

In a surprising bit of modesty, Tabitha abandoned her bikini top/swimming shorts combo the following week. But while the siren red one-piece showed less skin, it called attention to where it had accumulated in the wrong places (something Lucy and Polly were all too familiar with). The clingy Lycra pronounced Tabitha's pooching tummy while its high-waisted cut called attention to her hips and thighs, which had grown pudgy and pasty beneath the shadowed canopy of her lifeguard perch.

While Lucy and Polly delighted at Tabitha's decaying figure, the pool's male attendees weren't amused. As Tabitha packed-on, the horndog crowd packed-up and by the middle of July she had lost a sizable chunk of her audience. Lucy and Polly worried this might impede Tabitha's journey to becoming a 'sizable chunk' herself, but Dean busily picked up the slack for any drop in tributes. Tabitha may not have had Jeeves delivering her cocktails by the pool this summer, but Dean proved even more diligent in his doting.

At one point, Polly wondered aloud how Dean could afford to keep up Tabitha's decadent diet on a lifeguard's modest salary. "Is Dean buying all that food or growing a tab?"

"Both!" Lucy exclaimed, wiggling her brow like Groucho Marx.

The duo laughed at the joke the rest of the day and Tab-related puns joined Pig Latin as their go-to for barbs at the couple's expense. "Do you think Dean's putting that greasy pizza 'on his Tab'?" "How much longer will Dean be able to 'pick up his Tab'?" Etc., etc.



Though the girls contributed to Tabitha's dietary delinquency—the common area fridge employees shared became a dumping ground for sugary sodas and fattening goodies while morning donuts (one each for Dean, Lucy, and Polly, the rest for Tabitha) became routine—for the most part they were content to observe. Lucy even started wearing her contacts while on duty. Continually putting them in and taking them out was a pain, but it was worth it to see the turkey wattle developing beneath Tabitha's chin or the swell of her belly as it grew throughout the day on sodas, donuts, and the sundry snacks Dean bought her.

Then something strange happened. By August, word was out that fab Tab was going flab (guessing her gain became the girls' favorite game: Lucy said 35 pounds; Polly guessed 40), but the pool was more crowded than ever. Tabitha's audience had returned with a vengeance—literally! There was Tank Ferguson, a Lurch-like lineman for the school's football team who always wore his jersey to school ("so he could remember how to spell his name" according to Tabitha) bringing Tabitha cans of Coke. And was that little Ricky O'Bannon (who Tabitha once called "Paddy Melt" during a school assembly) buying her ice cream?

Of course, it never dawned on Tabitha this fresh wave of worship could be born of personal ire rather than sexual fire. She still thought she was doing everyone a

favor on the occasions she lumbered down her ladder to rinse her greasy fingers (which left a sunscreen-like ooze on the pool's surface) or pinball past playing children (using her well-padded hips, butt and belly like bumpers) on her way to the bathroom to make room for more offerings. All she perceived were smiles and nods of approval from her adoring messes.

Stranger still, hunks that had paid Tabitha homage were now congregating around Lucy and Polly. Lucy initially dismissed them as callous culls. Weren't these the same meatheads who called the pool the "five and dime" (a reference to the hotness of the lifeguards) back in June? Still, the attention was nice, as were the occasions she caught Tabitha casting jealous glances her way.

This male mindfulness inspired Polly and Lucy to close the remaining numerological gap between them and their plumping antagonist. They weren't in tight-and-toned territory yet, but their daily swimming sessions and had de-jiggled the junk in Lucy's trunk and firmed the flab on Polly's pleasing hourglass. They also sported a sun-tinged glow that sharply contrasted Tabitha's pallid complexion. With each passing day, more of Tabitha's entourage headed to the deep end while Tabitha got closer to going off it.

Lucy and Polly relished every moment. It was hard to believe what began as the worst summer ever had become the best.

Until the day it wasn't.

