

# Liberated Man's Survival Guide

BY ROBERT LUHN

**N**ow that the women's liberation movement has finally settled into a comfortable groove, let's admit the sorry truth: It hasn't made much of a dent at home.

Though he may diaper the baby and do his share of the washing, your average liberated guy is still in the dark. As one feminist writer neatly summed it up: "My boyfriend may be liberated, but he can't clean my oven right."

If you're a sincere but confused liberated guy on the cutting edge of this revolution, there's no need to cast about like a Druid without his runes. With this compendium of hitherto unknown and essential facts, you can learn how to navigate the curious twists and turns of the modern relationship — and discover where liberation ends and the mystery begins.

**BOBBY PINS.** Like chromosomes, a woman comes into this world with a fixed number of bobby pins. No more, no less. She inherited them from her mother, and thus it remains.

If you dig down into your liberated woman's purse, you will find it holds exactly eight bobby pins. Three appear to have been retrieved from the USS Arizona and are a ready source of tetanus; four have permanently done the splits and have not seen their plastic tips since 1977; the last is encrusted with something resembling peat. Don't touch these bobby pins unless you want to see Islamic justice in action.

(This primal pendant is not unlike male toothpick bonding rites. Toothpicks — particularly for the liberated guy with a sense of *recherche machismo* — must be procured from hash houses and similar eateries. Wood is *de rigueur* — the colored plastic toothpicks sold in supermarkets don't count.)

**HANGERS.** Like bobby pins,

the number of hangers a woman has is a matter of genetics. The closet gene pool can only be increased with hangers that come from certified dry cleaners.

(The plastic contoured hangers you get when you buy a suit at Saks don't count. We're talking about real wire hangers, the kind wrapped in sanitary paper sleeves emblazoned with the name of the dry cleaner.)

As with bobby pins, look, but don't touch.

**PAPER TOWELS.** If you make \$10,000 or \$100,000 a year, you, the male, are still using too many paper towels. Paper towels are not for wet hands or for mopping up that spill on the floor, contrary to TV ads. Paper towels are for changing contact lenses on or for stuffing into the toes of \$70 Italian high heels.

And never peel apart a two-ply paper towel to create quick and easy kleenex. This is frowned upon.

**JARS.** To a man, a jar is a jar, a place to save masculine things like screws, bolts and extra machine-gun bullets. To a liberated woman, a jar is more than a repository for bacon grease — it is the ultimate renewable resource. It's a coffee cup, emergency ashtray, rice holder and occasional lamp base all rolled into one.

Don't get between a woman and her jars. The smart liberated-man-around-the-house buys his own jars and hides them.

**BUTTER WRAPPERS.** When you strip a wrapper off a butter cube, do you throw it away? Tuck it into your portmanteau? Not if you want your relationship to last.

Lest your mate be forced to grease a cookie sheet with a paper towel (just cause for terminating the relationship if recent court cases are any indication), remember to carefully peel off the butter wrapper, refold it and put it back in the refrigerator.

Chances are she will never get around to those cookies she's been threatening to make all year. When the wrappers turn Irish three



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months later, she will toss them out, along with anything found moving in the Tupperware bowl at the back of the refrigerator. Which brings us to ...

**TUPPERWARE.** Though no liberated woman would be caught

dead at a Tupperware party, yours probably has a Tupperware bowl. This is acceptable, since she probably stole it from her mother, along with the eight bobby pins. (If she has three or four Tupperware bowls but swears she's never been near a Tupperware party, it's time to hire a private detective.)

When you grope around the refrigerator some night looking for a snack, resist opening the Tupperware bowl. If you can't resist, remember to *burp the bowl* and close it completely. A half-burped, sloppily sealed bowl can turn *flambé* jeunesse into something fit for fighting gonococci.

**CLOSETS.** Men have traditionally been allotted enough closet space by their mates for a tie, a shirt and perhaps a pair of shoes. Under today's liberated regime, your closet space is of equal worth, though no larger.

The liberated woman still needs several hundred cubic feet for her shoes, boots, sandals, pants, dresses, suits, blouses, slippers, shawls, raincoats, parkas, formals and other social combat gear. Don't argue. Closets are closely tied to the genetics of hangers (*ibid*). Let her have the clos-

ets. You buy shoe trees.

**BATHROOMS.** In the early 1970s, an open relationship meant that either partner could fool around and not feel guilty. Today it means that cleaning the bathroom is no longer a job just for the female of the species. How this chore is allotted can make or break any liberated relationship.

When in doubt, do without. Remember that the bathroom is a delicate ecosystem, governed as are we all by the laws of natural selection. Drop a little Comet cleanser in the wrong spot and suddenly billions of amenable bacteria and protista could be irrevocably mutated. The Center for Disease Control has enough to do already.

Of course, these are only general rules of thumb. Every liberated woman will have her own whim of iron, every liberated man his Dunkirk, every couple its Stalingrad. For some, the issue may be who gets the car fixed or empties a past-due kitty litter box.

Though the turf you each stake out — bathtubs excepted — may vary, as every wise liberated man knows, it pays to be liberated. But not *too* liberated.

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