

Revised seminal sartorial piece

Property of A&Fitch

Vested with stubborn fixation, I steered my mother towards the black shutters that enclosed my fashion dream: I was going to (convince my mother to) buy my first brand name clothing. My parents had always been practical shoppers, and my mother had an aptitude for haggling over prices, so usually the cheapest clothing made its way to my closet. For a while, I never really cared. But at twelve years old, I started to notice that other people did. Eyes glossed over me, as if I blended in with the dull lockers, and I was edged out of conversations with girls decked in designer logos. One of the “cool” girls, Nyah, once walked up to me after Algebra and scoffed, “Sonali, *what* are you wearing? Where are those from?”, eyeing my faded navy sweatpants, repulsed. Another girl, Shreya, dragged me to the bathroom with her as she fixed her hair; I watched, entranced, as she deliberately tucked her A&Fitch tee behind a braided belt and adjusted her immaculate braids so they splayed over her Juicy jacket. She noticed me watching and said, “You know, you could be pretty too, if you tried,” glancing at my baggy shirt over non-ripped Gap jeans. Soon enough, I wanted nothing less than to strut down the hallways of middle school as a “cool” sixth grader, just like everyone else.

Plastered with blown-up images of models garbed in the branded attire – or in some cases, sparsely covered in it (you could see more skin than cloth) – the Oxford Valley Abercrombie & Fitch department store always got a second glance from passerby. I internally oohed and aahed at the fashionable superiority exuded from the black-and-white, impatient-looking faces. My mother, however, with a disgruntled expression contorting her face, had to be pulled through the darkness. Her nose wrinkled as we stumbled through wafts of

perfume and she pursed her lips when the blaring music reached a thunderous climax. I would spot a cute outfit, flip over the price tag, and then hurriedly conceal it within the folds of fabric, so my mother wouldn't know I was considering buying something so expensive. Nonetheless, some of the "sale" signs – "50% off jeans – Now only \$50!" or "Buy 2 Jeans, Get One Free" or "Don't miss this steal! \$45 Tanks" – etched more disbelief into her face; her eyebrows climbed higher as the prices grew more obscene. I knew her patience was wearing thin, but I was still determined. I tugged her arm and led us to the narrow clearance section, where I hoped red lines and crossed-out initial prices offered some hope. The (slightly) more reasonable prices breathed a cool spell over my mother's tension, and sighing in relief, I went about performing price checks among the clearance rows. I always checked the price first, and then contemplated the clothing. Spotting "\$12.50" in red text, I pulled the sweater off its hanger. A deep, royal blue, thin, and most importantly, emblazoned with "Property of A&Fitch" in white fabric letters, it was exactly what I was looking for. Admittedly, it wasn't anything especially pretty or unique, but it boasted the brand name, loud and clear, on its front. That was all I needed.

I finally had a place among the girls whose every article of clothing featured a brand name. Nyah and Shreya nodded at my outfits in approval and – was it possible? – slight jealousy. "Where did you get that top? I really like it," Shreya told me, playing with the spaghetti straps poking out from my thin Hollister sweater. Little did she know, it only cost \$7.95 after clearance. And so began my obsession: I resolved to (convince my mother to) buy all the brand name clothing I could at the cheapest prices I could find. So maybe I could play the part without having to pay the price for it.

The double act continued into high school. I pretended that I cared about high-end clothing, when really I was only using it to spare myself from social isolation—I didn't want to be ridiculed by Nyah and Shreya. But I started feeling like I was wearing a different person than who I was. The frugal shopper who pounces on red-lined tags and discount aisles didn't coincide with the teenager sporting designer outfits. Shame filtered into my conscience as I gradually developed a self-awareness about all the money I made my parents spend. The semi-ridiculing, semi-joking comments from my dad that I dismissed before – "A crop top?? You paid *more* money for *less* clothing???" and "You could find the same quality Walmart jeans at \$10" – now made me think twice. It took me years to unlearn the way I was socialized to care about clothing.

I continue to wear my Abercrombie sweater, even now, because I don't want my parents' money to go to waste. When I look at it now, the word "Property" stands out to me. How was I so willing to wear a shirt that named itself, and, transitively, its wearer, property? It felt more like the clothing owned me, not the other way around.