

Iced

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When I first heard about the Ice Bucket Challenge for ALS awareness, my thoughts automatically went to Angela Lansbury, who is a supporter of the ALS Association. I thought, what if she did the Ice Bucket Challenge? Better yet, what if Jessica Fletcher did it? So... inspiration struck, and here's the grand result. Jessica does indeed take the Ice Bucket Challenge. The question is, who gets to pour the water over her head, Seth or Mort? Read on and find out - and there's a little surprise at the end!

"This is bad."

"Ayuh, it is."

"Man. I never thought I'd be putting Mrs. F on ice."

"Hold it! Who says you're gonna put her on ice? I am going to put her on ice!"

"Like heck you are! I'm gonna do it!"

"Hey, at least she'll be able to hit me if I do it!"

"Exactly why I wanna do it! I'm the sheriff; she *won't* be able to hit *me*!"

"I'm going to give both of you a good smack if you don't hurry up and get this over with!"

Seth Hazlitt and Mort Metzger both looked over at Jessica Fletcher with a mutual sigh. Neither one of them knew what she had been thinking when she decided to take the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, but when she approached the two of them and said she needed a volunteer to dump the water on her head... well, suffice it to say that the opportunity to "put her on ice" had been too great to pass up. They both wanted to douse her for the same reason: the pure, cussed stubbornness that always got the better of them in nearly every single murder investigation, the unspoken *I-told-you-sos*, and the occasional joke at their expense. Oh, it wasn't because they were bitter. Far from it. Seth and Mort both loved Jessica with all of their hearts, yet when the chance arrived to finally get her back for all the times she'd gotten them, the two of them jumped on it - and were now wrestling over who would be the victor that took the spoils.

"Well, Doc, what are we gonna do?" Mort asked, returning his gaze to the doctor.

"I dunno. Rock, paper, scissors?"

"No way. You almost always pick scissors."

"I'm a doctor. So sue me," Seth dared the sheriff.

"It could happen. Ink-a-dink?"

"No. You could fix it so you'd lose on purpose."

"I would not!"

"You would too. You did that when we had to decide who got to throw a pie in Sam Booth's face Lord knows how many years back. You lost on purpose and you gave Sam a mouthful of coconut custard."

"Cripes, Doc, are you still holding a grudge? I said I was sorry!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, will you two stop arguing?" Jessica said, catching their attention once again. "I've been standing here in my bathing suit for the last ten minutes while you two argue over who gets to pour a bucket of ice water over my head, and yes, it *is* as ridiculous as it sounds!"

"At least the cause isn't ridiculous, Jessica. And if memory serves, *you* volunteered for this challenge in the first place," Seth retorted, shooting her a pointed look.

"Well, Eve dared me. And I would've done it even if she hadn't. ALS is a terrible disease, and it needs every bit of research and funding possible to find a cure. One of these days, we'll get there. And I want to do my part to help, even if it means having an entire bucket of freezing water poured over me. But we're never going to get anywhere if you two can't decide who gets to soak me, so *I'm* going to decide for you." Jessica put her hands on her hips and stared the two of them down. "Both of you do it together."

"*What?*" Mort and Seth exclaimed simultaneously, staring at Jessica as though she had suggested they beat her up.

"You heard me. Both of you take the bucket and pour it over my head. I know you've both been waiting for a chance like this for years." When they both began protesting otherwise, Jessica laughed. "Don't even try to deny it. I know I can be a little stubborn..." She sighed when they both gave her skeptical looks. "All right, *very* stubborn, and I know you both think I'm a big pain in the behind sometimes..."

"Sometimes?" Mort chuckled while Seth elbowed him in the ribs.

Jessica's brows knit together. "All right, I get your point. *My* point is, I know you two don't want to pass this chance up, even though you love me..." Her expression cleared and the old sparkle returned to her eyes. "Right?"

The boys chuckled. "'Course we do, Jess," Seth said, unmistakable affection shining in his eyes as he regarded the woman he'd always loved with all of his heart.

"Yeah, Mrs. F. And nothing says *I love you* like a big bucket of ice where the sun don't shine," Mort quipped, causing everyone to laugh.

"All right, all right, enough chatter," Jessica said, holding up her hands.

"One of you go turn on the camera and then get into position. I don't want to deprive you of your opportunity for one minute longer."

