

Red

I can't believe I've done this to myself. Did I really buy two cones of fire-engine red yarn? Yes, not only that, I knit a skirt in a style I like very much. And then I knit a sweater. That's where the trouble began. I tried them on; I even wore them very briefly New Year's Eve. Very briefly. Beyond that one time I can't seem to venture. I can't find much wrong with the skirt, but the blouse I can pick to pieces in several different ways. At least one of those ways is legitimate (the sleeves are too long), but I know that the basic reason I won't wear the outfit is that it is red.

Where does this negative feeling about red start? I generally like red on other people. In fact, I've spent a lot of time trying to persuade Wilma to wear a red blouse she bought on an impulse. She's a red-headed friend who has always longed to wear the red clothes her grandmother told her she mustn't ever put on. Her hair is soft and curly and evenly mixed now by gray to a beautiful muted red. She would be stunning in red. And I've worn some red, including the red car coat I got last winter. I enjoy that, but I'm careful to wear a dark skirt or pants as well as a dark or white scarf with it. I still feel conspicuous. And I keep on finding reasons not to wear that all-red knitted outfit - I don't like the way the sweater fits here and there, although the fit isn't unlike that in other garments that I'm quite happy with.

I can remember Mother, who must have been all of twenty-eight at the time, complaining that her friend Lucille, definitely a contemporary, must have been feeling old, for she'd appeared in a bright red dress. She explained to me and my sister Martha that a sure sign of resisting old age could be seen in a woman's buying a red dress or red shoes, or, heaven forbid, both a dress and a pair of shoes in that tell-tale shade. Looking back, I think Mother really didn't like red for anyone. As long as she selected my clothes or had any influence on my selecting them, I can't remember having anything red except for a rare plaid or a discreet polka dot, usually no more than a white swiss dotted with red. She did like to dress me in pink, which I eschewed as soon as I started choosing my own colors. Now why would I listen to her ban on red and resist her choice of pink? That's what I did, and it's only been the last ten years that I discovered that pink is indeed a good color for me. I have a number of pink clothes, tee and sweat shirts, blouses, and dresses, not to mention several pink scarves that I use with non-pink garments. Somewhere in the back of my mind there must be a suspicion that, if she was right about pink, she was also right about red, meaning that it's not really "my" color? Other shades of red were fine. One of my first formal dresses was a fuchsia georgette gown that Mother helped me select. Various bright shades of orange were fine, too. It was just a pure lipstick or fire-engine red that was taboo. A kind of superstition, if you like. I collect superstitions and have a good time laughing at them: such things as black cats crossing your path, walking under ladders, breaking mirrors, and leaving a building by a door different from the one you used to enter. But I have trouble classifying the wearing of red as a superstition.

I think I'm comfortable with the aging process. I don't think I'm trying to avoid the appearance of succumbing to age, but I can't help wondering if Mother's observation

about old women and red wasn't right. No, I generally notice and admire other women who wear red. My friend Lisa, who has just celebrated her eighty-fourth birthday, wears a number of red dresses and looks charming in every one. Ah, Lisa is petite. Do I associate RED and BIG? I don't really think so. That, however, is an entirely different story.



I have recently read a delightful book entitled *When I'm Old I Shall Wear Purple* in which a purple hat is associated with all the outrageous things one can do when she is old. Those associations go beyond my feeling about red. Red simply means that a woman fears that she's gotten old.

I can't find a genuine reason for my not wearing red, and I intend to take this story to class and read it as I wear my lovely new red suit.

I think.