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nonfiction



by Holly Coleman

When I worked at American Apparel, Sasha Grey modeled the assless tights. Officially, they were called Sheer Luxe Cut Out Pantyhose. We had a huge poster of her, an entire wall of tights in every color

imaginable. I got a pair for free, so I could try them out and sell them better.

Product knowledge.

The first thing I learned was that assless tights are surprisingly versatile. I wore mine over a gold lamé halter bodysuit and under a black pencil skirt. The bodysuit covered the area the tights did not, and the skirt covered the whole operation. I could demonstrate the layering to a customer without removing anything, which was a major selling point.

They can take you from day to night.

This was a standard retail promise. Day to night. Desk to dinner. Work to weekend. You could wear the same outfit to a job interview or an orgy, provided you were interviewing at the right company. I was employed by one such company.

I remember stopping at a local coffee shop for a double shot early one morning, on my way to open the store. Everyone was dressed for work. I was too.

There were people in button-downs, people in cardigans, people whose clothes suggested that their employers provided health insurance. I was wearing the aforementioned gold lamé halter bodysuit, assless tights, and a pencil skirt. I had spent considerable time getting dressed. (Dov Charney himself had inspected a photo of me wearing the outfit and gifted it to me. “Comp it!”)

There was a sequence: bodysuit first, then tights, then skirt. I had a system. I was an adult woman with a job.

By nine in the morning, I was standing beneath Sasha, prepared to discuss the benefits of a garment that had deliberately omitted one of its principal responsibilities.

Can I help you find anything? Just looking? Of course. Let me know if you have any questions.

I love the phrase *just looking*. It relieves both parties of any immediate obligation. The customer can look. I can stand nearby. We can both enjoy a few moments of mutual uncertainty beneath the enormous photograph of a porn star.

Have you seen these? They’re actually really comfortable.

This was the opening move. Comfort. You have to establish comfort before introducing the possibility of an exposed ass. People are generally receptive to comfort. They like the idea of being comfortable. They will purchase almost anything if you can persuade them that it’s comfortable, including shoes that are visibly causing them pain.

You just have to break them in!

I would explain that the tights were designed to be layered. You didn’t necessarily have to wear them with your ass out. That was simply one of the available configurations.

I would gesture toward my skirt.

I’m wearing them right now.

This was the moment when the interaction became educational.

The customer could see that I was just a regular person. A girl-next-door type. A college student. I had a job. I was standing upright. I could operate a cash register. The tights had not interfered with my ability to participate in society.

You could wear them under a pencil skirt, I explained. *Or with a bodysuit. Or with a longer top, depending on what you're going for.*

I tried to avoid asking what anyone was going for. This was a personal question. I was there to facilitate the purchase, not investigate the customer's intentions. Although I was curious.

I am always curious about what people intend to do with their clothes. I like watching someone choose an outfit for an occasion I know nothing about. A woman buying a mesh dress at three in the afternoon. A man purchasing a white button-down shirt and a single pair of socks. A girl trying on six identical black skirts and looking increasingly dissatisfied with all of them.

Where are they going?

Who will be there?

What has happened?

What is about to happen?

But the assless tights weren't a mystery. They were a solution.

I showed the customer the tights wall.

We had pink, blue, green, yellow, purple. Colors you would ordinarily associate with tropical fish, children's birthday parties, or serious chemical spills.

The assless ones came only in black.

This made sense to me. Black was elegant. Black was timeless. Black was appropriate for almost any occasion. A woman could purchase assless tights in black and reasonably expect to get years of use out of them, provided her circumstances remained favorable. Black goes with everything, after all. Even gold lamé.

A customer might ask whether they were difficult to wear.

Not at all, I would say. *You just have to think about what you're pairing with them.*

And BONUS: they were made in Los Angeles. Sweatshop free!

We were very proud of this. There were signs about it. There were advertisements about it. The ethical dimension of the purchase was prominently displayed alongside the sexual one.

You could have a bare ass and a clear conscience!

I found this appealing. I still do, in theory.

The customer might hesitate. This was natural. Assless tights are not an impulse purchase for everyone. Some people needed time to imagine the possibilities. Some people needed to consult a

friend, or a lover. Some people had never considered that their existing tights might be providing unnecessary coverage.

I could wait. I was paid by the hour.

They're really fun, I'd say.

And they are!

I mean, they were. I don't know where mine ended up. I haven't seen them in years. They may be in a landfill somewhere, tangled around a broken Duck umbrella or a plastic jelly shoe. They may have been donated to a thrift store, where someone discovered them and tried to determine whether the missing fabric was intentional.

I hope they were resold. I hope somebody got a good deal. I hope the person working the register knew what they were.

I hope she said, "Wow. These can take you from day to night."



Holly Coleman is the author of Good Girl (Tough Poets Review, 2026). Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in The American Poetry Review, The Sun, Hobart, Passages North, The Whitney Review of New Writing, Dream Boy Book Club, On the Rag, and elsewhere.

for whom shall i perform? ›