

STILL LIFE

Emily Mann

The time is now. The place is where we are. CHERYL (28) is married to MARK (28): "an ex-marine, Viet Nam vet, artist, lover, father." Their marriage has not been an easy one. The war has left MARK unsettled. In this "spaghetti story," CHERYL reveals the tensions and pressures they share.

CHERYL: I hate to cook. Probably because he likes to cook. I hate to cook. I don't now how to cook, and I hate it. Mark does this spaghetti dinner once a year. Has he ever told you about that? Holy Christ!

[MARK: EXCUSE ME. (Leaves.)]

CHERYL: Every day before Thanksgiving Mark does a spaghetti dinner, and this is a traditional thing. This is the one traditional bone Mark has in his body, and I'd like to break it. He has 20-45 people come to this thing. He makes ravioli, lasagne, spaghetti, meatballs, three different kinds of spaghetti sauces: shrimp, plain, meat sauce. Oh, he makes gnocci! He makes his own noodles! And it's good. He's a damn good cook for Italian food. But you can imagine what I go through for three weeks for that party to feed forty people. Sit-down dinner. He insists it's a sit-down dinner. So here I am running around with no time to cook with him. I'm trying to get enough shit in my house to feed forty people sit-down dinner. We heated the porch last year because we did not have enough room to seat forty people. And I run around serving all these slobs, and this is the first year he's really charged anyone. And we lose on it every year. I mean, we lose, first year we lost \$300. This dinner is a \$500 deal. I'm having a baby this November, and if he thinks he's having any kind of spaghetti dinner, he can get his butt out of here. I can't take it.

Pizzas! He makes home-made pizzas. You should see my oven. Oh my God! There's pizza-shit everywhere. Baked on. And when it's over with, he just gets up and walks out. He's just done. The clean-up is no big deal to him. He won't even help. He rolls up the carpets for this dinner. People get smashed! He's got wine everywhere, red wine. It has to be red so if it get on my rugs, my rugs are ruined and my couch is ruined. I've just said it so many times I hate it. He knows I hate it. My brother brought over some speed to get me through that night. My brother, Jack, who is a capitalist—intelligent—makes me sick. Never got into drugs. Was too old. Missed that whole scene. But he now has speed occasionally on his bad day, you know, drink, two drinks one night, speed to get him through the day. Business man. He brought me some speed to get me through the night cause he knew what a basket case I'd be. And then Mark goes and invites my family. And they're the last people I want to see at this. Sure, they love it. I mean, they all sit around and they stuff themselves to death. I'm not kidding! It is one big stuffing feast. The first time, the first spaghetti dinner we had was right after Danny was born. Danny's baby book got torn up. I had to start a whole new one. Mark's crazy friends. Drunk.