A Lot of Help from Our Friends

There are at least two possible reasons to explain why we are told so clearly, incessantly and forcefully that we live in a patriarchy. The first possibility is that we do indeed live in a society dominated by men.

The other possibility is that we live under a different kind of rule that is so strong, so pervasive, so clever, so subtle, so insidious that it forbids, intimidates and cripples us from seeing it for what it is.

In a dark mist, two ancient bulwarks break the gentle incline of a lush, grassy slope rising from the banks of a languid river. A new moon seems to race behind feathery clouds, but never moves in fact.

A sagging, rusty fence borders the ghostly white lunar light, reflecting weakly upon the faded pastels in which one of the citadels is weirdly washed. Guards are yawning.

From behind the pinkish walls we hear a muffled rumble, as of people in turmoil. Then, a voice of triumph and defiance and quickly another and another break into the open. Soon, the night is filled with shouts of liberation and escape. This is not a fortress, we begin to understand, but a prison, a minimum security prison. Inmates topple the fence and flee. All of them are women. Only women are imprisoned here.

Guards nearby register half-hearted resistance. But under their breaths, as the women stream away, they only mutter, "You'll be back."

Higher up the hill, the other structure stands somber and unperturbed in its solid grayness. Nothing changes there. We see now the words "Men Only" chiseled above its single portal. There is no fence. There are no guards.

We have evidence from what we have seen that conditions in the pastel prison must be horrible indeed. Why else would so many women want to escape? Why else would their liberation cause such jubilation?

And we can conclude—one might say it is obvious—that the gray citadel for men in the superior position on the hill must be quite posh indeed. No one, after all, is leaving. No fences keep them in.

We join the breathless women climbing the slope to learn the secrets of male prerogative. Through the mist we hear an orderly chanting of deep male voices. We cannot yet discern the words, but we know from its tone that it conveys the solidarity of Men as Men. The Patriarchy. It is obvious.

"We're going in," the women shout, "and no one can stop us!"

We climb upon a ledge to peer through a small grate. We are shocked to see row upon row of men, dressed alike in black, blue and gray flannel dullness, heads shaved in uniformity, their eyes wide and glassy like zombies, pulling, pushing and tending a labyrinth of whirring machinery. We can at last hear the words of the chant. "Man's world! In control. No problems. Man's world! "

This bastion, we clearly and immediately realize, is the most maximum security prison of all—the prison that convinces its inmates that they are not inmates at all, but members of the privileged few.

We might say that the machinery inside the men's prison is the economy, the means of production. We could say that the wardens are capitalists or corporations or just disembodied greed or sheer survival needs. But to the extent that women have a desire to consume more than they produce, they have an interest in keeping men tending that machinery.

In *Why Men Are the Way They Are*, Warren Farrell cites a study of retail space allocations to men's and women's products and concludes that women must be spending seven times more money on personal items than men are. Ostensibly liberated women only half-jokingly rate men on their "E.P."—Earning Potential. Many women seem to harbor a belief that they have an inherent right to be provided for.

Women have not only the motive, but the power to induce us to stay in our mind-numbing production plant. That power is a dizzying amalgam of sexuality, the ability to allow or deny us our children, the purported moral superiority of femininity that absolves men of our natural baseness, and a phenomenal sense of marketing, packaging and PR. Because they effectively deny the existence of their power, we find it difficult to ask them to use it responsibly. It is not because they are bad, but rather because they are human that they sometimes use it otherwise.

The men's movement will therefore need the cooperation of women in a way that women's liberation never needed the help of men. It is not women's responsibility to liberate men, but it is incumbent upon women of good will to banish the idea that women are powerless, the idea that confounds and bamboozles us by telling us we are autonomous when we are in so many ways like automatons.

Back on the ledge of the men's prison, one of the women peers through the grate and snarls, "Hah! Look at those jerks! They think they're better than us!" She and several other women turn to leave, not knowing now exactly where to go.

A frail woman asks, "What are those guys doing?"

"Generating power," comes the answer.

"Oh," she responds as she first observes the transmission lines running down the hill. "Good. It's dark and I'm cold. I'm going back."

But another woman—a stronger, better, heroic woman—insists, "No! We have to get them out of there! Don't you see? They'll never do it by themselves."

Jack Kammer