

# Swapping crock pots for the car

## THE PROVIDER

**O**UR RESPECTIVE upbringings may have prepared us for the role of wife, but never for that of husband.

Our politics are clear on this point at least: Thou shalt not mimic the trappings of heterosexual marriage.

My partner and I thought we were safe, were smug in our shared sense of superiority over the unfortunate, the married, the straight.

But now, for the first time in my adult life, I am realizing my earning potential while she has bravely left the security of the 40-hour work week for the uncertain joy of life as a full-time potter. I am cast into the improbable role of "The Provider" and suddenly I don't feel so smug. I am afraid. Sorely afraid.

While I do enjoy the novelty of being of use, of no longer squinting in fear when I mail a cheque, wondering not if, but when it will bounce, I also find myself emotionally ill-equipped for having "a wife."

My partner is not a natural girly-girl. She hates to cook, for example. I'm the one who tunes in to Emeril (with the mute on)

and the Naked Chef for cooking tips. Now I walk through the door and am greeted by the smells from the crock pot.

Crock pot was not a part of my vocabulary before becoming The Provider. Apparently, we have one, and she dusted it off and put it to work.

Her approach in the kitchen is simple: Get the hell out as soon as you can. If the food can cook itself, better still. Hence the disinterment of the crock pot from the shelf that is home to the fondue set and a homemade yogurt machine, circa 1982, a "gift" from my mother.

I am most appreciative of my loved one's crock-pot creations, but it unsettles me. I know she takes no satisfaction in it, that every potato peeled is an annoyance; every meal plated a grim finale to a despised process rather than a culinary accomplishment.

"I can't believe how much time this took," she said recently, of a meal that did not issue from the crock pot. "Did it?" I asked stupidly, not out of ignorance, but because I never saw cooking as a waste of time when I was the one in her shoes.

As The Provider, my attention has turned from the kitchen to more manly interests, like the car.

I used to ignore the car, more or less. If pressed, I could tell you the model, but certainly not the year. It is big, white and has a CD player, and that was all I wanted to know. I couldn't even reliably recall the licence plate number.

I would practice on the rare occasion when such superfluous knowledge was required. In a parking lot, for instance, I'd do a shoulder check on my way to the booth to have it at the ready, spoken with confidence and on cue.

Now I could recite that string of incongruous vowels and numbers from the depths of a coma. This is because, as The Provider, my car is now my friend. It takes me home every night. I love my car. I worry about its tire pressure and need for clean oil. I enquire of these things delicately, as I would of an ailing relative's health.

"She's good to go," my overly familiar fuel attendant informs me at my local gas bar where, to my horror, I have become

a regular. His name is Frank. He believes he has pumped gas into my beloved car for my husband just two days ago, and scratches his chin, wondering why I would drive 500 clicks in the middle of the work week.

I toy with the idea of telling him the truth — that I am, in fact, the husband. Then Frank again tells me I'm good to go. So I go. Home.

And over the remnants of our crock-potted meal, we rationalize soothingly to ourselves that this, despite all appearances to the contrary, is different. That we are two equal partners in a loving lesbian relationship, and damnit, there's neither husband nor wife in this house.

No, of course there isn't, though the necessity of circumstance tells us otherwise when she finds herself chucking in a load of whites while on a break from her busy work day and I can no longer find the light bulbs because I wasn't around when they were unpacked from the grocery bag.

We can rail all we want against traditional family constructs, but right now, it doesn't seem to be doing us a whole lot of good.

I should just put my feet up, enjoy my beer and slap myself on the back for having acquired what most of us would kill for — A Wife.



**KATE BARKER**