



A NOVEL

PINK DIAMONDS

Mikhaila Stettler

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Creatrix Arts, Inc.
Santa Barbara, CA

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Creatrix Arts, Inc.
133 E. De La Guerra, Ste. 51
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

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Cover Design: Emily Mahon
Author Photo: Kremer Johnson Photography

Ordering Information:

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the "Special Sales Department" at the address above.

PINK DIAMONDS/ Mikhaila Stettler. -- 1st ed.
ISBN 978-0-9981570-0-9

To Izaak, who always believed.

CHAPTER ONE

Daniel My First Tangasm

It's been a few weeks since my first tangasm with Daniel. I stand in my closet assessing my wardrobe. I want to look hot and sexy but not slutty. My choices are limited — lots of business attire, casual clothes and yoga wear with a few cocktail dresses mixed in. The dresses are all at least ten years old and inappropriately short for a middle-aged peri-menopausal woman. Time to invest in a whole new wardrobe. I settle on a flowing low-cut top and a pair of skintight jeggings. It's a thing now, leggings that look like jeans. I have two pairs of shoes to choose from, both old and stretched out, a pair of salsa practice shoes from back in the day and a pair of hand-me-downs from Zhenya. This is going to be an expensive addiction, between a new tango wardrobe and made-for-tango-only shoes at two hundred bucks a pop. I take extra time with my makeup, apply a triple coat of mascara to my lashes, outline my mouth and shine my lips to a full pout. I check myself out. Not bad for 48. I give my hair a final fluff, blow a kiss to the mirror and head out.

My love affair with tango began with Daniel. I was still an ignorant novice. I had never stayed after class for social dancing before. My teacher, a dishy Ukrainian Jewess if there ever was one, kept encouraging me. "Alexis," she said, "The only way to get good at tango is to practice." But I felt insecure and intimidated. "I don't know, Zhenya," I said. I'd stayed late after class one time to watch. A group of experienced dancers frequented the milonga that followed class at this unlikely hotel bar near the Burbank airport. My corner seat by the DJ gave me an excellent vantage point to observe the ladies' footwork. It looked way beyond my meager technique. "I'm not really good enough yet," I said. What if I can't follow their lead? What if I start back-leading again? What if I make a fool of myself on the dance floor? What if no one wants to dance with me? I'm transported back to junior high, when my overriding concern was how to get boys to like me. "Maybe next week," I said.

Not one to give up, Zhenya suggested I take some private classes. I quickly improved. Back at the bar a few weeks later, I still felt tentative and uncomfortable. "What the hell," I thought, "If I want to get good at this, I'm going to have to bite the bullet and put myself out there." Class ended. I stayed. Marco invited me to dance. He was one of my favorite partners from class. We had good chemistry together, despite our height difference, he at six feet, me at five foot four. I liked Marco. He was kind and funny. I felt safe with him. He led me onto the dance floor. I was nervous, unsure. "Relax," Marco said and pulled me close. It was early still. There were only a few couples on the dance floor, some like us who had stayed after class and some early arrivals for the social dancing. His hand felt warm and comforting on my back. "Just listen to the music and let me lead you." I took a deep breath and tried to relax. I focused on feeling our connection and tried to sense his intention from his chest, the way Zhenya taught me. It worked! I was doing it, following him. Marco made it easy for me. He kept the steps basic, led me into a sequence we'd learned in class. I made it through the entire four-song set of the tanda with only a few stumbles.

Marco led me off the dance floor back to my stool near Zhenya's check-in table. "See, that wasn't so bad, was it?" she said. "No, I managed with Marco's help," I said and squeezed his hand. "Thank you for being so patient and kind, Marco." Marco squeezed my hand back and gave me a kiss on the cheek. "No problem, Alexis," he said, "You'll be a great dancer one day. Just keep practicing." More people had begun to trickle in now that class was over. The next tanda started up, a Nuevo Tango set. I like Nuevo Tango best, much more than traditional tango music. It's sexier, more dramatic. It speaks to me. I feel it in my body. It makes me want to dance. A man I had seen here the week before walked by and caught my eye. I nodded back, my confidence boosted by my first social dance experience.

He led me out onto the dance floor. "I'm Daniel. What's your name?" he said. "Alexis," I said, "But I should warn you I'm a beginner." Daniel smiled and held out his hand. "No worries," he said, "We'll take it easy." Daniel took me in his arms with gentle authority. He was tall, well built, about early-60's with greying hair. At first, he just stood holding me, breathing deep and shifting weight from left to right. It was easy to sync up with him. I liked the way he felt. Then he gave me a clear signal, a little lift, and the dance began. He walked me around the line of dance smooth and steady. I could feel him reading my energy. I'm a sucker for a man who can read energy. It felt like millions of tiny antennae caressing my field. The more I felt him feeling me, sensing me, attending to me, guiding me, taking care of me, the more I trusted him. God, he felt good!

The first song of the tanda ended. Daniel took a step back. Wide-eyed, I looked up into his face. I watched him check me out and saw the appreciation in his eyes. I was glad I'd made the effort to dress up a little. Usually I wore casual workout clothes to class, but all the women who came to dance dressed up in sexy tango outfits. It was part of the scene — sexy clothes and the cult of the high-heeled tango shoe. The next song started before I could say anything.

