Awake In The Vixen Dreamworld

Mikhaila Stettler

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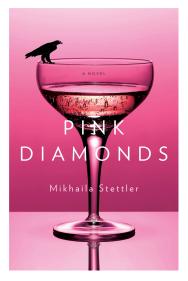
Note to reader

This is an advance pre-publication copy.

Awake In The Vixen Dreamworld is the short prequel to Pink Diamonds, available in eBook, print and audio book versions on Amazon: http://amzn.to/2nEfuoo

Download the first chapter for free at http://www.mikhailastettler.com/downloads

This prequel gives the backstory that explains how the main character, Alexis Rycof, came to see spirit animals and past lives.



From the sexy tango milongas of Los Angeles to stylish Milan, sultry Rio and weekends cavorting on super yachts, Pink Diamonds is a smoking hot mystical love story that takes you on a wild ride of sexual reawakening and personal empowerment. Follow Alexis in this sophisticated erotic romance as she reinvents her life, re-ignites lost passion and finds true love.

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It's possible I'm losing my mind. Strange things have been happening ever since I did that shamanic journey a few months back. Taking Amazonian hallucinogens out in the woods with a bunch of strangers was never my kind of scene, but my best friend, Cheryl, talked me into it. "What have you got to lose?" Cheryl asked me. What indeed, other than my current state of paralysis about my marriage and career? I watched grey rivulets of rain snake down the coffee shop window, another dreary Seattle day. Everyone in the cafe wore the typical Northwest color palette of dark muted neutrals except for Cheryl, who looked like a California surfer girl in a bright orange and pink warm-up jacket with her blonde hair and tan from spring break in Hawaii. Doug, Laura and I were supposed to go with them but Doug canceled the trip at the last minute. He had too much work to do at the end of tax season and pitched a fit when I wanted to take Laura without him. Selfish prick. "I don't know, Cheryl," I said. "I've never done any hallucinogens before. What if I freak out? And what do you really know about this

group anyway?" Cheryl sighed and rolled her eyes at me. "Girl, you need to grow a pair, get out of your comfort zone, shake things up! Besides," she said with a naughty grin, "You already missed out on one fantastic trip this year. At least this way you can go on some kind of journey and Doug can't stop you."

Cheryl and I have been there for each other through thick and thin, best friends from the first day we met in a mother's group when our girls were barely toddlers. Now here we stood, one of us divorced and the other on the brink, with Laura and Sammy about to graduate from high school. Things with Doug had been gradually getting worse since Laura started high school and I began to focus on my career again. Our marriage had turned into a soul-crushing insidious torture. I felt like I was suffocating, my life slowly smothered under a heavy, grey wet blanket. I couldn't breathe, couldn't move, couldn't be myself. It's not like Doug was outright abusive or anything, but he was passive-aggressive and so controlling, in a way that was weirdly limp and rigid at the same time. He never wanted to go anywhere or do anything anymore, not that he ever was the life of the party. If I got tickets to a concert downtown, he said it

was a waste of time and money to drive there, fight traffic, pay for parking, deal with the crowds and noise for a measly hour or two of boring classical music when he could just stay home and watch a movie. If I made the mistake of sharing anything about my dreams of starting my own branding agency, he'd dump doubt and fear all over them, telling me all the reasons why it could never work. I can't even remember the last time we had sex. Something had to give, but I was terrified I couldn't make it on my own and was torn with indecision.

