

LAILA'S QUEST

Book One



Max Swyft

Laila's Quest Book One by Max Swyft

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A Sequel To Layton's Lament

By

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"It is said that our imagination is ninety percent of our sexuality. This dark tale comes from the largest organ of the human body: the mind."

Max Swyft

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Author's Note

This book continues the Cytherea Coterie series (See the list of books on the previous page).

Cyrenaica (pronounced Cer En A she-ah), the city on these pages is fictitious. It is situated west of the Barrows River. However, on a clear day, from the cathedrals of brick and glass in the business district known as the Canyons, can barely be seen its sister city and the outline of Manhattan.

Cyrenaica is a thriving metropolis of teeming masses much like the real cities of New York or Chicago or Los Angeles. Indeed, there may be some references to New York City contained in this book. In the vast business district of the Canyons is the Cypris Club. It has a nondescript, almost anonymous entrance. The Cypris Club is home to the Cytherea Coterie, a private and radical feminist organization that believes the world would be better served if it was ruled by women.

That such organizations exist is a fact. That most of the nineties has brought about the feminization of the male is also a fact. As feminists gain prominence and emerge as leaders of our society men will become subservient to them. It is part of the feminist creed and is undisputable. In addition to countless scholars and liberal academia, there are many institutions, including NOW and others that advocate and are instrumental in blurring the line between the sexes.

It is not the intention of this book to argue the morals of this phenomena in our society, but merely to tell a tale about one such organization and the lives it effects.

This book contains vivid scenes of a sexual nature. If you are offended by fetishistic adult material pass this one up and go to the library. You'll not find this title there...at least not yet.

The Players

Following is a list of most of the characters in this book. It is put here as a reference tool since these characters overlap many of the books in the Cytherea Coterie series.

LAILA LAMPKIN: Young, resembles movie star. Gwyneth Paltrow, now lives in Cyrenaica, is good friend of Trixie.

AURORA SPILLANE: Tall, full-bodied woman with dark commanding eyes. Befriends young Layton while shopping in his aunt's antique warehouse.

SALVATORE DONATELLO: CPD Detective who catches the tranny case.

BERTRAM STEINBERG: Partner to Salvatore Donatello, wise cracker, good cop

BUSTER: Works at the Antique Barn where Laila first started working. Has a thing for Laila.

LYNETTE LAMPKIN: Layton's protective older sister. Strikes out on her own with childhood friend, moves to New York City, then to Cyrenaica.

SASHA EDMUND: Daughter of Martha Edmund, and close intimate friend to Lynette Lampkin.

TRIXIE: Tall blonde tranny, hooker and player on the streets of the Barrows.

THE BAD GUY: He stalks trannies in the Barrows.

ALSO, characters from previous books appear.

Book One

The Hunt

Chapter One

It is an unlikely bright sunny day for winter. A thin blanket of snow covers the surrounding countryside. Open fields border the rural road, which are several miles off the two-lane highway from the cemetery and the small hamlet of Massena.

On the left along the gravel road, the field gives way to a sloping hill dotted with brush, the trees naked, stripped of their leaves. The rising hill blocks the bend ahead. Last year on a dismal rainy day I remember thinking another car or truck might be rumbling toward us, come around this blind curve and crash into us, killing auntie and me.

The thought brings a wry smile to my face as I negotiate my sister's red Dodge Ram into the curve. It's big, a king-cab and bespeaks Lynette's success since moving to the city. Like that day so many months ago, there is no oncoming vehicle this afternoon. Just the cold wintry inhospitable landscape.

Around this blind curve the gravel road becomes asphalt and the sun has melted any trace of lingering snow on the wet narrow black ribbon that leads to the house.

Off in the distance I see the old Victorian manse surrounded in a stand of tall pines.

Though it hasn't been quite a year, as I look at it I feel like I'm traveling back in time. From another life when I was another person.

I pull up to the house. Despite the bright wintry sun, this time of day the front is in dark shadow.

It is an old, turn of the century three-story Victorian, with an intricately carved, double-door portico. A porch dusted with snow

where the sun cannot reach it, extends from the right side of the portico and wraps around the house. The left corner is marked by a three-story tower with sash windows. The round tower which leads to the upper floors is characteristic of the Victorian era. A gable roof extends right of the tower and under the eaves dormer windows face north. In back, peeking over the slate roof are two chimneys, both belching grey smoke into the clear crisp air.

I get out of the red pickup, pull my coat around me, and look at the house.

My eyes move upward to the dormer window on the third floor. Parted curtains still hang either side of the window. I squint, try to peer beyond the windowpane into the darker interior. No movement. No face looks out at me. No white hair.

Nothing, just still shadows reflected on the windowpane.

