

"Mi Madre"

My mom, God bless her, tries so hard to be normal. But she's not. Doctors call it Manic Depression. I call it weird. When she's up, she's ecstatic. When she's down, watch out. And when she leaves messages on my answering machine, they're in Spanish. I don't speak Spanish. Took it in 6th grade and failed out. My mom's a high school linguistics teacher. She knows a few languages. I don't. She knows that. She doesn't care. She speaks Spanish.

Since I don't speak Spanish, and neither did the two girls I lived with while attending graduate school in Atlanta, when they received messages in Español on our answering machine, naturally, the messages got erased. They did the erasing. Not me. I was never home to receive the messages in the first place. Always in class, in the library, or in short shorts and a t-shirt waiting on yuppies at the beer and burger joint in Buckhead. As the weeks passed, not only did the messages increase, so did the intensity in which they were left. After a series of messages inundated our machine in screeching Spanish slang, my roommate, Jennifer, had the phone company trace the stalker. Moments before having the number blocked and a spell of voodoo cast over the demented dialer, Jennifer learned that this mystery woman and I shared the same last name. Same, Dutch, last name.

After learning the news, Jennifer apologized profusely for not giving me the messages from my mom. She had no idea I spoke Spanish and that's how my mom and I communicated. I don't speak Spanish, I told her. It was a long evening with a lot of explaining and a lot of wine. They didn't understand why my mom insisted speaking a language that I didn't. I didn't understand it either. I just went along with her shenanigans. Eventually, they learned to, too. The Spanish messages never stopped. But erasing them did.

One night, while my roommates were out of town, I invited over a guy that I had been seeing from school. We were in the middle of a movie and making-out when the phone rang. The greeting

played. The machine beeped. My mom yapped. In Spanish, of course. She went on and on until the tape cut her off. I didn't know what she was saying. And at that particular moment, I really didn't care. I DON'T SPEAK SPANISH!!! Turns out, he was fluent. He stopped in mid-kiss, looked at me and said, "So, you want to break-up with me and don't know how to do it? Well, your mom has a very interesting plan."

I never did ask my mom what her plan was, and he didn't stick around long enough to translate.