Cheryl was right. What did I have to lose? Something had to give. "OK, I'll do it," I said. Cheryl whooped and lifted her green tea latte to make a toast. "Here's to new adventures and breaking out of old ruts and dysfunctional marriages," she said. We clinked cups. I barely noticed it at the time, but there was a distinct shimmer in the air and a faint scent of rainforest floor. Later that week, I almost backed out I was so nervous, but in the end good old Doug convinced me. He stood leaning up against the dresser with his arms crossed watching me pack with a disapproving frown. "How much is this girls' spa weekend going to set us back?" he asked. I'd told him I was going for a spa weekend with Cheryl. I didn't want to hear any shit from him about what I was really going to do or get into a big fight about it. I tried to remember what attracted me to him in the first place. Doug wasn't bad looking, medium height with wavy blonde hair just beginning to go grey. He kept himself in shape, but more from a joyless discipline than any athletic enthusiasm. As a young woman in my twenties, coming out of a chaotic and difficult childhood, his laser-sharp analytical mind and sober, cautious manner felt like stability and security. "Less than a trip to Hawaii," I snapped back. That shut him up and reminded me why I decided to join Cheryl and a bunch of strangers in an ayahuasca and mushroom journey led by a "shaman" from Ojai, California.

We got to the retreat center late in the afternoon. There was a rustic main house, several out-buildings and a large yurt. We got settled quickly and went for a walk before dinner. There was a magical aura about the place, as though it sat on a threshold between dimensions. The forest seemed ancient, and if I was the type to do so, I could almost have imagined wood nymphs and fairies flitting about. The air was filled with a chorus of bird song and I could hear running water in the distance from the creeks running through the property. The first part of the journey began after dinner. About twenty people gathered in a circle in the yurt. I looked around the circle, my stomach twisting nervously. Cheryl squeezed my hand and whispered, "Relax. You'll be fine." But my mind was running wild. What kind of hippy-dippy people came to an event like this? I mean I did yoga and some basic mindfulness meditation and all, but I was more Seattle soccer mom than some new age, aura-fluffing, crystal-healing, chakra-balancing, moon-worshipping pagan in Birkenstocks. Cheryl was the new age explorer, always trying to talk me into going with her to some workshop or psychic reading or another.

Our guide, Cameron, arrived. He was middle-aged, tall, lean, and clean-shaven with longish, sandy colored hair. He looked more like old money from the Upper East Side of New York City than some sort of psychedelic shaman. I don't know what I expected, someone short and brown maybe. The only clue there was anything more was his eyes, deep-set and piercing ice blue. I'm not sure why, but his patrician East Coast vibe calmed me right down. I took a deep breath and settled onto my cushion.

Cameron began with a short welcome and orientation, explaining how the weekend would go. We could have a light breakfast in the morning, then nothing to eat until after the journey the next night. He did a ritual to cleanse and protect the space, then he guided us through a process to set our intentions and connect with our spirit guides. He started a soft heartbeat rhythm on a small drum, punctuated at intervals with a rattle. I pretended to keep my eyes closed and peeked around the room. Cameron looked super-focused and stared into the flames of the candles on the altar he had set up in front of him. Everyone else had their eyes closed. Most were lying down, but a few like me sat erect. I closed my eyes again and focused on my breath the way my mindfulness instructor taught me. I decided I should just go with the experience and try not to judge or keep doubting everything. What was my intention? What did I want to get out of this experience anyway? As though he heard my thoughts, Cameron spoke for the first time since the drumming began. "Don't force an intention," he said, "Let one emerge from your heart as a feeling. What your mind thinks may be different from what your soul knows you need."

I cut off a snide, silent come-back and reminded myself to go with the process. I felt my jaw tighten and my shoulders tense up. Scenes with Doug ran through my mind, like a trailer for the movie of our marriage. It was no rom-com, that was for damn sure. The channel changed and scenes from the ad agency where I worked flickered by. I felt my stomach knot up and my fists clench in frustration. Nothing emerged from my heart. Instead my heart felt crushed, heavy, like it was encased in a concrete block. Round and round the scenes spun on, a kaleidoscope of frustration, dissatisfaction and confusion. The drum rhythm sped up. A herd of horses stampeding. Each spinning lap of whirling thoughts and images tightened the screws. The pressure and tension ratcheted up. The pain was intense. It felt like my head was going to explode. There was a crashing crescendo and then a soft slow heartbeat again... badum, ba-dum, ba-dum. Then it came to me. I knew what my intention was. I wanted clarity, a crystal clear sense of direction for my life.

