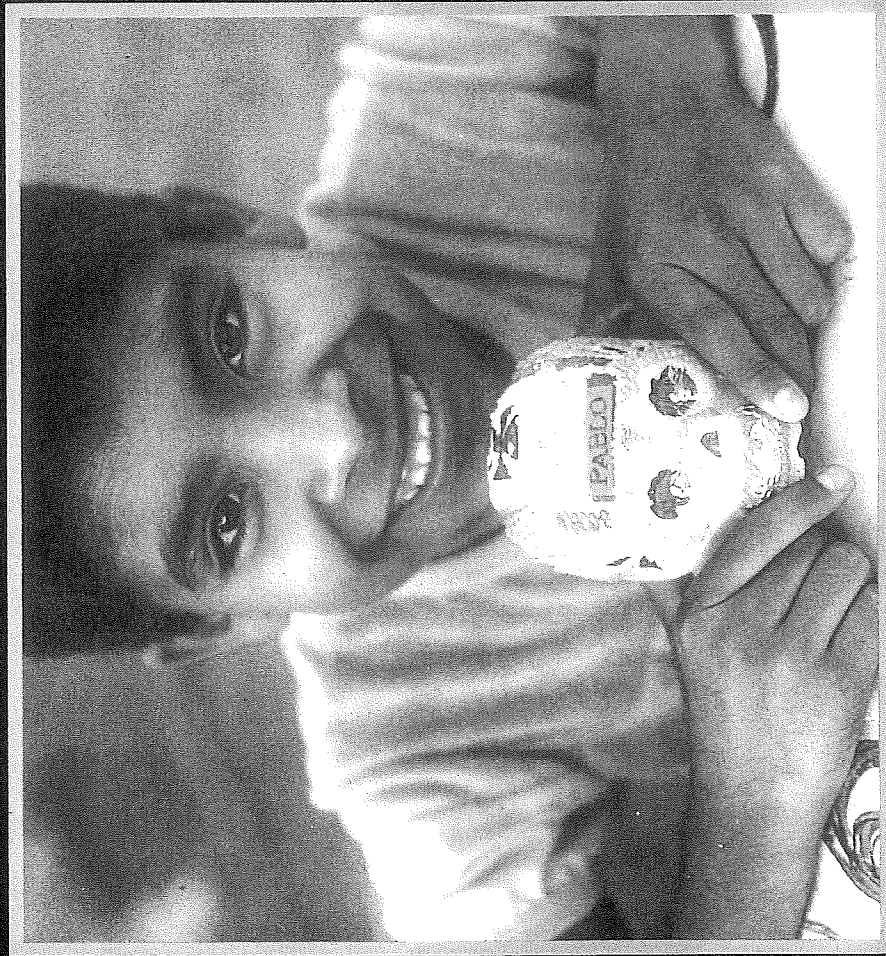


PABLO REMEMBERS

❖❖ *The Fiesta of the Day of the Dead* ❖❖



George Ancona

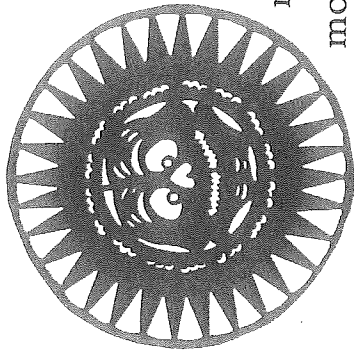
3 OCTOBER 31

All Hallows Eve





The village church bells are ringing and the rooster is crowing. Pablo knows it is time to get up. The first thing he sees when he opens his eyes is the picture of Abuelita, his grandmother. The smiling photograph on his wall, made when she was a young mother, is the only one that was ever taken of her. Pablito remembers her with white hair and wrinkled hands—but the very same smile. Abuelita died two years ago, and he misses her.



Today, the three-day *fiesta* of *el Día de Los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead, begins — a time when Abuelita seems especially close. Everyone has so much to do to get ready. Pablo can hear his mother, Señora Refugio, already bustling about in the kitchen.

“*Niños*, hurry and get dressed,” she calls, “or we’ll miss the bus.”

Usually when Pablo is not in school, he is working alongside his father, Señor Samuel, weaving the beautiful rugs that have made their village famous. But today there is no school, and there is no time for weaving, either. Today Pablo and his sister Shaula are going to help their parents shop in the big city market of Oaxaca. Their two younger sisters, Cristina and Angelita, will stay behind with their god-mother.







