

## 12 Stand and Wait

When I consider how my light is spent,  
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,  
And that one Talent which is death to hide,  
Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest he returning chide;  
“Doth God exact day-labor, light denied,”  
I fondly ask; But Patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, “God doth not need  
Either man’s work or his own gifts. Who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve Him best; his State  
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed,  
And post o’er Land and Ocean without rest;  
They also serve who only stand and wait.”<sup>1</sup>

Her mother’s favorite poem known by heart, AJ placed the slip of paper on her mother’s headstone, weighing it down with a piece of limestone that she found at the base of a nearby oak tree. Then she methodically placed orange marigolds and candy skulls, all in a tidy row against the headstone. She did the same for the headstones of her uncle Jamie, her grandmother Amy, and her grandfather Zack – a little family reunion of sorts. Once done, she stood up, opened one bottle of Corona beer and sprinkled its contents on the headstones. She stepped back and surveyed her work with satisfaction as she opened the other bottle of Corona.

*Happy Day of the Dead*, she sent, raising her bottle in salute. She took a healthy draft and looked around, seeing other people gathering around their family graves, also paying respect to their dead.

It was fortunate, that her layover in Dallas was long enough that she could leave the airport, grab some celebratory items from a local grocery store, and make it to the cemetery. Also, while

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<sup>1</sup> Milton, John “Sonnet XIX.”

Mathematics conferences were always fun, she was looking forward to coming home, already seeing David and the kids waiting for her at LAX in her mind’s eye. So AJ knew that she couldn’t dawdle.

She squatted down, leaving a half-drunk bottle of beer at her grandfather’s grave. As she stood up, she felt an odd presence and turned around.

She saw a little wizened nun – a woman with dark, deeply-lined chocolate skin and wispy white hair, enveloped in a cheery blue and white habit.

The nun was smiling at her over half-moon glasses. “Happy All Souls Day,” she said in a soft oboe of a voice.

AJ at first stared at her, the nun’s color an odd swirl of the darkest black and brightest white, in constant motion, turning and chasing each other like the yin and yang symbol of old. Then she recognized her for what she was, and she smiled back. “Happy All Souls Day, sister,” she replied.

The nun’s smile widened, her eyes disappearing in a constellation of soft wrinkles. “*Daalu,*” she responded, dipping her head slightly.

AJ left soon after, the nun still remaining in the cemetery, standing and waiting while observing the happy people celebrating the Day of Dead. When AJ turned around to look back one last time, the good nephil was gone.