



CHAPTER EIGHT

A BLESSED ACCIDENT

ANXIOUS to increase his earnings for his Lolo's medicine and doctor's bills, Tonio decided to work every hour of the day. Having finished his newspapers early, he offered to carry two kettles of steaming tea for a woman "puto" peddler. For a pole he used his Lolo's cane, which was not rounded like ordinary canes, but flattened. It rested snugly on his shoulder, the two kettles dangling on its ends.

While the woman hawked her "puto", Tonio followed, but his mind was back in the little cottage. Before him he saw the old man gazing at him intently, his eyes fixed as if they had a story to tell. Close behind the woman, he crossed the street in front of the market. His eyes grew dim and he sobbed in spite of himself.

Suddenly the grinding of brakes and the sharp screams of women rent the air. And all went black to Tonio.

When he came to, he was in a hospital room, a nurse all in white bandaging his head. An unknown lady was seated beside the bed. Collecting his wits, he asked excitedly,

"Why, where am I? Where is my cane? Let me go please. My Lolo will be anxious about me."

"Your cane is not lost. But you cannot go home yet." A gentle but unknown voice answered.

Tonio looked at her, a question in his anxious eyes.

THE ADVENTURES OF A BEGGAR BOY

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by Julio Cesar Peña
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"You met a slight accident. You cannot go about for a while, but you need not fear, I shall take care of you."

It was a strange woman who spoke. She had a sweet smile but a pair of wistful, almost sad, eyes.

"But my Lolo is sick. I must go to him. He will miss me." And Tonio made an effort to get up.

A soft hand was laid gently on his arm.

"If you will go to sleep, I shall go to your Lolo. I have your address."

"You must not tell him that I am hurt at all. Anyway, I do not feel any pain. My Lolo! My Lolo! Who will look after him?" Tonio turned about and buried his face in the soft pillow.



"There, there, dear. I shall see to it that he is taken care of."

The low, caressing voice of the strange lady soothed Tonio. He looked long at her face. There was something familiar about her, her looks, her hands, and her voice. But he could not recall where he had seen her before.

His face brightened as a thought flashed in his mind.

"Please, Madam, send me home and let my Lolo stay here in my place. He is very, very sick. I am all right." Tonio begged.

"Yes, child, I'll bring him here if you will go to sleep."

Tonio closed his eyes and kept still. He felt a strange faith in the kind lady. When he awoke, the lady was gone. After a while, the nurse came in to inform him that his Lolo had been brought to the hospital.

"He is in another room. He cannot be here with you. He has a different sickness." The nurse explained.

Tonio asked no questions. He murmured a prayer of thanks to God for the accident which had brought the benevolent lady into his life.

"Was not my cane lucky?" He said to himself.

After three days, Tonio was pronounced well. The strange lady came with a man.

"Tony, Dear," she was saying to her companion, "I want you to tell him now about our plans."

"His name must be Antonio, just like mine." Tonio thought.

The man helped Tonio sit up on the bed. He began,

"Now, child, my wife and I feel that we must do something for you. We were to blame for the accident. How would you like to live with us?"

Tonio's face suddenly lit up with pleasant surprise, but as suddenly grew serious.

"I should like to, if I were alone. But I cannot leave my Lolo. He is all I have and I am all he has." He spoke slowly with his eyes on the white sheet that covered his feet.



"But you don't have to leave your Lolo," the lady explained. "We shall take him, too, as soon as he is well."

"And we shall send you to school," the man added.

"Oh, how good you are!" Tonio exclaimed. "I will serve you as long as I live. I am big enough to do anything." He boasted. "But I must ask my Lolo what he thinks about your offer."

His Lolo accepted the offer with endless protestations of gratitude. With Tonio in kind hands, he could die in peace if God so willed.

The kind couple took him back to his old home. They drove in a roomy and luxurious car through the narrow and dirty streets of the slums until they reached the head of the alley that led to Tonio's home. He gathered his Lolo's few belongings and picked up the small rattan trunk that contained all their clothes. He cast a last loving look about the little home. He paused at the head of the stairs to take in a last glimpse of the beautiful sea and the more beautiful sky splendid with the fiery tints of the setting sun.

(To be continued)