The drumbeat tapered off. There was a minute of silence, then Cameron rang a bell. The tone was clear and pure, unworldly and bird-like. Somehow it had the effect of closing a door. The air in the yurt gave a slow sigh. Cameron asked us to sit up and open our eyes. He gave a few closing instructions on holding our intention close and incubating a dream to meet our spirit guides. I was relieved he didn't have us share our intentions with the group. We filed out of the yurt. People were quiet. Cheryl and I stood off to the side, breathing in the crisp night air and looking up at the full moon. We went back to our room and got ready for bed without talking. I felt unable to form words. I jotted down some notes and impressions in my journal and wrote out a dream incubation phrase, "Bring me clarity. Show me a clear path forward." Cheryl came over and gave me a long hug. Then she got into the other single bed and turned out the light. I lay staring up in the dark, thinking nothing. Cheryl tossed and turned for a bit. I breathed slowly and tried to relax my body. It took a while to fall asleep. I remembered no dreams when I woke up.

After breakfast, we all met back in the yurt again.

Cameron's assistant walked around the circle with an abalone shell, smudging us with smoke coming from dried cedar and pieces of a pale yellowish wood. Cheryl told me it was from a South American tree called palo santo. Cameron came in and sat down in front of the low altar. He lit four candles, arranged in a diamond pattern. "Close your eyes and listen to your breath," he told us. The yurt was quiet now, except for some rustling and fidgeting. The smoke in the air made my nose tickle. Outside, crows cawed loudly, drowning out the other birdsong. "Hold your intention in your heart and become very alert and receptive," he told us. After a few minutes he began speaking again, giving us instructions. We were to walk through the property and let ourselves be led by impulse and intuition. The idea was to let nature speak to us and maybe, if we were lucky, a spirit animal or ancestor spirit would make contact. If so, we were to be open, receptive and express gratitude for whatever message or gift they might share. I worked to silence the critical, scoffing voice in my head telling me this was all an enormous load of bullshit. I repeated my mantra for the weekend, "What do you have to lose? Just go with it."

Once outside Cheryl pulled me aside. "How are you doing, Alexis?" she asked. I shook my head and grinned up at her. "I'm choosing to suspend disbelief. It's an ongoing process," I told her. That got a laugh. We decided to check out the lake and walked over together, even though Cameron instructed us to do this nature adventure solo. The sun was out, a welcome respite from the rainy week and it gave me an unexpected sense of hope. I could see the lake up ahead, not much bigger than a large pond. "What's your intention," I asked Cheryl. She didn't say anything for a bit, just kept walking. "I don't have one yet, at least not so it's clear," she said. That threw me for a loop. I stopped and grabbed her hand. "What do you mean?" I said, "This whole weekend was your idea and you don't even know why you're here?" Cheryl started walking again, fast. I had to almost jog to keep up with her long legs. "Will you please slow down and tell me what's going on?" I said.

"It's Jeff," she said.

"What about him?"

"I'm really worried what he's going to do," Cheryl said. There was a small grassy patch near the shore and we sat down. "Do about what?" I said. She started pulling up blades of grass and splitting them with her thumbnail. "I got an offer to buy my business," she said. "I'm not sure I want to take it. If I do, I'm afraid he's going to come after me for more alimony or try to sabotage me again somehow." It had been a very difficult divorce. Jeff had gone nuts and tried to ruin Cheryl's life and destroy her business. In the end, she had to agree to pay him alimony for ten years to get it done. "Do you really want to sell your business?" I asked.

