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Cinco de Mayo in Iowa

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Cinco de Mayo in Iowa

Lorna Van Gilst

To remember the day of Mexican conquest
in May of 1862,
the teachers ask all the children
with surnames of Lopez, Gutierrez, Perez,
Sanchez, and Catalan
to supply the fourth grade class
with Mexican *comida*:
40 tamales from Marisol,
40 gorditas from Miguel,
40 morelianes from Luis,
frijoles and tacos and nachos
and the richest of all *tortes*—
tres leches—oozing the sweetness
of three milks.

The Mexican mothers and fathers
come as summoned,
a few minutes after one o'clock,
laden with the patient endeavors
of a long morning
shredding beef,
pressing tomatoes and onions
and jalapeños
into fresh-baked tortillas
and leaves of corn.
They come to school, the *padres*
of Luis and Miguel and Marisol,
happy to comply.

But the children in fourth grade
merely nibble the edges
before they put down
their Mexican treats,
for they are already stuffed
with the May 5 menu:
“chicken nuggets,
mashed potatoes,
peas, and fruit.”

In wonder, the Mexican *padres* pack up
35 tamales,
35 morelianes,
35 gorditas--

and go home to a quiet Cinco de Mayo feast.