“Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid


JAMAICA KINCAID

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 your little cloths right after you take them off; when buying cotton to make yourself a nice blouse, be sure that it doesn’t have gum on it, because that way it won’t hold up well after a wash; 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 buttonhole 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 grow okra—far from the house, because okra tree harbors red ants; when you are growing dasheen, make sure it gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it; this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard; this is how you smile to someone you don’t like very 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

1. Calypso songs.
table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner; this is how you set
a table for dinner with an important guest; this is how you set a
table for lunch; this is how you set a table for breakfast; 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 marbles—you are not a boy, you know; don't
pick people's flowers—you might catch something; don't throw stones
at blackbirds, because it might not be a blackbird at all; this is how to
make a bread pudding; this is how to make doulkona; this is how to
make pepper pot; 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 catch a fish; this is how to throw back
a fish you don't like, and that way something bad won't fall on you;
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?

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