

# Bathing Suit Bother

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*Since it's a scorching summer so far, why not beat the heat with a summery cool Slice of Life from Cabot Cove? In this new story, set around 1990, Jessica goes shopping for a bathing suit and brings Seth along. And, of course, the good doctor has an opinion on everything!*

"Remind me again why you're dragging me along on a shop-a-thon?"

"I need a new bathing suit, Seth, and I need your opinion on what suits me and what doesn't."

"My opinion? On a female's bathing suit? Jess, are you sure you wouldn't rather have Eve Simpson's opinion? She's bound to know more about this stuff than I do."

"Eve's busy today, Seth."

"Ayuh, of that I have no doubt. Busy sniffing out the latest piece of gossip from the Cabot Cove rumor mill, I'm sure."

"Besides, I didn't want to ask Eve in the first place. I wanted you, because I know I can ask you anything and you'll always be honest with me."

"Well, *that* you can count on. Honesty is the best policy, I always say."

"And you say it in spades."

Elbows were exchanged and laughs floated through the air as Jessica Fletcher and Seth Hazlitt strode down the street to Cabot Cove's local boutique. Summer in New England had arrived with a bang – blazing blue skies, white clouds, sunshine everywhere, and moderate temperatures with the occasional hot day. Unfortunately, today was a hot, hot day. Days like this would get so hot that the only reprieve, other than to stay indoors with

a cold drink, was to swim. Jessica loved swimming as much as the next person, but she had one major problem at present: both of her bathing suits had worn out. So, not wasting any time, she decided to take a day off from writing and go shopping for a new suit, taking Seth with her as a sounding board.

A bell tinkled as the two of them entered the boutique, and Julie Christianson, who owned the pretty little shop, smiled as she saw her customers enter. "Hi, Jessica! Looking for a new dress today?"

"No, Julie, I'm here to beat the heat before it beats me," Jessica laughed. "I'm looking for a new swimsuit."

"Right back that-a way," Julie said, gesturing toward the back of the store with a sweep of her hand. "Are you going to be waiting for her, Dr. Hazlitt?"

Seth shook his head. "Not exactly, Julie. I'm here to provide commentary while Madame Fletcher walks the runway," he said drily.

Julie burst out laughing. "Gonna strut your stuff, eh, Jessica?"

"I'm only trying on a few things for him because I need an honest opinion. I'm hardly Christie Brinkley."

"No, but you do look fantastic just the same, if you don't mind my saying so," Julie said, while Jessica flushed and laughed self-consciously. "The fitting rooms are open. Go on back there and knock yourself out."

With a thank-you to Julie, Jessica made for the display of women's beachwear at the rear of the shop, Seth following close behind. The rack was crammed with one-pieces, two-pieces, and pieces that Seth had never even seen before, prompting him to ask what, to those in the know, was a dumb question. "What in the Sam Hill is all of this?"

Jessica raised mirthful blue eyes to him. "Bathing suits, Seth. Or have you never seen one before?"

Seth shot her a *no-dip Sherlock* expression. "Of course I've seen a bathing suit before, woman; what kind of an idiot do you think I am?"

"I don't know. What kind are you?"

Seth had to laugh in spite of himself. He loved it when her sarcastic side came out. Come to think of it, it only ever came out when she was with him, probably because he was the only person she was comfortable enough with to unleash it. "Somebody's been brushing up on her backsass."

"I have to stay current if I'm to have a prayer of keeping up with you and your smart comments," Jessica retorted, giving him a gentle smack on the shoulder. "I am your best sparring partner, after all."

"Jess, you're my *only* sparring partner. But seriously, what the heck is all of this? I know what bathing suits look like, and a lot of these skimpy little things and other doodads don't bear any resemblance that I can see."

Jessica laughed. "I can understand. Some of them don't look like they'd last past the first wave. But you have to bear in mind that these are women's swimsuits. There are many more styles to choose from. All men have are trunks."

"And those blasted Speedos that *no* man looks good in, but who's keeping track?" Seth asked. "Anyway, why would a woman need all these different styles? It's 'bout like needing a hundred different pairs of shoes, which is something else I've never understood."

"The answer to both is the same, Seth: you're not a woman."

"Well, obviously not," Seth said sardonically, holding out his arms while Jessica grinned.

"Then allow me to give you a lesson on bathing suits." Jessica sorted through the rack and came up with a plain black one-piece. "This is your garden-variety one-piece. No frills, no fuss, just basic coverage."

"I can see that. That's more like what I'm used to."

"*This*, on the other hand..." she now pulled a screaming red, high-hipped one-piece from the rack and held it up, "looks like something from *Baywatch*."

