As a homesick immigrant, I longed to mix in with my people whenever I returned to México. Once I was in Taxco, in the state of Guerrero, though my family was from Michoacán, so I made do on this visit as an interpreter at a writers’ conference. My private time was only in the evenings, while the gringos were having dinner, socializing with each other and not speaking to the citizens of Taxco through me.

At dinnertime I sat at the town square near the church and soaked up the evening energy—children running, music blaring, vendors displaying their wares. It was Semana Santa, a week of daily festivals, and tonight was the ceremony of the virgin’s pilgrimage. A statue dressed in silk was brought out of the church on a platform carried by four young women. They walked at the center of a procession through the square, out of the town, the followers illuminating the way with large candles.

I joined them, pretending I was one of them, a faithful, a Taxco native. We walked down the mountainside, through the dark dirt road that led to a nearby village. A chapel bell rang, the virgin was deposited inside the church, and then everyone simply blew out their candles and went home. This was their village.
It was not embarrassment I felt as I stumbled uncertainly in search of Taxco in the pitch dark, or even fear after I lost my way and wandered the dirt roads for another hour or so. When I finally caught sight of a streetlight on the main road I did not feel relief; I felt cast out of every paradise.