

Great Books of the Western Bedroom

by Con Chapman

Clarinetist Artie Shaw gave actress Ava Gardner a reading list in preparation for their honeymoon that included Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov," Darwin's "The Origin of the Species," Marx's "Das Kapital" and Thomas Mann's "The Magic Mountain."
The Wall Street Journal



"What do you mean, you're only halfway through 'The Magic Mountain?'"

As we walked down the aisle together, I knew that I'd finally found the girl for me--after four tries! Ava was beautiful, talented, sophisticated, trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous--no wait, those are the Boy Scouts.



Anyway, as I was saying, Ava was my dream girl. But, like Achilles, she had one fatal flaw. I wasn't sure she had the 19th century French novelists down pat. At the rehearsal dinner I'd made a wisecrack about Benjamin Constant, and afterward she'd said "Is

that the guy who wrote 'Madame Bovary?'" I laughed it off at the time, but that was before our wedding night turned into such a disaster.



Benjamin Constant

Ava looked great when she came into the bedroom. She had on a *peignoir* that left nothing to the imagination--not even Joris-Karl Huysmans' imagination!



Peignoir and Joris-Karl Huysmans

I assumed that she had completed the reading assignment I'd given her and would be ready for a night of wild sex, enhanced by the deep understanding of Keynes' notion of aggregate demand that I was sure she'd acquired from the well-thumbed copy of the *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* that she told me she'd read on the set of *The Killers*. God, how wrong I was!



As we embraced under the covers, I made my move.

"You're not going to touch me . . . there, are you?"

"Sure, babe," I said--maybe a little too breezily. "You *did* read *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* by Karl Marx--didn't you?" I asked hesitantly.

She was silent, and after a while, she began to sob.

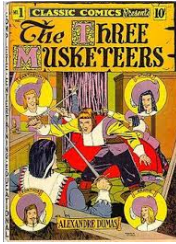
"Yes--and no," she said through her tears. "I read the Cliffs Notes."

Oh boy. I had no idea she was a virgin!

"Sorry, sweetie," I said, hugging her. "You were married before, so I figured . . ."



"That was Mickey Rooney, when I was 19," she said. "We never got beyond Classic Comics."

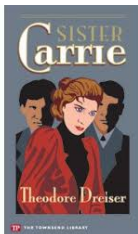


I knew then that it was going to be a long night. "Okay," I said. "Let's take it slow. I'll start at the beginning." I reached over to my night stand and grabbed a copy of *A Tale of Two Cities* that I carried with me on the road--in case I met a piece of jail bait.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," I began.



She seemed to like it, and for the next ten days we stayed holed up in our honeymoon suite, eating room service, sampling the delights of *Lorna Doone*--even with all the crumbs in the bed!--*Pollyanna* and *My Friend Flicka*. She grew comfortable with me so, on the last night before we were to return to our new home to begin our humdrum married life, I decided I'd try something--different.



"What's that big lump in your pants?" she asked as I came to bed. "That? Oh, nothing. Just a copy of 'Sister Carrie.'"

"What's it about?" she asked. Her voice still had a trace of dewy-eyed innocence to it.

"It's a fairly typical story of the erotic education of a naive young girl," I said. "I . . . thought we might read it. Together."

She looked at the 512-page tome. "Not tonight, dear," she said. "I already have a headache."

