

Making a stand minus my man

Teetering on the edge of my bed, my arms flailing as if I were directing a 747 to land in my back yard, I lunged to kill a wasp with the precision of Lara Croft — but landed butt-first on the floor *a la* Jackie Chan.

That night wasn't my first attempt at swatting a scary bug. But it was the

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first time I couldn't enlist my fiance to join the fight. After Justin hit the road for Florida (because his Salem technology venture tanked), I have found myself darting between a desire to be self-reliant and desperation for the protection of my future husband. That nighttime bug battle marked the first time I let myself miss Justin, not because I love him, which I do almost as much as air conditioning, but — sorry, Kelly Clarkson — because Miss Independent needed a man to come to her rescue.

Ever since Justin set up shop in

Dante's summer digs (also known as Geezer Central), I have called him regularly for advice and, um, hazard control. I've elicited tips on extracting a splinter from my own foot (Would that be the tangled-python position?) and replacing a light bulb while balancing on a phone book on top of a rickety chair on top of a squat step stool. (What? I'm short!)

We've eased our time apart by sending love letters and e-mail updates about our professional successes and personal endeavors, but the long-term separation has turned us a bit crazy. The future father of my children often calls me to describe the latest lizard scurrying up his kitchen window. I, of course, disclose only the most important information, including a recent triumph at the mall, where I found a bra — that fit! — for just \$6.

Lately, we've been counting the months before we can return to living in the same state. Justin is growing frustrated with my anxious e-mails, which span wedding

details, health dilemmas and financial concerns. He also could dispense with my frantic calls when the toilet clogs, the computer freezes or the fish tank refuses to filtrate. I wouldn't mind putting a stop to our muffled phone dates, when we eat dinner together over speakerphone.

Until then, though, we're learning about the power of distance to test and strengthen our devotion. I'm also learning that I can be strong on my own — with a little moral support.

And despite my exasperation, I finally did slay that defiant wasp. But I cornered and killed it around midnight, so I opted not to call Justin. After all, I wouldn't want to be a pest.

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