



Chapter Nine

THE NEW HOME

“THAT is your new home.” The lady whispered in her gentle and silvery voice as the big car started to ascend a steep drive.

Tonio looked in the direction the lady pointed.

“That?” He gasped as he saw a large and massive concrete building snugly perched on the top of a high knoll. Huge mango trees stood on either side forming a fitting frame for it as it presented a beautiful picture to the gazer.

“I seem to have seen that somewhere.” Tonio murmured. “It looks like one of those houses in front of the big hospital.”

The boy walked as if in a trance when he was led to a back room on the first floor. The couple gave directions to a maid about helping Tonio with his things. He thought he was dreaming when the lady said,

“This is your own room. Ask the maid for whatever you need. She will also instruct you about your work tomorrow.”

“Yes, Madam.” And then, as if he could not contain his joy anymore, he said in a voice that trembled with emotion, “How kind you are! God will repay you for your goodness. May He teach me how to serve you, Madam and . . . and . . . Sir.”

“My husband’s first name is like yours. Call him Mr. del Valle. Yours is Ramos,

THE ADVENTURES OF A BEGGAR BOY

•
by Julio Cesar Peña
•

isn’t it?”

“Yes, Mrs. del Valle, but everybody calls me Tonio.”

“We shall call you Tonio. You see, I call Mr. del Valle Tony.”

“All right, Tonio, you need rest.” Mr. del Valle interrupted. “Eat your supper and go to bed.” And he led his wife out.

Once alone, Tonio fell on his knees and uttered a fervent prayer of thanks. There was just one more wish to be fulfilled—his Lolo’s recovery. His happiness would be complete then. He lay awake long after the other people in the house had retired. Silence reigned over the place. Only the occasional call of the gecko could be heard. How different it was from his old home. There the loud talking and boisterous laughter of street boys lasted far into the night. He was happy over the change, but he missed the soft lapping of the wavelets on the beach which had lulled him to sleep.

In the morning, he was taken to the grounds by the maid. He was to feed the chickens and tend the pigeons, water the plants, and help with the cleaning of the car. He determined to perform his work promptly and thoroughly and to give the generous couple no cause for complaint. He had hoped that he might be assigned to the cleaning of the rooms so that he could be at hand whenever Mrs. del Valle needed help.

Tonio enjoyed his work more and more as days passed. He could not tell which he liked better, the garden or the chicken yard. He attended to the chickens first of

all. He fed the big ones corn and palay. For the chicks, he mixed ground rice, chopped dried fish, and finely cut up greens. He was careful about changing their drinking water daily.

But the pigeons were more interesting to him. He learned from the manager of the grounds that the stock increased rapidly because the place was quiet.

"They are sensitive creatures," the man said. "They want peace and harmony about them. When the people in the house often quarrel or are noisy, the pigeons move to another home."

"How do they find a new home?" asked Tonio in great wonder.

"They seem to communicate with other pigeons they meet. Often a pair of discontented pigeons follow their friends to the latter's home. The owner gets a pleasant surprise by finding one morning that his stock has grown."

"The pigeons have very interesting habits, the man continued. "The male pigeon is a model husband. He is always true and affectionate. And he demonstrates his affection in many ways!"

"Please tell me more about them," Tonio begged.

"No, you will enjoy better if you observe them."

And then the garden! Rows and rows of dahlias of different colors and as big as sau-

cers, hundreds of roses in big vats, and plots of azucena made the garden a beautiful sight. It was there where he awaited the break of day. If the sunset in the sea in his old home was gorgeous, the sunrise on the hill of his new home was glorious.

The bracing air and mild morning sunshine filled Tonio with vigor and a desire to plunge to work at once. Even the sky on a starry night seemed different. It looked much vaster and the stars brighter.

Tonio was very happy. He never had dreamed of so beautiful a life. When after two weeks his Lolo was brought home his joy knew no bounds. He wanted to do something wonderful for Mr. and Mrs. del Valle but succeeded in merely hugging their favorite dog.

(Please turn to page 317)