Cheryl wrapped her arms around her knees and rested her forehead on them. "I don't know," she said. "What I really want is to work with higher end clients and bigger profile projects. The deal on the table requires me to stay with the company for three years but they're focused on a totally different target market, very ho-hum middle-of-the road stuff, like corporate offices and mid-priced hotel chains." I watched the water lapping at the shore and the breeze rippling across the surface. "He's getting all triggered with Sammy's graduation and eighteenth birthday coming up," she said. "No more shared custody you know, so he won't be able to use that to try and control me anymore. It's a good offer. If Jeff refuses to pay for college, that money could make all the difference. I don't know what to do. I just have a very bad feeling about him. He's up to something." I thought about it for a minute, watching the water ripple. It was quiet, just the buzz of bees feeding on the wildflowers growing nearby. "So, what do you need most?" I asked her. "Clarity? Or maybe a way to resolve the relationship or to neutralize him?"

We sat there for a few minutes, neither of us speaking. I felt the urge to walk to the other side of the lake and stood up. "I'll see you back at the yurt," I said and headed off. I tried to empty my mind and put myself into an open, alert state. I wasn't too keen on ancestors or animal spirits speaking to me, but I did believe in intuition. I repeated my mantra for the weekend again, "What do you have to lose? Just go with it." I followed the path that meandered through the trees around the edge of the lake. The air seemed to shimmer in the filtered sunlight. Small animals rustled in the undergrowth. I came upon a creek that fed into the lake when I got to the spot I'd seen from the other side. I sat down and leaned my back against a tree and watched the water flow. A red fox stepped out of the trees on the other side of the creek. It paused and regarded me for a minute. I held my breath. Then she twitched her tail, somehow I knew it was a female, and delicately picked her way across the creek. The vixen stopped again, not five feet from me, flicking her ears back and forth. Then she screamed at me, kind of a half bark, half scream. She did it three times and then jumped in the air and bounded off. I sat there, my heart pounding, and remembered to be grateful.

The group gathered back at the yurt in the late afternoon with our pillows, blankets and water bottles. I was starved, but I'd been warned many people throw up from the ayahuasca and it's worse with food, so I left my stash of protein bars untouched in my bag. Cameron lit the candles again and performed a short ritual to open the space. Then he asked us to tune into our intention and write it out on a slip paper provided by his assistant. Then one by one, he had us come up and place our intention inside a hand-carved wooden bowl. When it was my turn, he asked me if an animal had come to me during my walk. I told him about the fox. "Very auspicious," he said. "Why? What does it mean?" I asked him. "Not now, "he said, "We can talk about it after." Then he handed me four capsules. When everyone had come up, Cameron gave some further instructions and we all swallowed our capsules. He began to play his drum and chant. I sat waiting to feel the capsules take effect.

It began with a strange body sensation. My skin felt super sensitive, almost electric, like it could decode messages in the air. My stomach felt queasy and tender. My hearing became hyper-acute, so much so that I was sure I could hear Cheryl's heart beating on the cushion next to me. Cameron was no longer drumming. Instead music was playing, an evocative haunting song. Things were about to get weird.

My journey went through several distinct stages. In the first stage, I was able to sit erect. I was very aware of everything in the space; all the other people, their breathing, their hearts beating, the scent of their bodies, the smell of the cedar and palo santo burning, the flicker of the candles, the music, the air currents moving. I could feel Cameron monitoring the energy in the room. At one point, I felt him checking me out and opened my eyes to find him looking at me. In the second stage, and from then on, I had to lie down. As though from above, I saw scenes from my marriage, but not just scenes. Somehow, I saw the true emotional reality behind the habitual patterns of our relationship. Something was forcing me to see it all clearly, my part and Doug's part, too. It was excruciating to face, all the ways I blamed him and projected my own shit onto him, all the times I judged him and closed my heart.