Last year, in that other life, when I first laid eyes on this place, a face appeared in that high window. Briefly for sure but unmistakable, down to wispy white hair. I remember it as if it was yesterday. That day my eyes were drawn to the third floor. A feeling . . . something made me look up. I saw an indistinguishable face, but a face all the same. Our eyes held for mere moments before the face moved away. I remember the moment, too, how I felt, my presence of mind, keenly aware of that face, it's spectral countenance.

I was meant to see that face. Goose bumps coursed over my arms. At the time I thought it was just the chilly incessant rain.

Auntie and I were delivering Diana, goddess of the hunt, complete with bare sculpted breasts, arms outstretched, bow in hands, the ancient mythical goddess of love. A replica of the statue that once sat atop the old Madison Square Garden.

In many ways that rainy day was the beginning of a journey that changed my life forever.

And now I am back.

Back to finish this business, what started here.

Back to make good on my word.

My vow to right a wrong.

For months I have fretted over it, pushed it from my mind, and invented elaborate distractions to keep from thinking about it. Thinking about her.

Once more I glance at that dormer window, half expecting the face to appear. It does not. I sigh, see my breath fog the cold air and go up on the porch, take the tarnished cold brass knocker in hand and slap it several times against the striking plate.

The wind comes up, rustles my hair. I push strands from my face, look at a low cloud of powdery snow swirl across an adjoining field.

I knock again, listen to the forlorn sound echo through the interior.

After several minutes I go to a window, peer inside at an empty room, listen for footsteps.

It is unlikely no one is here. Yet it's been nearly a year. Things may have changed in that time. Maybe they've gone on holiday to get away from the winter.

A chill passes over me and I hug my coat tighter, reach for the doorknob. It turns in my gloved fist. With some hesitation I step inside the wide foyer, stomp my snow-rimed boots on a rug, hope the sound might bring someone.

"Anybody home?" I call out, my voice trilling with tension.

I move into the hall which is lit by antique sconces along either wall, just enough light to make my way. I stop at tall narrow double doors, push them open. A small sitting room with rockers and claw-feet brocade couch. It's empty.

I stand uncertainly in the hall. Should I retrace my steps, get out

of here? No. Taking leave of the city, I've driven for hours. I will not turn back now.

I move through the first floor rooms, calling out, my voice greeting only eerie silence.

In the great room a dying fire is in the hearth, a hearth one can stand in without stooping.

I smile, thinking back; standing before another fireplace, shivering and soaking wet, while auntie and Aurora drank tea.

My skin tingles a little thinking about the tall statuesque Aurora, a larger than life woman, robust, heavy of breast and buttock, possessing dark penetrating eyes that compliment a magnetic demeanor.

For a moment I am overwhelmed with memories and my nipples come to life.

It seems so long ago, another time, when I was another person.

I pause near the tower, glance upward to the second floor, distinctly remember following Hildy up through the tower on these circular stairs . . . getting caught peeking under the crinoline petticoats of her maid's uniform at legs encased in black, back-seam stockings, going red in the face. "See anything you like?" she had said, an amused devilish expression on her face.

My room then was upstairs, down the hall from Aurora's.

Without realizing it I climb the circular staircase, peer out the same leaden window I did then, the landscape now covered in a thin blanket of fresh powdery snow.

I move down the hall, footfalls silent on a hall runner. The door to my old room is open and I look in but don't cross the threshold. It seems like I left it and brings a smile to my face. I've been on the road and need to use the facilities, go down the hall into a bathroom, and step back in time.



The bathroom is large and very antique. The porcelain tub is sloped, sits on claw feet. I remember thinking at the time how pleased auntie would be to see such an ancient lavatory. The bathtub has a marble rim. Beneath the rim are inlaid tiles with a checked pattern. Along the wall is a shower, defined by a tile floor and overhead oval ring which holds a plastic curtain. The water closet is customary of Victorian homes in that the water tank is high, bracketed to the wall near the ceiling with a long pull-chain depending from the side of the cistern. The commode is very unique. It's fashioned in the shape of a dolphin with a curly pattern bowl. The linen cabinets match the intricately carved wooden wainscot.

It was in this bathroom where Hildy gave me bath, flirted with me like the trollop she is.

I sit and do my business, pull up panties, pantyhose and woolen slacks, push the cuffs over the tops of sensible low-heeled ankle boots. I check my face in the beveled mirror, wish I'd brought my purse with me from the truck, and rake fingers through windswept blond hair.

Back in the hall I gaze above my head. One night I went up there to that room and the dormer window that overlooks the front of the house. I was drawn to the third floor by an unseen force. The door, which was usually locked, mysteriously wasn't that night. My heart beats faster recalling the events of that night, how I was scared out of my wits.

