

welcome

And So to Bed

I was talking to a friend who had spent some time building an online retail furniture company. One day she decided to find out what keywords her customers used most frequently to search her site. Two jumped out immediately: La-Z-Boy; sleigh bed.

This caught my attention because I was feeling like a lazy person and I had a hankering for a sleigh bed myself. I've always been attracted to sleigh beds, and canopy beds, too. More on the latter in a minute, but as for sleigh beds: why are they so appealing? They look like cribs: big, cartoony renditions of the cradles in which (we wish) we had been rocked to sleep night after night during our baby lives. I can hear the squeaking of the wood as it tenses from one side to the other; I can feel the strong, sheltering embrace of the sides of the bed around me. I can smell the clean, waxed wood; I can see the rich color and the lively grain in the wood. Sleigh beds are about wanting to be young—if not infantile—again. Some people reach a certain age and long for hot red cars. I'll take my red in the cherrywood of a sleigh bed.

There is something about the sturdy, old-fashioned shape that makes you feel as though you are sleeping in a boat, a vessel that will bob and float through your subconscious currents, or, more literally, that you will be guided safely through your dreams by a swift team of able, snorting, stamping horses. Any bed should feel strong enough to carry you through the dark passages of the night—and those bad days, too.

I have never had a sleigh bed. But I recently bought a four-poster bed. I have to confess that my bedroom is the least settled part of my house. No, not because there is so much drama in my love life. But because, for some strange reason, I cannot get the room to look right. I keep changing my mind about everything in it. And, like the sort of dream in which vague shapes keep shifting about, and nothing stays pinned down, my bedroom is in a continual loop of redecoration. As soon as I get the walls painted a color that I love, the curtains become problematic. As soon as I get the curtains right, the walls suddenly seem to need wallpaper. As soon as the wallpaper goes up, the carpeting, which should have been neutral enough to do under any circumstance, is glaringly wrong. As soon as the carpet is right, the bed is wrong. I am bored with my milky white Swedish bed, with its scalloped edges and finial tops. Anyway, the silk upholstered panels set into the



headboard are the wrong color; the stripe is wavering a bit there, in the upper right-hand corner, and if I look at it long enough, I begin to feel crazy. One chaise is too hard, another too long, yet another too frumpy. It all goes—to my sister, to the consignment shop, to friends. And the next circuit of wrong decisions begins. Well, they aren't wrong, piece by piece. They're wrong in that they don't add up to something I want to fall into—a swoon, a cocoon, a cloud, a bed of roses. . . .

And it all begins with the bed. Most things do. Actually, come to think of it, everything does. We all did. Maybe that's why beds are so tricky. There is so much at stake. What if I had been conceived in a canopy bed, under a tent of blowsy pink roses cascading to the floor—instead of '50s Danish modern? I'd probably be pining for Danish modern instead of searching for the perfect canopy bed. I recently fell for a four-poster bed, American, tiger maple. I visited it several times at the antiques shop before succumbing, but only because I have learned to pretend that I am not acting on spontaneous impulses when making rather large purchases. (I don't know who I am bothering to kid; I'm paying the bills. But self-esteem is a tricky business.) I am too mortified to confess to my bed profligacy over the last ten years, so I won't. But suffice it to say that I just cannot find the bed of my dreams.

Maybe this one will be the one. The posters are discreetly drilled at the top to accept a canopy frame, should I decide to go all the way. I'm not there yet. It is already stunning to sit in a bed that feels like a throne, the posters like scepters protecting the four corners of my world. I am high enough off the ground that anything bad under the bed will just breeze right on through. I know a decorator whose own rooms look like they leaped from Marcel Proust's novels. In his guest room is the perfect canopy bed—a jewel of a bed, from its old, steel frame curving up into an elegant topknot, to the sumptuous folds of painted fabric puddling on the floor. The first time I saw his bed, I said to my friend, you are a Russian princess trapped in the body of a twenty-first-century man. Maybe that's it. I am afraid of my inner princess. The minute I conquer this neurosis, I'm sure my bedroom will be perfectly decorated. I'll have a kingdom for a kiss.


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