

# SHOES FOR HECTOR

by Nicholasa Mohr

## PART I

*This story was written more than twenty years ago. Twenty-five dollars bought a lot more then than it does today.*

Hector's mother had gone to see Uncle Luis the day before graduation, and he had come by the same evening. Everyone sat in the living room watching Uncle Luis as he took a white box out of a brown paper bag. Opening the box, he removed a pair of shiny, light-brown shoes with tall heels and narrow, pointed toes. Holding them up  
5 proudly, he said, "This cost me 12 bucks, boy!"

Everybody looked at Hector and then back at Uncle Luis.

"Here you go, my boy . . ." He gestured toward Hector. "Try them on."

"I'm not gonna try *those* things on!" Hector said.

"Why not?" asked Uncle Luis. "What's wrong with them? They are  
10 the latest style, man. Listen, boy, you will be *a la moda*<sup>1</sup> with these."

"They . . . they're just not my type. Besides, they don't **go with**  
my suit—it's navy blue. Those shoes are orange!" Hector's younger  
brothers and sister looked at each other and began to giggle and laugh.

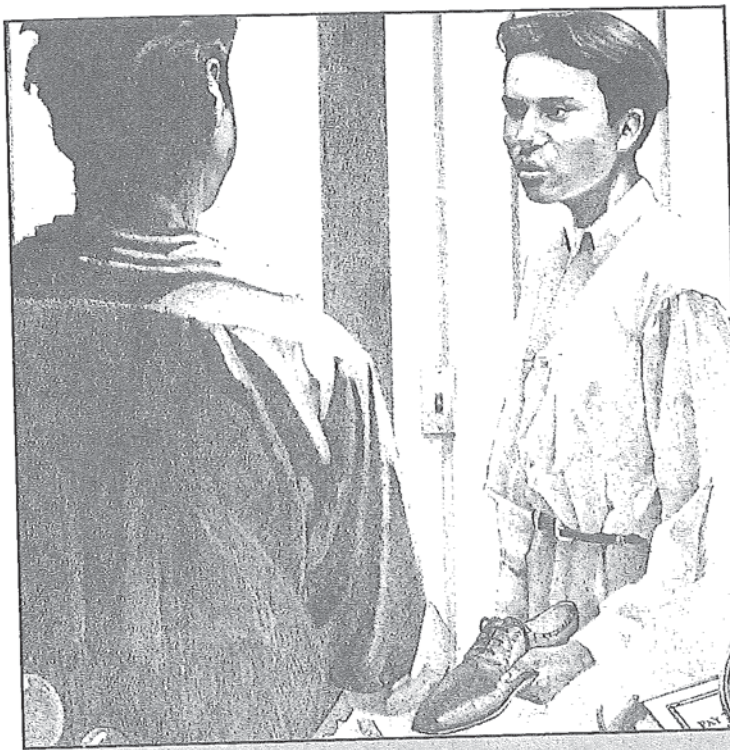
15 "Shut up, you dummies!" Hector shouted angrily.

"Hector, what is the matter with you?" his mother asked. "That's  
no way to behave."

"I'd rather wear my sneakers than those, Mami. You and Papi  
20 promised to buy me shoes. You didn't say anything about wearing  
Uncle Luis's shoes."

"Wait a minute, now. Just a minute," Hector's father said. "We  
know, but we just couldn't manage it now. Since your Uncle Luis has  
the same size foot as you, and he was nice enough to lend you his new  
shoes, what's the difference? We did what we could, son; you have to  
25 be satisfied."

1. *a la moda*: the Spanish words for "in style."



Hector felt the blood rushing to his face and tried to control his embarrassment and anger. His parents had been preparing his graduation party now for more than a week. "They should have spent the money on my shoes instead of on a dumb party," he thought. 30 Hector had used up all the earnings from his part-time job. He had bought his suit, tie, shirt, socks, and handkerchief. His parents had promised to buy him the shoes. "There is not one cent left," he thought, and it was just too late now.

"It's not my fault that they laid me off for three days," his father 35 said, "and that Petie got sick and that Georgie needed a winter jacket and Juanito some . . ."

As his father spoke, Hector wanted to say a few things. Like, "No, it's my fault that you had to spend the money for shoes on a party and a cake and everything to **impress** the neighbors and the *familia*. Stupid 40 dinner!" But instead he remained quiet, looking down at the floor, and did not say a word.

"Hector . . . come on, my son. Hector, try them on, *bendito*.<sup>2</sup> Uncle Luis was nice enough to bring them," he heard his mother plead. "Please, for me."

45 "Maybe I can get into Papi's shoes," Hector answered.

"My shoes don't fit you. And your brothers are all younger and smaller than you. There's nobody else. You are lucky Uncle Luis has the same size foot," his father responded.

"Okay, I'll just wear my sneakers," said Hector.

2. *bendito*: the Spanish word for "dear."

50 “Oh, no . . . no, never mind. You can’t wear sneakers. You wear those shoes!” his mother said.

“Mami, they are *orange!*” Hector responded. “And look at the pointed fronts—they go on for a mile. I’m-not wearing them!”

55 “Come on, please,” his mother **coaxed**. “They look nice and brand new too.”

“Hector!” his father said loudly. “Now, your Uncle Luis was nice enough to bring them, and you are going to try them on.” Everyone was silent and Hector sat **sulking**. His mother took the shoes from Uncle Luis and went over to Hector.

60 “Here, son, try them on, at least. See?” She held them up. “Look at them. They are not orange, just a light-brown color, that’s all. Only a very light brown.”

Without looking at anyone, Hector took the shoes and slowly put them on. No doubt about it, they felt like a perfect fit.

65 “How about that?” Uncle Luis smiled. “Now you look sharp. Right in style, boy!”

Hector stood up and walked a few paces. In spite of all the smiling faces in the living room, Hector still heard all the remarks he was sure his friends would make if he wore those shoes.

70 “Okay, you look wonderful. And it’s only for one morning. You can take them right off after graduation,” his mother said gently.

Hector removed the shoes and put them back in the box, resigned that there was just no way out. At that moment he even found himself wishing that he had not been selected as valedictorian<sup>3</sup> and wishing he wasn’t receiving any honors.

75 “Take your time, Hector. You don’t have to give them back to me right away. Wear the shoes for the party. So you look good,” he heard Uncle Luis calling out as he walked into his bedroom.

“That stupid party!” Hector whispered out loud.

3. *vaedictorian*: the student who has the highest average in his or her class. The valedictorian usually makes a speech at graduation.

