

South Mouth

—MinervaDeannaBond

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Seth may have lived in Maine, but he had Southern roots, and the good ol' boy in him comes out in this Slice of Life as he teaches Jessica all about Southern colloquialisms. The expressions used in this story are some of my all-time favorites, and I hope they tickle you just as much as they do me!

The steady *click-clack* of typewriter keys stilled as Jessica Fletcher looked up from her work. Her ears had pricked up at the sound of a car door slamming out front, freezing her fingers on the keys. Now came the unmistakable sound of footsteps coming around back. Her eyes darted to the clock on the wall. *Nine o'clock? Who could that be at this hour?* Slowly but surely, Jessica rose from her chair, pulled her glasses off and set them on the kitchen table, and grabbed a nearby frying pan just in case. She crept toward the back door and watched, her muscles tensing as a shadowy figure approached, impossible to see in the dark. The doorknob turned and opened and Jessica raised the frying pan over her head...

"Whoa!" The figure threw up his hands and let out a cry of alarm. "For crying in a bucket, woman, are you trying to kill me?"

"*Seth?*" Relief washed over Jessica like a warm bath, yet at the same time, she couldn't help feeling a little irritated with him for spooking her. "Good Lord, don't you ever do that again! You scared me half to death! I thought someone was trying to break in."

Dr. Seth Hazlitt, shrugging off his overcoat as he came into the kitchen, had the grace to look sheepish. "I'm sorry, Jess. You always keep the back door open, and you were right in here, so..."

"So, the light was dim and I was in the middle of a stabbing."

Seth peeked around his best friend's shoulder. "Cleanest stabbing I ever did see. Where'd you hide the body?"

Jessica gave him a look. "Not funny." She sighed and rested a hand on one hip. "What are you doing here so late? More to the point, what are you doing back in Cabot Cove already? I thought you weren't coming back from South Carolina until tomorrow."

"I decided to leave a day early."

"Homesick?"

"Homesick and peoplesick. My brother-in-law darn near ruined a good crawfish boil when he tried to throw my sister in the pond."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes! Yesterday, we were right in the middle of dinner, all of us peeling crawdads and having a fine old time when he and some of his buddies busted out the Bud Light and got drunk as a bunch of monkeys. Talk about 'All My Rowdy Friends Are Coming Over Tonight.' And when my sister told them off, they tried to grab her and throw her into the water. She wound up shoving all of them in and told them to stay in there until they sobered up."

"Goodness! Was that the first time your brother-in-law did something like that?"

"Ayuh, and I guarantee you it'll be the last. My sister doesn't take any crap from people, least of all her own husband. At the party, right after he made a grab for her, she yelled at him, 'You'd better give your heart to Jesus, 'cause your butt is mine!'" He chuckled. "She chewed him out, let me tell you."

After raising an eyebrow at the expression Seth used, Jessica began to laugh. "What did she say to him?"

Seth grinned. "Half of it I can't repeat without making you blush. All I can tell you is that she was all over him like a duck on a junebug."

Streaks of pink shot into Jessica's cheeks. "'Like a duck on a junebug?'" she chortled. "Lord, Seth, where are you getting these expressions?"

Seth started guffawing himself. "I've spent so much time in South Carolina that my South Mouth is coming out again."

"Your South Mouth?"

"Ayuh. My native tongue, so to speak. To a Yankee, it seems like Southerners have a language all their own, and more expressions than you can shake a stick at. Nobody, and I mean nobody, can come up with a good all-purpose expression better than a Southerner."

"Really? In that case, what are some of the expressions you know?"

"You really want to know?"

"Of course I do. I could use a good belly laugh."

Seth gave her another smile. "You know, I figured you'd ask. That's why I wrote a bunch of 'em down, just in case you needed something to spice up one of your books... or a good laugh." He reached into the breast pocket of his jacket and withdrew a small notebook, which he opened to the first page. "Okay, listen up. These first few are garden-variety threats, just in case you've got a child acting off or a brother-in-law that needs his butt whupped.

"I'll knock you in the head and tell God you died."

"I'll hit you in the Adam's apple so hard, you'll spit cider for a week."

"I'll knock your teeth down your throat and you'll spit 'em out single file."

"I'll knock you so hard you'll see tomorrow today."

Grinning, Seth raised his eyes to Jessica, who had her hands pressed tightly over her mouth to hold in barely concealed snickers. He eyed her reddening face for another second before continuing on.

"She's busier than a one-legged man at a butt-kicking contest."

"He fell out of the ugly tree and hit every branch on the way down."

"I don't know whether to scratch my watch or wind my butt."

At this point, a sound halfway between a mouse's squeak and a scream of hysteria escaped Jessica's mouth and her hands covered her entire face, her shoulders heaving with mirth. Seth took this as a very good sign, wanting very much to laugh himself, and read the next expressions.

"That table's so heavy, it'd take three men and a midget to lift it."

"I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse and chase his rider."

"It's drier than happy hour at the Betty Ford Clinic."

That last one was too much for Jessica, and the laughter she'd been holding in exploded like champagne bursting out of a bottle. She threw her head back and roared, one hand over her heart as though it were going to beat out of her chest. "My stars!" she exclaimed, wiping away a tear that had begun to trickle down her cheek. "Who came up with all of these?"

"Don't ask me. Most of 'em have been around since I was a boy, maybe even before. All I know is they're hilarious, and I've got more. You still want to hear them?"

"Yes! Keep going!"

"Okay. And just for the record, a Southerner's response would've been something along the lines of 'Is a frog's butt watertight?'" He waited for Jessica to stop laughing and then began again.

"He's so stupid, he could throw himself on the ground and miss."

"She's so tall, if she fell down she'd be halfway home."

"He's so cheap, he wouldn't give a nickel to see Jesus riding a bicycle."

"Don't let your alligator mouth overload your hummingbird butt."

"*What?*" Jessica laughed. "What on Earth does that mean?"

"Ever heard the expression 'Don't write a check your butt can't cash?' It's the same thing."

"Oh, I get it. It means don't make a boast you can't back up."

"Exactly. 'Cause if you can't, your rear end is going to pay for it, big time." Seth closed the notebook with a smile. "And that's all she wrote."

Jessica chuckled heartily and wiped the remaining tears of mirth from her eyes. "Oh, Seth, that was wonderful. It's the best laugh I've gotten in a long time."

"Good. Makes me glad I've held on to my Southern roots, knowing I can make you laugh on a cool night."

"Speaking of which, you still haven't answered my previous question. Why did you come here so late after you got back? I would've thought you'd have gone home and straight into bed."

Again, a sheepish expression crossed Seth's face. "Well... I've been away from Cabot Cove for nearly a week."

"And you're back now."

"Ayuh, and I missed it, but it wasn't the town I missed the most." Seth's bashful look morphed into a warm smile. "It was you, Jess."

Jessica's mouth formed an O of surprise. "Me?"

"Yes, you. I missed talking to you, going for walks with you, making you laugh. I know South Carolina is where I grew up, but it didn't feel like home to me without you there. And as sappy as it sounds, I know I'm home now 'cause I'm with you."

Jessica smiled, her eyes shining. "So you missed me most of all?"

Seth chuckled. "Yes, Miss Scarecrow. I did."

"Oh, Seth..." Jessica slid her chair close to his and pulled him into a hug. "I missed you, too." They stayed locked in a warm embrace until Jessica spoke up again. "I don't suppose you have a Southern expression for a moment like this?"

"No, but I do have one that's the same no matter who says it." He kissed the top of Jessica's head and hugged her even tighter. *If home is where the heart is, my heart is with this woman.* "There's no place like home."