Daniel pulled me into the close embrace. I took a deep breath and willed myself to relax and focus. I closed my eyes and laid my cheek on his chest, on the soft black silk of his shirt. His scent intoxicated me, something exotic with a spicy top note I'd never smelled before. How a man smells is so major, either a turn-on or a turn-off, and there's nothing you can do to change that reaction. I nestled my face into his neck and breathed him in. The voice of reason, or maybe my mother, piped up, "Jesus, Alexis, what the fuck are you doing? You don't even know this man and you're nuzzling and sniffing him like a wild animal." Daniel just squeezed my hand. No time to think. Just feel and respond to his lead.

As we circled the dance floor, I felt protected in his arms, totally taken care of. I felt alive, wildly present in the moment. With my eyes closed, all my other senses amplified. I could feel the heat of his body against mine, the collar of his shirt tickling my face, the melody and rhythm of the music billowing through me, my feet caressing the floor. My feminine energy began to open and radiate. I could feel all my womanliness respond to his male essence. My sense of presence heightened, both his and my own. Our connection was intense. I could feel everything. We became one with each other and with the music. Daniel guided me into some simple ochos, crosses and ocho cortados. Miraculously I was able to follow him, to respond to the signals of his intent coming through his chest and hands. He slowed down our steps to express the dramatic sexy song. I matched him step for step, attuned to the rhythm of the music. I could feel his hand moving energy up my spine, opening my chakras. I gasped and almost stumbled. Daniel just pulled me closer. My pussy began to tingle. Waves of pleasure rolled up and down my body. I pressed myself up against him, leaned into him, more than I should have for proper technique, but I couldn't help myself. Daniel didn't seem to mind. He held the strength and power of his chest steady. He pulled me even closer, lifted my right hand into the upturned palm of his left. His touch made me feel contained and free at the same time. It sent a thrill of heat and electricity through my chest and my belly, down to the delta between my thighs.

The second song in the tanda ended. I stood there stunned. What just happened? Who was this man? I was in a daze. My legs felt shaky. I clung to him. I didn't want to open my eyes. The third and final song in the tanda began. Nothing existed but this man, our connection, and the song that moved us. I let all

my energy flow free. I stroked the back of his neck and the back of his heart. I pressed my face into the side of his neck. I melted all over him. Daniel kept us moving in the line of dance, but I was oblivious to anything outside the circle of our embrace. I could feel my body heating up, getting wet inside and out. I was so turned on. We breathed together, felt together, moved together. It was like making love right on the dance floor, so intimate, so present, so connected. I was flying high in ecstasy.

The song ended. Daniel stepped back and slid his hands down to hold mine. I didn't want to open my eyes and break the spell. I didn't think I could walk off the floor on my own power. Without him holding me up, my legs felt weak and shaky, as though he'd just fucked my brains out. "I think I need to sit down," I said. Daniel seemed to understand and guided me to the nearest seat in a booth along the back wall. He sat with me while I tried to gather my wits. "Have you had any training in martial arts, or energy healing or something?" I asked him. The way he moved, how his body felt, how he shared his presence, how he tracked my energy all reminded me of master martial artists. "Quite a bit actually," he said, "Why do you ask?" I was still holding onto one of his hands. I didn't want to let go of him. My thigh was pressed up against his. I could feel how wet my pussy was from dancing with him. I wanted to lean over and kiss him. I had to stop myself. A fast milonga was playing as couples swirled past us. The bar was dark, the decor cheap and dated. A few random blue collar guys sat at the bar, looking surprised to find themselves mixed in amongst the well-dressed tango crowd. The dance floor was filling up. "The way you move energy," I said. "It's amazing." I have a thing for martial artists, especially if they're experts in all the internal practices. Their power and strength excite me. Their fierceness and capacity for controlled violence scare me and turn me on. If they know how to read energy, how to build the charge, how to circulate it, how to focus it wherever they want, it makes them sensational lovers. Daniel stroked my hand as we watched the dancers slide by us. "Would you like something to drink?" he said. "Some mineral water, please." Daniel left to get our drinks. I sat there trying to figure out what just happened.

We finished our drinks and the next tanda started up, a romantic tango vals. Daniel looked at me and gestured to the dance floor. He guided me out into the line of dance, pulled me close and held me there, breathing with me and shifting our weight side to side. My cells lit up like they were plugged into an electric socket. I closed my eyes and gave myself over to him and to the music. Our connection was absolute heaven. Daniel guided me into moves I didn't even know I could do. I felt like I was coming right there on the dance floor, wave after wave of orgasmic pleasure. Light and sweat streamed from my pores. My panties

were drenched. I could feel him moving energy up my spine again and I opened everything to him. My body felt like liquid light. I could smell his animal maleness beneath the spicy cologne. I had to restrain myself from leaping into his arms and wrapping my thighs around his waist. I felt him slide his hand down to my back of my waist, then down to my sacrum. I gasped and missed a beat, but he caught me and brought us to a pause. We breathed together, shifted our weight again. I was getting dizzy, lightheaded, weak in the knees.

