

Please

by Michelle McEwen

I don't like wedding rings. You couldn't get me to wear one even if Lenny (that's my man) paid me by the hour to wear one. I just don't particularly care for wedding rings— all day, every minute on your finger shining like it ain't no ordinary ring. When me and Lenny got to talkin' about getting married, I told him I didn't want no ring and he said, "the folks gon' think I couldn't even buy my woman a ring." And I told him not to worry about those folks, but he went on and got a ring anyway— a little piece of diamond here, a littler piece of diamond there and some gold. It was a nice ring, but not for me. After we was married, I wore that ring but one day. The day after the wedding, I walked into the grocery store with that thing on my finger and folks who knew me got to looking at me like I was different. I couldn't stand that. As soon as I had my groceries in the trunk good, I took that ring off and threw it in the glove compartment. "What I need to wear the ring for," I said to myself, "I already got his last name and child." And I never put that ring on again. Lenny come asking me later that day, "Where your ring at, Gal?" (Gal's my birth name). I told him where it was, in the glove compartment, and he got this frown on his face like I done told him some death news or something. He said: "Aw baby, a ring don't belong in a glove compartment" and he went to the car to get it. He tried to get me to put it back on, but I told him, I said: "I told you I didn't want a ring in the first place." Then I tried to put the fear in him, I said: "Supposin' I was out late at night walking down Sadie Street and one of them young mean suckers caught sight of my ring just a-gleamin' and decided they wanted it for themselves?" Lenny started nodding then and rubbing his chin. He said: "it's best, then, to leave it off" and he put the ring in a small wooden bowl on a kitchen shelf. I figured he put it there so the folks who come by to

see me could see it in the bowl and say to themselves: "Gal's a fool for not wanting to wear something so pretty!"

That's exactly something my sister would say. She says one of these days I'm gonna find that ring missin' from the bowl. "If you don't let Lenny start wearin' the pants around here," she says, "Lenny is gonna give that ring to some other woman." Lenny wouldn't do that, though, not with all that I do for him. Ever hear of cold-cakes? Naw, 'cause I'm the one what put the hot in hotcakes. Ever hear of an iron running up and down a pair of pants without no hand? I do all of that and I don't wear pants while doing it either. Lenny wears the pants, I tell my sister, but it ain't up to me to zip them. My sister said once that I need to just gone on and wear the ring and start acting like a woman. I said to her: "Sister, what you know about being a woman when the only time you pick up a broom is when company's comin'." I said "What you know about being a woman when you can't even get you no baby." I wanted to take that back because she started crying then— almost chokin' and carrying on and when she gets like that, you can't help but to cry right along with her. Lenny, who was outside working in the garden, came in then. He said he could hear us, through the open window, crying. My sister told him what all I said to her and he come patting her head and rubbin' her back like she was a child. He said, "Gal, you shouldn't say things like that to Glymph." (That's my sister's birth name). That shut my tears right off— looking at my sister all hugged up under Lenny like she was his wife and not me. Later, in the bed, Lenny told me I ought to treat Glymph better.

"She ain't tough like you," he said turning over to turn off the light. I asked him since when he come to know so much about Glymph and he said:

"I watches folks. I pay attention— and your sister's not built like you."

"How am I built?" I said.

"You're more like a man, Gal," he said and he turned on the light and sat up in bed like he had a whole bunch of more stuff on his mind that he wanted to say to me. "Take that ring—" (I knew

he was gon' bring up the ring). "Take that ring for example— you won't wear it, but you got womens out there who'd die to wear a ring like the one I got you." I almost told him to find one of those fool-women and give her the ring, but I just said "uh huh, yeah, uh huh" and he kept on:

"Now, I respect you not wantin' to wear the ring but sometimes, Gal, sometimes you just gotta do things you don't want to do just to please somebody else sometimes."

"Ha!" I said— my eyes rolling every which-a-way. "I don't have to please nobody but myself!" And I told him good night. I don't know what he called himself doing that night— I guess that was him trying to put his foot down (or rather zip his pants). But I got this sense that he had been talking to someone about me-&-him and that he and that someone had been agreein' on something, had been agreein' that I needed a talking-to. On the bus, the next afternoon, on my way to the drug store, I told my good friend the bus driver about it and she said: "Supposin' it was Glymph and Lenny agreein' about you?" She said: "You know, Gal, you better watch those two." She stopped talking then and hummed for a little bit. Later, when but me and one other passenger was on the bus, she said: "Gal, I been meaning to tell you this, but I've been seeing them around town without you— at the dollar store, at the park, at the bakery." She said: "Once, I heard your sister saying to Lenny, 'What Gal know about being a woman— she ain't been a size six since the 70s.'"

