

Vows for Madeline

Madeline,

Before I say my vows, I first wish to express my gratitude.

Gratitude to the Almighty, first and foremost.

To the angels in my corner. Most notably ours truly, the officiant, Paige Hill, a.k.a. Paigey Waigey. Were it not for her, and a strong assist from Brian Cabral — in his words, “a stellar recommendation” — we would not be standing before you all this evening, on this most gorgeous of Sundays, surrounded by the love that radiates around us.

To you, Maddie, for ranking California third on your regional preference list, and winding up at one of Mexico's greatest capitals: East San Jose, to teach at Mt. Pleasant High School.

To Yesenia Rubio-Gudino, your roommate, for tutoring you on all things raza.

For your embrace of this raza. Its hollering, its going-for-the-jugular, find-the-most-traumatic-thing-about-your-childhood-and-give-it-a-nickname humor.

For always humoring me.

For helping me unlearn the violence of my past. For teaching me that love could carry me across a culture, a country.

And so I vow, mi chulada, mi esposa, mi chuparrosa:

To tend to you the way my grandmothers tend to a flame. Always and only a few paces away. There are fewer things more ancient than learning what it means to love while on this earth. La leña y el fogón. Las manos que tortillan como un aplauso. The heat. The loved ones that gather around and sit in plastic chairs. Las hosannas sonando desde la bocina de la plaza. Las señoras vendiendo longanizas a las siete de la mañana, ya ni tiznan. The kindle crackling. Stoked. For being fed.

That is how I promise to love you. Like this has always been yours too.

I promise to press snooze on my phone at least once a week, and watch how the light travels on your body.

Te juro that I'm gonna wake you when I wake up, especially when you need to be awake. To pick up as many Large Iced Skinny Vanilla Lattes as God and Peet's Coffee and Tea Company can muster.

To celebrate all your victorias as my victorias.

To be your biggest cheerleader, and defender, to the ends of the earth, and to the Stanford Department of Sociology.

I promise, in all the business and busyness of our days, to stop and hold what needs to be held, especially each other.

I swear to sleep on only one side of the bed, even when you are not there, because without you physically next to me, I can't.

I will do my very best, while you're away, to water the plants the way I feel watered whenever you come home.

For you to be home. Whether home is an apartment in Redwood City, or Brooklyn, or London, or whatever land we find ourselves in.

To dance until our feet can't — and even then, we can wiggle.

To teach our children Spanish, and Italian, so help me Dios, and Duolingo.

To make sure the flight you are on is indeed the same flight I am on, so we don't get to our gate, and realize, ten minutes to boarding, oh shit, you're in C14, and we're in A29, and we race to the most romantic venue of our lives, Customer Service at American Airlines, in Dallas, three days before our wedding, and we're on standby, and alhamdulillah, the gate agent, a kind Arab man, puts us together on the next flight, and yes, we're finally on the plane, together, we're gonna get there, it's hella hot inside this plane, but we're gonna get there, and we're still on the runway, why are we still on this runway, and the pilot announces, folks, we're having some trouble with the AC, we're gonna try to turn on the second engine, and after about ten minutes, it feels like a baptist church, the passengers fanning themselves with the in-flight literature, I love how airplanes still use the word literature, and we deplane, and wait another three hours for another plane, and you ask me to watch your stuff, and I promise, Maddie, to always watch your stuff, so you can pace the terminal in circles to keep your and our sanity, and finally, at 1 AM, we land!

I vow what your grandmother insisted: to not be separated from one another for too long.

I promise to never stop admiring you, your beauty, your compassion, your smile as big as a room, your intellect.

Above all, I promise to hold — the difficult moments, the curveballs life will throw at us, but also the little moments, the frustrating moments, the everyday moments, that have made and will make up our life.

One of my greatest joys in my life is coming home from work and seeing you curled on our suede sofa, blue like the blanket of hydrangeas you curl under, a carton of Costco grapes in one hand, a bag of chocolate chips in the other, your phone pinging as you rack up streaks in a language neither you nor your grandparents spoke to each other, and the only one mine ever did, one of those quiet summer nights in California, where the birds are chirping out the window, and I say “Look Look,” the way Baby Arlo says “Look Look,” a flock of foos are popping wheelies by the pool of this new apartment complex, and I think to myself, *Aren't those fellas afraid that their bikes are gonna fall in the pool*, I think how silly, how wild, all it took, for us to have met, the beginning of this American bloodline of ours, Ellis Island on one side, and a hole in a fence in the other. A steamboat groaning out of the Sicilian port of Palermo, and a car with my dad inside, heading north.

I stand by this dock, and am amazed at how narrow the distance between Liotta and Lopez and Anderson is now.

Before everyone here, I promise you, Maddie, to look at you across any aisle — a supermarket, a plane, or a boathouse — and say,

I've made it.

Yours, always,

Antonio López

Prospect Park Boathouse
Brooklyn, New York
Sunday, July 26, 2026