Then it segued into a scene in a mountain monastery. The place was made of stone and very austere, with only roughhewn wooden tables and benches for furniture. Doug and I were there, both of us brown-robed monks. He was older, a rigid dogmatist who lived in a solitary cell and wore a hair shirt. I was a young lay monk, forced into the order by my family who couldn't afford another mouth to feed. He pressured me to take vows and join his life, but I wouldn't. There was a sexual undercurrent in the relationship, which created conflict and guilt in both of us, and led to increased abstinences and selfpunishment on his part. There was an incident where we were seen by another monk touching each other. After that I was sent away to another monastery. I opened my eyes to the yurt again. I sat up to drink some water and wash the taste of bitterness, resentment and shame from my mouth.

In the third stage, the vixen from the lake appeared. She stood staring at me, then turned away and looked back, twitching her bushy red tail. She trotted down a path that opened up from the yurt floor to my left, stopped, looked back and twitched her tail again. I got the message and followed her. She led me to her den, and when I crawled in after her, I saw four kits curled up asleep in a pile. The vixen sniffed them and then walked around them to the back of the den. She pawed in the dirt until it opened into an underground cave. I followed her down. In the center of the cave was a pool of shining obsidian water. The walls were made of amethyst, like the inside a giant geode. The vixen stepped over to the pool and dipped her head down to lap at the water. I followed her lead. When I bent down to cup the water in my hands, I didn't recognize my reflection. A woman wearing a red flowing gown and a garland of stars stared back at me. She smiled and winked at me. I drank the water and fell into a dream and began the fourth stage of my journey. I was in such a deep state that I have very little memory of that stage,

just vague impressions of someone guiding me, showing me things about my life, and doing something to me that felt like an activation or quickening. I woke from the dream with the vixen pawing my chest. The next thing I knew, I was back in my body and had to pee really badly.

People were moving about now, sitting up and talking in low voices. Cheryl was gone. I tried to stand up but my legs wouldn't hold me. Cameron's assistant came over and helped me to the bathroom. After I peed, I washed my hands and splashed water on my face. My pupils were huge and I felt raw, shaky and exhausted, like I'd just run a marathon. I went outside and sat on the steps, looking up at the moon. Food was served in the main house and people walked over to eat. I found Cheryl and we stood in the moonlight hugging. I was hungry but my stomach was still sensitive so all I could manage was some soup. When we got back to our room I took a shower, got into bed and fell off a cliff into a deep, dreamless sleep.

When I woke up in the morning, I knew what I needed to do. I had absolute clarity and was filled with a sense of resolve and purpose. I needed to end my marriage and find a better job.

After the journey, I started seeing fox images everywhere, in random places; on a coffee mug, a company logo on a delivery truck, the back of a tee-shirt, a browser window, a keychain hanging by a cash register. I Googled fox spirit animals. "When the fox appears in your life as a spirit animal, it encourages action and quick, swift moves," I read on one site. Another site said the fox was the ultimate problem solver who uses cunning, patience and persistence to find the way through tricky situations. A clever, quick-witted trickster with a sense of humor, a harbinger of good luck, my vixen lent her energy to guide me through the process of disentangling from my marriage and my job with a minimum of collateral damage. Within three months, I'd filed for divorce, we put the house on the market, and found a new job at a bigger and better agency, one much more progressive, known for its edgy style.

One day, Cheryl and I were talking about our journey experiences and her decision not to sell her company but to change the focus and grow it into what she wanted it to be. That meant securing some new capital and taking a near-term hit financially. She'd have to file to reduce the alimony payments. Her eyes were fierce and determined when she told me, "Jeff be damned. I'm not going to let his vengeful toxic rage keep me from doing what I want with my business!" Superimposed over her blonde head was an angry snorting palomino tossing its head and shaking its mane. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. What was happening to me? When I opened them, no more horse, just the face of my best friend flaring her nostrils. "Uh, Cheryl," I said, clearing my throat, "You didn't happen to see a horse in your journey, did you?" She scrunched her face at me, "No, but I did have a dream about one. Why do you ask?" I told her what I'd seen. "It's kinda freaking me out," I said, "What do you think it means? You know I don't really believe in all this stuff." Cheryl laughed and said, "Why Alexis Rycof I do believe you're more spiritual than you realize. Maybe the ayahuasca and mushrooms activated some latent psychic abilities or something and you can see people's spirit animals now." I was about to snap back that I doubted it, when I remembered the feeling during the journey of something activating inside me after I drank the water in the amethyst cave. The same thing has happened several times since then. I'll be talking to someone, when I'll

catch a glimpse of an animal superimposed over their head.

