**Girl by Jamaica Kincaid**

(this is an abridged version. For full text go to <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1978/06/26/girl>)

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap**;**

wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry;

don't walk barehead in the hot sun;

cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil;

…

soak salt fish overnight before you cook it;

is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school?;

always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach;

on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming;

don't sing benna in Sunday school;

you mustn't speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions;

don't eat fruits on the street--flies will follow you;

*but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school*;

this is how to sew on a button; this is how to make a button-hole for the button you have just sewed on;

this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming;

this is how you iron your father's khaki shirt so that it doesn't have a crease;

this is how you iron your father's khaki pants so that they don't have a crease;

…

this is how you smile to someone you don't like too much;

this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all;

this is how you smile to someone you like completely;

this is how you set a table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner;

…

this is how to behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming;

be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit;

don't squat down to play marble you are not a boy, you know;

…

this is how to make a good medicine for a cold;

this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child;

…

this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you;

this is how to love a man; and if this doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work don't feel too bad about giving up;

this is how to spit up in the air if you feel like it, and this is how to move quick so that it doesn't fall on you; this is how to make ends meet;

always squeeze bread to make sure it's fresh;

*but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?*;

you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread?

**Hooks, Bell. *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. South End Press, 2000. (viii-ix;71).**

I have wanted them to have an answer to the question “what is feminism?” that is rooted neither in fear or fantasy. I have wanted them to have this simple definition to read again and again so they know: “Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.” I love this definition, which I first offered more than 10 years ago in my book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. I love it because it so clearly states that he movement is not about being anti-male. It makes it clear that the problem is sexism. And that clarity helps us remember that all of us, female and male, have been socialized from birth on to accept sexist thought and action. As a consequence, females can be just as sexist as men. And while that does not excuse or justify male domination, it does mean that it would be naïve and wrong-minded for feminist thinkers to see the movement as simplistically being for women against men. To end patriarchy (another way of naming the institutionalized sexism) we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go of sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought and action.

Males as a group have and do benefit the most from patriarchy, from the assumption that they are superior to females and should rule over us. But those benefits have come with a price. In return for all the goodies men receive from patriarchy, they are required to dominate women, to exploit and oppress us, using violence if they must to keep patriarchy intact. Most men find it difficult to be patriarchs. Most men are disturbed by hatred and fear of women, by men violence against women, even the men who perpetuate this violence. But they fear letting go of the benefits. They are not certain what will happen to the world they know most intimately if patriarchy changes. So they find it easier to passively support male domination even when they know in their minds and hearts that it is wrong. Again and again men tell me they have no idea what it is feminists want. I believe them. I believe in their capacity to change and grow. And I believe that if they knew more about feminism they would no longer fear it, for they would find in feminist movement the hope of their own release from the bondage of patriarchy.

. . . .

\*Most men in this nation feel troubled about the nature of their identity. Even though they cling to patriarchy they are beginning to intuit that it is part of the problem. Lack of jobs, the unrewarding nature of paid labor, and the increased class power of women, has made it difficult for men who are not rich and powerful to know where they stand. White supremacist capitalist patriarchy is not able to provide all it has promised. Many men are anguished because they do not engage the liberating critiques that could enable them to face that these promises were rooted in injustice and domination and even when fulfilled have never led men to glory. Bashing liberation while reinscribing the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal ways of thinking that have murdered their souls in the first place, they are just as lost as many boys.

A feminist vision which embraces feminist masculinity, which loves boys and men and demands on their behalf every right that we desire for girls and women, can renew the American male. Feminist thinking teaches us all especially, how to love justice and freedom in the ways that foster and affirm life. Clearly we need new strategies, new theories, guides that will show us how to create a world where feminist masculinity thrives.

\*Last two paragraphs are from page 71