

CLAIRE:

Well, I had an adventure today. Went into town, thought I'd shake 'em up a little, so I tried to find me a topless bathing suit. Yes, I did. I went into what's-their-names', and I went straight up to the swim-wear, as they call it, department and I got me an eighteen-nineties schoolteacher type, who wondered what she could do for me. And I felt like telling her, "Not much, sweetheart"....But I said, "Hello, there, I'm in the market for a topless swimsuit." "A what, Miss?" she said, which I didn't know whether to take as a compliment or not. "A topless swimsuit," I said. "I don't know what you mean," she said after a beat. "Oh, certainly you do," I said, "no top, stops at the waist, latest thing, lots of freedom." "Oh yes," she said, looking at me like she was seeing the local madam for the first time, "those." Then a real sniff. "I'm afriad we don't carry...those." "Well, in that case," I told her, "do you have any seprates?" "Those we carry," she said, "those we do." And she started going under the counter, and I said, "I'll just buy the bottoms of one of those." She came up from under the counter, adjusted her spectacles and said, "What did you say?" I said, "I said, 'I'll buy the bottom of one of those'." She thought for a minute, and then she said, with ice in her voice, "And what will we do with the tops?" "Well," I said, "Why don't you save 'em? Maybe bottomless swimsuits 'll be in next year." Then the poor sweet thing gave me a look I couldn't tell was either a D-minus, or she was going to send me home with a letter to my mother, and she said, sort of far away, "I think you need the manager." And off she walked.