Other strange stuff started happening after that initial burst of energy to get free from my marriage and old job. In the middle of my day, doing ordinary routine things, out of the blue everything would get hyper-vivid as though the volume dials on my senses got turned up to max. The boundaries between my skin and the external environment blurred and I'd feel and sense things beyond the threshold of normal human awareness. I'd hear conversations down the hall or behind closed doors, as though I was right there in the room. The olfactory input was overwhelming, currents of scent flying at me from all directions telling me what everyone had for lunch, the conditions of their internal organs, every body, beauty care and cleaning product used within a hundred-foot radius. It would last for a few moments and then go back to normal.

Another weird thing happened a couple of times while working on a client account. I'd get a flash of knowing, a total random out-of-the-blue insight on how to position a product, or a crazy idea for an ad campaign that I just knew would work. I don't know how I knew it would work or where the idea came from, but I could feel it in my body and had absolute confidence when I pitched it. It's too early in the campaigns to know for sure, but everything seems to be proving me right so far. Whenever a flash of that inner knowing burst into my awareness, there was a sense of seeing things from way up high, the entire pattern of a situation laid out below me. There was a sharp crystalline quality to the images, yet they were multilayered, too. I could see underlying possibilities beneath the situation as a concentration of sparkly pinpoints in certain areas.

One day I was out shopping for college stuff with Laura. She was picking out new sheets and the emotional reality suddenly hit me like a ton of bricks. Her childhood was over, she was starting her adult life and we'd probably never live together again. Suddenly the scene blurred and I saw us standing in a muddy courtyard, horses and men in battle gear milling about. Laura was a tall, heavyset man in armor. I tried to hold back tears as I said goodbye, a wife sending her husband off to fight in a foreign land. The vision only lasted a moment, but it freaked me out. I leaned up against the shelves of bedding and burst into tears. It was so embarrassing, people were staring, but the emotions overwhelmed me and I couldn't control it. Poor Laura, she was mortified.

I really don't know what to make of it all. I Googled "ayahuasca flash backs and side effects" and read about Hallucinogen Persisting Perception Disorder on one site and freaked myself out. I read on another site about a research study that showed only positive effects on the brain and psychological status of habitual users, but it scares me that I have no control over these strange happenings. I wonder if I'm losing my mind, if seeing animals superimposed over people's heads and scenes from other lives are the early signs of a mental illness or an impending psychotic break with reality. But everything is actually going quite well and the sense of guidance or intuition or whatever you want to call it has gotten me through a couple of very tricky situations.

The whole thing with ending the marriage could have gone very bad and very ugly, but it didn't. Somehow, I was able to present it in a way that didn't send Doug off the deep end. Maybe all that stuff I saw in the journey about our relationship

and my own role helped? It could have messed Laura up, too, but so far she's fine with our divorce. She knows what her dad is like and understands. That foxy sense of guidance helped with the job situation, too. I maneuvered my way out of my old job without them trying to enforce the non-compete clause. I consulted with an attorney and he said it wasn't really enforceable anyway, but they could have made things difficult and expensive if they filed a lawsuit. Cheryl is the only person I've told about these altered reality experiences. She thinks it's great. She's sure I'm going through some sort of psychic awakening and tells me the shamanic journey must have opened my third eye. I don't know what to believe. I don't understand it and I can't explain it. But maybe I don't have to. Maybe I can just let it be and see what happens.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



An interdisciplinary artist, writer and producer, Mikhaila explores the themes of creativity, consciousness, sexuality and female empowerment in a variety of media and performance arts.

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