

## THE COVER-UP CONSPIRACY

I believe that beaches are the sacrificial arenas of present day. It's a place where multitudes of spectators laugh, jeer, point fingers, whistle, and whisper, when parades of unsuspecting victims walk by.

What's in sand anyway? Is there some kind of potent elixir mixed into those fine granules of crushed rock that shrivel the brain down to a bean? Let's face it, as soon as our feet touch the beach, we become one with the superficial faces of the mob. Thumbs up or thumbs down, we shift into inspection mode and become full-fledged judges of the pageant.

It's not something we plan; it just happens. Our critical eye appears out of nowhere and unexpectedly grabs hold like the great white in *Jaws*. Instead of treading softly in a sea of lighthearted compliments or drowning ridicule, we dive into the fray and the games begin.

As a spokesperson for women of substance, I can honestly say that men have the advantage. There is an acceptance men automatically receive that a full-figured woman doesn't. And what's with this full-figured crap? Has anyone ever seen a partially-figured woman? Oh, Twiggy, what have you done? Where is Marilyn when we need her?

Why act surprised? This distinction is slapped upon us at birth. Big baby boys aren't flabby. They are big, strong, healthy boys whose destinies include roaring crowds, footballs, and hockey sticks. Unfortunately, with the flip of a coin, the big baby girl is considered a cute bundle of joy with chubby cheeks.

"Don't worry," people say, "it's just baby fat. She'll grow out of it."

Really?

When I was little—okay—younger, I remember going to stores where racks of girl's clothes were captioned 'Chubby' while our male counterparts enjoyed a 'Husky' status. Maybe these words no longer top the children's racks, but biased labels still prevail. Why else would men charge into 'Big and Tall' departments, while we retreat to a 'Plus-Size' section?

Even if there isn't a *Conspiracy Theory* within department stores, there's still a cover-up situation that needs to be addressed. It concerns that elusive, sacred shroud that grants us entrance to the games—the perfect swimsuit cover. Yes, this mandatory piece of beach equipment lets us slink to our respective chairs with the barest amount of stares and glares. Unfortunately, I have never found that holy grail.

Don't get me wrong, I try, but my failure meter seems to be stuck on high. I'm not sure why I choose such unbecoming outfits, but I do. Is it possible there really is a skinny mirror in stores? If so, why can't we make sunglasses with this material and pass a law mandating that everyone going to the beach wear them? Then we would all look *Perfect*. Okay, if not perfect, better.

Let's face it, men aren't ruled by this doctrine. The camera's eye is not set on telephoto when they drift down to the beach in their t-shirts and trunks. If I did that, the lifeguards would be calling *Baywatch* security about the beached whale.

I've definitely gone through my share of unbecoming swimsuit cover-ups. Who hasn't? But for me it seems to be an ongoing problem. Like *Superman* and kryptonite, I don't recognize the mishap until it's too late. Oops, what was I thinking?

One memorable cover was a sleeveless, white terry-cloth wrap. Who knew this material added pounds? Not me. Walking to the beach in my red one-piece and white cover, I looked more luncheon special than beach honey. Yep, I was #6—the ala carte—Hot Sausage Sandwich with red sauce. Believe me, at *High Noon* everyone skipped lunch.

Next was my turquoise outfit with matching hat. I felt quite fashionable that year, until I passed the pool and Mr. Belly Flop displayed his *Splash* technique. No problem. I was covered. What an understatement. When I reached my seat and removed my soggy turquoise cover-up, I discovered that my new white bathing suit was covered with big blue blotches. It looked like I was in a fountain pen squirting contest and lost. Too bad it wasn't invisible ink.

The following year I bought a black zip-up with long sleeves and big pockets. Black is a wonderful color, very slimming. Unfortunately, I must have forgotten the affects of the mysterious mirror. While I thought I looked great, I obviously didn't take into consideration its length.

Okay, maybe it was a bit shorter than those in years past, but it still covered everything. Right? I guess not. My friend went shopping a couple days into our vacation and bought me a new one. The black one must have been bad, she paid cash.

