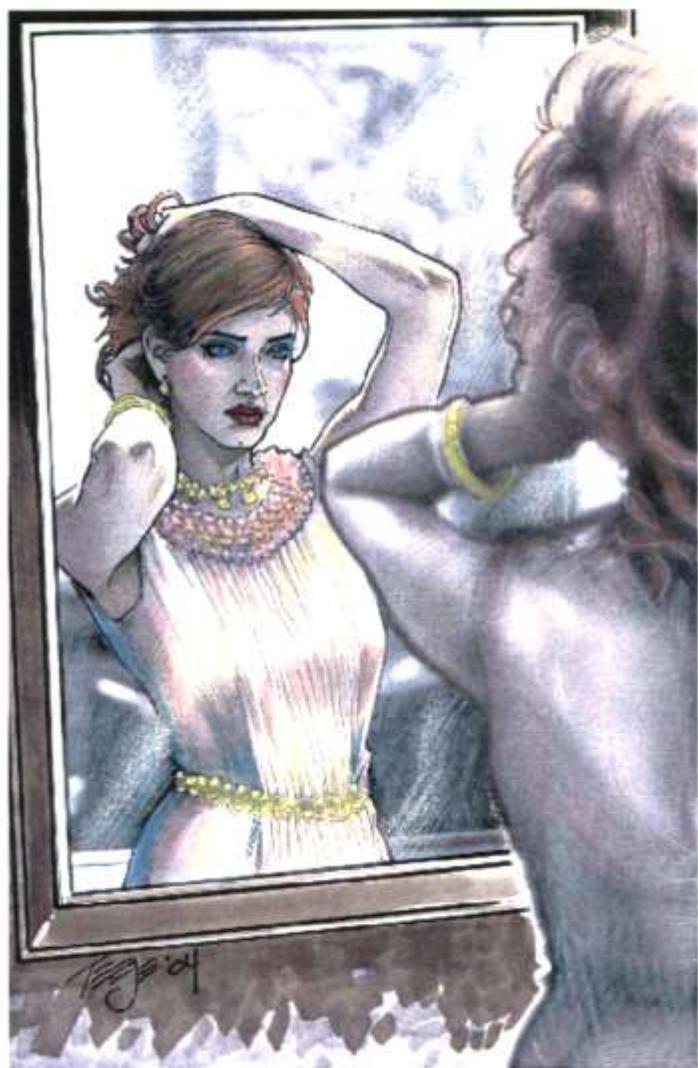


# LAILA'S QUEST

Book Two



Max Swyft

**LAILA'S QUEST**  
**BOOK TWO**  
A SEQUEL TO LAYTON'S LAMENT  
By  
Max Swyft



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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 Two**

## **The Chase**

### **Chapter Eight**

The delicate teacup looks fragile in his large hand. We sit before a roaring fire in the very parlor where I and auntie sat when on our first visit to Aurora's. It's been nearly a year since that time. It seems longer.

His name is John Rickett. Aurora didn't know his parents but knew he lived not far from this property. She tells Detective Donatello all this as he sits on the edge of an armchair writing notes in a small pocket notebook with a stubby pencil.

The notebook and stubby pencil remind me of Columbo. The thought makes me smile. Columbo and Donatello have only the notebook and stubby pencil in common.

Aurora cannot give us a physical description because she never saw the boy. Before the murder stray cats and dogs had turned up dead. Some of them had been tortured, and for a while the local police thought it might have been the work of a satanic cult.

While Salvatore takes notes I get a look from Aurora, her eyes going from me to him and back again. Getting her meaning, I shake my head no. Hildy has already pulled me aside, excitedly asked me if I'd been with him, and my answer was "Whatever do you mean?" She told me I wasn't too old to be spanked, this brief conversation while Mr. Donatello used the facilities.

John Rickett was an only child and the family pretty much kept to themselves. Mr. Rickett worked in the town's foundry until it shut down and she'd heard that he'd picked up odd jobs for a while, and then after the murder he moved away leaving Mrs.

Rickett alone and homeless since her son burned down their house in an effort to cover up his crime. Apparently she had moved to Cyrenaica after her boy was incarcerated.

Salvatore finishes his tea and thanks Aurora. She invites us back for dinner afterward but Sal politely declines. He has to get back to the city. I hang back, hug Aurora as Sal stands on the porch, tell her what she already knows; we haven't been intimate.

