

Life(guard) Lessons

By Maverick

“Oh, no!”

Polly followed Lucy’s gaze until it fell on Tabitha Cumberbatch, their schoolmate at John J. MacArthur High. Upon seeing her, Polly parroted her friend’s words:

“Oh, no!”

Tabitha was a year ahead of the junior duo and the school’s resident ‘Queen B.’ At least to anyone younger, poorer, or less attractive which--as an upper-class, upper-classman with a plastic surgeon father--was basically anyone with a locker.

The girls watched from their elevated poolside perches as the braided brunette strode purposefully through the gate and past the “Lifeguard Wanted” sign.

“Maybe she’s just here to swim?” Polly posed.

“Not likely,” Lucy said. Never mind that she wasn’t wearing a swimsuit or carrying a changing bag, someone like Tabitha Cumberbatch would never deign to swim in a public pool.

Sure enough, Tabitha paraded past the pool, the locker rooms, and straight to the lifeguard station where she shook hands with Dean Fairborn, the hunky head lifeguard.

“Oh, no!” the girls said in unison.

“Wait a minute,” Lucy said, suddenly striking an optimistic tone. “Remember Tabitha’s old nickname for Dean?”

Dean Fairborn was a senior like Tabitha, but that hadn’t spared him her scorn and ridicule--at least up until the previous summer when he got the lifeguard job. The chlorine cleared his complexion; the sun lightened his hair and tanned his skin; and the exercise, coupled with a four-inch growth spurt, transitioned him from chump to champ.

“Stillborn!” Polly remembered a bit too loudly.

Lucy scowled at her plump pal and waited for the turned heads of swimmers and sunbathers to turn away. “This may turn out better than we think.”

Dean led the buxom brat to a picnic table on the far side of the pool where they sat and chatted like old friends. The girls couldn’t hear what was being said but were so transfixed by the proceedings that it was good the weekend crowd was sparse. A struggling swimmer would surely have drowned.

“C’mon, Dean, lower the boom.” Lucy squinted and leaned forward in her chair, nearly belly flopping into the pool. Since contacts and chlorine don’t mix, she rarely wore them

to work; however, she wished she'd risked it today. Witnessing Dean rebuff Tabitha was worth ruined contacts. Heck, it would make a whole summer whistling at rambunctious kids while getting whistled at by rambunctious men worthwhile. Unable to get a clear view, she turned to Polly and her bird's eye, "What's going on?"

"Nothing good, I'm afraid."

Tabitha hit Dean with every trick in her flirty fascist's playbook: The head-cocked puppy; the laughing arm touch; the lean-in/lean-back leg-cross combo. It was masterful. The black belt around Tabitha's waif-waist may have been Prada, but it was still black. And if the goofy grin on Dean's blushing face was any indication, it was going to be a short fight.

Stay strong, Dean, Polly thought.

As if imbued by her fortitude, Dean frowned as Tabitha handed him a crumpled one-page resume folded like origami to fit in her tiny Chanel purse. Polly's had been six-pages, filled to the brim with references and certifications.

"What's happening?!?"

Now it was Polly's turn to scowl at her friend.

Dean flipped the ragged document over, looking for more as Polly dug what remained of her nails into the wood railing of the trellis tower. Just as it looked like Dean might KO Tabitha with a single shake of his head, she unleashed a doe-eyed, lower-lip bite combo--

And Dean held out his hand to congratulate her on filling the summer's final lifeguard position.

"Son of a *bitch!*"

Apparently, the handshake and subsequent hug were demonstrative enough that even Lucy could see them. Of course, she would have had to been deaf, too, not to hear Tabitha's squeals of delight.

As Lucy wilted under the gaze of angry mothers, Dean waved for the girls to come meet his recruit.

The lifeguard ladders were only four-rungs high, but the climb down felt like a decent into hell. With graduation only weeks away, Lucy and Polly figured they were finally rid of Tabitha's torment. Now they'd have to endure it the whole summer.

Even though Tabitha hadn't come up with the disdainful nickname 'Portly Polly' (that was courtesy of Colby Gatlin back in 3rd grade), she revived it in High School just like straight hair and ripped denim. When Polly mistakenly sat too close to Tabitha's lunchtime clique as a Freshman, one of her minions held up Saltines and asked, "Polly want a cracker?" to which Tabitha added, after sizing Polly up, "I think she'd rather have a Twinkie." 'Portly Polly' was back.