The one she chose was a dark pink sleeveless model with scooped-neck and giant-pink flowers. I looked like an old lava lamp, one that wiggled pink goop once it warmed up. Not a good visual. And while the southern hemisphere now had adequate coverage, the northern hemisphere was overexposed. By the end of the day I was an orange Oompa-Lumpa in need of *Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory*. Too bad I wasn't Coppertone's 'Product X' model—I could've made a few bucks.

Now to this year's fiasco, and my beautiful extra-large white jacket. Tailored, it covered the hips, and had big pockets. Believe me, big pockets are a plus. They eliminate the need for an oversized tropical bag, which instantly advertises one's tourist status. Instead, the hands are free for a graceful entrance. It was a great look, and I was set.

So who turned up the *Heat*? I soon discovered that the jacket was insulated with a substance designed for NASA. Yes, I was covered and protected, but instead of keeping the sun out, it kept the heat in. In minutes, I resembled a roasted Thanksgiving Butterball. Instead of looking sizzling, I was just plain hot.

I knew I had to do something fast. My husband and friends were all meeting for lunch and removing my jacket was not an option. This was definitely a *Bullwinkle* moment—time to pull a rabbit out of my hat. So I did the only thing I could think to do. I went to the place where no man has gone. Yep, I made a store trek to the hotel gift shop.

Once inside, I was immediately sucked into *The Black Hole* of large sizes. It's that empty space surrounded by those cute items we see in catalogs—size 2's and 4's. Feeling downtrodden, something bright caught my eye. I stared. Could it be? Was it my holy grail?

I reached over and pulled out an unusual one-size-fits-all beach dress. It was bright fluorescent blue with multicolored flowers all over it. Okay, so it had a ruffle, it wasn't that bad. Was it?

Now, everyone knows I would never buy a fluorescent blue, ruffled beach dress, but something funny happens when an outfit fits. Shivers of excitement ripple along the spine, and an invisible shield glazes over the eyes. Yes, our sight becomes distorted.

"Does this look okay?" I asked the clerks.

They surrounded me making little head bobs. I couldn't help but think they looked like the toy dogs that used to grace the back windows of cars.

"Are you sure?"

They were good at these head bobs. I felt like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. One of the girls handed me a matching bag, and I wedged it under my arm. I turned in the mirror as a fan fluffed my hair. The clerks smiled—not a normal smile—these smiles were big and toothy, and I felt comforted in the glow.

Yep, there's a fool born every minute—out came the credit card.

The closer I got to the pool restaurant, the more doubtful I became about my new purchase. Instead of a sun goddess making her grand entrance, the song, "*Send in the Clowns*," sang in my head.

"Hi, I said to my husband and friends.

Silence.

It was unnerving, this quiet. Even the birds stopped chirping. I thought I was in an E. F. Hutton commercial, except people didn't lean forward, they reached for sunglasses.

There's an old adage—if you don't want to know, don't ask—but sometimes I can't help myself.

"Do you like my new beach cover-up?" I asked.

Silence.

"I know it's a bit loud, but it's very cool."

Silence.

"Maybe it's not cool like in—Oh, wow, that's cool—but cool like air conditioning."

Silence.

"It doesn't make me look like a clown, does it?" I asked my husband.

"No, Honey, you don't look like a clown. You look like that movie star?"

A tingle of pride raced through me. Could it be? Like *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, was my hunt over?

"A movie star?" I whisper, hardly believing my ears.

"Yes," he said. "The one on TV."

"Really? What show?" I asked. "What's her name?"

He scratched his head. "You know, the blond on that weekly show. I don't think it's still playing, but it was popular."

What a sweetie, I thought, all doubts fading. A smile pierced my cheeks. Visions of Marilyn and other full-figured beauties flashed before me. This was great. This was wonderful. *I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar!*

"Mimi," he said.

"What?"

“You look like Mimi on the *Drew Carey Show*.”

And with that statement, the coliseum went wild—the gates swung open, the spectators cheered, and the lions roared.