I turn and clutch my heart, mouth open to cry out but I remain silent, as if a mute. He stands in the doorway, long unruly black hair framing an oval androgynous face. He is black, skin the color of coffee diluted with creamer ... and pretty.

"What are you doing here?" he demands.

I'm speechless. He wears a flannel shirt open over a nylon undershirt, tight slacks, feet in flats. Before I can speak he says, "Who are you?"

"Hi. I'm Laila," I say hesitantly, venturing a small smile.

I move toward the door but he blocks the way.

"What are you doing here?"

I give him a broader smile, wish again I'd brought my purse and touched up my lipstick. "I used to live here."

"I don't know any Laila. Never heard such a name."

"Is Aurora home?"

His eyes open a bit. "No, she isn't." He's upset and I don't blame him, finding a stranger in the upstairs bathroom.

I move to him, offer my hand but he doesn't take it.

"What are you doing here?"

"Uhm, ah, that's a long story. What's your name?"

"None of your business."

"Great." "

He gives me a look. I shouldn't have said it. His eyes, however, sweep over my body. Which is usually a good sign.

"I knocked several times and nobody answered the door." I bat my eyelashes just a little, gaze at him. "The door was open so..."

"You just came in. Is that it?" A bit hostile.

"Yes, that's it. My old bedroom is down the hall." I look over his shoulder. Still he blocks the door.

"How do you know Aurora?"

"Uhm, that's a long story too. It's been over a - "

"I have time. Tell me."

He's too arrogant to look so femme. Maybe I should kick him in the balls, if he has any. "Are we going to stand here in the can, or may

we move to one of the parlor's downstairs? I saw a nice fire in one of them."

"Yes, I was out back gathering wood for the fire. That's why I didn't hear you." He steps aside and waves his hand.

In the parlor we sit in two old rockers facing the fire which he's just stoked with fresh logs. I shuck my coat and hold out my hands to the fire, am aware of him checking me out.

"So how do you know Aurora?"

"What's your name? You do have a name?"

He gives me a look. "Cordell. And yours . . . ?"

"Laila. I told you."

"Did you come to visit Mrs. Spillane?" he says, voice tentative.

"Not really. Where did she find you?"

His eyes slide from mine and he frowns. "You were going to tell me how you know Aurora Spillane."

"Yes. But you can tell me. I can probably guess at some of it anyway."

"Really?"

"You're a brat," I say, softening it with a smile. "I'm surprised Aurora hasn't spanked that attitude out of you by now. I know you've been here a while."

"How do you know that?" He rocks, looks at the fire which is coming to life from fresh logs.

"You're in transition." He blushes. "Where did she find you?" I repeat.

Cordell sighs. "Boston. Living on the streets ..." He's a faraway painful look in his eyes.

"Hmm, on the stroll."

"The stroll?"

"Oh, don't act so naive, Cordell. You were hustling and Aurora took you off the streets, brought you here."

He nods, folds hands in his lap. I notice again the long lacquered fingernails. "Is that how she found you, Laila?" he says, voice a little softer. "On the stroll?"

"No. Mrs. Aurora Spillane knew my aunt, came shopping in her antique barn on several occasions. Who would not notice such a woman, tall and stout, having that certain air that only a few women possess. Did you notice it, her magnetism, I mean?"

"Yes. At first I thought she might be a mark, yet I was afraid of her, the way those dark eyes sort of looked through me." He scratches long black hair. "Like she could see into my soul."

"When I was around her my palms would go sweaty and I'd get excited. Couldn't help it." I shrug. "Aurora discovered me in my aunt's antique store. The rest. . . well you're going through it now." I look at him. "Just like I did."

"You were here then. You stayed here?"

I nod, give him a smile, pat his knee. "I have to go into the woods before dark," I say, standing, grabbing my coat.

"The woods?"

"Yes out back. The woods that border the property." I look at him sharply. "Have you been in them?"

Cordell stands, shakes his head. "But why?"

"That's another story. Perhaps Aurora or Hildy will tell you. Is Hildy still here?"

"Yes. I don't know what I'd do without her." He gives me a genuine smile.

"Briscoe?"

He shakes his head. "I don't know any Briscoe."

"Huh."

"By the way, where is Hildy?"

"She's gone to town with Aurora. They should be back soon." He follows me out of the parlor toward the back of the house. "Maybe I should go with you."

"No! I have to do this alone. But thanks. When will they be coming back?"

He pushes back the cuff of the flannel shirt he wears, looks at a ladies watch. "Soon I should think. They went shopping at the new mall on the edge of town. Near the interstate."

"Yes, I saw it when I came through. You might tell them I'm here. In my own way I miss them both."

He follows me out on the back porch. I button my coat, smile, start down the steps.

"You sure you don't want me to tag along. Aurora told me to stay out of those woods. People have been lost in there."

"Yes, I've been lost in them too."