

Status quo: I'm thirty-six years old, and my husband died nine months ago, and I'm locked in the bathroom getting ready for my first date in nearly six years. I stand over the bathroom sink watching with horror as my last disposable contact lens slithers down the drain. Boys don't make passes at girls who wear glasses! And my scratched tortoiseshell frames are about as stylish as saddle shoes. Choosing vanity over depth perception, I forget the glasses for now and move on to my hair. It's the dull, unglamorous texture of yarn today. It doesn't want to go on a date. It says, *Let's stay home and eat rhubarb pie!*

I believe every woman with curly hair has a graveyard of products under her bathroom sink that she resorts to in emergencies such as this. Canisters of mousse, gel, and pomade—each promising to be the miracle cure. The pathetic part is, I *moved* my mousse collection from California to Oregon. Towed it up in the U-Haul. And now I'm on my hands and knees, burrowing through the bottles. I choose one: Frizz Eaze—the z's on the can mirroring my own kinks. I rub the goo between my palms and pat my head. Now my hair has a shellacklike sheen. It's frizzy, sticky, and crunchy all at once. I give up, tug it into a ponytail, and slide on my glasses for an overview. Great. The librarian look. *Allow me to recommend this volume on the Dark Ages.*

I remember holing up in the bathroom getting ready for the prom in high school while Dad cowered out in the hall, wanting to help. "Sweetie, is there anything I can do?" he called through the door.

"No!" I shouted over the roar of the hair dryer as I worked at straightening my curls—a forty-five-minute chore that left my scalp scorched and my arm muscles aching.

I am thirty-six years old and my husband died nine months ago and here I am getting ready for a date to go bowling with a too-handsome actor who must have some sort of dark, psycho-killer secret because everyone knows all the nice, smart, normal men are married. Only the trolls are left.

In the past hour I've changed from corduroys to jeans to a skirt. How could I have managed to lose my husband, my job, my house, *and* my *** all in one year?

Oddly enough, I didn't fret over my first date with Ethan. We went to see the Lakers, who'd come to town to play the Warriors, and I wore jeans and a flannel shirt. As mustard dribbled down my front, I distinctly recall not worrying about what some goofy engineer thought about me or my hair. Maybe because I didn't fear then that I might be alone for the rest of my life.

Now I know Ethan would want me to start dating. *Go for it*, he'd say. *Don't sit home alone.* I feel a pang of jealousy imagining him remarrying if I were the one who died. Who would it be? That woman engineer at his office who was smart and funny and had the teeniest feet? *I hate her!*

I rub blush into my cheeks, trying to work up a healthy glow.

I didn't tell Ruth about my date because you never want to tell Ruth when you're doing something inappropriate, and I'm not sure this is appropriate. Yet. She'd never *say* anything, she'd just bristle, her dance-student posture straightening a notch.

The only thing worse than being widowed is being widowed and single. Well, how could you *not* be widowed and single? The thing is, though, there's this grace period right after your husband dies when you're sort of widowed and still married. When it's okay to burrow under the flannel sheets with a family pack of Oreos. When you're not expected to take off your wedding ring and go on a date with a man whose slate-blue-gray eyes give you goose bumps. But eventually you *are* supposed to get on with things and start bowling with actors.

How will I know if I really *like* Drew Ellis? I'm so eager for intimacy, I would date a tree.

Words and phrases

status quo	to burrow [<i>used twice</i>]	must [<i>evidently</i>]	to go for it	the thing is
first date	goo	troll	pang of	grace period
to make passes	frizzy	to manage to [<i>incl. ironic</i>]	teeny, teeniest	to go on a date
to resort to	the ... look	to fret	to work up	to get on with
pathetic	to hole up, holing up	to see [<i>to attend a game, etc</i>]	healthy	
mousse	prom	to recall, distinctly recall	to bristle	
U-Haul	to cower	goofy	a notch	