People everywhere in México are busy preparing for the *fiesta*, the holiday. Bakers are baking the traditional *pan de muertos*, the bread of the dead. Candy makers are making sugar skulls. Children are cutting out cardboard skeletons. Artisans are stamping out tissue-paper decorations called *estampas*. Farmers are harvesting *compasúbil*, marigolds, the flowers of the dead.

The Oaxaca market is already crowded when Pablo, Shaula, and their parents arrive. As they make their way through the throng, the children watch their parents examine the fruits, taste the nuts, and bargain with the vendors for the best prices. They buy:

NARANJAS (*oranges*)

MANZANAS (*apples*)

CHILES (*peppers*)

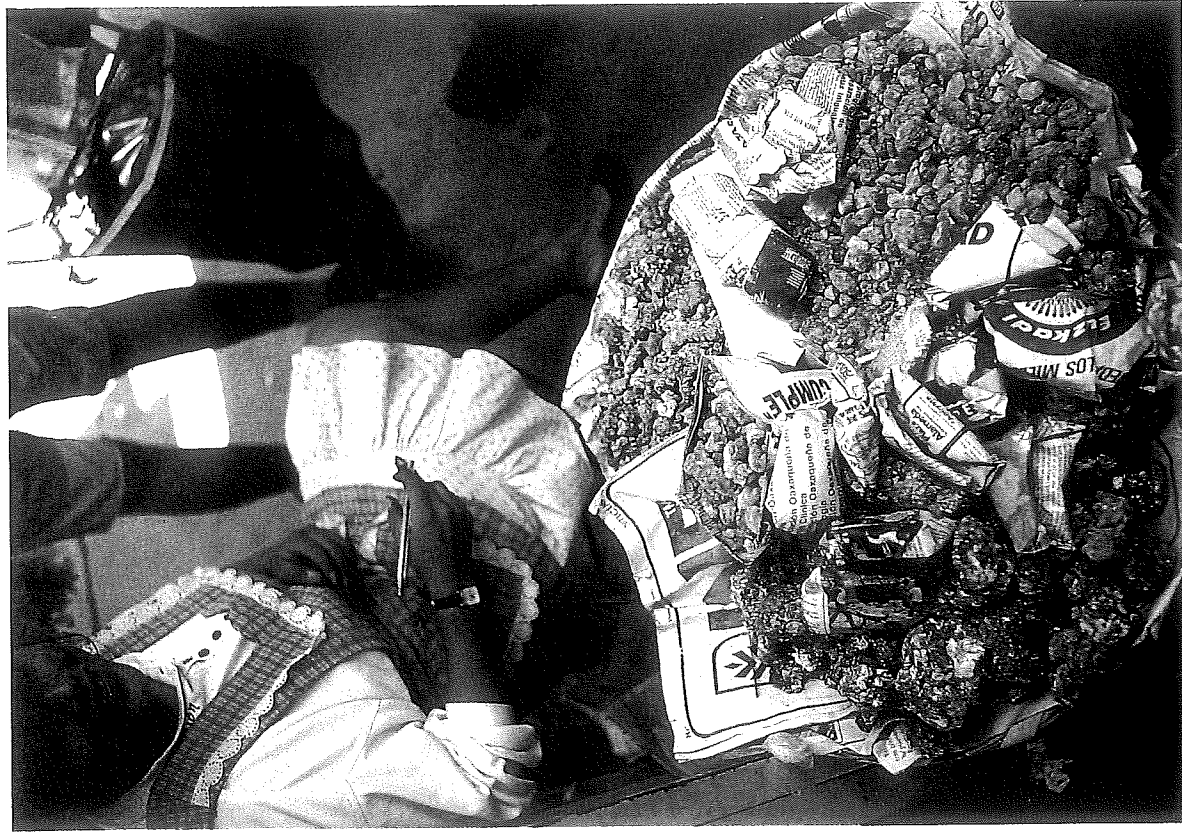
NUECES Y CACAHUATES (*pecans and peanuts*)

CHAPULINES (*fried grasshoppers*)

CACAO (*cocoa beans*)