The tanda came to an end and Daniel walked me back to my stool by the check-in table, thanked me for the tanda, smiled and squeezed my hand, then walked away. Zhenya saw me and came over. "Oh. My. God," I said, "That was incredible. I'm completely high. I can barely walk straight. It was like making love on the dance floor." Zhenya laughed. "I think you just got bit by the tango bug," she said. "I totally get it now," I said, still trying to catch my breath, "how people become completely obsessed with tango." I blathered on for a while until someone needed her attention and interrupted us. I just sat there, dazed and amazed, trying to process the experience. Another man caught my eye for a dance, but I didn't want to chance it. I didn't want to lose the high of dancing with Daniel. I sat there in an altered state, watching the dancers, until I got it together to leave. That night, my obsession began. I fell head over heels in love with tango. I didn't realize that my tangasm experience with Daniel was a rare phenomenon, elusive as a yeti sighting, but it was too late. Now I'm addicted, and like any addict, I've been chasing that original high ever since.

When I walk in to class tonight, Zhenya eyes me up and down. She gives me a big smile and knowing wink. "Hi Alexis," she says, and pulls me close for a big hug. A heady mix of fragrant warmth and voluptuousity envelops me. She smells like the tropics - ripe, juicy and sweet. I think I'm falling in love. Zhenya is married and neither of us are lesbians. These are insignificant details when faced with the wolf-eyed, raven-haired beauty before me. Who could resist the brilliance of an intellectual Soviet-trained concert pianist improbably grafted onto a she-wolf with an earthy sense of humor and a heart as big as the sky? "You look great," she says. "Thanks," I say, "I thought I'd make more of an effort." I'd been coming to class in workout wear and barely any makeup. Not exactly elegant or sexy.

Class takes forever. I'm impatient with my fellow students' fumbling leads and their awkward lack of musicality. I keep checking the clock and scanning the tables for Daniel. When it finally ends, I take a seat at the bar with a good view of the dance floor. The lights dim and the DJ starts a set of traditional tango music as the bar begins to fill up. Daniel comes in. He smiles when he sees me and walks over to say hello. "Hi, Alexis," he says. "How are you?" Daniel looks great tonight, casual but sophisticated, in a midnight blue heavy silk jacquard shirt and

black trousers. He leans in to give me a kiss on the cheek and I catch his distinctive scent again. He orders a beer. I ask him how he's been, but before he can answer, some people come up to say hello to him. Every time I get his attention, some woman comes over to kiss him and he turns away. He heads off to the dance floor with one of them, a tall gorgeous blonde in a revealing halter top and clinging skirt with a thigh-high slit. I feel like I'm 16 at the school dance crushing on a boy. Why do I feel jealous?

I sit on my stool and wait for an invitation, feeling stupid and insecure. Since I'm new to the tango community, I don't really know anyone yet. Besides, I'm a beginner. I can't keep up with the good dancers. I wonder if this is how it felt to Doug during our marriage, never able to keep up with me, always lagging behind. To me it felt like he was always holding me back, dragging me down. He was so threatened by anything new I wanted to do. Zhenya has taught me the strict etiquette of traditional Argentine tango, a safe container for the intimate connection this form demands. The man invites the woman to dance with a cabaceo — he catches the woman's eye and gives a gesture with his head to indicate the invitation. If the woman doesn't want to dance, she avoids his glance or looks away. This convention prevents the awkwardness of a direct refusal. Marco comes to my rescue again. I like dancing with Marco. I relax into his embrace and let myself enjoy the feeling of a man holding me close in his arms. Ever since my divorce, I've thrown myself into my work. I put dating on the back-burner, but I promised myself I would get out more once I got settled in Los Angeles. I decided to try tango because I love to dance, and I was in the mood for something more elegant and sophisticated than salsa. I figured I could meet some new friends and maybe even some eligible men. Marco and I share a tanda and I manage to keep up. After the fourth song ends, he walks me off the dance floor back to my barstool and heads off to find another partner.

I guess I must look pretty hot tonight. Despite my inexperience, several men catch my eye over the course of the evening. It's a challenge to follow them. I have to concentrate just to keep up with the steps. I try and focus on the embrace, on the connection, but I don't feel that electric charge with any of them. How come Daniel hasn't asked me to dance? I know it wasn't just me. I know we both felt the connection. I'm about to give up and head out when Daniel comes back to the bar. "Be cool," I tell myself and swing around on my barstool. "Having fun?" I say and give him a flirty smile. He's changed into a grey and black patterned shirt that goes perfectly with his grey eyes and his salt and pepper hair. "Always," he says, "How about you?" I lie and say, "Absolutely!" He drinks his beer and he introduces me to some of the people sitting next to us at the bar. The next tanda starts up with a super sexy Nuevo Tango song. I'm praying he asks me to dance.

Daniel turns to me and inclines his head toward the dance floor. Finally! I slip off the barstool and he leads me out to the edge of the floor.

