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DAVE BARRY'S COMPLETE GUIDE TO GUYS: A Fairly Short Book

By Dave Barry

Random House. 193 pp.

Possibly because they never met my college roommate Woody Rubin, the New York Times once called Dave Barry "The funniest man in America." But, whereas Woody's gifts generally involved inventive means of transporting massive volumes of vodka, Barry dazzles with wit, with language itself: the expertly paced sentence leading up to the surprising word or phrase. Like Stephen King, Barry reduces us to children. But instead of King's world of childhood nightmare, Barry takes us back to our days on the playground giggling hysterically at the silliest of jokes.

Take care with Barry, though. Like vodka, a little more than a little can be much too much. He can become formulaic, as, through long exposure, you're no longer surprised by how, or even how inventively, he surprises you.

Taken in smaller units, though, say one chapter at a sitting, Dave Barry will make you laugh loud enough to jeopardize your lease. And in his *Complete Guide to Guys* Barry is at the top of his form. Reading it, many times I found myself laughing so hard I could not finish the sentence that started me laughing in the first place. I'm not talking chuckles here. I'm saying doubled-over, choke-on-your-coffee, rip-open-your-gall-bladder-incision guffaws you don't want even your best friend to witness. Virtually any one page contains enough hilarity to justify the cost of the book. I am not making this up.

This is not a book about *men*, Barry tells us, as there are far too many such books already, with their pretentious obsession with Manhood resulting in "stupid behavioral patterns that can produce unfortunate results such as violent crime, war, spitting, and ice hockey. These things have given males a bad name, specifically 'asshole'."

No, this is just a book about *guys*, that gender that doesn't talk about its "deep innermost feelings" because it really has none that don't involve a professional sports franchise; that likes momentous challenges, like how far can you ride a canoe off a ski-jump; that, when coming upon an untamed river in the wilderness, will not, like that non-guy gender, "contemplate its beauty" but rather will "see who can pee the farthest off the dam." The book is the perfect primer for, say, diagramming a John Madden.

And boy, will you learn stuff. "Every statement of fact you will read in this book," Barry assures us in a learned preface, "is either based on actual laboratory tests, or else I made it up." Readers will discover, among much else:

- Why Arnold Schwarznegger *really* has an Austrian accent
- Why male elks will mate with shrubbery
- Why guys should avoid toilets in which pythons could conceivably be lurking
- Why male dogs howl at the moon
- How violence is coded on the male-exclusive Noogie Gene

- Why it was essential for pre-historic man to achieve instantaneous orgasm, even if non-guys no longer find themselves impressed by this skill

This last, of course, suggests that many problems between genders still need to be worked out, and His Loyal Guyness Barry stalwartly addresses those issues. One obstacle to harmonious guy/non-guy domesticity is that non-guys have "hundreds, perhaps thousands" of domestic standards, such as which pillow case goes with which sheets, while guys have "maybe four standards (such as 'No spitting in bed,' for example)." The instantaneous orgasm disparity also "causes a lot of unhappiness, because when a man and a woman are trying to have sex, he will often climax before she is ready. Sometimes he will climax before she is, technically, in the room."

Is there hope for the future of guys, you wonder; don't you worry, Barry reassures us, future guyness rests competently in the hands of champions such as the author's young son, who likes to set golf balls on fire. And that's good to know, because, as Barry constantly reminds us, guys make "numerous, positive, vital contributions to society," even if, by the end of the book, he still hasn't discovered, exactly, what they are.