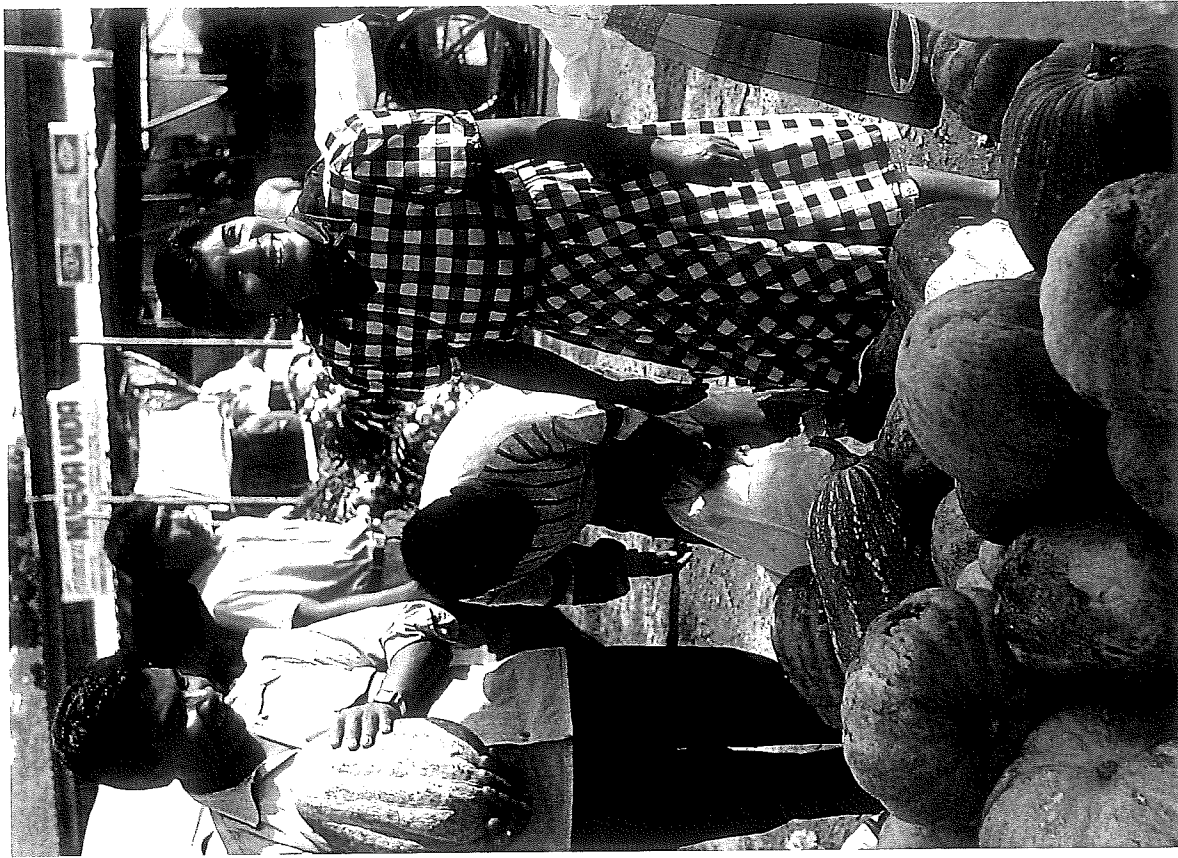




COPAL



(a resin incense)



CALABAZA



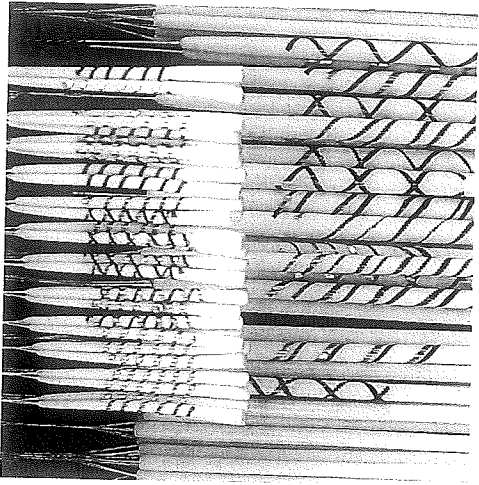
(pumpkin)



CAL
❖❖❖
(lime)



PAN DE MUERTOS
❖❖❖
(bread of the dead)



- VELAS (candles)*
- TOMATES Y JITOMATES (tomatoes)*
- CAÑA (sugarcane)*
- LIMONES (lemons)*
- RÁBANOS (radishes)*
- ESPECIAS (spices)*
- CEMPASÚCHIL (marigolds)*
- CALAVERAS DE DULCE (sugar skulls)*



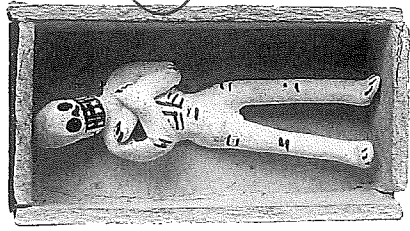


At last they have everything they need. Loaded down with packages, they catch the bus for their village.

