Preguntas y frases para una nieta americana

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Abstract

“Preguntas y frases” is an imagined letter from my grandmother. It is composed of Spanish words and phrases (including missing accents and misspellings) as my grandmother, Esther, wrote them in a series of letters she sent to my mother in 1983 while my mother was living in Ecuador. In those letters, Esther spoken plainly with her daughter—principally, by questioning my mother’s decision to leave the United States and asking that she come back home to Calexico, California.

Many years after my grandmother’s death, my mother found these letters tucked away in the house attic. When my mother shared these letters with me, it was startling for me to see and hear so clearly my grandmother’s voice and way of speaking after so many years since her passing. In response, I wrote “Preguntas y frases para una nieta americana.” The title is inspired by Teresa Palomo Acosta’s poem “Preguntas y frases para una bisabuela española” in which Acosta reflects on her Spanish heritage by writing a letter to her great Spanish grandmother. In contrast, “Preguntas y frases para una nieta americana” reflects on American assimilation and what is lost, protected, and honored across three generations of Mexican American women. The letter is my imagination of what my grandmother would say to me today if she were to write me—and speak plainly—as she had with my mother all those years ago.

Keywords
abuela, nieta, Mexicali, Calexico, Spanglish, loss, assimilation
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Mija,

Cuando te bienes para tu tierra estare suave. ¿No saves de la que te estas perdiendo? Pero sin embargo, estas conmigo y no me das miedo.

Mija,

Mandame tu retrato. Mandame todo lo que necesitas para que pueda saber como eres. Mandame flores tu Love el es lo unico que me acompalla cuando me fui dejando todo para irme a sufrir por alla. Ayer puse techo a la casa. Fui a la playa sonando flores. Algunos días siembro frijoles tan chiquitos que no van a crecer quienes despues yo lo se nos pondran muy tristes. Y alla aqui en la playa lloramos juntas quebradas porque pues este mundo esta solo. Nos atraviesa en la casa de atras la casa amarilla esa cosa fea vieja y loca tan bonita como esta playa cerrada en Mexicali a donde voy pintando tu boca puntada pagando por los cuentos de aquellas flores que nos robaron.

Mija,

¿por cuanto tiempo te vas a quedar donde estas? ¿No quieres saber nada? Aqui todo esta podrido. Todo Borracho. No tengo la bodega o la cena contigo o las flores. No estoy contenta porque antes de morirme no podre saber que clase de hija eres. Asi que te mando el retrato de Bebe Sigo aguantando todo la mitad de nuestra flor una pistola este choque que llamamos nuestro.

Ahora hare el sofa. Voy a componer la casa bailar un balcón y todo a la playa donde estare durmiendo del pajaro mas pequeno un vestido de vestidos una boda con flores para que todo este bien cuando me escribes y no se como contestarte pues no saves espanol.
**Questions & phrases for an American granddaughter**

*English Translation*

Mija,

When you come for your land I will be at ease. Don't you know what you loosing?

Still, you are with me & you do not scare me.

Mija,

Send me your portrait. Send me everything that you need so I may know who you are. Send me flowers your Love the only thing that accompanies me when I left leaving everything so I could suffer por alla. Yesterday I put roof on the house.

I went to the beach dreaming of flowers.

Some days I am growing beans so small they will not grow & who late I know will make us bien triste. Y alla here at this beach we cry together broken because pues this world is alone.

It passes us in the back house the yellow house that ugly thing prieta old y loca the same beautiful as this foreclosed beach in Mexicali where I go painting your sharp mouth paying for the stories the flowers that they robbed from us.

Mija, for how long will you stay where you are? Don't you want to know anything? Here everything is rotten. Everything Drunk. I don't have the warehouse or dinner with you or flowers.

I am unhappy because before I die I will never know what kind of daughter you are. So, I send this portrait of Bebe.

I continue tolerating it all this half of our flower this gun this choque we call ours.

Now I will make the sofa. I will compose the house. Dance a balcony & everything to the beach where I stay dreaming of the smallest bird a dress of dresses a wedding with flowers so that everything may be good when you write me & I do not know how to reply porque pues no saves espanol.