

The Adventures of an Inveterate Pool Crasher

It's barely nine and the temperature has already climbed into the triple digits. Sweat's dripping down my neck and I'm considering spending the day soaking in the bathtub to cool off when my phone pings with a text from Rose: "I'm on my way over. Who do we know that has a pool?" I slip into a bikini, toss on a caftan and throw my towel in my bag. When Rose screeches to a stop a few minutes later, I'm ready. In a desert town like Los Angeles, water is money. Those with pools wield the power. The rest of us beg for an invite or go to the beach. I prefer my water heated and without sand so, with Rose as my partner-in-crime, I've learned how to pool crash. The question hangs in the air: whose pool should we try today?

Rose and I weigh the pros and cons of the names in our contacts as we head to Trader Joe's to pick up goodies. Into our cart go the kind of snacks that evoke European vacations: craft beer, cold wine, prosciutto, crusty bread, cheese, olives. Twenty-five ninety-eight should buy us enough good will for a full day by someone's pool. But whose? The A-list, our actual friends, are quickly eliminated — Jeff's out of town, Laurel and David have friends for the weekend, we were at Jessica's two weeks ago. Next up, the periphery friends, the B-listers who are not part of your inner circle. We make a couple of calls but no luck there. It's on to the C-tier, people you've only seen in groups. When we get to Nick, someone Rose knows from her married days, her eyes light up. "I have a good feeling about this," she says. I try to ascertain the outcome as they chat. Her tone with him is casual and non-committal; desperation is the death knell in a pool negotiation. She hangs up with a look of triumph. We're in! We swing out of the parking lot and head towards Beverly Hills.

That particular afternoon proves to be a fruitful one. Nick and I flirt, splashing each other like kids at a water park. By the time the sun sets, I have a new beau and an all-access pass to a lushly landscaped pool. To top it all off there's a hot tub, a sauna and a closet just for towels. What's left of the summer and fall prove blissful. When the following spring rolls around, I stock up on swimwear, anticipating another summer of weekends by his pool. But my euphoria is short-lived: Nick and I break up just as a record-breaking heatwave rolls in. I beg and plead but it's over. I've lost that lovely body of bath-temperature bliss forever.

Rose and I return to our pool-crashing ways. Unfortunately, the unrelenting heat quickly leaves our address books parched. It's not long before we've exhausted the goodwill of everyone we know with a pool. In desperation, I pick up a set of sprinkler attachments. We set them up in Rose's backyard and, for a few weeks, we content ourselves with running through them. But they don't quench our lust for a pool. And then it hits me. Of course: hotel pools. Cabanas! Lounge chairs! Poolside snack service! We agree to try our luck the following weekend.

Hotel pools call for a different strategy. With access often restricted to guests, slipping past the front desk can be tricky. In anticipation of this, Rose and I compile a back-up list. The following Saturday, with Rose's daughter Bella in tow, we set out for our first choice: the rooftop of The Standard Downtown. But operation hotel pool is immediately thwarted. We're not the only people with water on brain. It feels like half the city is lined up to take the elevator to the top floor. Disappointed, we head towards our next target. But we strike out there too: The London, in

West Hollywood, is closed to outsiders. Next stop, The Beverly Hilton. We're within steps of the water when the security guard notices that my guest pass is expired. I'm all for throwing in the towel, heading back to Rose's and cranking up the sprinklers when she remembers a hotel in the Marina we might be able to sneak into.

"We're already this far into it," she reasons as we head west. We go over our strategy: Rose will lead the way, digging through her purse, feigning the distraught mother. We pull Bella into our plan: she'll streak by, a kid looking for her parents. "If they stop me, I'll just tell them it's my birthday," Bella pipes up, "Nobody's gonna stop a kid on their birthday." "That's my girl," Rose says. I'll hold the rear position, intent on a pretend phone conversation. The ruse works. We're in.

But that only takes care of one day out of one weekend of what is proving to be an insistently hot and oppressive summer. Then Cecily, a new acquaintance, invites me over for dinner. As I push through the front door on the way to her apartment, I'm stopped dead in my tracks by the tiled pool that is the centerpiece of her building. While I curse myself for not getting a better bottle of wine, I'm determined to cement this friendship come hell or pool water. And I give it my all: I empathize with her man troubles, I praise her efforts in the kitchen, I suggest drinks — my treat — the following week. But, after three lady-dates there are no suggestions we take our social engagements waterside. Seriously? What part of "wow, the pool in your building is gorgeous" does she not understand?

And then I get "the call": friends of friends are going out of town for two weeks and the gig includes a pool. Would I mind housesitting? Mind? I say yes before they have time to change their mind. I'm so excited, I broadcast the news on social media. Pooooool, I write. The word needs no explanation. That post gets three hundred likes, my biggest ever. Rose and I plan a party.

The power is intoxicating. This is what being model-gorgeous or having big boobs must feel like; everyone hits on you, everyone wants to give you something, everyone is at your beck and call. The next few days can only be compared to a drug-induced haze as I experience a marathon of invitations, flirtatious conversations, artisanal cheeses and expensive wines. Like a kid on Christmas morning, I pop awake at dawn: "I have a pool!" I splash around in the shallow end, pretending to swim laps. I perfect the water-soaked hair flip. I Instagram poolside selfies. By mid-morning, though the marine layer has yet to fully burn off, my phone is blowing up. The calls and texts affect that faux-casual attitude I know too well and I quickly learn how to use it to my advantage. Almost everyone offers to bring something; when they don't, I become brazen. By the end of that first weekend, I have enough cases of my favorite French rosè to see me through the end of the year and one hundred and fifty new followers.

And then, disaster strikes.

A new editor I'd been pitching emails with my first assignment. With a deadline of one week, I hunker down. At home, this isn't a challenge; my friends have gotten used to my occasional disappearances. But, when you have a house with a pool, this becomes a problem that's only exacerbated by the spike in temperature. "Hahaha," my friends text back when I say I'm working, sure that I'm joking. Rose, to whom I've extended an open invite, drops by with Bella and a few of her friends. What am I supposed to do? "We won't be in your way," Rose promises. But, after an afternoon of splashing and yelling, I have to kick them out. I feel guilty but the noise is

killing my concentration. Getting rid of the physical bodies doesn't help. The text messages, emails and phone calls continue unabated. The disappointment, when I explain that I need to be alone, is palpable, despite the layers of technology. There are even a few angry emails. What had been a joyous advantage just a few days ago has now become an albatross. Suddenly, having a pool doesn't seem like such a good idea. Sure, the grass on the other side is wetter, but it leaves a lot of mud in its wake. When the owners email that they're unexpectedly coming back a few days early, I'm relieved.

I'm back home now and, while I miss the pool, I'm content: I have a place where I won't be disturbed, friends who understand when work takes precedence, a bathtub and plenty of chilled rosè.