We make our way to his personal car, a late model Ford Taurus station wagon. He didn't want to bring me along in his police car in case we had an accident or something. Explaining my presence wouldn't be easy. As it is we are traveling incommunicado.

Two inches of fresh snow fell overnight. The interstate coming up to Massena was clear but we did have a harrowing moment on the state road that leads to Aurora's. Slipping and sliding a bit. The car fish-tailed but he kept it on the road.

I dressed carefully for the trip, tried not to overdress but I did wear a knee-length wool skirt with sensible boots, an angora sweater and long car coat. Sal wears a worn brown leather bomber's jacket and blue jeans.

He looks ruggedly handsome.

All the way he avoided looking at me, or more precisely my legs. I did everything but raise my skirt for him, show my panties. I'm sure his avoiding eyes were a deliberate gesture.

I think this older man is afraid of me.

Afraid of his own feelings and desires.

I am sure of my desires. I want him badly, though know he's married and nothing could ever come of it. It's just as well he pretends indifference.

The old prison is some miles from the small hamlet of Massena. It is an old cinder block structure that has seen better days. It sits in the

middle of open fields, looking like a boxy substance which has sprouted from the soil.

At the gate is a guard house and Sal opens his window, flashes his tin (I learned this lingo from my hip friend, Trixie) to the guard. The wind is surprisingly strong out here and whistles through the open window, an angry zephyr mussing my hair and making my skirt float a little. At least the guard is appreciative of my legs, though that's small comfort.

Evidently Detective Donatello called ahead and we are quickly waved through, told where to park. We pull up to large imposing double doors with steel bars across panned windows that are reinforced with hexagonal shaped wire mesh imbedded in the glass.

We go inside, the wind whipping at our coats, mussing my hair.

The guard house called ahead and we are greeted by two more guards who escort us down a long dingy corridor. It is almost as cold here as outside. Through more imposing doors and down another corridor and into an office.

Behind a grey metal desk sits an older man in yellow coveralls. He looks over Donatello warily but his eyes caress me, make me shiver but not from the cold. He buzzes an intercom, announces our arrival.

Warden Bloch is short and fat with a crown of shiny black hair that encircles his scalp like a halo. In other clothes he'd look rather monkish. He ushers us into his office and we take chairs that front another metal desk, this one in a little better shape than the one in the reception office.

Yes, we'll have coffee and he rings for it.

"We don't get many visitors here, especially this time of year. We're phasing out here and will be completely shut down by spring. Most of the records have been transferred to Rockland. I don't know how useful we can be."

"His name is John Rickett and he was here several years ago. A sex crime. Murder and rape and - "

The warden holds up his hand. "You need go no further. I could not forget Johnny Boy in two life times." He shifts around in his chair, steeples his fingers over the desk and frowns. Into the intercom he say, "Bring me Rickett's file, Horace. I think we still have it. Uh, at first he was set upon." The guy looks at me, back to Sal. "Well, you know how things are in lock up, Detective Donatello. But they left Johnny Boy alone."

"Johnny Boy?"

"The inmates dubbed him Johnny Boy but it wasn't meant as an affectionate term. He put a couple of our inmates in the infirmary before they learned to leave him alone. Johnny Boy spent some time in the Hilton - that's what the cons call solitary." Warden Bloch glances my way again. "There are some things better left unsaid in front of young ladies."

I smile at this, get a look from Donatello. "Warden, this creep is on the loose and killing again. I know some of his victims and nothing you say will make his grisly acts less so. Please be forthright. John Rickett raped and killed a very close friend of mine."

Yellow coveralls brings a carafe of coffee, three cups, sugar and creamer. A worn manila file is tucked under one arm and he puts it on the desk, gawks at me. Donatello gives him a look and the trusty hurries out.

"Uhm, very well," says the warden, opening the file and pursing his lips while Sal pours for us and gives me a smile. I take the opportunity to cross my legs, smile back and am encouraged at his dark flitting eyes on my modestly exposed knees. Our eyes meet and hold until I have to look away, doctor my coffee with packaged creamer and sugar.

"I have a mug shot here but not much else," says the warden,

breaking the moment. "Most of his jacket went with him to Rockland when he went up there for psychological evaluation. Johnny Boy never came back here." He gives us both a look, says, "I was glad to see him go."