Lucy, an athletic and outspoken Tomboy, wasn't as wide a target for Tabitha's teasing (apart from generic "four-eyes" comments) until the following year, when the sophomore slumped an abundance of junk on her trunk and became the butt of her jokes. Having missed out on the genius that was 'Portly Polly,' Tabitha quickly coined "Lucy-caboosie." Lucy, to her credit, treated the nickname like a badge of honor, proudly shaking her tush whenever it was uttered and turning it from derisive to affectionate. (A fact that drove Tabitha crazy.) Still, the bottom-heavy betty would have preferred not to have so much attention drawn to her...asset.

Nevertheless, the girls tried to remain optimistic as they trudged around the pool. They never thought Tabitha would take a job, much less one that required interaction with the hoi polloi. Maybe she was changing. Maybe now that she was getting ready to graduate—stepping into adulthood—she was finally growing-up.

"Hiya Bitches!" Tabitha gave princess waves with both hands, middle fingers extended, as the girls approached.

So much for growing up.

"Uh, Tabitha, we try to keep swearing to a minimum while on duty," Dean said. "Right, Lucy?"

Lucy looked at her feet as Tabitha batted her baby blues and pouted, "Sorry."

"No problem, Tabitha" Dean blushed. "Do you know our other lifeguards, Lucy and Polly?"

The silence was as loud as the fire-engine red swimsuits blaring Lucy and Polly's imperfections. The Lycra one-pieces were designed to be functional, not flattering, and since the cold temperatures had only recently given way the girls were a wider shade of pale. They fidgeted under Tabitha's scrutinous gaze.

Dean cleared his throat. "I take it you do."

Lucy folded her arms indignantly while simultaneously squeezing a touch of cleavage on her otherwise flat chest. "Did she complete the swimming test?"

The confused look on Tabitha's face made it obvious she had not.

"It's just a formality," Dean assured Tabitha. "You can take it anytime."

"You made us rescue a dummy off the deep end!" Polly whined.

Tabitha mirrored Lucy's arm fold, trumping her shallow valley with a deep canyon. "Which of you was the dummy? 'Cause you're both off the deep end!"

Dean stifled a chuckle. "Look, whatever differences we've had in the past, we're starting with a clean slate."

Tabitha eyed Polly's paunch. "Did you say, 'clean plate'?"

“You little—” Lucy lunged towards Tabitha.

“I said CLEAN SLATE!” Dean yelled, stepping between the combatants. Though neither would admit it, both Lucy and Tabitha eased up, allowing the muscley stud to separate them. “Now, shake on it!”

The girls huffed and puffed, but ultimately grasped hands...each hiding a grimace as they gripped as hard as possible.

“I wonder if they’re hiring at Burger World?” Lucy popped a fry in her mouth as she pondered potential employment.

“Nah,” Polly said, noshing a French fry of her own. “I hear they have a full staff.”

Lucy arched her brow and smiled, “In more ways than one.” She was referring to the greasy spoon’s infamous reputation for fattening its female employees. A few of its victims were legendary.

“That isn’t very nice.” Polly threw half of her fry back on the pile they were sharing.

“I know. I’m sorry.” Lucy cast a sympathetic gaze at her chunky chum. “I’m just frustrated.”

School let out in two weeks and time was running out to find decent summer jobs. Most of the coveted ones had already been filled.

Until the prior weekend, they thought they had one. The girls submitted their applications before the community pool’s winter covers were even taken off. Getting early consideration meant taking their swimming tests in icy water and working weekends while the facility ramped-up its hours, but it seemed a small price to pay for a summer soaking up rays by the pool.

Unfortunately, the prospect held the same charm for that bitch, Tabitha.

The girls’ eyes drifted to her lunch table, where she sat with her cronies, enjoying her own plate of fries delivered by Dean Fairborn. Scuttlebutt on the bubble butt was her father insisted she get a summer job after wasting the previous one lounging by the family pool. He anticipated she would work at his clinic (perhaps modeling the cute button nose that materialized between 10th and 11th grade), but instead she duped that daffy Dean into hiring her for what she wanted to do for free. The irony wasn’t lost on Tabitha, and she bragged about it to everyone.

