

*a Lesbian walks into a bra store*

By El Newell

You lie in the interview.

*I just love these bras. I just love how gender-neutral they are. Period underwear slays. You as a queer woman living in today's society is a big lit-up triple seven in their eyes. You're wearing a bra you bought in seventh-grade, the second worst shopping trip you've ever taken. It's falling apart, drenched in sweat. You don't remember the last time you had your period. You get the job. They can't wait to bring you onboard.*

The number-one-worst-shopping-trip is when they ask you to try on all the bras they sell. We sell. *All of them?* Yes. We want to be able to recommend our favourites to our customers. *Having a "favourite bra" is an oxymoron.* They laugh like wind chimes. The fitting room is bright snow. You avoid your own eyes like the plague. Take a breath. Shove your baggy tee back on the next.

You wear low cut tops to the job. You wear the bra they gave you. You pitch-your-voice-up-smile wider. Your winning attitude sells. Your eyeliner doesn't hurt. Your hair is long and it frizzes in the presence of the clothing steamer. You get more steam burns that summer than anything else, reverberating down to your core.

The fitting process is mechanical. Simple. Requires one measuring tape and two hands. A soft voice and a sympathetic ear. You wrap the measuring tape around busts, breasts, hips, hundreds of times a day, You feel like you're the one being constricted. You walk into a fitting room with a half naked woman and feel nothing but shame- the bubblegum walls and bright mirror turning into lockers and sinks- gym clothes discarded on the floor- staring resolutely at a broken piece of tile and *absolutely nothing else*. Not that it matters. Not like you care. You are the epitome of calmness.

It's a weird place to work, as a lesbian. It's a weird place in general. Before this, you've tried very hard to not think too much about your vagina, and now it's a main selling point. Strangers ask you about your period more times than your doctor. But you haven't seen a doctor in a while, to be fair. For 40 hours a week old women look you up and down. Their

daughter looks about your size, they tell you. You're not sure if you look about your own size, in a too-small crop top. You look like a lot of daughters that summer. You are an ever-shifting kaleidoscope of femininity.

Head office has a shortage on name tags, allegedly, so it's a long, anonymous summer before you get yours. The conservative she/they sits heavy on your chest, and you see customers stare. You wonder if it's better to have not have asked for one in the first place. But before that, you get young-lady'd and she'd and you're-so-beautiful'd the daily. It's nice, in a dissociative way. You've firmly put real you and bra-salesman-you in two different boxes- shedding the latter like a snake when you walk home in the July heat.

Your coworkers are nice, to be fair. So, so, so nice. The only other queer girl is trans, and when she gets harassed at work, corporate sends a little rainbow sticker to put on the window- *this is a place of no hate*. They send cupcakes the next week. They're pretty good. You never stop feeling uneasy. She takes to working in the back, pulling stock- tells you it's a way better deal, if she was gonna get screamed at by a 50 year old woman, at least now she's getting something of it. You don't want to agree, on principle, but her impressions score a belly laugh. It almost sounds like your own.

Mom's bring their kids in, first bra, first period underwear- which- isn't that a *statement*. You got your period in 2014. Your mom handed you a book about puberty and a box of pads. You felt like you were burning up. These kids aren't much better. Some of them are gay. You *know*, obviously, you know. One of them asks you which bra has the most compression and you want to look them in the eyes so badly and say that you get it. You know what it's like to turn off the lights when you shower. To not look in the mirror. You hate to wear a swimsuit, but you love to swim. *The period-proof swim shorts ones are 30% off, can I grab you some to try?* You understand. But you don't say this, how can you? But. *Oh, yeah, I get it. I don't like bras either.* You find them a sports bra. You hope they wear it, and they look like they're burning up as their mom gets out her credit card. You wish you could say good luck. Good luck, good luck, good luck. You think you're a bad queer. *Here's your receipt.* You just wave and smile like jagged rocks. You laugh like windchimes.

The funniest thing about working in a bra store, is that the bras aren't very good. The top shelf sports bras go for \$90. You make \$18.50 an hour. You feel a bit like a cheap swindler

that summer. You feel like Matilda's dad. *Oh, girl, you look amaaaazing. You need one in every colour.* The bras are like tissue paper in water. They never stop stretching. They slough off of you like a second skin.

You becomes like a fucked up sleeper agent- a machine built to automatically size tits of all kinds. You're a 34DD. You tell many, many, people this. You wear a size large in the underwear. A small country has this information. But the bras. They stretch. They stretch, and you were never allowed to tell people this. It was freezing there, too. The entire province of Ontario has seen your nipples.

One of your last weeks at the bra store- on a sweaty, blinding, August day-off- a man catcalls you at a park. You've coined the term *reverse* cat-call, actually. It's how it always goes. He calls you pretty in one breath and then an ugly fucking freak in the next as he spies the foliage of your unshaven legs peeking out under the hem of your sweltering jeans. He is the reason you wear them. You invent a girlfriend- tell him she doesn't care about hair. He laughs, calls you a dyke, says it *makes sense*. You make an exit- less than victorious. You walk home feeling like spoiled milk.

You laugh like windchimes. You measure, you sell, you google *good short haircuts for round faces*. Again, again, again.

You wish this had taught you something. You selfishly, embarrassingly, had hoped for it since you began. It's nice to learn lessons through life, like a gasping heroine in a book. It's altogether disappointing to feel as if a psychological seismic shift has just grazed you. Like this was meant to be your coming-of-age breakthrough. This summer of hyperfemininity would have taught you something about being a lesbian, about *not* being a woman, society, feminism, whatever. You think maybe there was a point, and you missed it while you were restocking underwear. You coworkers tell you when you leave they should get a robot to go around and say *slay*, and it'll be like you're still there. They're probably right.

*Hey girl! What are you looking for today? Something with structure? Sorry- something with structure that won't stretch- Awesome, yes, totally- I've got just the bras for you. Is it okay if I just give you a quick measurement? Awesome, great- so if you want to just turn around, and I'm gonna come around and put this over the widest part of your bust. Great, 38. Awesome.*

*Now I'm gonna measure your band, you tell me if it's too tight. Ok, awesome. 34- slay, we're so matching. Twins! Okay, so I'm gonna go grab you those bras, but you just sit tight, and I'll get them right to you. My top, aww slay, thank you! Winners! Yours is so cute too. Ok I'll be right back.! Bye!*