Daniel takes my hands, pulls me close, and we enter the tango embrace. A thrill of nervous excitement starts in the pit of my stomach and skitters up and down my body. I try to match my breath with his as he shifts our weight in time to the song. I tell myself to relax and focus on the music. I surrender into the embrace, close my eyes and lay my cheek against his chest. There it is, my chemical reaction to the crystal velvet of his scent and the feel of his body. It's as good as I remember. He may be older, but there's solid muscle under there. I can feel him reading my energy, like the sweep of a hand from my crown to my tail. I want to melt all over him. "Keep it together, Alexis," I tell myself. He starts us off with a simple tango walk at first. I put everything out of my mind, everything but the music and our connection. I may not have the technique, but I have the musicality. With a song like this, the music takes over and fills my body with pleasure. I have to remind myself to stay focused, to wait for his lead and not choreograph my own thing. The song ends and we stand there breathing together. I catch a glimpse of us in one of the mirrored pillars. We look good together in the low light of the dance floor. I pull back a bit to look up at him.

There's something fierce in Daniel's eyes. It's kind of a turn-on. All of a sudden, I see him astride a shaggy horse. He's wearing what looks to be medieval Chinese armor and a helmet with a red tassel on top. Superimposed over his features are narrow, almond eyes and a drooping mustache. His sword glints in the sun. I'm overcome with the smell of smoke and mud. The taste of copper fills my mouth. We're in trampled fields surrounding a walled city. All around me I hear the screams and grunts of men fighting, horses snorting. With a savage yank on the reins, the Daniel-warrior pulls his horse around. He raises his sword and swings it down toward me. I'm frozen in place. I hear a thwack followed by a scream of agony. Blood splashes in my face. A severed arm clutching a sword falls to the ground at my feet. I gasp and step back. "Alexis?" he says. What the fuck was that? The battle fades in and out. I try to bring the dance floor back into focus. I'm sweating. My heart is pounding. I can feel the adrenaline coursing through my body. "Are you OK?" I shake my head to clear my vision. I look up at him again. I see concern and kindness in his grey eyes. "That was weird," I say. "What happened?" he asks. The next song in the tanda starts up. "I'll tell you later." I step in again to take up the tango embrace. I take a deep breath and try to calm my racing heart. Did we have a past life together in China? Why would it bleed through on the dance floor? Who were we to each other?

There's no time to think about it. I try to put the vision out of my mind, re-establish our connection and just focus on the dance. I feel his strength and

attention. I know he's checking me out to make sure I'm OK. Daniel runs a hand up my spine. It sends a rush of energy through my body, makes me feel safe and protected. I turn up the dial and open my field to receive his intention and register his lead. His male presence amplifies in response, brings out even more of my feminine energy. The warmth of his hands kindle comet trails, passing the torch in relay races, spirals up and down my body. I'm all woman in his arms. My pussy starts to swell and pulse. I'm consumed with desire. I lose my focus for a moment and miss a step. Daniel holds us in place to steady me for a few bars. I sync my breath with his as he shifts our weight from side to side. There's so much charge between us, it's hard to pay attention to my feet. I just want to open everything to him and let go. "Jesus, Alexis! Get it together," I tell myself. "What the fuck are you doing? You don't even know this man." The song ends and I stand there trying to process the experience. For a moment, I smell the smoke and mud again, then it passes.

The DJ plays two more Nuevo Tango songs in the tanda. It takes every bit of focus I can muster to keep dancing as waves of pleasure roll through my body. All I want to do is jump on him and wrap my legs around him. My panties are getting wet. I know he must be able to smell me, but it feels too damn good to be embarrassed. My eyes are closed, so I have no idea if anyone notices, and I'm past caring anyway. I have to admire his concentration. I have to follow his lead, but he has to navigate us around the crowded dance floor. Daniel escorts me back to the bar at the end of the set. "That was wonderful," I say. "Thank you." Daniel looks me up and down and shakes his head. "No, thank you," he says. He squeezes my hands. My legs are shaky. My panties feel slick. I need to pull myself together. I grab my bag and head to the bathroom.

I wipe myself after peeing. I can feel how engorged I am. My panties are soaking wet. I stuff them in my purse. I stand at the sink running cold water over my wrists trying to collect myself. Between the over-heated chemistry of our connection and that battlefield vision, I'm a wreck. I look in the mirror. My pupils are dilated and my face is all flushed. My mascara has run all under my eyes and I'm a sweaty mess. I look like I've just had my brains fucked out. I fix myself up as best I can and head outside into the cold night air. I sit on a bench in the hotel driveway. There's a faint stench of jet fuel in the air and the roar of planes taking off in the background. Daniel comes out and stands by the door, scanning the entrance. I can tell he's looking for me. He turns his head in my direction and sees me sitting there in the shadows. He walks over. "Everything OK, Alexis?" he asks and sits down on the bench next me. "Yeah," I say. "I just needed to get some fresh air. What time is it?" He looks at his watch. "12:30."

"I think I'll head home," I say.

"Let me walk you to your car." I'm still all hot and bothered and make small talk to cover it up. "So how long have you been dancing tango?" I ask him. The boulevard is nearly empty of cars and the streetlights cast a harsh glare. The moon is almost full in a cloudless sky. "Oh, I grew up with tango," he says. "My parents loved to dance. Tango, cha-cha, salsa, all of it. They had weekly dance parties at our home." It sounds like he misses those times. "Where did you grow up?" I ask. "In Istanbul," he tells me. He doesn't look Turkish, but what do I know? What if he's religious and a traditional Muslim? I could never be with a man who expects me to obey him, who would want to dominate and control me. I try to reconcile evenings of sexy partner dancing with traditional Islamic attitudes when he asks me, "What about you? Where are you from?"

