

LOVE ALWAYS

Stephanie Hellman has been coming to this restaurant for ten years. She had her first dinner date with him here. She had her engagement party here. He proposed to her here and she told him she was pregnant with their first child here. Like I said, it's her favorite little Italian Restaurant.

(LIGHTS come up on the quaint, cozy restaurant. It has a lot of warm, old world charm. The NARRATOR is now STEPHANIE. SHE lights a cigarette, takes a sip of her drink and looks at her watch. The maitre d', DANTE, comes to the table.)

DANTE

Would you like to order some lunch, Signora?

STEPHANIE

No, thank you, Dante, I'm sure something very important came up for my husband and that's why he's been detained, so, I'll wait a little longer, if you don't mind: because I don't mind at all.

ARTHUR

(Curtly.) Hello.

STEPHANIE

(just as curtly.) Mmmm.

ARTHUR

I said hello.

STEPHANIE

I said mmm.

ARTHUR

How'd you like a breadstick up your nose?

STEPHANIE

How'd you like some vinegar in your eye?

ARTHUR

How'd you like a face full of cheese?

STEPHANIE

Drop dead.

ARTHUR

Same to you.

STEPHANIE

All right, Arthur. Enough with the pleasantries. I wanted to have lunch with you because after what happened last night I did a lot of thinking and this morning I called my lawyer, so you'd better call yours because I hate your guts and I want a divorce.

ARTHUR

You got it. Let's order.

STEPHANIE

(yells.) Dante!

ARTHUR

Don't you ever call the waiter in my presence. If you don't feel feminine when you're with me ... fake it!

(DANTE comes over.)

ARTHUR

Dante, in the ten years you've been our waiter, how come you never learned that you don't come until the man calls?

STEPHANIE

(to Dante.) He's very nervous about his masculinity.

ARTHUR

I'm not nervous about my masculinity, pal. I'm nervous about yours. *(HE turns to Dante.)*
Two martinis.

STEPHANIE

You know I don't like martinis.

ARTHUR

They're for me.

STEPHANIE

I'll have a double bourbon, straight up.

ARTHUR

You drink like a truck driver.

STEPHANIE

Stick a piece of fruit in it, Dante. It'll make the sissy feel better.

(DANTE leaves.)

ARTHUR

I'm a sissy? You're a sissy!

STEPHANIE

I thought I was a truck driver.

ARTHUR

You're a sissy truck driver.

STEPHANIE

You're stupid.

ARTHUR

You're obnoxious. Dante!

(DANTE comes over.)

ARTHUR

I'd like to eat and get out of here quickly, so take the other gentleman's order.

DANTE

The specialty of the day is cheese soufflé.

STEPHANIE

Thank you, but I'm on a diet. I'll just have a small piece of broiled flounder and a green salad with lemon juice.

ARTHUR

I think I'll have some of that soufflé and then I'll have veal parmesan, fried zucchini, and what's that spaghetti sauce she loves?

(DANTE shrugs apologetically, wanting to be diplomatic. ARTHUR grabs him by the lapel.)

ARTHUR

(Screaming) What is it?!

DANTE

(frightened.) Carbonara!

ARTHUR

Oh, yeah, Carbonara ... A nice, big, double order of Spaghetti Carbonara. *(To Stephanie,*

sweetly.) Give up?

STEPHANIE

I could kill you for that.

ARTHUR

Kill, kill, kill. That's your middle name. You want to kill everybody.

STEPHANIE

No, just you.

ARTHUR

Well, you'll never get a chance, because underneath that tough guy exterior you're scared to death of me.

STEPHANIE

I'm not scared of you in the least. In fact, I find you amusing in a weak, pathetic sort of way. You're more than a sissy. You're a sissy, fairy worm.

ARTHUR

I don't scare you, huh?

STEPHANIE

No.

ARTHUR

(Shoots a fist at her and pulls it back.) Two for flinching.

STEPHANIE

Oh, my. That was scary. I'll bet you could beat up any woman in the restaurant.

ARTHUR

I'm leaving. I've got more important things to do at the office.

STEPHANIE

What could possible be important in the frozen shrimp business. What are you doing?

Merging with a cocktail sauce?

