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Stones for Bread

Lorna Van Gilst
Dordt College

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Stones for Bread

Lorna Van Gilst

I move with the evening crowd
into the corner *panaderia*
to buy fresh bread.

My pale flesh
absorbed in the mass,
we press toward the counter
and over the edge.

*"Pan con queso,
Pan con yuca,
Pan, pan, pan."*
Give us this day our daily *pan*.

All around me
anonymous arms
reach out to receive the loaves.

"Seis pan francés," I call out boldly at last,
for now my tongue is ready to speak Spanish,
and I clutch in my hand
enough of the tattered bills
bearing the face of Simón Bolívar
to buy six fresh French rolls
to eat with cheese.

But the red-lipped girl in unifrom
gives me no rolls,
"No, no, no," she answers, and more.
Glancing over her head, I see the sign.
"Seis pan Isleña," I venture,
then thrust the crumpled bills across the chasm
between tongue and brain
and slump home to eat
six crusty little lumps of *pan*.