"I grew up in Seattle," I say. "I just moved to LA last year."

"What brings you to Los Angeles?" he asks. "Work," I say, "and I wanted a change." I don't mention my divorce. "What kind of work do you?" he asks. "I'm in marketing," I say. I don't want to talk about work. I stop walking. "This is my car," I say.

Daniel starts to stroke my hands and arms as we stand there next to my car. It's making me shiver, or maybe I'm just getting chilled in my sweaty clothes. Daniel pulls me close and just holds me. I have to stop myself from hooking my leg around him and grinding my panty-less crotch up against his thigh. I step back and take a shaky breath. He looks me up and down. "You are so gorgeous, Alexis," he says. I smile up at him. I've finally learned to accept a compliment gracefully, a little gift that came with age. "Thank you, Daniel," I say. I open the passenger side door to put my shoe bag and purse in the car. I bend over to deposit my bags and to give him a good view of my ass up in the air in my skin-tight jeggings. "Mmm, mmm, mmm, Alexis," he says, "you are so damn hot."

"Actually, I'm cold," I say and walk around my car to get into the driver's seat. I leave the passenger door open. Daniel leans into the car. "Are you getting in?" I ask. He climbs in and shuts the door. I start the car and turn on the heat. The sexy Alabama Shakes song I was listening to on the way over starts up. I turn to face him. We just sit there looking at each other. Then he leans over and kisses me, a soft sweet kiss. He pulls back and looks in my eyes. His eyes are hooded and fierce again. He takes my head in his hands and pulls me in for another kiss, deeper and more demanding this time. I part my lips and he slips the tip of his tongue into my mouth. I feel a tug down in my pussy. I hear myself moan and feel myself getting wet again. Without thinking, I reach over and put my hand on his cock through his pants. He's already half-way hard. I can feel the swollen head and run my fingers along the ridge. When I squeeze it, his cock thickens and

comes to rigid attention. I start to stroke him through his pants, running my hand all along his impressive length and girth. He groans.

I come to my senses. What the fuck am I doing? "Sorry. I didn't mean to do that," I say, "I have to go." I pull back and turn away. I'm embarrassed now. What is wrong with me? I don't even know this guy and I'm giving him a hand job in my car. "Thanks again for the fabulous tandas," I say, "I'll see you next week." Daniel sighs and adjusts himself. Then he leans over again, puts his hand on my cheek and turns my head to face him. He kisses me slow and deep again, etching our nerve endings with the promise of more to come. "It was wonderful to dance with you, Alexis," he says. Daniel opens the door, then turns back and says, "Be careful driving home. Text me when you get there so I know you got home safe?" I'm touched by his request. We exchange numbers before he gets out of the car. He shuts the door and I take off.

I drive in a daze, like I'm high and tripping, with scenes of the battlefield still flashing before my eyes. I drive embarrassed and shocked by my behavior, excited and appalled, turned-on and wet. I drive with the sensation of Daniel's mouth on mine and his hard cock in my hand. I text him when I get there and he texts back, "Sweet dreams, beautiful." I take a shower to wash off the sweat and clear my head. It takes me along time to fall asleep, even after I rub myself off, reliving our tanda together. I dream of our life together in medieval China. I wake up with images of us training at sword practice in the courtyards of a mountaintop Taoist monastery, as comrades riding shaggy horses down endless dusty roads, clattering through the gates of our general's gilded palace with its curved roof, walking the length of his red-pillared hall between rows of armed guards to bow before him.

I call Zhenya the next day. "I need your help," I tell her, "I danced with this guy last night and I seriously embarrassed myself." The gods smiled on me when they brought Zhenya into my life. I totally lucked out with this one. A combination of intuition and Google led me to my first tango class with her. I knew she was a kindred spirit right from the start. Not only did I score a great tango teacher but also my first real girlfriend in Los Angeles. "Why," she says, "What happened? Was it Daniel?" I'm still lying in bed. I was so charged up I couldn't get to sleep until two in the morning, so I slept in late. "Yes, it was Daniel." I cringe as I tell her about practically orgasming on the dance floor with him. I can feel my face turn red when I tell her about the aborted hand job in the car after. "I'm so confused," I say, "I want to fuck this guy and I'm not even sure I want to date him!"

"Alexis, you have to be careful in the tango community," Zhenya tells me, "It's a small circle and you don't want to get a reputation." I wince. I love the way

Zhenya teaches tango, so much more than mere steps or technique. She brings an element of consciousness and spirituality to the process that suits me just fine.

"I'm gonna steer you straight," she tells me, "I was newly divorced when I first got into tango, too. I made plenty of mistakes. I didn't have anyone to advise me, but you do." I'm grateful to have the wise and generous Zhenya as my mentor. "First of all, you don't want to ruin a beautiful dance relationship," Zhenya says, "If you have sex with him and it's not good, it's going to be really awkward at the milongas. You'll be seeing each other all the time." Hmm, good point. It would be impossible to avoid him. And everyone knows him. "But Zhenya, we have the most incredible connection," I tell her. "That may be," she says, "but that's on the dance floor. It doesn't mean he's like that in bed. Believe me, I know. It doesn't necessarily translate." I find that hard to believe. I think back on Daniel's kisses and the feel of his big hard cock in my hand. "I'm telling you from personal experience. Ask any of the women who've been in the community for a while. They'll tell you the same thing," she says.

