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Amazon Trail: Butch Clothes Horse

My friend the pianist called me a clothes-horse. Moi! Who only buys what's left at the 50% off sale-price clearance sales, thrift stores and garage sales. Me, whose daily uniform consists of jeans and a long-sleeved shirt or jeans and a short-sleeved shirt. With the same vest day in and day out, changing only with the season.

The pianist and the handy dyke are helping me to move. While the handy dyke was a whirlwind of touching up, repairing, watering, cleaning and hauling, the pianist surveyed my closet in preparation for packing. I had to beg her to explain why she was doubled over hiding suppressed laughter behind her hand.

"Butch clothes horses!" she spluttered.

"What?" I asked. All I saw was the bathrobe my mother sent me several years ago, a robe too girly for me to wear, but which might come in handy for a guest. Oh, and some flannel shirts that are two small for



me at present and some other flannel shirts waiting for cold weather and some short-sleeved flannel shirts that I can wear about twice a year during a brief window of just-right weather. Why was she laughing?

It's true that I have a tendency to buy two of an item I like, or more if the price is irresistible. The handy dyke and the pianist and I once stopped at an unpromising-looking end-of-day garage-sale fund-raiser being held in a hard-to-access corner of a football stadium. The handy dyke didn't even bother to get out of the van, but I found four comfy-large quality sweat-shirts, hardly worn, for a quarter apiece. I had no problem with two advertising Disneyland - I thought it was a hoot, never having been there - another portraying Tweety Bird, or the fourth, which was colored a garish green. At an earlier garage sale that day I'd nabbed another oversized sweatshirt simply because it hailed from Steamboat, Iowa, a great name for a Midwestern town. Does that make me a clothes horse?

Once in a while I do spend real money on clothes, usually on vests. I like a light vest I can wear daily in the summer, to stash wallet, keys, cell phone, PDA, something to read and other necessities of life. My old one was so ratty I intensively researched a replacement on line and found the most economical, well-vented and multi-pocketed at amateurgeologist.com. Yesterday, while checking out at a store where pre-season flannel shirts were selling for \$5.99 (I only bought two), the cashier admired my vest, commenting that they were better than purses. Then she grievously wounded me by sharing that she'd found hers at Goodwill.

Also, I admit that I am weak when it comes to catalogues like The Territory Ahead and have succumbed to three of their nifty, immortal and overpriced vests in the past decade.

A few years ago I signed on for an L.L. Bean credit card in order to get an additional discount on a clearance item - rain pants -- at one of their outlets. Shipping is free with the card, as it used to be when I first ordered from them decades ago. Bean rewards me with coupons. Pretty simultaneously I fell in love with L.L. Bean two-chest-pocket sunwashed canvas shirts and figured out, if I waited for them to go on sale, which they have every year so far, I could collect most of the colors, one or two a year, free. The pianist had not even gotten to that rainbow-colored part of my closet when she had her laughing fit.

My clothing inventory (which certainly does not make me a butch clothes horse) is complicated by weight gains and losses for the last twenty years. Why discard my size 32 jeans when I am sure to fit in them as soon as I lose this weight again? Or the size 34s? Ad infinitum. My mother used to do storage by seasons; I wonder how many other daughters do it by weight.

I once got rid of all my small and laundry-shrunk t-shirts and kept only two for their sentimental value. I know it's time to do this again, but darn it all, that's like giving away an archive. So what if I never wear them - this year the local department stores put Hawaiian-style shirts on the clearance racks early in the season so my t-shirts got short shrift.

Does this tendency to buy and collect clothes make me a clothes horse? And is it a butch characteristic? The handy dyke isn't big on clothes, but then, she lives with the laughing pianist. On the other hand, I recently went out to play with my friend the librarian and her partner. The librarian scored from the clothes racks in both thrift stores we visited. But who spotted the shirts she couldn't resist and who brought them to her attention? Her femme partner, of course. If some butches (not me) are clothes horses, who do we dress for? ▼

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