

Craigslust

The Birthday Boy had to have a motorcycle jacket. I wanted him to have one. So I arranged a noncasual encounter.



I emerged from the vegetative coma I'd slumped into while finishing my last novel, stretched, looked around, and discovered that (a) our house looked as if the Collyer brothers—the notorious pack rats overcome by towers of their own junk—lived there and (b) our only child was turning eighteen the next day. ¶ I had probably suppressed this last bit of knowledge, since buying presents had become such a fraught activity. In the early years, it was a breeze—a very cost-effective breeze. I would wrap up whatever I found lying around the house: pepper mill, stapler, bag of charcoal briquettes. The Birthday Boy would delight in shredding off the wrapping paper, toss the “gift” aside, crawl into the box, and have the “hours of fun” promised by commercials that actual toys failed to deliver (possibly because his mother had neglected to buy sixteen D batteries). ¶ All too soon, however, he wised up, and actual gifts were forced to enter the equation. Thank God for those crafty Danes and their Legos. Many a happy birthday rolled by with the Lego

bot, giving way to the Lego log cabin, the Lego starship, the Lego particle accelerator. Then there was the year when, like most parents around the world, we participated in the pyramid scheme that was Pokémon cards and paid exorbitant sums for pieces of cardboard. It would have been cheaper to simply draw Pikachu's picture on \$50 bills and wrap *those* up. Had I only known. After Charizard and Squirtle left our lives, we entered the years when the answer to “What do you want for your birthday?” was invariably “A new computer.” From there it escalated alarmingly to this year's request: “A new car.” Fairly certain that the B'day Boy didn't mean a squared-off yellow-red-and-blue Danish-made car he could snap together himself, I conveniently forgot the whole matter.

Until the day before the monumental eighteenth, when I came to and went straight from hibernation to hysteria. Fortunately, I had a clue: I'd glimpsed Internet searches for “motorcycle jacket” on the B-Boy's computer. Unfortunately, I'd also glimpsed price tags. Price tags high enough to explain why Joey Ramone apparently owned no clothing other than his iconic jacket. In any case, there was no time for shipping. Frantic, I defaulted to my solution to all of life's tough problems: Call girlfriends and sisters. One of the first responders suggested that I try Craigslust.

I was dubious. Several years ago, when a friend I was visiting in Boston introduced me to this phenomenon, I misheard “Craigslust” as “Kegelust.” I couldn't understand why there would be a Web site devoted to strengthening the pelvic muscles. My misapprehension was reinforced when my friend drew my attention to the “Casual Encounters” section. I left Boston believing that “Kegelust” was a specialty site catering to young men | CONTINUED ON PAGE tkk

BLITZKRIEG SHOP: To my amazement, I found a perfect Joey Ramone model that was dirt cheap.

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with time, and so much more, on their hands— young men who enjoyed posting cell phone photos of attributes whose most winning qualities were being “disease-free” and available at no cost to any lucky lady or gent wishing to rush over and claim them.

Then, like so many innovations, from the cell phone to the Dewey decimal system, Craigslust under its proper name wormed its way into my consciousness. I warily typed in the words “motorcycle jacket.” To my amazement, one popped up at exactly the price I wanted to

pay: dirt cheap. I fired up my regulation Suburban Mom gray Volvo station wagon and raced over to meet the seller.

Scott was waiting on the porch of his subdivision bungalow. He’d just finished mowing his lawn and was drinking a beer. He looked like Ricky Gervais—in his late thirties but with a slightly larger paunch and no twinkle in his eye. Or anywhere else. In fact, Scott was twinkle-free to the point of outright grumpiness.

Undeterred, I bounded up and stuck my hand out, eager to make my first Craigslust friend.

He ignored my hand and, without a word, languidly waved his Shiner longneck toward

the jacket, a perfect Joey Ramone model, hanging from the screen door.

“Is that it?” I asked brightly.

“Uh, yeah,” he answered, his tone adding, *You see any other motorcycle jackets up here?* He pointed again with the Shiner bottle. “I saw Sonic Youth, Jane’s Addiction, Beastie Boys, Smashing Pumpkins, and Nine Inch Nails in that jacket.”

“Wow. Great bands.”

He looked from me to the Volvo and narrowed his eyes. A thought bubble appeared above his head that read, *The last ‘great band’ you heard was backing up Enya.*

Scott didn’t seem terribly interested in selling the jacket, and that worried me. “Can I check out the size?” Without waiting for an answer, I slipped the jacket on. It was exactly too tight around my middle and too long in the sleeves. It would fit B-Boy perfectly.

I had to close the buy. “Well, Scott, you’ll be happy to know that it’s going to a good home. My son will carry on the bad-ass attitude.”

“Hey, lady, I’m selling the jacket. The attitude stays with me.”

From inside the house came the sound of young children squabbling. Their mother screamed at them and turned on cartoons. Loud.

“So why are you selling the jacket?”

Scott shrugged, turned toward the open door, and yelled, “I’m selling the jacket because SHE told me I HAD to sell the JACKET!”

The cartoons were turned up even louder. It was clear by then that the words “my youth” could be substituted for “the jacket.” At this point, a decent person would have backed delicately away and allowed the crisis intervention team to step in. I wasn’t that person. I was a person who had to come home with either a motorcycle jacket or a new car.

Desperate, I pulled up a little trick I’d learned for dealing with balky toddlers, the illusory choice (“Bun-bun, would you rather brush your teeth with the Mickey Mouse toothbrush or the Batman one?”). With more pep than a Longview coed rushing Pi Phi, I asked, “So, Scott, should I write you a check or would you prefer cash?”

Still wearing the jacket, I backed off the porch, stuffing twenties into Scott’s hand, jumped into the trusty Volvo, and gunned her out of there like the sweet, smokin’ getaway car she was.

The jacket was the biggest birthday hit since I wrapped the rice cooker in a refrigerator box. B-Boy put his present on and didn’t take it off for the next three days. As for me, I had had my first Craigslust encounter. It wasn’t casual, but I did come out of it wearing more clothes than I’d gone into it with, and I considered that a major score. ♣