I think about this for a minute. Then I think about my dreams of our Chinese life as sworn comrades-in-arms. Do I want to date Daniel? I don't know. He's kind of old for me, but maybe he's the one. Maybe we were destined to meet again in this life. "What do you know about Daniel?" I ask her. "Does he have any money? Do you know what he does for a living?" I refuse to be with a man who doesn't have serious bank. My 18-year marriage was a financial disaster. Ever since Doug lost all our savings in his second failed business, I was the sole breadwinner. For ten long years. All I got out of that marriage was debt. Well, debt and our daughter, Laura. I'm never going to support a man like that again. I want a man who can take care of me next time. Not that I don't want to make my own money. I can support myself, but I want my man to be fully empowered in the world and that means he's got to have the money part handled. For sure, he has to make more money than me. "Not much," Zhenya says. "I know he's from Turkey. Oh, and he sells Oriental rugs."

"Sells, as in he's a dealer, or he owns his own business?" I ask her.

"No," Zhenya says, "I don't think so. I think he just works in a store." This is not promising. "Do you know how old he is?" I ask her. "Maybe 63 or 64," she says.

Arrgghh! Two deal-killers right off the bat, age and money. For the first time in my life, I want to be with a younger man. Not a lot younger, maybe five years or so, but definitely not someone on the verge of senior citizenship! All throughout my 20's and early 30's, I was always attracted to older men. They were more mature with more money, and besides, I was working out my Daddy issues. Now that I just got out of a sexless marriage, I want a younger, fit, hot guy who

will fuck me good and hard on a regular basis. I may be middle-aged, about to turn 49 and approaching menopause, but I don't look it. My three times a week yoga practice keeps me strong and flexible. Everybody tells me I look ten years younger than I am. I don't really believe that. Let's split the difference and say I look five years younger.

"If you want my advice..." Zhenya says. "Yes, please," I say. "Then keep it on the dance floor," she tells me. "You may have a great connection now, but as your dancing progresses, that can change. As you become a better dancer, you may no longer enjoy the partners you love dancing with now. It's pretty typical." I consider this for a minute. I see my wadded-up panties on the floor by the hamper and flash back to our dance together last night, how it felt to be in his arms, to move together as one with the music, that super sexy song playing, the feeling of his body against mine, breathing in his exotic scent, his hand on my back moving the energy up my spine, caressing the back of my neck. Something in my pussy tugs and twangs again. "Really?" I say. "I don't know if that would happen with Daniel." I imagine that impressive cock all up inside me. "We have super intense chemistry together." Then again, do I really want to get involved with a man that old? There's always Viagra, I guess. "Even more reason to preserve your dance relationship, then," she says. I get what she's saying, but then I get a flash of our past life together. We're sitting in a pavilion by a fish pond. A beautiful woman in sumptuous embroidered robes kneels at the edge, playing the flute. I tell Zhenya about the dance floor vision of the battle scene and my dreams from last night. "That is so... bizarre, Alexis," she says. She clears her throat. "I get how that would make things more confusing for you, but this life is here and now. Think it over and decide what's more important to you — protecting your dance relationship or having sex with the guy. And remember, there's a lot of gossip in the tango community. Word gets around fast. You're new and I want to protect you. Maybe have lunch with him first and see if there's anything between you off the dance floor. Find out if you have anything in common." Excellent advice. I am so lucky to have her to guide me. "Zhenya, you are an angel," I tell her, "Thank you for helping a sister out."

After we hang up, I debate the pros and cons of going to bed with Daniel. Pros — it's been a long, lonely, dry spell. Daniel is the first guy I've felt desire for in at least a couple of years. He can track and move energy. He has a big cock and probably knows how to use it. Cons — first of all there's the age difference. Do I really want to get involved with a man at least fifteen years older than me, who probably doesn't have much money, who might harbor traditional sexist Islamic attitudes, who will demand obedience and expect to control me? And what about our past life connection? Is that a pro or a con? What does it mean for this life? The

only thing I know for sure is that I love dancing with him. In the end, I decide to follow Zhenya's advice and vow not to date my dance partners. At least not until I'm sure they're boyfriend material!

I planned to talk with Daniel about my decision to protect our dance relationship after class tonight, but he never shows up. This Monday the bar is full of women on the other side of middle age, on the fast slide toward 60. It's not a bad looking bunch. They've made an effort to fix themselves up, but you can see where the years have gnawed at them and worn them down. Sagging and bulging, faded flowers trying too hard. It happens to the best of us. I know. It's happening to me. No one gets out alive.

We're all here to dance. The younger women are already out on the dance floor. Tango meets Darwinism at an airport hotel in the San Fernando Valley. I wait to be invited to dance. A wave of anxiety and insecurity washes over me. I'm back in junior high. Am I pretty enough, thin enough, young enough, a good enough dancer? I cringe inside. I feel old and invisible. I went through an ugly duckling phase in eighth grade, my childhood cuteness gone, braces on my teeth, while my face morphed into adult features. That first school dance, I stood alone the entire night watching my nemesis flirt with Jacob. Marcia was everything I wasn't — tall with straight blonde hair and popular. Not a single boy asked me to dance.

