



Chapter Ten

GOING TO SCHOOL

“**T**ONIO, my boy, you are going to school next week. Mrs. del Valle offers to place you in a private school. What do you say?”

“O, Lolo, please let me go to that fine school near our old home. It has long been my dream to study there. Please!” Tonio begged.

He could not tell his Lolo that, next to his desire to serve him, was his dream of going to that beautiful and imposing school building that had spurred him to do the hardest work. He could never forget the uplifting influence upon his young mind of that massive building that rose in majesty from the mud and dirt of the slums of Tondo.

Thus at the opening of schools in June, Tonio found himself enrolled in the school

THE ADVENTURES OF A BEGGAR BOY

•
by Julio Cesar Peña
•

which had been the object of his boyish dreams. His heart could not contain the rapture he felt when he found himself in the building. He was indulging in all kinds of day dreams when he heard someone say his name.

“Well, if that is not Tonio, the blind man’s grandson,” exclaimed one of the boys in surprise

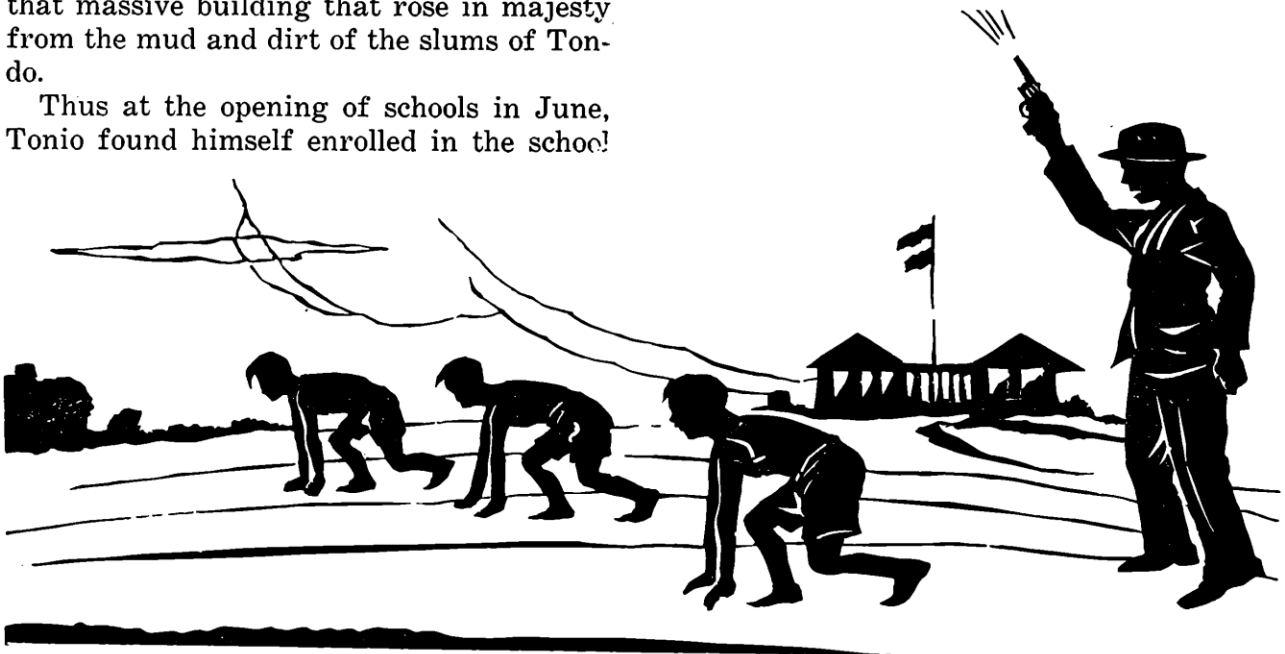
A number of his old neighbors crowded around him.

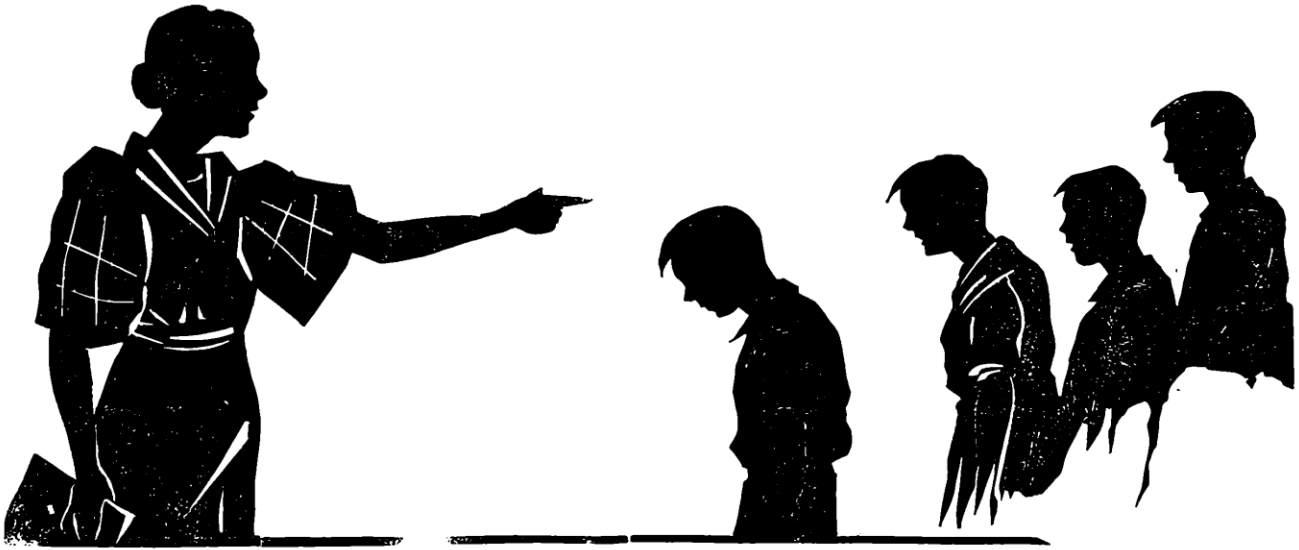
“Where do you live now?” asked one.

