expectation.

"We've known each other almost all our lives," Shon Janchi began.

"Yes, Shon Janchi," Titichi agreed excitedly.

"I've been thinking a lot, during the last few months," Shon Janchi continued and swallowed almost the entire contents of his cup of coffee.

"Me too," Titichi confessed, her voice trembling a little.

"I don't want you to misunderstand me," Shon Janchi began to perspire.

"I won't misunderstand you," Titichi assured him.

"I don't want you to look upon me only as a blind man," Shon Janchi tried to explain.

"I don't look upon you only as a blind man," Titichi exclaimed reassuringly.

"I don't want you to feel sorry for me!" Shon Janchi exclaimed emphatically.

"But I don't feel sorry for you!" Titichi exclaimed even more emphatically, "I admire you!"

Shon Janchi started to stir his tea-spoon in his empty cup. He didn't know what to say next. It was a good thing his cup was empty, because he was stirring with such vigour that he would surely have spilled any coffee left in the cup all over Titichi's white table cloth. Titichi didn't say anything

either, but at that moment, Shon Janchi felt a bare foot touch one of his feet and that foot was not withdrawn. On the contrary. Another bare foot touched his other foot as if to encourage him. A tremendously warm feeling of tenderness crept through his whole body and gave him strength to go on talking.

"Titichi" he began again, in a soft tone.

"Yes, Shon Janchi?" Titichi answered, her voice full of hope.

"I've been thinking a lot; I've been examining my conscience. I've decided I do not want to seek protection for myself, because I'm blind. I've decided I shall never accept an attitude of pity towards myself. I've decided that, if I truly love a person, I must be able to offer that person my love, my friendship, my personality. I've decided that if I accept a person, that person must truly love me. She mustn't just want to take care of me, protect me, help me, just because I'm blind. She shall have to accept me for what I am as a human being."

There was a short moment of total silence. Then Titichi broke the spell, by saying:

"Yes, Shon Janchi, I fully agree with you." Her voice was soft and ever so beautiful.

"Titichi" Shon Janchi said, hesitantly.

"Yes, Shon Janchi?" Titichi said in unconcealed suspense now.

"I love you!"

"I love you too." Her voice was almost a whisper.

"Will you marry me?"

"Yes, I will."

Shon Janchi could hardly hear the answer. A long and profound silence enclosed them both, finally broken again by Titichi's voice that said:

"Would you like another cup of coffee?" •

The End

This book was illustrated by Nigel Matthew.

The English translation of this book was minutely scrutinized, corrected and revised by Crispin Bruce.

The FAVI is the Aruban Foundation of the Visually Handicapped.

The Initials F.A.V.I. stand for the Papiamento name: Fundashon Arubano di esnan Visualmente Incapacita."

The FAVI was officially founded on February 21, 1974. It is involved in the full range of service to the visually handicapped in Aruba. The FAVI activity centre is located at:

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