The warden pushes the open folder across the desk. Donatello holds it in his large hands and I lean over, take a look. Inadvertently my breast encounters his upper arm. I peer at a grainy black and white split photo, the left frame a side shot, the other with him facing the camera. I'm surprised, John Rickett is a handsome boy, yet there's something about his eyes.

"Why was he sent to Rockland?" Detective Donatello wants to know.

In spite of the situation I want to know if my persistent breast is making an "impression" on the handsome detective. I lean closer and my skirt slides up past my crossed knees a little. Sal sits stoically as I invade his space, scan several paragraphs in the folder.

"At the time he was incarcerated here we had a young female shrink who was just out of college, making her bones working for the state. She was a homely woman and Johnny Boy impressed her. I told her he was dangerous and advised that she not be taken in by his boyish charm and fanciful lies. Of course she wouldn't listen, said the boy could be rehabilitated, that he needed better treatment which was available only at the Rockland Sanatorium." He pauses, looks at the surface of his desk. "Fanciful name that."

"Fanciful name?" I ask.

"Yes. Rockland Sanatorium. It's nothing more than a prison for the criminally insane." "Oh."

Sal gives me a look, a bemused expression on his face. I feel his bicep flex on my breast and my nipple comes to life but I pull away from him, rearrange my skirt as I cross my legs the other way.

"And he was released from the loony bin?" says Sal. Warden

Block shrugs. "I'm not sure. They had a fire up there a year or so after he left us and I sort of lost track of Mr. Rickett. He's not a person one wants to remember but once you've seen him you can't forget him."

"Why's that?" Donatello wants to know. "For all his charm with the ladies he could freeze you with those unique eyes, make you want to be anywhere but where he was."

"Unique eyes?"

The warden gives us a look, as if to say, 'you don't know?' "Oh, yes. John Rickett is marked. It's like he carries the mark of the devil with those eyes."

"What about his eyes?" I say.

"A couple of guards who witnessed it told me that he once just looked at a butt boy with those eyes, made the poor wretch wet his pants."

Detective Donatello shifts impatiently on the uncomfortable wooden chair, tells the warden to quit with the dramatics.

"John Rickett has kind of light grey eyes. I wouldn't exactly call them albino eyes but they're close. He's a hulking figure anyway but those eyes give him a menacing appearance when he's - how shall I say - off his feed so to speak."

"Yet you say the state's psycho analyst was taken with him?" Detective Donatello points out.

"Yes." The warden smiles. "He could charm the ladies. I'm not sure, maybe he could turn those eyes on and off. However, he should be easy to identify with those damnable translucent eyes."

"I want to show you something."

The early fierce wind - the Hawk - coming out of Canada has diminished but swept the sky clean. It's not as cold and a warm front is approaching, this according to the handsome detective with whom I ride. The sun is in the west and stars will sprinkle the heavens this night.

We've passed the suburbs of Cyrenas-ton and Northbrook and we're on our way to the sanatorium near Rockland State Prison to see what else we might discover about John Rickett.

The drive back from Massena has been quick and pleasant. From Sal's questions I can tell he was impressed by Aurora Spillane.

Sal takes a two lane blacktop off the main highway and we drive for several miles. The terrain is hilly and wooded here and around a sharp turn I see an imposing hill. He guns the Taurus through a series of switchbacks that continually rise. My ears pop as he maneuvers up and up until we crest the mighty hill.

Another turn takes us on a rutted gravel road bordered by tall pines and overgrown with brush and weeds. We come to a rusting iron gate which is padlocked. A sign on the gate announces the park is closed and underneath that in underlined capital letters is; This Property Condemned.

Sal gets out of the car, retrieves a crowbar from the trunk, and pries at the rusty lock and hasp that secures the gate. He jimmys the chain and lock and it pops open with a little effort.

"Isn't that against the law, detective?" I chide.

"Quite right, Laila," he says, smiling, "but I outrank any of the gendarme's around here."

He puts the car in gear and we drive through the gate.

The sun is blocked from penetrating this dense forest and I get the sense that Sal's been here before the way he stirs the station wagon through the turns of this narrow primitive roadway.

We go for several miles and suddenly we emerge from the woods and I have a sense that we're on some kind of plateau.

Before us is a flat plane and beyond that some distance is higher rocky ground in tree cover.



He leans toward me and points out my window. "You can see it pretty clearly now from the sun's western position."