ARTHUR

(Sits down.) So you don't like the frozen shrimp business and all the luxuries it's brought you the last ten years. Well, then I guess you won't mind that after you went to your mother's last night, I had all the locks changed and today I'm going to buy a killer police dog and I'm going to let him smell your stockings, so if you come snooping around my

house, or my kids, you're going to get your skinny legs chewed off.

Look, I didn't want to be that hard on you, but that's what a fight is... you try to hurt the other person, I mean we aren't here to have a good time... And you brought it on. Now I'm going to give you a little bit of advice. If by chance you do meet another gut and you're able to talk him into marrying you, take a course on how to be a woman, preferably from my mother. Because she knows what a woman is. At six o'clock she gets up, scrubs the floors, washes clothes, waxes the furniture, bakes her own bread, irons my father's shirts, and then brings him breakfast in bed. She never complains or opens a fresh mouth. And the only time she cries is after he's gone to sleep. Then, she lies on the sofa and sobs quietly to herself because she doesn't want to wake him. In thirty-five years of marriage, she never took a vacation. The only time she rested was when she was carried to the hospital in a stat of exhaustion and the doctor told her she had to stay in bed for two days. That's a woman. And let me tell you, they don't make them like that any more.

STEPHANIE

Thank God. Now, let me tell you what my idea of a man is. A real man lives for only one thing: to try to make up to me for all the injustices that have been done to women since the beginning of time. He loves all women and he secretly wishes he was one of them. But he's very sexy in an animal way. He's desired by other women and he desires them. But, he never looks at them, or talks to them. And his greatest pleasure is to relate to me. When he's making love to me he talks to me. Not just things like, "I'm your slave," but things like, "How's your mother's cold?" He has no secrets from me. He tells me every single thing that's on his mind at every moment because he knows how only I get when he thinks. When somebody hurts me, he lets me take it out on him, and he sees my rage as touching. Now, you may think a man like that doesn't exist, but you're wrong, because I've seen him. The man I'm describing is a combination of Robert Redford, Richard Burton, Billy Graham, Joe Namath and Golda Meir. You couldn't be that in a million years. So goodbye, Arthur. *(SHE gets up and leaves.)*

ARTHUR

Hey, you. Come back here. *(HE gets up and grabs her arm.)* I said come back to the table. Are you deaf? No woman walks out on me!

STEPHANIE

This woman does.

(SHE starts to walk away again. HE spins her around, and starts screaming out of control.)

ARTHUR

I could strangle you with my bare hands! I could pick you up and break you over my back and smash you up against the wall and put you in a hospital for six months!

STEPHANIE

(tearfully) You really don't love me.

ARTHUR

Why would I get this crazy if I didn't love you? You're the one who doesn't love me.

STEPHANIE

Of course I love you, Arthur. But you make it so difficult because you don't need anything from me.

ARTHUR

I need a lot from you.

STEPHANIE

What do you need from me, Arthur?

ARTHUR

I need you to get off my back.

STEPHANIE

That's our problem, Arthur. I need you to relate to me and you need me to leave you alone.

(DANTE walks by with food)

STEPHANIE

I don't want to fight any more. I can't go through a divorce every week.

ARTHUR

I'm hungry. Is the fight over?

STEPHANIE

(thinks about it.) I think so.

ARTHUR

Can we sit down?

STEPHANIE

Okay. Here's the thing. In the future I'll try to need less, but you'll try to need more.

ARTHUR

Right.

STEPHANIE

If I'm needing at a time when you don't feel like giving, I'll hold off my need till when you're ready. But, then you'll give me total love.

ARTHUR

Okay.

STEPHANIE

However, if I'm really needing, you'll force yourself to give.

ARTHUR

Fine.

STEPHANIE

And the next time you want to be left alone, I'll leave you alone a few minutes more than you even asked for ... Okay, pussycat?

ARTHUR

Okay, pussycat. Now let's just relax and eat our food quietly.

(SHE nods. There's a long pause as THEY begin eating.)

STEPHANIE

Arthur, would you look into my eyes while we're eating?

(HE nods and looks at her. There's another pause.)

STEPHANIE

Arthur, can you eat with one hand and hold me hand with the other?

(HE nods and gives her his hand.)

STEPHANIE

Arthur, I feel so wonderful. This is enough for me. It's all I ever wanted from you and I'll bet you thought "God knows what." All we have to do is keep this up.

ARTHUR

Right.

(THEY sit there eating, holding hands, staring into each other's eyes, looking very frightened. LIGHTS fade out.)