“Where is your Lolo?”

“Who brought you here?”

“My home is very far from here. I am living with my Lolo. A kind couple is taking care of us.” Tonio explained, glad at the knowledge that his old acquaint-





tances had not forgotten him.

The boys welcomed him and put him at ease. They invited him to join their games and offered to share their lunch with him. Tonio realized what good the school had done for the boys of the slums. Those who had jeered at him outside were friendly to him at school. Boys whom he had known as street rowdies hanging around Chinese stores with dirty faces and tattered clothes were clean at school.

Naturally intelligent, hard-working, and helpful, Tonio soon became a favorite among the teachers and popular among the children. As a monitor, he worked the fastest and helped the others with their assignments. When bamboo was needed for any construction work, he furnished his classmates with sticks. He was so happy that he was always eager to do something for others. Never wanting in pocket money, he found himself in a position to help even those boys who were better off than he at the time when he walked the streets as a beggar boy. Accustomed to frugal living, Tonio found little to spend his allowance for. On Fridays he would find twenty or thirty centavos in his little pocket book. With the money, he would buy pansit and buyo for his Lolo.

Always attentive and diligent, Tonio learned fast. He felt that he had to make up for the lost years. Nothing that the

teacher ever said escaped him. After two months, he was promoted to the next higher grade. Mr. and Mrs. Del Valle were gratified. His Lolo was very proud of him.

Tonio came to be a star player in the primary department of his school. He won for his school many points in the track and field events. His long walks with his Lolo when they had to go begging strengthened his legs and developed his endurance.

His first year at school would have been entirely free from trouble had it not been for an incident in which he was involved. His seatmate was younger and smaller than he but one who thought it smart to make his classmates laugh at the wrong moment. One afternoon as the pupils passed out in two's, a sharp whistle coming from the middle of the line startled the children. The teacher was red with anger as she stopped the line and demanded,

"Who did that? Who whistled?"

The pupils all turned their heads toward the teacher but said nothing.

"Who whistled? Tell me." She glowered upon the pupil nearest to her.

"I do not know Miss Garcia. It must be somebody from the rear."

Knowing that Tonio was a serious-minded boy and expecting to obtain the needed information from him, Miss Garcia turned to Tonio.

"Antonio, tell me who it was."

(Please turn to page 28)

THE ADVENTURES OF .

(Continued from page 13)

"I cannot, Miss Garcia. Please excuse me." Tonio answered very softly.

"You cannot? You know who it is but you will not tell me." Turning to the rest, she said, "If you don't tell me who it was who whistled, you will all be kept until five o'clock." And Miss Garcia sent the children back to the room.

The little children began to cry.

"We did not do it," they sobbed.

"The big boys behind did it."

Miss Garcia had to dismiss the younger children. Only four big boys, Tonio among them, remained. She scolded them. She threatened to have them whipped by their parents, but they would not tell on the culprit. She appealed to Tonio.

"Antonio, I know that you can tell me who it was who whistled. For the fault of one, four are being punished. You and two others are innocent."

"Miss Garcia, please punish me alone. I think I did it." Tonio hung his head to avoid the teacher's eyes.

"All right, I will keep you alone. When your guardian comes to fetch you, I shall tell him what a liar you are." Miss Garcia assumed her sternest look. "The three of you may go home."

Tonio's head was bent. He said nothing, but tears dropped on the desk. What would Mr. and Mrs. Del Valle say?

The three boys stood, but one of them walked slowly toward the teacher.

"It was I who did it, Miss Garcia. I'm sorry, he confessed.

"Yes, yes, Miss Garcia. It was Tomas who whistled," the other two boys added, speaking at the same time.

Just then Mr. Del Valle stepped into the room. Not finding Tonio at the gate, he went in to inquire. In low tones, the teacher talked with Mr. Del Valle for a moment and then dismissed Tonio and the other two boys.

(To be continued)