Everyone except Dean, of course.

“I’m SO disappointed in that boy.” Lucy picked her teeth with the pointy edge of a fry. “I thought he was a smarter cookie.”

Polly sighed and fished the unfinished fry from the pile and back into her mouth. “He’s just like any other boy. When a hot girl’s around, their brains melt.”

“Never mind she wouldn’t give him the time of day last year.”

“He’s got something she wants now.” Polly was referring to Dean’s posh poolside position, but with his sun-kissed blonde hair, dimpled ‘ah-shucks’ smile, and corn-fed physique, Tabitha didn’t seem to mind feasting fries from his fingers.

The truth was the girls were jealous. They thought working with Dean would be a fringe benefit. Now it looked like a tag-team.



“Dean says to put out the sign boards and turn on the pumps.”

Saturday was Tabitha’s first day on the job and she was already barking orders.

“Why can’t you do it?” Polly asked.

“Dean wants to debrief me in the locker room before we open.”

Lucy watched Tabitha scurry off like a kid on Christmas morning. “I’ll bet he does.”

Grudgingly, the girls pulled signage marked ‘No Diving,’ ‘No Running,’ and ‘No Swearing’ from the supply closet. They noticed none forbade the hog-tying and strangulation of co-workers.

“Tell me again why we didn’t fucking quit?” Polly asked as she forcefully planted a ‘No Swearing’ sign into position.

Although they had seriously considered it, their last-minute employment options were either too menial, too manual, or ‘too Manuel’ (Polly’s response when Lucy suggested they try day labor). Ultimately, they decided to give their new co-worker a chance. How bad could she be?

“Dean also said to check the chlorine levels,” Tabitha said after emerging from the locker room. “He doesn’t want me getting a chemical burn on my first day.”

Pretty bad.

Tabitha spent her first shift mugging poolside like a cover model for Sports Illustrated. The lack of a photographer didn’t seem to matter; she was more than happy to pose for mental pictures taken by Dean and the other men in attendance. At one point, Lucy had to rescue a toddler whose distracted father had allowed him to slip into the deep end.

She could hardly blame him. She was distracted by Tabitha, too.

Lucy and Polly often joked about how unflattering the lifeguard swimsuits were, but Tabitha revealed the hard-bodied truth: they were unworthy wearers. The spandex that pinched Polly's rolls and folds caressed Tabitha's curves like wet silk, while the high-waisted cut that made Lucy's trunk look junky followed Tabitha's firm contours like a rainbow, arching to a crescendo above each cheek before descending to a paradisiacal point in front.

It wasn't fair.

Neither was the way Tabitha conveniently cozied up to Dean before closing, right when it was time to drag in the lane dividers for the lap pool, retrieve the sign boards, and clean the locker rooms.

As bad as Tabitha's first day on the job was for Lucy and Polly, her second day was worse. Dean assigned her lifeguard chair #1, which overlooked the kiddie pool and was the only chair fitted with a canopy. It was a coveted spot as there was little risk of incident in 6" of water and even less risk of sunburn. Ostensibly, Dean stationed her there because she had little training in deep water rescue, but the girls felt he wanted her near the entrance to attract attention.

It worked. Attendance doubled the following weekend despite temperatures barely reaching 70. The pool was suddenly filled with pasty white guys squeezed into last summer's suits, sucking in their stomachs, and trying not to shiver.

With a perfect figure for turning heads, Tabitha proved the perfect figurehead. Dean even allowed her to wear bikini tops if they were coupled with regulation lifeguard bottoms.

"Why can't we wear bikini tops?" Lucy whined to Dean after Tabitha had left early.

Dean glanced dismissively towards her torso. "Do you WANT to?"

Lucy's face turned as red as her one-piece. "Not really." She'd been blessed with a washboard stomach, but God had granted her a matching chest. And without a plastic surgeon father there wasn't much she could do about it.

"What did he say?" Polly asked upon Lucy's return to where she reeled in rope floats.

"He said we could if we wanted."

"Oh. Are you?"

"Nah. You?"

"Me? No."



The girls worked in silence after that, resigned to pulling in buoys while Tabitha pulled in the boys.