Marco rescues me. Now I'm out on the floor again, trying not to back-lead. He pulls me close. I mean, really close. Close enough that I can feel his erection against my thigh. What the fuck? This ain't no salsa club, dude. I pretend I don't feel it and adjust my posture to make a little space between me and his little man. I'm distracted thinking about it. Would I even want to sleep with him? I miss a step and stumble against him. There it is again. A Top 10 pop song marks the end of the three-song tanda. I thank him for the dance and walk off the floor.

I don't know anyone here. I'm still new to the tango scene. I'm not a good dancer yet. Zhenya keeps insisting I start showing up at these things to practice, says it's the only way to get good, but I don't like it. There's a snobby element. I feel intimidated by all the better dancers. I don't like the drive to get here, don't like being here by myself, like some sort of social reject. I don't like the slightly seedy vibe of this bar, and I'm not drinking tonight anyway. I don't like being shoved around by men who aren't very good leaders. I don't like feeling old and invisible.

An older Japanese man invites me to dance. I've seen him occasionally in class. He's short and intense. His body feels dry and brittle, his lead rigid and demanding. I try to connect with his energy and follow him but something tender and delicate inside me recoils. My skin pulls tight like it's trying to get away from

him. I miss a cue and he scolds me. I don't think I can stand this for another two or three songs. He tries to lead me into some move I don't know. He tsk's and scolds me again when I don't get it right. His hands feel like crow claws. A dried up old crow gripping me in his sharp black talons, ready to peck my eyes out, ready to tear into my breast and stick his pointy black beak between my ribs, ready to tear out pieces of my heart, my tender little heart, a hummingbird fluttering madly, trapped in the black steel cage of his grip.

He grips me tighter and hisses, "No, no, no. Back ocho." His breath smells like mold. My stomach convulses. I want to run off the dance floor. It's a major tango faux pas. I don't care. I can't take it anymore. "Excuse me, but I don't feel well," I say and make my escape. I grab my bag and practically run to the bathroom. I wash him off my hands, splash cold water on my face and neck, make the mistake of looking in the mirror. The fluorescent lights are not kind. I don't recognize the face staring back at me. I will never be young again. My romantic tango fantasies shrivel up and slink off to join their cousins in the corner, rattling around in the shadows. I go back to the bar. The women sit sipping their drinks and sucking in their stomachs. I turn and walk out the door. I head to my car. My tango fantasies limp along behind me.

It's been several weeks and I still haven't gathered the courage to venture onto the scene again. Zhenya calls to find out where I've been. I tell her all about my misadventure with the Japanese man. "Aww, honey, that's awful," she says, "But don't let that turn you off to tango. Just don't dance with him again." Beads of condensation dot my martini glass. "It's more than that," I say. At 36 years old, can she really understand what I'm dealing with? "I don't want to be just another pathetic, middle-aged woman looking for romance on the dance floor," I tell her. The late afternoon sun floods my bedroom with a warm amber light. I'm home from a stressful day at the office, filled with missed deadlines, angry phone calls with the printers, and interminable meetings where nothing gets decided. I'm lying on my bed, sipping a cold dry martini. Across the room, my newly purchased silver tango shoes glitter their reproach in the slanting light. "Alexis, darling, you are the least pathetic woman I know," she tells me. "Don't be put off by that scene at the hotel. There are plenty of other places to dance." I am so overdue for a pedicure that I've ripped a hole in the toe of my stockings. I skipped yoga this afternoon and feel guilty about self-medicating with alcohol instead. "Come out with us tonight," Zhenya says. "It's a very friendly milonga with an international crowd of all ages. There's a great dance floor and a free class before. Plus, my favorite DJ is playing tonight." I'm reluctant to venture out, but what's more pathetic than staying home and drinking alone? "Come on, Alexis," she says, "It'll be fun. There's a group of us going so you won't be alone." It's almost

impossible to resist Zhenya when she wants me to do something. I sigh and take a big gulp of my martini. "OK, fine. Text me the address and I'll meet you there."

I decide to go early to take the free class before the milonga since I haven't danced in while. Even though I'm spoiled by the fabulous Zhenya, I enjoy the class. The teacher Emilio is a short muscular man. He's funny and charming and from Peru, of all places. I'm flattered when he singles me out for special attention. By the time class ends, I'm feeling way more confident. The lights are dimmed. The milonga begins. People trickle in. It's still early for the tango crowd. Much to my surprise, Emilio invites me to dance. He's a wonderful lead. He makes me look good. I'm having fun. Zhenya shows up in a royal blue dress that brings out the electric blue of her eyes. A deep V-cut displays her double-D boobs. She comes over, gives me a kiss hello. Sylvie is with her. I recognize her. She's the tall blonde Daniel danced with at the hotel bar. Zhenya introduces us. We get some drinks and sit down. Zhenya and Sylvie seem to know everyone. A stream of people come over to the table to say hello. There's much kissing of cheeks. I feel like I'm at the best table in the lunch room with the popular girls. Sylvie is hysterical. I'm laughing so hard, I'm practically peeing in my pants.

