



Chapter Ten

AMONG BARRIO BOYS

ACCUSTOMED to a life of regular habits, Tonio did not find any difficulty in following his daily schedule of work. Two hours in the afternoon, from four to six o'clock, were his to spend as he pleased. He easily made friends with the peasant boys of the neighborhood. They all liked him because he had no "airs," although he had been brought up in Manila. When they asked him about the manner of living in the big city, he did not brag at all about it. In fact Tonio made the boys understand that city boys were in no way superior to the barrio boys. Tonio found the barrio boys more congenial. Their pranks were harmless and their games wholesome. At sundown before the boys drove the carabaos home, they played leap frog. Tonio's friends taught him all the tricks of the game until he became just as skillful as they. He learned to balance himself standing on a carabao's back. On moonlight nights the boys played "patintero."

Among the farm boys, there was one who was particularly friendly and played the part of big brother to the smaller ones. Every boy called him "Ka Jose." He taught the boys how to make lanterns and kites and how to initiate bird calls. His father, too, was very popular among the

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boys. The old man told them the most fantastic tales about enchanted princes, kind fairies, and wicked witches. He knew the local names and legends of constellations. He did not tire repeating the tales about "Juda's Purse," "The Three Marys," the "Cross," and the "Hair of Queen Esther." He was illiterate, but he could chant pages and pages of the "Pasion" and recite in a sing-song manner the entire adventures of such heroes as Carlo Magno, Rodrigo, and Bernardo Carpio.

The children of the country seemed to Tonio nearer to God. At dusk they hurried home to be with the rest of the family for



the evening prayer. Every child could say the rosary. Every young person greeted an older one at night with "Good evening" or "mano po," bowing low as he uttered the words in a most reverent manner. The young people were regular church goers. Tonio observed that the faces of the country people seemed bright and happy on Sunday. The traces of poverty and daily grind seemed to banish from their countenance as Sunday dawned. Having been brought up in the old-fashioned way, Tonio found he had much in common with the barrio boys. He realized that country life was just the life for him. His once vague ambition took a definite form. He decided to prepare himself for the farm.

The last days of May were most pleasant and gay. Every village had its own fiesta as each had its own patron saint. Simultaneously almost every street had its series of "Sta. Cruz de Mayo" processions. To climax all the minor "fiestas," a general "Flores de Mayo" festival was held at the end of May. While nobody in the City paid attention to him, everybody in the country seemed to have taken a fancy to him. Several times he played the part of "Constantino" at processions in honor of the Holy Cross of May.

About a week before the opening of schools in June, Tonio's Lolo was called by

Mr. and Mrs. del Valle.

"As we once told you," Mr. del Valle began, "it is our intention to send Tonio to school. We have a barrio school here."

"But I wish to send him to a school in the City. Anyway Mr. del Valle goes down every day," Mrs. del Valle interrupted.

"Yes, Madam," the old man agreed, "I believe the schools in the City are superior to our barrio school. But I am afraid to let him stay alone among strangers the whole day."

"Oh, your fears are unfounded. Pupils are taken care of in schools," Mr. del Valle blurted in defense of public schools.

"If you would rather have him in a private school, I am willing to send him to one," offered Mrs. del Valle.

"Oh, no, Madam, it would be too much to ask that of you," the old man exclaimed. "Besides, I want Tonio to mingle with poor children and to meet problems which he must learn to solve by himself. However, I would not want him to go with street boys from whom he will learn nothing good."

"All right, then," Mr. del Valle finally said, "think it over. You have a whole week to decide."

"Yes, Sir, we shall talk it over. Although my boy is young, he has a mature mind."

(To be continued)