While Seth got their four-gallon bucket of water, frosted with a sheen of sweat on the outside and rattling and sloshing with ice cubes on the inside, Mort dashed over and turned the digital video camera on. "Okay, Mrs. F, you're on!" he said, running back to join the doctor. Jessica then faced the camera and began her speech.

"Hello, my name is Jessica Fletcher, and I was nominated by Eve Simpson to do the Ice Bucket Challenge for ALS awareness. I hereby nominate Grady Fletcher, Donna Mayberry Fletcher..." A rather wicked smile spread across Jessica's face, "Dr. Seth Hazlitt, and Sheriff Mort Metzger to take part as well." She smothered a laugh at the two sharp intakes of breath behind her. "You have 24 hours to complete the challenge, or to make a donation to the ALS Association. Good luck to you all, and here I go!"

Seth and Mort looked at each other and grinned. The second she had nominated them for the Ice Bucket Challenge, they knew they had yet another reason to dump four gallons of icy water all over her. They grasped the bucket together and, in one fluid motion, poured the whole thing over her head.

The instant the frigid water deluged her, Jessica's whole body locked into place, her hands balling tightly into fists and her muscles clenching, rooting her firmly to the ground despite the fact that she was shivering from head to toe. Mort and Seth watched her carefully, wondering if she was going to scream from the cold. Before the downpour stopped, Jessica did indeed let out a strangled cry and shuddered violently. "Aaaaargh! Dear God in heaven!" she cried, folding her arms over her breasts as though hoping to keep some little bit of heat within. No such luck, though, for gooseflesh was popping up all up and down her arms. "Oh, that's cold!"

"No dip, Miss Marple," Mort said, managing to keep his voice level in spite of the laughter threatening to spill out. "You just got drenched in a penguin's bath water."

Seth, chuckling both at Mort's zinger and Jessica's reaction to the ice water bath, brought a beach towel over and wrapped her up in it. "Are you all right, Jess?" he asked, pulling her into his arms to warm her up.

"Yes, Seth, I'm fine," Jessica replied, snuggling into his hug, her body singing with relief when it absorbed the warmth of his. "I just need to get inside and get warm."

Seth kissed her cheek. "I'll fix you some soup. And because you've been such a good sport, I'll take the challenge myself, and you can dump the water on me."

Jessica laughed and rested her head on his shoulder. "I'm holding you to that. And Mort..." She turned to the sheriff and made the *I'm watching you* motion with her eyes. "I've got my eye on you. Your turn is coming."

"Yeah, that's what you think. After your video comes out, you'll have to try and beat Adele to the punch. She's been waiting to dump a bucket of ice water on my head for the last thirty-odd years," Mort retorted, though he couldn't help grinning at the whole idea.

"Well, in that case, I won't deprive her of the chance." Jessica untangled herself from Seth's hug. "All right, I'm going inside to take a hot bath. Will one of you get the camera, please?"

"Sure, Mrs. F." Mort grabbed the camera and watched the replay, laughing the whole time. "Man, I can't wait to see people's faces when this hits the Internet. J.B. Fletcher getting drenched in ice water."

"It's for an excellent cause, Mort. If wearing nothing but my bathing suit and getting soaked in freezing water helps raise awareness for ALS and gets a few more contributions to the Association, then it was well worth sacrificing my dignity for one day," Jessica said with a smile.

Mort chuckled again. "All right. I'll take this inside and work on uploading it." He disappeared into the house, leaving Jessica and Seth outside.

The doctor put his arm back around Jessica and hugged her again. "It was worth it for me, too."

"Why? Because you finally got me back for being stubborn?" Jessica asked, grinning up at Seth.

"No, because I get to cuddle with you on the couch to warm you up," Seth said mischievously, returning her impish grin.

"Cuddle? This says you get to do a lot more than just that," Jessica said, her eyes twinkling as she held up a hand that bore a white gold wedding band and an engagement ring with a sapphire that matched her eyes.

Seth chuckled deeply. "Lord, Jess. We've been married eleven years now, and you still drive me mad."

"It's my job. And I thank God every day that it is." Jessica leaned in to kiss him on the lips. "Now... what was that you were saying about cuddling?"

Seth drew her close and deepened the kiss, dropping a few more on her cheeks and nose. "Woman, I can show you better than I can tell you." And with that, he grabbed Jessica's hand and pulled her into the house, the two of them laughing like a pair of teenagers as they made their way upstairs.

Mort, from his position at Jessica's laptop in the kitchen, merely chuckled

and shook his head, thinking that the two of them were going to need another ice bucket sooner than they thought.