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Sex Tips from a Bookworm

There was one vacation long ago (I don't remember where, I just remember the lounge chairs), when my husband and I read *The Firm* together. He would tear chapters off to pass to me as he finished them. And I'd sneak the book to read ahead while he was getting us more of those banana drinks. It was a wonderful trip. The same words that were streaming through his head were streaming through mine. We experienced the same feelings of suspense, surprise and enjoyment. We also had a lot of sex. Yet somehow, despite those good times, we didn't bring the book-sharing revelation back home in our suitcase.



Perhaps this is because, although both avid readers, we have never had the same taste in books. Sound familiar to anyone? We both majored in English in college, but we rarely took the same classes. He preferred Renaissance literature and drama; I liked Virginia Woolf and Caryl Churchill. He adored *Ulysses*. I could barely understand a word of it. The one book that we truly agreed upon was *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. We revered it as one of the best novels ever written. And, yet, he will be surprised to find out when he reads this blog that I never quite finished those last fifty pages! (At least I have the excuse that I was reading it in Spanish.)

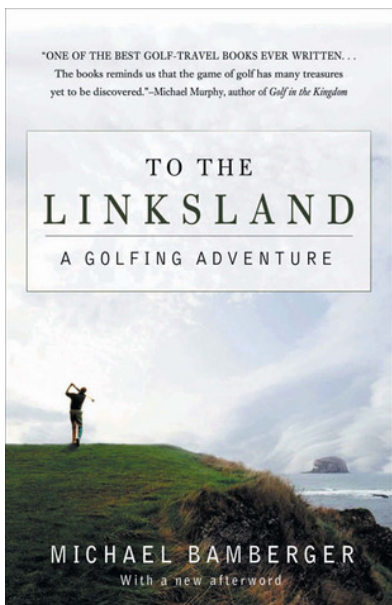
These days my husband's nightstand is piled high with books about his many hobbies – golf, music, photography, soccer, coffee, cycling – and some Dickens tomes for good measure. Mine is a hodge-podge of literary fiction, really sad memoirs and my kids' board, picture and chapter books.

So one night in the heart of the marital bed, I glanced over my husband at his pile of books and realized how alone he was over there. Sure, we've read beside each other in this bed for years – legs touching, the occasional nod in the other's direction, our breath sometimes falling into the same rhythm. But our minds couldn't be further apart. When I read, I am inside my book. I am nowhere to be found. And in over two decades of reading together I had never gone to his side, gone where he goes. So that night I reached over and took him... Michael Bamberger. *To the Linkland*.

My husband was thrilled. I was thrilled. It was positively titillating. We both knew it was the exact book I should read without even discussing it. *To the Linkland* is his favorite golf

book, and he has certainly read enough of them to know. Ever since it was published in 1992, my husband has gifted it, recommended it, reread it, taken it on trips, invited guests to learn about it. The book chronicles the year Bamberger took off from journalism to travel as a caddy on the European tour for the pro golfer Peter Teravainen. He then golfed through the “Linksland” of Scotland in a quest to improve his own game. It seemed particularly fitting that his wife accompanied him on the journey marked by bad hotels and long bus rides, just as I was following after my husband on his.

I won't lie to you, it took me a good three weeks to read the first thirty pages. That's a page and a half a day. I'm not a golfer, but I've golfed enough (twice) to know this book was like trudging through the rough looking for a lost ball. I was determined to soldier on, but all the time I was thinking, it's true: *Men Are from Mars Women Are from Venus*. I worried this great experiment would be over before it started.



Soon enough, however, I found myself engrossed in the relationship between the author and the journeyman golfer for whom he was paid to carry a bag. I began to find deeper meaning in the book; it was no longer just about golf. For instance, explaining why Teravainen was so hard on him, why he berated his caddy for things like talking to his golf ball, Bamberger astutely pointed out that “In the Rules of Golf, a player’s caddie is a legal extension of himself, and I think that is exactly how Teravainen saw me. I believe that in his treatment of me, I had the rare opportunity to see exactly how a person treats himself.” This stopped me in my tracks. I wondered what it meant and what other relationships shared that same quality. Given the context in which I was reading the book, I began to reflect: do I treat my husband as I treat myself? Was this a good thing or a bad thing? Was it a justification for bad behavior? Or an honor?

And when Bamberger launched into a discussion of what makes a golfer truly great, as a segue into his Scottish travels to improve his own golf game, I was suddenly reading the book in every snippet of spare time I could find. I was hooked, because, again, the discussion seemed to rise far above the playing field. How does one achieve greatness in anything? Bamberger discussed how golf genius revealed itself, the role that truthfulness plays in golf success and even drew from Teravainen’s Buddhist beliefs. According to Bamberger, seeking Nirvana and golf greatness can both require “a dedication to certain types of concentration, effort, mindfulness, resolve, speech, action, employment, and belief.”

