



## 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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## Preguntas y frases para una nieta americana

Mija,

Cuando te vayas para tu tierra estaré suave. ¿No sabes de la que te estás perdiendo?  
Pero sin embargo, estás 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 acompaña  
cuando

me fui dejando todo para irme a sufrir por allá. Ayer puse techo a la  
casa. Fui a la playa

sonando flores. Algunos días  
siembro frijoles tan chiquitos que no van a crecer quienes después yo lo se  
nos pondrán muy tristes. Y allá aquí en la playa lloramos juntas  
quebradas porque pues este mundo está solo. Nos atraviesa en la casa de  
atrás

la casa amarilla

esa cosa fea

prieta

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 estás? ¿No quieres saber nada?

Aquí todo está podrido. Todo Borracho. No tengo la bodega o la cena  
contigo o las flores. No estoy contenta porque antes de morirme no

podré saber que clase de hija eres.

Así 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 estaré durmiendo

del pajarito mas pequeño un vestido de vestidos una boda con flores  
para que todo esté bien cuando

me escribas y no se como contestarte pues no sabes español.

## 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 later  
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.