

# The day of the dead

*Georgina Luna Parra*

We should... as always, make an offering to the dead.

Oh! It's going round and round in my head.

Instead of hurrying to do my chores.

Gosh! Just remembering when Benito brought me those long, long rushes from the river, and made me the arch... how we filled it with fruit, bananas, tangerines, loquats, even open pomegranates, so you could see their bright red seeds. Everybody came by to look. Those trails of fruit with the green leaves of the rushes shooting out all around the arch, like pointed stars...

It was really pretty. My mother-in-law said that's how offerings were in her native Huastec land; poor thing, she was still alive then. How good she was to me. She knew so much. She would light all the candles and dance in front of them to the rhythm of her chanted prayers, holding the fragrant smoking copal dish in her hands.

What chocolate we made...! And the *zacahuil* she knew how to cook, that huge tamale that was so good; it was enough for everyone. She called it the little departed, because she laid it out on a little bed, and then began to uncover it, peeling back the steaming banana leaves, and there: it was ready to eat.

How did we manage it? Today there's not enough money, it's worthless. Benito works twice as hard. What time does he have now for such things, to enjoy these moments!

However humbly I can, this time the offerings to our dead will be all right. As they deserve; my parents, my mother-in-law, my dead baby, my little angel...

Oh! And here I am sitting on the patio step and I haven't cleaned up the kitchen. Really late! When I start thinking, time flies.

If they could see me... they'd say I'm crazy. When I remember, I can't stop the tears...

Quick, pick up the dishes. Yes, I've got time to go to the market.

If they've got that glazed pottery, the one that looks like burnt honey, I'll buy a casserole and a pitcher...

Or the green ceramic, with pigeons. I'll buy them two candlesticks and candles covered with flowers. And a basket! This one is very old. No way can I put it in the offering. I need a new one, the kind with a woven braid on the edge. I'll fill it with oranges, green lemons, clove leaves. Later, I can use it for going to market.

The market! I've got to run... just let me take off my apron, and I'm off. I'm going to take those coins for sure; why not, what else are they for? If we need something later, God will provide. Where's that knotted bandanna? Where did I hide it? Ah, yes! Behind the wardrobe. There it is! Great!

It's hot! I'm even sweating. But it's great! I had enough for everything. The bag is really heavy! And these candles in my hands, so delicate I

daren't even graze them. What beautiful white wax flowers, they're completely covered.

I'm almost home, it's only a little farther, I'll take a rest...

I'm going to lay the tablecloth I embroidered with purple forget-me-nots on the table, it hangs down to the floor. Then I'll put the crates on top, to make a little altar, and on top, the paper cut-outs of dancing skeletons, how pretty! The strip of eight will be enough.

The Virgin of Guadalupe in the center, in front of Christ; with the candles at the sides. Pictures of my dear dead all around the Virgin on the wall.

My casseroles below, the *mole*, corn-on-the-cob, *tortillas*, chocolate. My father's cigarettes and his tequila.

It's great I've got these pretty napkins with lace borders I made! They're to line the baskets.

I'll open the window, so the neighbors can see when they go by; for sure they'll turn to look, because the yellow of the marigolds will stand out lit by the candles, and they'll smell the aroma of copal, and want some *mole* with sesame seeds.

With just a little cash; it will all be done, as it always is, as it should be, with a will, and effort! I'll sure finish late tonight.

How my son and grandchildren will enjoy it, when they come tomorrow! I've got sugar-skulls for the kids. And how proud Benito will be...! 