

# "Sex, Style, and Substance: the Role of Gender in Romance"

by Virginia Kantra

Gender roles are changing in society and romance, yet the differences between men and women still impact our genre. Using examples from her own work and best-selling authors, Virginia Kantra demonstrates how an understanding of gender can add credibility to our characterizations and spark to our romance. This workshop will discuss gender roles from the standpoint of biology and genre fiction; meeting reader expectations and subverting stereotypes; and how male and female communication styles affect dialogue, point-of-view, conflict, and intimacy.

## The Male Model: Establishing rank

"You can't make me go anywhere," Skinny sneered.

Caleb's jaw set. What was this, fifth grade? He pushed away a memory of Dylan yelling, tearful, dancing out of their father's reach. *You can't make me.*

"You don't have the power," the man added scornfully. "I have power."

Caleb tapped his chest. "I've got a badge." More than his anger, more than his gun, that gave him authority to act. "Let's go."

*Virginia Kantra, Sea Witch, Berkley 2008, 159*

## The Female Model: Establishing intimacy

Doubt lodged like a splinter in her chest, pricking old insecurities. She couldn't entice her live-in boyfriend to go out for pizza. Did she seriously think she was going to sell the three thousand year old lord of the sea on the concept of dinner-and-a-movie?

"[I want the chance] to get to know each other."

"I know you," Conn said.

*Sexually.*

Yes.

The red marks of her teeth scored his arm.

She flushed and looked away. "You only know part of me. You don't know my favorite color or my favorite flower or if I leave the cap off the toothpaste or whether I like Chinese food. You don't know if I go to church or what side of the bed I sleep on or the name of my first boyfriend."

"And you think these things are important."

She stuck out her chin. "What they demonstrate—the trust, the closeness—is important. Yes."

"Very well. Tell me."

She was surprised into a laugh. "You want a list?"

"Yes."

He was serious. The realization was at once completely ridiculous and oddly reassuring. "Getting to know someone doesn't work that way. It takes time."

He clasped his hands behind his back. "How much time?"

He was pushing at her, always pushing. Tentatively, she pushed back. "Worried about how many childbearing years I have left?"

His eyes glinted. "Not as long as I can spend them in your bed."

*Virginia Kantra, Sea Lord, Berkley 2009, 161*

**Negotiating Power and Intimacy**

"I love you," she said.

Which hit him like a two-by-four upside the head. Panic seized him. He didn't, couldn't, speak. What could he say?

"Thank you"? He wasn't grateful.

"I am...honored," he managed.

That sounded good. Reasonable. Appreciative, even.

Her clear brown eyes clouded with annoyance. "No, you're not. You're scared."

She scrambled off his lap, her slim pale legs flashing in the sunlight, and stooped for her underwear. The curve of her butt made him dizzy. Regret weighted his tongue.

"Regina..."

"Don't sweat it." She scooted the thong--red--up her thighs and wiggled it into place. "You want lunch?"

Dylan watched the movement of her hips and didn't know what he wanted. He was uneasily aware of something missing, something lost: a mood, a moment, an opportunity.

"I am not scared." His jaw set. He was terrified. "You surprised me, that's all."

She shot him a glance over her shoulder before she tugged her shirt over her head. "Uh-huh. Get the basket. We don't want all that food going to waste."

"Of course I care about you," he offered stiffly.

Regina looked at him like he was the restaurant cat and he'd just deposited a dead mouse at her feet. "Don't throw me a bone," she said. "I told you I love you. You don't love me back, that's my loss and your problem."

"My father claimed to love my mother."

She set her hands on her hips just above the line of red elastic. "So? I'm not your father. If you leave me, I'm not going off on a drunken twenty-year bender. I had a life before you came. I'll have a life when you're gone. But I'm not going to hide or lie about how I feel because you might be threatened by it."

She was blazing. Furious.

"Are you done?" he asked.

"I guess."

"Good." He picked her up in his arms and jumped with her over the side.

Water rushed over their heads, cutting off her shriek.

She surfaced sputtering and clutching at him. "You son of a *bitch!* Are you out of your mind?"

He buoyed her up, felt her shiver with shock and cold.

"Scared?" he demanded.

She glared, her hair dripping in her eyes. "I'm *wet.*"

"Out of your element."

"Yes!"

"Over your head?"

She squinted, adjusting her grip on his neck. "I...so?"

"Me too," he confessed.

GUYS DO NOT DISCUSS FEELINGS.

WHEN FORCED TO DISCUSS FEELINGS, GUYS WANT TO APPLY LOGIC.

SMART WOMEN CALL THEM ON THIS.

GUYS THINK ABOUT SEX.

WOMEN USE SEX (AND FOOD) TO NEGOTIATE.

THESE ARE OFTEN SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES.

GUYS DON'T ADMIT FEAR. MEN THINK IN HIERARCHICAL TERMS ("ONE UP/ONE DOWN). USES TYPICAL MALE FACE SAVING STRATEGY INSTEAD.

WOMEN DISCUSS FEELINGS. MEN THINK IN TERMS OF ACTION (AND VIOLENCE). See below.

HIS BACK STORY COMES OUT ONLY UNDER DURESS--IN THIS CASE, WHEN HER DISPLEASURE BOTHERS HIM MORE THAN HIS DISCOMFORT.

MEN ARE DIRECT.

MEN TAKE ACTION TO SOLVE PROBLEMS.

HAVING ESTABLISHED HIS STRENGTH, HE CAN ADMIT HIS WEAKNESS.

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*USA Today* bestselling author **Virginia Kantra** credits her enthusiasm for strong heroes and courageous heroines to a childhood spent devouring fairy tales. A six-time Romance Writers of America RITA Award finalist, Virginia has won numerous writing awards, including the Golden Heart and two National Readers' Choice Awards. *Sea Lord*, book 3 in The Children of the Sea series, is a May 2009 release. To read her articles or about her books, visit her on the web at <http://virginiakantra.com/>