Eventually Bamberger sought the wisdom of John Stark, a cigar-smoking Scot with a brogue and a body that ached after years of playing and teaching the sport. Stark was famous for giving every student a different piece of perfectly-tailored golfing advice. Stark’s primary

message to Bamberger was to listen. Simply to listen. “*Hear* the sound the shaft makes as it comes through the air, *listen* to how rhythmic and sweet that sound is ... There’s no one proper sound. The only requirement is that the sound be pleasing.” And, incredibly, for Bamberger, when he listened to whether a putt or a drive sounded right, everything else flowed from there. His game improved.

I absolutely adore this philosophy. It can apply to so many things – to writing, of course. But also to love and parenting and tennis and painting the house. According to Stark, so much of golf teaching has become about breaking the strokes up into parts and technically, mathematically improving each tiny section that the game’s inner spirit has been lost. To be good, Bamberger had to find the game’s soul. And this is what, for me, animated the book.

When I told my husband that Stark’s teachings were my favorite thing about the book, he looked in love, smitten like that first day when he saw me through the glass of his college dorm window. Honestly, his entire body language changed. It was full of appreciation. For this was his favorite moment of the book as well.

Intimacy exists on so many levels within a relationship, and I felt like we had entered a deeper spot than before. The one thing you can never do, even with your closest soul mate, is get inside his or her head. But at least when you read the same book, you know what words are shaping it, making it grow. The secretary of Saint Andrews explained to Bamberger that the famous course “is always undergoing change, and always has, natural and by the hand of man. It breathes, it lives, it cannot remain static.” I am always tickled when I find out something new about my husband, when he tells a story I had not heard from his past or when he says something I wouldn’t have expected him to say. Reading *To the Linksland* brought me somewhere new with him. It made our relationship breathe and live and sound pleasing.

If you decide to undertake your own reading experiment with a book your mate has loved, please learn from my mistakes. A few words to the wise:

1. Make sure you have a lot of time to read when you start. If it takes you an excessively large number of days to get through the book, you might hurt your partner’s feelings. This, I can tell you from experience.
2. Don’t criticize your partner’s book. I cannot emphasize this enough. Early on, I made the mistake of telling my husband that it felt like Michael Bamberger had gone on the golfing trip simply so he could write about it, that the experience didn’t feel organic. I wish, in retrospect, that my husband’s response had been something snarky like, “It seems like you’re simply reading my *favorite* golf book *ever* so that you can write about it for some blog some day.” But instead, he just looked very sad (which was far worse) and said, “Hmm. I hadn’t thought about it that way.” Try not to make your partner feel bad about his or her favorite book.

3. Choose wisely. Make sure it is a book you will actually enjoy. This should be an experience that will bring you closer to your partner's joy, not take you farther from it.
4. If you are lucky enough to have a significant other who enjoys the very same books you do, then perhaps you could pick a book to read together that is outside both your reading comfort zones. If you like biography and history and things that are real, try the fantasy novel by Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*. Or something commercial like Stephen King's *Doctor Sleep*, a sequel to *The Shining* due out in September. If you usually read commercial fiction, try some literary short stories. Raymond Carver or *Drown* by Junot Díaz or *Tenth of December* by George Saunders. Learn something new together. Read about Michelangelo in *The Agony and The Ecstasy* or about music in *Violin Dreams* or about climbing Everest in *Into Thin Air*.
5. If your mate isn't a reader or you're not a reader or neither of you reads, then you're screwed. Your relationship is in the weeds. Just kidding. If you don't read much, pick something whimsical or funny – *Pippi Longstocking* or David Sedaris. Read it aloud and listen to each other laugh. This can be highly erotic.
6. Once you get started, keep going. Maybe you can get him or her to read the books on your bedside table.
7. Most importantly, do not forego actual sex because you are reading his book.

When Teravainen's wife came from Singapore to walk a tournament with him, it just so happened that his partner for the round was none other than Jack Nicklaus. It was a charming section of the book for two reasons. First, Bamberger explained that the experience was made all the more special to Teravainen because his wife was there. She bore witness to it, so it was real. Second, while they played, Nicklaus asked Teravainen what he was reading. Indeed, they talked books as they navigated the holes, even in the midst of a professional competition. Nicklaus must have known a little something about what makes a long walk with a partner great. So go raid your mate's bookshelf; I promise your journey will be the better for it.

Image of "Reading is sexy" golf ball available for purchase from [CafePress](#). (No affiliation.)

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