ALTERNATIVE







Back home, Pablo, Shaula, Cristina, and Angelita make a children's altar. The altar will invite the *angelitos*, spirits of dead children, to come back for a visit tonight. Everything on it is small. The children fill small baskets with nuts. They pour *chocolate*, hot cocoa, into small cups. They place sugar skulls decorated with their own names on the altar. Pablo lights the copal incense, and its smoke fills the room with its perfume. Flowers and fruits and toys complete their *ofrenda*, ~~or offering~~, to the little spirits. Finally Pablo lights the *velita*, the small candle to light the way for the *angelitos*. It will burn all night long.

By the time they have finished making their altar, it is time to go to bed. As Pablito falls asleep, he hears his mother, still busy in the kitchen. She will be up late into the night, cooking the chicken, soaking and cooking corn kernels in lime, and making all the other preparations for the day ahead.

DM: Hed


NOVEMBER 1

All Saints Day



The next morning, Señora Refugio prepares an early breakfast for the family. The children dip their *pan de muertos* into steaming cups of *chocolate*. *Atole* is a treat for everyone, a warm drink made from ground corn that has been cooked in water. Then comes chicken broth served with large tortillas called *tlalludas*—a hearty beginning to this special day.

Everyone has plenty of chores to do after breakfast. They must clean the house and have all the food ready by three o'clock, when family will begin to arrive. By then the *angelitos* will be ready to depart, and the adult spirits will come to visit. Pablo fetches water for his mother and cleans the yard. Shaula washes the dishes while Cristina and Angelita feed cornmeal to the chickens and turkeys.





Señora Refugio begins to prepare the traditional meal for the festival, *tamales de mole*. First she drains the lime water from the softened corn. She takes the kernels to a neighbor's mill, and the miller grinds it into a coarse dough.

Señora Refugio kneels beside her *metate* to grind the *chocolate*, *chiles*, and *especias* for her mole sauce. Stone *metates* have been used for centuries to grind food.





While the señora dices the chicken she cooked last night, Shaula begins to make the *tortillas*. Using a little machine called a *tortilladora*, she presses the corn dough into small, flat circles.


Working together, the girls and their mother make the *tamales*. They cover each *tortilla* with mole sauce and chicken. Then they fold it, wrap it in corn husks, and tie it. When they have prepared all the *tamales*, Señora Refugio steams them in a large pot, and the wonderful smell of *tamales de mole* fills the air.





Meanwhile, Pablo and his father have gone to the local market to buy some last-minute things for the grown-ups' *ofrenda*. They waited till midday so that the flowers for the altar would be fresh. They also buy long sugarcanes with which to build an arch.

It is nearly three o'clock — time is running out. Pablito and Señor Samuel hurry home. When they arrive, Señor Samuel calls everyone to come help finish building the large altar.





Señora Refugio spreads a cloth on a table and centers a crucifix on it. Then the children and their parents pile the table high with *pan de muertos*, *frutas* (fruits), *flores* (flowers), cups of *chocolate* and *atole*, and special things that their dead relatives enjoyed during their lifetime—their favorite foods, candies, or drinks. When the *tamales* are cooked, some will be placed on the *ofrenda* as well.

