

Avoiding the Curse of the Boyfriend Sweater:

Dear Readers,

According to one of the polls by Clara Parkes on Knitter's Review, 41 % of us believe that, if you knit a sweater for someone to whom you are not married or engaged, you will break up. By her poll, 30% of us think that's nonsense. But 15% say they've experienced it firsthand.

Why? Because men seem less like members of a different gender, but members of something that is almost a different species--a wary sort of prey species that sees females of its own kind as predators. Maybe the BF figures if you'd commit that much time and effort and money to him, you're committed, and he's not *that* committed. So he ducks out. I think you have to be seeing someone for a while—six months to a year or so—before it's reasonable, and not premature, to make him a sweater.

Other reasons for him to flee? Maybe he thinks the sweater is horrendous, that he'd never wear it and it would hurt your feelings and the whole thing is just too complicated.

The last person I encountered who had a story about the Curse and her recent breakup was telling me her story over the last sleeve. The sweater was in college colors—Princeton orange and black--in stripes that would have made her departed BF look like one of those tabloid favorites, a Killer Bee. What would you do, had you been in his position? She said she was going to finish and wear it. Bet she didn't!

Somewhere between a month and six months to a year, it might reasonable and unthreatening to start with something smaller. A scarf? A hat? Mittens? Socks? A U neck or V neck sweater vest, rather than a full sweater? If a full sweater, consider replacing the beloved and ratty one, stained and fraying, that he's owned since high school or college.

But if it is going to be a actually new sweater that won't present a problem in and of itself, you need to stick to a conservative shape, in colors that he doesn't find unacceptable, in a modest yarn, plain or tweedy. Maybe superwash or an acrylic/wool blend for washability, and a plied yarn for durable good looks.

This is no time to try to "liven up his wardrobe," a mistake whether you're dating him, engaged to him, or married to him. No matter what, he does not want and will not wear a sweater in orange, unless he goes deer hunting, or anything in wild patterns or what men think of as "girl colors."

Stick with the colors men like: Cream to beige to brown to black. Blues in shades from denim to navy. Darker reds, such as wine colors. Greens from sage to forest. Long sleeves or none at all. A neck that won't make him feel strangled. A length that becomes

him, and no tight ribbing. Not a cardigan, unless he's the age that Mr. Rogers was when we knew and loved him. No bells or whistles, a yarn in worsted or Aran size on needles no smaller than #7 and no larger than #9, so it will go pretty quickly, fit under a jacket, and make him realize that it's not a big, menacing commitment of time, effort, and money.

Make sure it fits. Either measure the man, or measure a sweater he owns that looks good on him and that he likes. Correct any errors as you go. And when you've finished it, take special care with blocking and finishing and weaving in. You want it to look handmade, not homemade. You want him to want to wear it, and be proud to do so.

Avoid the kind of sweater that most of us make only for fiancés or husbands: the full-dress Aran or Fair Isle or Norwegian. They are obviously too much work, and too much time, for someone you're dating. I actually know someone who can knit a Norwegian ski sweater in a week, but I can't, and you probably can't. The last one I did took more than a month of evenings, on #0s and #2s. When it was done, someone said to me, "You made that? I've seen them, but I've never known anyone who actually made one."

Because I design a fair amount, and knit a lot, I don't have a problem with making sweaters that I end up giving to male friends, any more than I do with giving things to female friends. Any rational human being knows that one medium sized woman who knits a lot must give things away, and does. The gentlemen seem mostly to have welcomed the additions to their wardrobes.

My postman, the genial mayor-by-consent of my neighborhood, gets all kinds of things, and field-tests cold-weather gear for me. A faraway friend from my college years got Altiplano for his annual hiking trip. A friend from around the corner got Andes. A friend's boyfriend got a Balaclava for field testing when he was working at the South Pole. Some friends got cowboy hats, and some got socks, as I perfected those patterns, and I've sent scarves to more people than I can count.

So far, they are, all but one, still speaking to me. Be mindful, of course, that at 65, I'm probably a little beyond boyfriends, and the curse of the boyfriend sweater.

Best,

Pat