

AFTER HOURS

# All I Want for Christmas is the Perfect Pair of PJs

**W**ith the holidays approaching, many women are making up their wish lists, noting the beautiful shearling coat they'd spotted in a store, or the Man Ray they'd wanted since Photography 101. They're dreaming of exotic trips, diamond earrings, Hermès bags, and rare pieces of Chanel haute couture. As for me, I'm dreaming of the perfect pair of pajamas.

I want to look good when someone takes my picture beneath the Christmas tree. This particular quirk is a throwback to a different time, when the photos in my childhood album showed me in a variety of nightgowns that called to mind "Granny" in *Little Red Riding Hood*. The one exception was the Carmen Miranda number decorated with tropical fruit. While this might have been marginally acceptable if we'd lived in Florida, we were from Massachusetts. There was snow on the ground that year.

"Smile!" my mother said as my father snapped a picture of me with my lips puckered.

"Is this from Santa?" I asked, worried that I might not be able to return it. I was relieved to see "Love, Mummy" on the gift tag.

My mother wanted to exchange it for mother-daughter nightgowns in pink. It was then I made the radical announcement that I was only going to wear pajamas. "*What?*" my mother said. "Girls don't wear pajamas. They wear nightgowns."

"So what are these?" I said, pointing to a pair in the girls' department of the store. They had comets and moons on them and were perfect for nighttime stargazing.

"They're science pajamas," my mother said. "You wouldn't understand them."

I wore them until the shooting stars disappeared and the moons developed craters and holes. My next favorite was a fleecy pair with attached feet. For some reason, my bedroom was the coldest in the house. My



Claudette Colbert, wearing Clark Gable's pajamas in *It Happened One Night*.

mother chalked it up to the "angle of the wind," which made no sense, but the feet were especially helpful when traversing the icy floor.

In high school, I saw *It Happened One Night*, Frank Capra's 1934 screwball comedy, starring Claudette Colbert as a spoiled heiress and Clark Gable as a cynical newspaper reporter. In one of the film's classic scenes, they wind up in a twin-bedded room, which Gable divides by hanging a blanket on a clothesline and then he tosses Colbert his "best" pajamas. They're obviously too big, but she looks far sexier in them than Jean Harlow ever did in her clingy negligees. When I arrived at college, most of the girls in my dorm were wearing flimsy baby-dolls. It was the height of the women's movement. Students were protesting the Vietnam War. The baby-dolls weren't the only reason I transferred, but I can't discount them entirely.

Once I moved to New York, my mother would always give me L.L. Bean red-plaid flannel pajamas for Christmas. She claimed that red "brightened up" my face.

I didn't have the heart to tell her that I didn't like them. Eventually,

my younger sister did. I felt so terrible, I immediately called my mother to tell her I loved them.

"I thought so," my mother said. "Red really brightens up your face."

"What does that mean exactly?" I asked.

"It means you're pale as a ghost," she said.

My husband and I were married right before Christmas. (I like to think that's the only reason I wore a red suit.) When I went to Bloomingdale's for "honeymoon pajamas," the saleswoman told me there was no such thing. She steered me toward the negligee section, where I looked through a dozen options, each more "womanly" than the last. "I want pajamas like the ones Claudette Colbert wore in *It Happened One Night*," I said. She hadn't seen the movie and tried to convince me to buy a pink satin negligee with a plunging V-neck, ruffles, and matching peignoir. I left empty-handed.

**T**his year I started my holiday-pajama shopping early. I went to Barneys, where I found a nice saleswoman and reeled off my requirements: white cotton, slim piping, at least one chest pocket, an open collar, and drawstring bottoms. "In a size small," I added.

"This is what we have," she said, pointing to a limited selection. I didn't see white, but I was partial to a handsome gray pair. She didn't have it in small, but she did have a blue pair in medium by the company Sleepy Jones. Despite the red piping, I tried them on. "Red really picks up your face," the saleswoman said.

The bottoms had pockets and the fit was good so I bought them. Still, I couldn't get Gable's white pajamas out of my head. Since the movie was in black and white, the pajamas could have been any color, though I couldn't imagine Gable in pink or yellow. Suddenly, I began to think of other larger-than-life men and remembered the artist and filmmaker Julian Schnabel, who famously wore his pajamas everywhere. For more than 17 years he was married to Olatz Schnabel, who, among other things, designs pajamas. I figured if you lived with a guy who lived in his pajamas, you'd be more qualified than most to design the perfect ones.

And she has. (They're available at her namesake store and website.) I bought a pair in herringbone-patterned white cotton, with three pockets and a drawstring waist. They're unisex, so while they're roomy, they're also Claudette Colbert sexy. Olatz occasionally does special orders, and since I wanted them fast, I settled on red piping.

So for Christmas this year I'll have two great pairs of pajamas. If anyone cares to take my picture, red really does brighten up my face. ♦



UNDER COVER

**RAW SILK FOR HIM**

After 60 years of crafting delicate, sensual lingerie for women, **La Perla** is now in the menswear game. This year the legendary silk house introduced a full range of masculine lounge attire and beachwear. The collection includes raffia robes, kimono-inspired gilets, slim-cut swim trunks,

and even a slip-on sneaker. The wide-leg pajama pants, a multipurpose standout of the collection, are available in raw silk, cashmere, and handwoven cotton. The cut is low-slung and loose for sleeping, relaxing, or—as La Perla suggests—wearing outside the house.

—Lauren Joseph

JENS MORTENSEN