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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*.