



Discussion Questions

She's on Top

by Susan Lyons

Kensington Aphrodisia; ISBN 978-0-7582-1703-5; March 2008

Awesome Foursome Series, Book 4

[see also *Champagne Rules* (Feb/06), *Hot in Here* (Aug/06) and *Touch Me* (Sept/07)]

www.susanlyons.ca; susan@susanlyons.ca

These questions are available for download (in PDF format) from my website.

Thanks so much for reading *She's on Top*. I hope you enjoyed it and would love to hear from you. I'm happy to provide bookmarks and autographed bookplates; just send me your name and address. Please visit my website for info on other titles, insights into how each book came about, excerpts, a monthly contest, and other fun stuff.

Now, let's talk about *She's on Top*.

1. *First love*. When Rina and Giancarlo were teens, they were each other's first love. Do you remember your first love? What was he (or she) like? What was the experience like, of falling in love and being together? Did the two of you think you'd stay together? Did you?
2. *First and unresolved love*. Neither Rina nor Giancarlo ever forgot each other. Yet quite possibly neither of them would ever have tracked the other down if Rina's girlfriends hadn't urged her to find Giancarlo. Were they right, that she couldn't move ahead until she resolved that past relationship? If you didn't end up together with your first love, is that person still in your life? If not, do you ever wonder what happened to them? Do you want to find out?
3. *First and future love?* When Rina and Giancarlo were teens, neither saw a future together, so they parted. Did they do the right thing? What do you think about falling in love when you're so young? Can the first love really be the forever one? If so, should the couple stay together or split up for a while to date other people and be sure?
4. *Karma*. Do you think people are ever destined to be together – as in, there's one special person for you, and somehow fate will bring the two of you together? When Al proposes to Rina, she doesn't know whether he's "the one." How do you know if a person is the right one for you?
5. *Being a romantic*. In the Awesome Foursome, Rina gets labeled as the "romantic." What does that term mean? Is it a good thing to be a romantic, or does it lead to having unrealistic dreams and expectations?
6. *Prejudice and snobbery*. Rina starts out as a music snob, believing only classical music is worthy of a good musician's talents. She thinks Giancarlo had "gone over to the dark side" by becoming a music video director. Yet, by the end of the book, she respects his work. What brought about her change in attitude? What do you think about prejudices? Can you think of examples from your personal life where someone has held a prejudice then come to realize they were wrong? What led to the change of opinion?
7. *Compatibility*. Rina thinks compatibility is important in a relationship, but her friends say people can be too compatible – i.e., it's better to stimulate and challenge each other. What do you think? Which is a better key to a successful relationship: compatibility or having differences and communicating about them? Is it important that people respect each other's work and values, even if they don't necessarily agree with them? How do you feel about making compromises for the sake of a relationship?
8. *Tackling the issues*. Giancarlo has avoided issues and conflict (e.g., when he and his parents disagreed, he walked away). He tends to assume that everything will work out with him and Rina because they love each other. Rina, on the other hand, is determined to work out their major differences before they commit to each other. Is this just "typical male" versus "typical female"? Are there things in each of their pasts and their personalities that are responsible for their different approaches? Which approach do you think is best?

9. *Two men.* At the beginning of the book, Rina receives a proposal and says she needs time to think. Then she has dinner with Giancarlo and finds herself powerfully attracted. What do you think of her behavior that night? Was she immoral to get involved with Giancarlo before saying goodbye to Al? Can you relate to how she felt and what she did? Is it okay to date two men at the same time? If so, under what circumstances?
10. *Body image.* Can you relate to Rina's poor body image? Why does she feel that way about herself? Her mom saw her a certain way, Rina sees herself one way, her friends see her another way, and Giancarlo sees her differently again. Is there any such thing as a standard of "beauty" – or is it truly in the eye of the beholder? Does any woman feel confident that she's attractive? What does it take to feel that way?
11. *Lights off.* Rina's rule is that she'll only make love in the dark because otherwise she feels too inhibited about her body and can't let loose and be sexy. She says that in the dark she can be a different woman. Is this a silly rule or does it make sense? Giancarlo agrees to her rule but has a secret agenda. What do you think of his approach to getting her to bend and finally break her rule?
12. *Character arc: Rina.* We writers talk about character arc. In a romance, it's particularly rewarding if both the heroine and hero start with some kind of weakness or flaw, then, because of meeting the other person and being challenged by them, they grow into a stronger and better person. What do you see as Rina's character arc? How does her growth come about?
13. *Character arc: Giancarlo.* Giancarlo tells Rina he is Peter Pan and he never intends to grow up. But he does, in some ways. At the beginning of the book, he has a career he loves but he hasn't touched the piano or composed music in a long time, and he's semi-estranged from his family. How does he change over the course of the book? What's responsible for his change?
14. *Change.* We like to see characters in fiction grow, and we like to see it in life as well. How much do you think a person can really change? Are some parts of our personality so intrinsic they'll never change? What does it take to make a person change? Can you think of examples in your own life of how you're different now than when you were a teenager?
15. *Parental expectations.* Both Rina and Giancarlo feel a heavy weight of parental expectation. What were those expectations, and how did they affect Rina's and Giancarlo's personalities and lives? Why do parents put these kinds of expectations on their children? When are parental expectations a good thing, and when are they not so good?
16. *Following dreams.* Rina's dad followed his dream to be a pilot. Giancarlo at first followed his parents' dream that he study music, then he deserted that dream and followed his own, of becoming a music video director. Rina followed her own dreams: to attend Juilliard, to be a classical musician, to have a cozy home and never have to move. Do you think following your own dream is always a good thing?
17. *Home.* Having a stable home is very important to Rina. Why? And how does her concept of "home" change over the course of the book? For Giancarlo, since he was a kid he'd wanted to see the world, and he almost never returns to his family's home in Italy. How do his feelings about home change, and why?
18. *Music.* What does music mean to Rina and to Giancarlo? Does anything in your life make you feel this way?
19. *Food.* Rina starts the book as a woman who is always dieting. Giancarlo likes women who enjoy food. Was he wrong to try to change her mind? What do you think of his approach – bringing food into their love-making, cooking for her, and so on?
20. *Levi.* What did you think of Rina's relationship with her neighbor, Levi Fischman? What role does he fill in her life? What role does she fill in his? Do you think he and Giancarlo will get along?
21. *The last book.* This is the last in the Awesome Foursome series. Were you happy with the way the series ended or would you have liked to see all the girls engaged or married? Do you think that would have been realistic? If not, do you care? To what degree should a romance novel be fantasy versus reflecting reality?

I'd love to hear your thoughts on some of these questions and issues! Email me at susan@susanlyons.ca. And don't forget to drop by my website: www.susanlyons.ca.