

Perri Klass Stripe Dreams

And in my night dreams, I cover the world in stripes . . .

There are these stripes that I dream about. Now, when I say I dream about knitting, I don't just mean daydream. Yes, of course I daydream about knitting; I walk through a yarn store and happily imagine making all the sweaters I will never actually make, from tightly patterned guernseys to tiny-needle fair isles to elegant form-fitting beaded evening wear—you have to know yourself, and there are certain projects I just don't have in me—or couldn't have on me. Still, what joy to drool over the patterns on the magazine page, to stroke the sample finished projects in a store, to finger the yarns, and to let myself decide that well, if I ever did make such a thing, I would go for that particular turquoise, that misty heather, that bright bright red. But I also dream about knitting in the other sense; there are times that I close my eyes and go to sleep and wake up aware that my mind has been knitting in my sleep. (I wonder if there are any records of someone truly knitting in her sleep, as a part of sleepwalking? Wouldn't it be interesting to wake up and find an extra few rows, or even an extra few inches, on your project, that you had knitted in your sleep? And would it turn out that you had followed the pattern, or would your subconscious have taken you in some entirely new and unexpected direction?)

But as I was saying, I dream, in both senses, about stripes. I can stand in a yarn store, looking at a wall of yarn organized by shade and color, and I can begin to fantasize about striping something across the spectrum, matching the shades so that I move from color to color almost imperceptibly, but creating a symphony out of tiny tonal changes. I can look at the range of colors available in one particular kind of wool—Brown Sheep, say, or Manos del Uruguay, and up bubbles my fantasy of knitting the world's largest felted bag, striped in every shade of blue, or green, or most often purple, stripe on stripe on stripe on stripe. In my imagination, this is always a

bag knit in the round, a circular, or maybe globular bag, knit up from a round base, like a giant African basket, and in my fantasy it is huge, of course, because I want it to be big even after it is felted. On and on I knit my stripes of purple and mauve and lavender and orchid and lilac and magenta and violet and everything in between, as the bag gets big enough and round enough to hold the world—and then I felt it, and wait to see how the stripes blend and blur.

And in my night dreams, I cover the world in stripes again. I don't know why this should be, but I often wake up with the feeling that I have been dreaming about making a particular striped blanket, which is related very specifically to projects that I made about twenty years ago, when I went through a passionate phase of "magic ball" knitting. I had been reading Kaffe Fassett and I had been limiting my yarn store indulgences to single skeins of whatever appealed to me most, and I was knitting for my first child. Together, he and I would construct magic balls, cutting lengths from many many different skeins, tying them together, winding up the balls. And then I would knit those balls into sweaters or scarves, and my son and I would look together to see how the stripes came out—even, uneven, fat, thin. I never actually made a magic ball blanket, though I did make my son a patchwork blanket out of swatches, which I then sewed to a cotton backing, with a little cotton batting inside to make a kind of quilt. I still feel very attached to that blanket, which had some of the same hectic colorful chaos as a magic ball blanket—but it wasn't striped. The magic ball blanket that appears in my dreams is definitely striped—I have a huge ball, made of very very long pieces of different yarns—most often brown and grey, though I think sometimes I dream in brighter colors and the blanket changes, and I am knitting something very big. It's not a child's blanket at all. And the frustrating thing

is that I can't remember any context from the dream; I don't remember seeing other people, or knowing why I am making the blanket, or for whom. It's not like I can say to you, ah, yes, in my dreams I sit in a swing on the front porch of a gracious old Victorian house in Maine, and I knit a beautiful blanket as a gift for my grown-up daughter. That would be a daydream.

No, I just wake up with the memory of this blanket, striped in different colors and different textures, and I don't know whether it is my mind's way of relaxing at night—or the dream of a project to come—or a metaphor for life's next assignment—or something else entirely. I suppose I could invoke someone who can interpret dreams and their meaning (no, thank you, Dr. Freud, keep away from my knitting; sometimes a cigar is only a cigar, but I don't want the wool to smell of cigar smoke!).

Or else I could invoke the world's most famous quote about sleep and knitting, which comes from Macbeth:

*"Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast,"*

But that, of course, is Macbeth's lament that because he has committed terrible crimes, he is denied the pleasures of that knitting-up sleep. And I would argue that to dream about knitting while you sleep probably helps your sleep knit up your ravell'd sleeve of care doubly effectively.

Stripes were, of course, my very first venture, long ago, into knitting with more than a single color. I tied on a new yarn (probably in a scarf) and kept going, and discovered for myself what every knitter discovers, the difference between adding a stripe on the knit side of a stockinette project and adding it on the purl side, where you get that row of overlap. And I learned the vivid joys of seeing two dramatically contrasting colors side by side, and then the



more subtle pleasures, which still lure me today, of striping closely related shades.

I feel the flapping wings of a huge metaphor hovering near, something about stripes, about the way that the days of our lives and the years of our lives are the stripes we lay down, sometimes vividly contrasting, sometimes shading subtly, sometimes equal and regular in size and texture, sometimes dramatically varied. And yet, rather than end with something so grand and grandiose, I think I'll end with my mysterious dream blanket, and with the sense that secretly, at night, my mind is striping patterns that I may not ever fully understand. ☺

Perri is the author of *Two sweaters for my father* (XRX, Inc.), and with her mother, Sheila Solomon Klass, of *Every Mother is a Daughter: The Neverending Quest For Success, Inner Peace, and a Really Clean Kitchen* (Ballantine).