The Mexican bus station bubbled with activity. Sitting down offered no respite because of the constant anxiety of noise that swarmed through the halls and polluted the air above the waiting rooms. That’s where I found myself in Michoacán one summer, Abuela sitting next to me, her legs locked around her vinyl shopping bag as we waited for our bus to Zacapu. We had just returned from Mexico City, where my cousin helped me carry Abuela on and off the metro escalators, which terrified her. The bag followed us everywhere—to church, to the bakery, to the market, when, to our embarrassment, Abuela held her six-pack of beer inside her see-through bag, showing off her purchase all the way home.

When the gate was announced, Abuela insisted we stand first in line to secure our seats on the bus. And since we were early, she said, “I’ll be right back. I need to use the restroom. Stand right here and don’t move the bag.”

Ten minutes passed, then fifteen, then thirty. The line grew, the bus arrived, and Abuela had not come back. Discombobulated, I left the bag and went looking for her, asking a woman walking into the ladies’ room to check for my grandmother. Nothing. Behind me, the people in line walked over Abuela’s bag to climb on the bus. The bag sat there
looking vulgar, mocking me with its stained Tupperware, unfinished needlepoint, and Abuela’s soiled clothing, including her undergarments.

And then I saw a frail old woman looking confused, standing on a different line. Heavy tears ran down her cheeks, and when I got close enough I heard her wail, “Somebody stole my bag! Somebody stole my bag!”