Seth cracked a grin. "Ayuh. All you'd need is a whistle."

"And a bigger bosom." She laughed aloud and pulled a few more one-pieces from the rack when Seth turned red to the tips of his ears. "This one has a plunging back. This has spaghetti straps. And *this* has straps that criss-cross."

Seth took his time examining the spaghetti-strap suit. "How can a woman swim with nothing but those teensy little straps holding her bits and pieces in? If just one of 'em breaks, Victoria's secret is out."

"You'd be surprised at how strong straps like this can be. But this is nothing compared to something like *this*." Jessica returned the one-pieces to the rack and held up a bikini for Seth's inspection.

"Good night! Talk about bits and pieces," Seth exclaimed, eyeballing the tiny swimsuit. "I remember the two-piece bathing suits back in our day, and I can guarantee you they didn't make a woman look half as naked as this probably does."

"I know what you mean. This hardly leaves anything to the imagination."

"Not to mention there's nothing to it. Jeez, one good wave to knock you over and that sucker is gone." The corner of Seth's mouth twitched at Jessica's giggle, and he nodded his head at a selection of what appeared to be long, flowing scarves. "What are those?"

"Those are sarongs. You tie them around your waist when you're wearing a bathing suit. Some women use them as a partial cover-up, and others just like it as a fashion accessory. Either way, it works." Jessica plucked one from the rack and tied it over her capris, modeling it for her friend.

Seth cocked his head to one side. "Well, I'm no fashion expert, but maybe it'd look better if you actually had a bathing suit on. No offense, but wearing that thing with your clothes is kinda like wearing your underwear on the outside of your pants."

Jessica's eyes twinkled. "Are you speaking from experience, Seth?"

"Jessica." Seth folded his arms over his broad chest. "I am not a frat boy or a superhero. When have you ever known me to do something that stupid? Although..." He grinned. "I did have an uncle who used to do that, but only at parties. He did it purely to pull my aunt's chain, 'cause she always threw

these prissy Junior League affairs that were about as fun as a root canal." He laughed heartily. "Every time he came out with his shorts on over his pants, she threw the duck fit of the season."

Jessica laughed. "'Duck fit'? Is that anything like a hissy fit?"

"Let me put it this way. A hissy fit is just a lot of wailing and hysterics. A duck fit is screaming bloody murder and threatening to do the same. Believe me, if you've ever seen an angry duck, you'll know what I mean. It's not pretty."

"All right, I get it. I think it's time for me to try some of these on instead of just standing around talking about them." Jessica grabbed a handful of one-pieces from the rack and headed for the fitting room, while Seth waited by the rack of swimsuits. After a minute or two, she came out in the same black suit she'd held up for him earlier. "What do you think?"

Seth took one look at the suit and told her exactly what he thought. "I think you look like you're going to a poolside funeral. I like the way it covers things up, but seriously, Jess, you need some color on you." He waited another minute until she reemerged, this time in a red-and-white polka-dot one-piece with a ruffle near the neckline. This time, he busted out laughing. "Now you look like Pollyanna meets Lucy." The laughter only intensified when she came out a third time in a one-piece that was hot neon pink and had a sarong to match. "Lord, woman, who rolled you in cotton candy?"

Jessica said nothing to that one, merely turned and did a perfect model walk back into the fitting room. Another heartbeat passed, and then she came out wearing a modest aqua-blue one-piece that plunged slightly in the back; a sarong of the same color was tied around her waist. "Any clever comments this time, Seth Skelton?" she asked, turning around once for his benefit.

Seth smiled. This time, she had chosen well. "Not a one. That looks great on you. The color suits you, too."

"He's right, Jessica," Julie spoke up, walking to the back to join them. "That shade of blue really brings out the gold in your hair. I think you've made the right choice."

At last, Jessica smiled. "Seeing as I'm two for two, I guess I have. Give me a minute to change, Julie, and I'll bring it up." Once Julie had returned to the front of the house, Jessica turned back to Seth and planted her hands on her hips. "Well, I'm glad you finally liked *something* I tried on."

"You asked for my opinions, and I gave them to you. If I hadn't, you'd be swinging yourself down to the beach looking like a walking advertisement for Pepto-Bismol."

"Point taken." Jessica glanced down at herself. "I do like the way this one fits. And I love the color."

"If you love it, I love it." Seth breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank God it's over."

"Oh, Seth, was it that bad?"

"No, not really. I've just never seen the like of choices in my life. The perils of shopping with a woman."

"That's nothing. I still need to find the right shoes." Resisting the urge to laugh as Seth slapped a hand to his forehead, Jessica winked and popped a foot in her friend's direction before disappearing back into the fitting room.