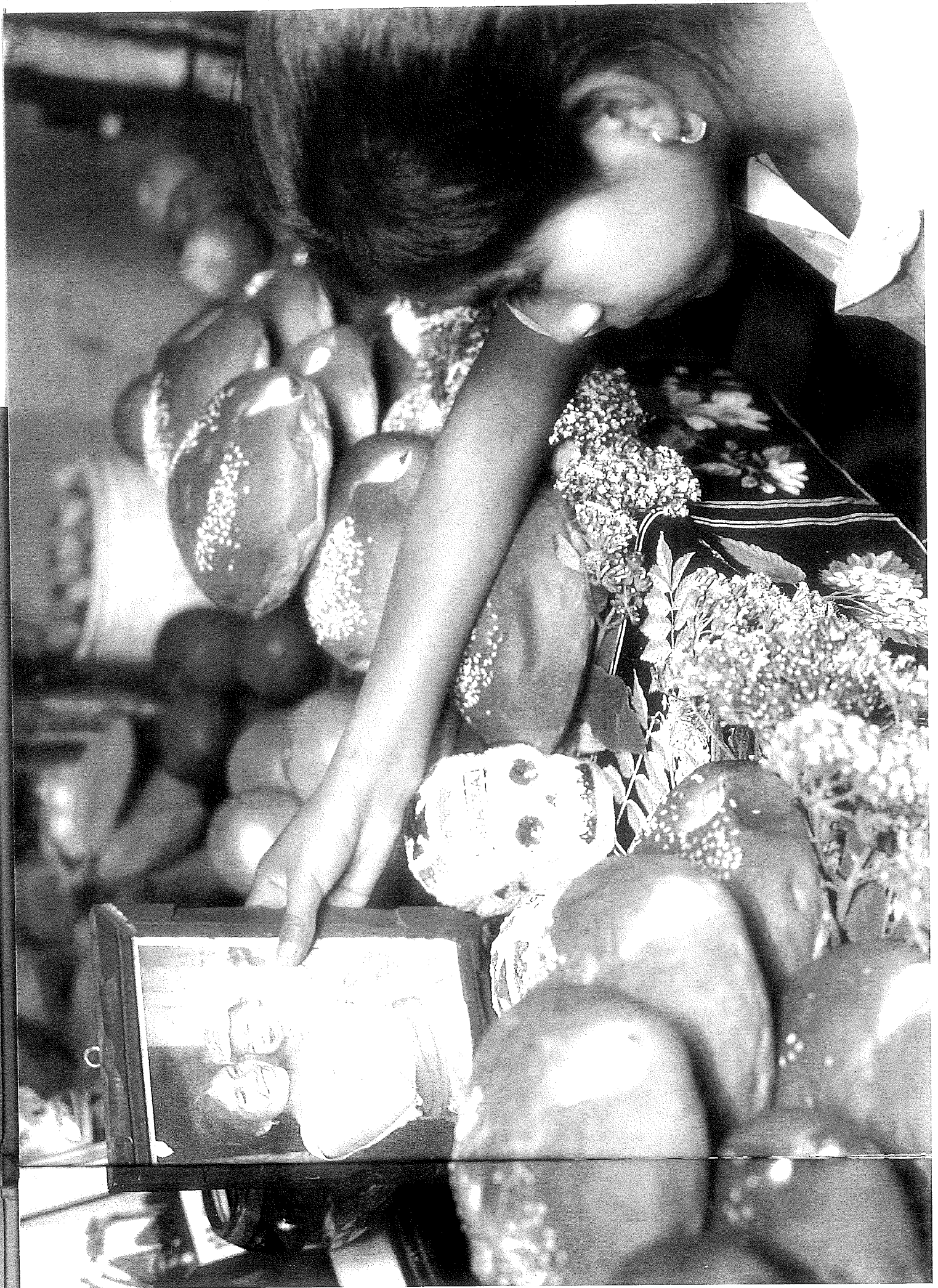
Señora Refugio lights the wick in the bowl of lamp oil in front of the crucifix. There is also a candle for each of the relatives



Finally, they place photographs of their dead relatives on the altar. "Now Abuelita can come to visit," says Shaula.

Omitted





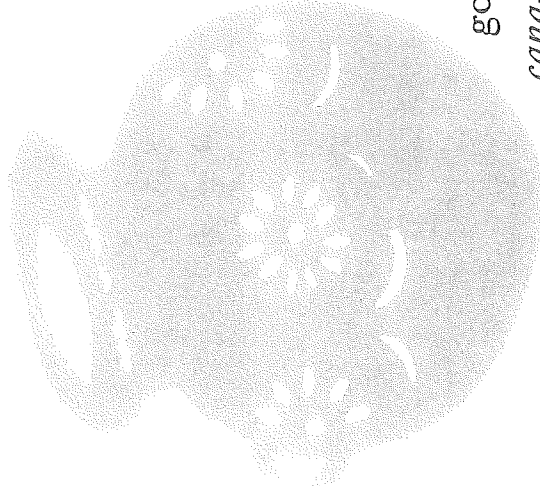




Just as the altar is ready, the sounds of fireworks fill the air. That is the signal that the spirits of the dead are on their way home. For the next twenty-four hours, the church bells will toll continuously. Teams of young men will take turns ringing them.

"And now we can eat!" shouts Pablo. The smell of cooking *tamales* has been teasing his appetite all this time. Señora Refugio uncovers the steaming pot and fills a basket with *tamales* for the children. Their parents will eat later with the guests.

Omitted



After they have eaten, Pablito and his sisters put on their new clothes—the first guests will arrive any minute. The visiting will go on late into the night and again the next day. Aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, godmothers, and godfathers will all come. Each family will bring a *canasta* filled with pumpkin candy, flowers, and candles to place on the altar. They will stay awhile to visit. Then they will fill their empty baskets with some of the food from the altar and go on to the next relative's house.

In between receiving guests, Pablo's family also goes visiting, and Pablo runs off to play with some of his friends. It is a day filled with feasting and talk and play and laughter for everyone, and the *fiesta* goes on even after Pablo can no longer keep his eyes open.

