NIGHT TRAIN TO BOLINA
BY NILO CRUZ

CHARACTERS
TALITA (early teens) is waiting in a convent for her stepmother to come and take her to America; CLARA (early teens) has run away from her village to the city.

SCENE
A convent in Latin America

TIME
The present

Although TALITA tries her best to distract CLARA, the newly arrived girl longs to be reunited with the boy she ran away with, who is in the nearby infirmary of the convent.

TALITA: When the little stick points to seven and the big stick points to twelve, that's the time the bell rings. That's the time we have to wake up. Sister Nora taught us how to tell time. Have you ever seen a cuckoo clock? It goes cuckoo... cuckoo... and a little bird comes out of the clock. Sister Nora has one in her classroom. Right around this time the bell rings. When the bell rings it's time to go to sleep. (The bell rings and light dim.)

CLARA: (Frightened.) What happened to the lights?

TALITA: It's time to go to sleep. The cuckoo clock must be going cuckoo... cuckoo... Are you afraid? Nothing's going to happen to you. I used to be afraid like you. Natalia, the girl who used to sleep in your bed, was afraid, too. She was always afraid the roof would cave in at night and soldiers would come in here.

CLARA: I want to leave this place. I want to get out.

TALITA: You can't. They won't let you.

CLARA: Why not?

TALITA: Because this is where you belong. Who brought you here? Was it your father?

CLARA: No.
going to sneeze. Like if she had a cold. Like this. (Places hand on her nose, breathes in and out through her mouth and spins. Laughs.) She looked like she wanted to be my mother. (Pause. Faces forward.) I don't have a mother. I used to have two mothers. I used to. Not anymore. One lives in America and one disappeared from home. My papi says she was kidnapped by soldiers. Do you know what kidnap means? (CLARA shakes her head.) It means that they steal you. The soldiers that come to our village, they come and do bad things. They put people in bags of rice and take them away. Then they throw them into a pit.

Were you at the Santa Rosa Mission? (CLARA shakes her head.) That's where my father took me, so my American mother can come for me. I'm going to be her daughter.

If I show you a secret, promise not to tell anybody. (CLARA nods.) Stand there and close your eyes. I don't want anybody to know where I hide my secret. Come on, close your eyes and stand there. Go on over there. (CLARA closes her eyes and walks away from TALITA. TALITA pulls out a bundle from under her bed cushion.) Open your eyes. And don't tell anybody I showed these to you. (TALITA takes out a pair of shoes from inside a pillowcase.) My mother in America sent them to me in a letter. In a little box. They didn't fit me when I got them. So my mother gave them to my sister, because she had bigger feet. Now they are small on me, because my feet got big. Try them on. They'll fit you. You have small feet. (CLARA tries them on.) Aren't they beautiful.

But you see my sister scratched them. She never took care of them. She was going to break them and get them dirty, so I took them away from her. She was sleeping one night and I took them from under the bed. I put them inside a sack, I dug a hole and buried them inside the ground, so she wouldn't wear them again. Wait. Let me see if someone's coming. (Runs to the door and takes a peek. SHE runs back to CLARA.) The next day everybody in my house was looking for the shoes. And I didn't tell. I didn't say anything. I used to go out at night and dig them out of the ground and wear them for a little while, even if they were big on me. Then I would polish them with my nightshirt and dab a bit of saliva to make them shine. They would shine so much you could see the bright moon reflected on them. Go see if someone's coming. (CLARA goes to the door.)

CLARA: But they don't fit you.

TALITA: It doesn't matter. (Places shoes on top of her head.) One day I will melt them into a hat. My grandma had her gold tooth melted into a wedding band. I could do the same with my shoes. And I'll have a hat. Maybe a purse. (Holds them by the strap, as if they were a purse.) Maybe a pair of gloves, like the ones rich ladies wear to church.

CLARA: Keep them how they are.

TALITA: When I look at them, I remember the smell of back home. Walking on the moist grass. The moon shining on my shoes. My grandma's face.

CLARA: You miss your grandma.

TALITA: Sometimes.

CLARA: I miss Mateo. When will I see him again?

TALITA: Pretend you're sick. They'll take you to the infirmary to see a doctor, then you can see him.