August 24th began like any other. Dean was off, so it was left to Polly and Lucy to scour the sides of the pool. Then, once the pool opened, they scoured Tabitha's sides for wear-and-tear to her bathing suit. A small vertical tear had appeared the previous week that, like Tabitha, was growing bigger each day. Pale flesh peeked from the slit like a waxing moon, growing fuller with every guzzle of Coke and bite of pizza. The dime-sized circle of flesh was now a nickel that begged for a Doughboy finger poke.

"Inkthay it'llyay akemay ityay otay aborlay ayday?" Polly asked.

"Onay ayway," Lucy said.

The girls were still debating the odds of their unexpected summertime gift unwrapping itself before the seasonal facility's last hurrah, when Tabitha suddenly lurched forward in her chair like someone pushed her from behind. The girls expected her to splash into the water, but she stayed seated as her head, shoulders and arms dangled from the platform like she was attempting to touch her toes. Lucy assumed she had dropped her pizza into the water, but there was only one thing floating on its surface—



A young girl, face down.

"Shit!"

Lucy blew her whistle and dove into the water, its shrill shriek becoming a noiseless trail of bubbles as she broke the surface. Two strong strokes and she emerged in the shallow end where she grabbed the girl—who was maybe four years-old and as light and as limp as a ragdoll—and hoisted her onto land. In an instant, Lucy was alongside her, pumping her chest.

"1...2...3...1...2...3."

Lucy was vaguely aware of the cloud-like canopy covering them. "Please step back," someone said. Polly. Someone else was crying. The girl's mother perhaps.

"1...2...3...1...2...3."

Lucy checked if the girl was breathing. She wasn't. Lucy tilted the girl's head and delivered two quick breaths into her mouth before continuing compressions.

"1...2...3...1...2...3."

Suddenly, the girl erupted into a fit of coughs, spits, and sputters and the crowd erupted into gasps, claps, and cheers. The girl scrambled to her feet, unfazed and embarrassed by the attention, and Polly helped her find her family.

Lucy remained on her knees, as if in prayer, as the shadows closed in. "Nice work!" "Great job!" "You're a hero!"

She didn't feel like a hero. She felt nothing.

One by one, the shadows drifted away like clouds from a passing storm, until only one remained. The blubbing girl. Not the mother.

Tabitha.

Then Lucy *did* feel something. Anger. She scrambled to her feet, clutched Tabitha's meaty bicep, and whisked her away from the crowd.

"Where the fuck were you?"

"I...I...I"

"You, you, you, what?"

Fresh tears streamed down Tabitha's cheeks and dropped to the deck. "I got stuck."

Tabitha turned her back to Lucy. Angry lines, as red as her bathing suit, ran horizontally across her backside just above and below her butt. Apparently, her ass had wedged in the gap between the platform's trellis seat and backing. The wound looked splintery, raw, and painful.

Lucy didn't care.

"Your being here is dangerous," Lucy said, before turning towards the office. She intended to fill-out an incident report that would open Dean's 'love is blind' eyes to that fact.

"Please don't tell Dean."

Lucy whipped around, intending to lay into Tabitha, but stopped short. Tabitha's pool blue eyes were flooded with tears and her cheeks were as rosy as the wounded ones below her waist. She looked pathetic.

"Fine," Lucy sighed. "But you need to get your act together..." Then she punctuated her final words with a Pillsbury poke of Tabitha's belly:

"Flabby Tabby!"

Later that day, Lucy stewed on her lifeguard platform, barely acknowledging the waves and thumbs-up from the appreciative crowd. Her eyes bore into Tabitha, who cast a sheepish glance back at Lucy from her own platform.

Why did I give her a second chance? Lucy thought. Guilt? Pity? A combination of both? Then she ran through a series of 'what ifs,' that turned her anger to nausea: What if it had been my day off? What if I hadn't worn my contacts? What if I had been distracted by Tabitha a few seconds longer?

Lucy shuttered. All she knew was it wasn't going to happen again.

What she didn't know was her regretful pardon was merely a stay of execution. Labor Day was looming, and the steady stream of ducks headed south suggested they were due for a hard fall.

Especially Tabitha.