Carried along in their jet stream, a number of Zhenya and Sylvie's friends invite me to dance. I'm still a beginner and my technique is minimal at best but, these men are kind and generous partners. They keep it simple for me. Back at the table for a rest, Zhenya asks me, "Aren't you glad you came out?" I pat the sweat off my face with a napkin and take a sip of my wine. "I am indeed," I say, "I'm having a marvelous time." I'm looking around the room, watching the dancers and chatting with Zhenya when I catch sight of Daniel in the line of dance. I feel a thrill of nervous excitement. I haven't seen or talked to him since that night in my car. The tanda ends and Sylvie comes back to the table. Daniel comes over to say hello to us. I think he's going to ask me to dance, but he invites Sylvie instead. I feel a pang of jealousy when I see him take her in his arms with the same intimate embrace he shared with me. I turn away and catch Zhenya watching me. "See, Alexis," Zhenya says, "He's like that with everyone. That's his thing." I'm embarrassed all over again about our make-out session and the abbreviated hand job in my car. Thank God I came to my senses before it went any further.

The tanda ends and Daniel escorts Sylvie back to the table. I can't believe how disappointed I feel when he walks away without inviting me to dance. "I've been telling Alexis to watch out for guys like Daniel," Zhenya says to Sylvie. "He swept her off her feet a few weeks back and she didn't know what hit her." They both laugh. "Did he do his special thing and give you a tangasm?" Sylvie asks. "A tangasm? So there's a name for it?" I say. "Oh yes, the rare and elusive tangasm," Sylvie says and cracks up again. "Hey," Zhenya says, "I'm just glad Alexis got to

experience it, because it made her fall in love with tango." I feel myself blushing. "Does he do it with you?" I ask Sylvie. "I've had it happen a few times, but not with Daniel," she says. Zhenya nods and takes a sip of her wine. "When you get more experience and become a better dancer," she says, "it's all about the connection, not about sexual energy." I need to get out of here and process this. I need to figure out why I'm so pissed off. I need some air. I get up from the table. Sylvie says, "Don't feel bad about it, Alexis. Daniel's a good guy at heart. He just likes making women come on the dance floor." They crack up again.

I walk up and down the sidewalk and take big gulps of air. I don't know which pisses me off more — the fact that this is Daniel's "thing," as Sylvie put it, or that I have so little self-control. I hate how vulnerable my unmet needs have made me, my needs for love, for sex, for intimacy. I feel like an out-of-control, horny teenager with no boundaries and no self-respect. This takes me back to when I was a teenager and how my mother shamed me for my burgeoning sexuality. Like that time in tenth grade when Rick and I were parked in my driveway after a date, making out in the front seat. My mother had been watching and waiting for me to get home. She stormed out the front door to yank me out of the car and drag me into the house, calling me slut and a whore. When I protested that we just kissing, she slapped my face. She told me boys only wanted one thing from me. Then she grounded me for a month. Uptight frigid bitch.

Fuck this shit! I'm a grown woman and I refuse to be ashamed of my sexuality. I give myself a little pep talk about owning my power and claiming my sexuality and making conscious choices over how I express it, blah, blah-blah, blah-blah. I pull up my tits, smooth down my skirt and head back inside, determined to clear things up with Daniel.

I find him by the buffet table. He's standing there chatting with a poodle in a pink dress, eating chocolate truffles. "Excuse me," I say to him, "Can we talk for a minute? I have something I want to share with you." Daniel hesitates. He seems a little swizzled, nervous even, but maybe I'm just projecting. "Don't worry," I say, "It's nothing bad." I lead him back outside. "Things got a little out of control the other week," I say. He looks like cracked cement. I go on. "I love dancing with you, but if we get involved with each other and for whatever reason it doesn't work out, then it will be awkward seeing each other at milongas all the time. I don't want to take the chance and maybe lose my favorite dance partner." Daniel seems relieved. "So I want to protect our dance relationship and keep it to the dance floor." I stick my hand out. "Deal?" I say. He takes my hand, "Deal," he says. He cocks his head toward the door, inviting me to dance. I smile and take his arm. We walk back inside and Daniel guides me to the dance floor.

Our timing is perfect. The cortina between sets is just coming to an end. A tango vals starts up. We assume the position. I am hyper-alert to his energy. His embrace is still delicious, just more contained. He still smells fantastic. I still feel the chemistry of our connection. I still want to fuck him. As he guides me around the dance floor, I can't help but test him. Just because I've set a boundary doesn't mean I don't want him to want me! In fact, contrary creature that I am, I want him to want me all the more now that he can't have me. I tap into the core of my feminine energy, reach into my womanly center, let it fill and flow through my entire being, let it radiate without letting it loose. "Let's see how you handle that," I think. I can feel his male response, but he manages to restrain it and get himself under control. Is it fucked up that his control turns me on even more? It's not a tangasm, but it's very nice just the same. The song ends. We stand there for a moment without moving. My eyes are closed. My face is pressed up against his cheek. I'm smiling, feeling very pleased with myself. Then we're off again, gliding into the next song.

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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