



Chapter Sixteen

The Story of a Foundling

LOLO had hardly recovered from surprise at the old cook's strange behavior when Mrs. Del Valle rushed in very much excited.

"Tony, my boy!" she cried as she threw herself upon Tonio, who was lying on a bamboo bed. "Something told me. I was a fool to have doubted," she said brokenly as she stripped the boy of his pants.

Mr. Del Valle, who had followed her, helped in turning the astonished boy on his back. His pelvis exposed, they saw a purplish-red birthmark as wide as a man's palm.

"My own! My precious!" and Mrs. Del

THE ADVENTURES OF A BEGGAR BOY

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by Julio Cesar Peña
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Valle smothered the boy with kisses.

Mr. Del Valle carried Tonio in his arms and walked out of the room.

"To his own room my dear, my baby's," Mrs. Del Valle told her husband as she followed him.

"I thought so. I thought so," the old cook pronounced solemnly, slapping the blind man on the back.

"Do you mean they are convinced my Tonio is their own child?" Lolo asked, his voice tremulous with great emotion.

"Yes, the birthmark will not lie."

"What birthmark?" Lolo was puzzled, for he did not know that Tonio bore any.

"The big, red mark on his pelvis. Now, Lolo, tell me the story. They won't care to hear it. It is enough that they have found their baby."



The blind man turned his sightless eyes heavenward. Passing his hand over his brow, he began slowly, "It was June, almost ten years ago, and the transplanting season was in full swing."

"Why, where did you live?" the cook interrupted.

"Very far, at a small *sitio* about two hours' walk from the provincial road of Bulacan."

"Bulacan! That is not far. The Master spent a great deal on public and private detectives. I cannot see why they failed to find the baby."

"Perhaps because I lived in a small *nipa* hut set apart from the center of the *sitio*. As I was saying, it was transplanting time and all the men and women of the *sitio* were out in the field the whole day. I was staying with my widowed daughter, who made a living by helping the farmers with the planting, harvesting, and threshing. On Saturdays and Sundays she also peddled rice cakes.

"It was a Saturday and my daughter had an unusually hard day. She came home late and we ate our supper at about eight o'clock. We lingered over our meal as she recounted to me the farm gossip.

"Mang Juan's boy has reported having seen a very dim light in the haunted shack," she said.

"Ho, the old story," I puffed. "Everybody believes the shack is haunted, but nobody has seen the ghost."

"This is different, Father," she countered. "The dogs howl fearfully at odd intervals in the night. The neighbors declare that the dogs are seeing things which are invisible to man."

"Just then our dog gave a piercing cry. We were silent for a while. I got up and felt for my cane under the *papag*. My daughter washed the dishes right where she was, using our drinking water. I sensed that she was afraid to go out to the *batalan* where our jars of wash water were."

"Did you not go out, Lolo?"



"Not right away.. Presently there was an insistent barking. 'Bring the lantern,' I told my daughter as I went out cautiously with my cane.

"*Susmariosep!*" my daughter exclaimed and she rushed forward. "A baby, Father."

"Well, to make a long story short, we found Tonio on our *batalan*. He was just a few months old, for he could not even turn on his side yet. The child was clothed in a single shirt and wrapped in a piece of gray muslin. A little piece of paper was pinned on the shirt. On it was scrawled the name *Antonio*. I gave him my family name and so he has been known as Antonio Ramos."

"What about the person who had brought the baby, Lolo? Was anything found out about him or her?"

"Nothing at all. But since that day, no ghost haunted the deserted shack. Now it is your turn to tell me how Tonio happened to get lost."

The old cook passed her fingers through her thinning hair—

"I know all the details connected with the kidnapping. You know, I have been in

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the service of the family for twenty years. I was originally employed by Mrs. Del Valle's mother.

"In brief, they had a pretty young woman for a maid. She was given charge of the child. It seems to me that the girl conducted herself in a most unwomanly manner toward Mr. Del Valle. The Master prevailed upon Mrs. Del Valle to dismiss the girl. Well, she had not gone a week when the child was lost, simply disappeared from his room. The mistress never lost hope. The child's bedroom has always been tidied up and the bed made every day."

The next morning, Mr. Del Valle came to Lolo's room.

"We owe you more than we can ever repay. Is there anything you desire to do or acquire? Give us a chance to do something for you." Mr. Del Valle's voice was pleading.

Lolo replied, "There is nothing I want now. The child has been my only concern. Now that he has found his parents I can die happy."

Tonio came in and embraced his Lolo. "Lolo dear, Mother wants to remind you about tomorrow. We shall take you to the hospital."

"The eye specialist is almost sure that he can restore your sight," Mr. Del Valle added.

"And Father says I may stay with you in the hospital after school hours."

The old man shed tears of joy. "Because you have been such a good boy, God has brought all these blessings upon you," he said as he stroked the boy's forehead affectionately.

"I am good because you have made me so," Tonio declared. "Promise, Lolo, that you will never leave me."

"Never, my boy, so long as you want me."

Mrs. Del Valle soon entered. In

her usual gentle manner, she addressed Lolo,

"Your room is ready for you Lolo. It is near Junior's room. He would not let you out of sight."

"The dear child," Lolo murmured with mixed pride and affection. He wanted to say, "My own Tonio," but he checked himself. His boy was no longer his own. He belonged to his parents. And he was not Tonio anymore. He was Tony, or Junior. He sighed in spite of himself.

Mr. Del Valle motioned to Mrs. Del Valle to leave the room. Both tiptoed out to leave the old man and the boy alone.

Left by themselves, Tonio found much to say to the old man.

"Lolo, they were asking me what you want most. They feel as though they cannot do enough for you."

"If I were young," the old man said slowly, "I would want to get back all the lands my family had lost. But I am old and with no kin. I have clung to life only for you, my boy. There is nothing I want except to be with you. Your future is secure. I understand your parents are very rich and they own extensive fields."

"I will be a farmer, Lolo. As soon as you can see again, we shall take long walks in our fields."

"My boy, I have no treasure to leave to you but my cane. I am convinced that it had something to do with our unbelievably good fortune. Get it from the corner and take it to your room. Do not part with it for anything."

"Why, what use can a small boy make of a cane?" the old cook asked as she took a seat near the blind man. "I came to congratulate you, Lolo," she continued. "You have brought happiness to this house and fortune upon yourself."

CAN YOU ANSWER THESE?

1. How did Nena drive the dog from the stairs?

2. What is Sea Scouting? How is it operated?

3. How did Mrs. Del Valle prove that Tonio was her son?

4. Repeat the song of the quail. Why did the mouse like it best?

5. Name the health fairies. How do they guard us from disease?

6. What do you think of Unggoy? Would you like to own him?

7. Compare the zinnia and the chichirica. Which would you rather be?

8. What are movie shorts? Name some that you have seen.

9. How can we become men and women that our country will be proud of?

10. For whom was the month of July named?

11. Describe some shrubs that you know. Which grow in your garden?

12. How can you enter *The Young Citizen* Essay Contest?

"As I always say, God never sleeps. He sends his blessings to the deserving in due time. Besides, my cane must have had something to do with the whole thing."

"Your cane? The camamong cane? How? Tell me." The cook who enjoyed all kinds of stories made himself comfortable in a wooden rocking chair.

And Lolo, drawing one leg up on the chair, began the tale he always enjoyed repeating: the old story of the camamong cane.

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