I look to my right, see where the sun falls on the hillside which faces south. The way the sun glints some of the rocklike structure of Rockland State Prison is in dark shadows. The slab-block angular building is surrounded by a tall brick wall. It looks foreboding and lonely, almost like a castle. It is kind of etched into the rocky hillside and overlooks what appears to be a great wide precipice.

Confused, I glance quickly at Sal, catch him looking at my legs (ah-hah!), say, "How do we get there from here?"

Sal smiles. "We turn around and go back to the main highway, go that way. The prison is some miles away though it looks closer. I wanted to show you where we hung out as kids before the bluffs started crumbling and became unsafe."

He looks ahead through the windshield and I follow his lead. In front of us on this dark plane is a long wooden walkway complete with a high wooden railing that faces out.

"Come on, I'll show you."

He gets out, comes around to my side of the car. I wait him out and he opens the door. I step out of the car and inadvertently flash him a nice expanse of stocking leg, take his hand. We start for the planked walkway which is still some distance from us.

As we approach the planked walkway I'm aware of a dull whooshing sound and see that we're atop a concave bluff. The bluff is similar to the curve of a quarter moon, and now that we're walking along the worn planking, I see the cliff face cast in long dark shadows.

I move to the wooden railing, peer at the cliff face, feel Salvatore grab my arm.

"Be careful, Laila. This planking is old. Don't trust the railing with your weight." He points forward and I see where the walkway

abruptly ends in a tangle of jagged timbers. "That's where the bluff slid away. Took the rest of the walkway with it. There used to be a large platform out there, a bandstand, a large gazebo and open air restaurant. Over the years scavengers pirated the area. Not much left now but this walkway."

I look over the railing on my right, have a sense of vertigo as I see the churning waters of the Ontario River below us. It looks a long way down, that whooshing sound now identifiable, becoming a roar as the bloated and frothy river boils through the narrow pass below.

"This was quite a place when I was a kid."

"Hmm, did you bring a lot of girls here?"

He meets my eyes and smiles. "Some."

Taking my arm, we move forward. I'm amazed that there's hardly any wind. It seems warmer but it could be because Salvatore Donatello is so close at my side, his sure hand on my arm, guiding me along as if I'm a fragile doll.

We stand at the wooden railing, look out over the gorge. Below the raging river is a frothy caldron, churns and bubbles through the narrow pass on its journey toward the city where it forks into the Barrows and Verdone River.

I try to imagine how this desolate landscape was once upon a time a place for families to bring their kids, parties and dancing, romantic dinners in the open air restaurant which is now just a shell, young men and women courting.

Sal rubs the back of his neck, looks over his shoulder at the woodline where we parked. Rubbing his neck he slowly turns, scans the woods. I follow his stare, skim the perimeter but see nothing out of the ordinary.

"What's the matter?"

His dark handsome eyes are intense and he doesn't answer for a

moment. "Nothing," he says and shrugs but his eyes sweep the tree line as if he's trying to find something or somebody. Finally he turns back, smiles at me. "You can't tell now but when the sun rises in the East this whole cliff face shines in colors of green, yellow and red. Serpentine and red clay."

"Serpentine?"

"Yeah, it's some sort of silicate and magnesium. A kind of stone." He points across the gorge at a narrow sandy spit of land along the rushing river. "The river's worn that beach away. We used to go swimming, camp out there, look up at the bluff as the sun shone on it, made it sparkle with color."

"What happened to this place?" I ask as we move farther along walkway.

"Mudslide's. This side is unsafe. Over time the rocks and red clay decayed from the rains that hammered this side. Wind." He shrugs. "Nor' Easterners I guess. That narrow gorge down there used to be as wide as a nice lake. The other side is mostly granite." He points toward the prison. I look and shiver but it's not from the cold.

"It's been a long time since I've been up here." He rubs the black stubble of his jaw, his eyes distant, remembering another time . . . perhaps another girl. "Since we were coming this way I thought we'd make a little detour. It's not like it once was, though," he says forlornly.

I move along, looking at the conclave cliff side, at outcroppings of rock which are in dark shadow, try to imagine how it once was, what the view must have been like from that narrow sandy spit of beach below.

I realize I'm alone, some distance in front of Sal who's hung back, hands on the railing looking to the other side. I wonder what he's thinking. I don't want to intrude on his reflection, sense this is a private moment for him.

My footfalls sound hollow on the worn planking as I move along.

I look to my left, try to imagine a bandstand and gazebo. There is a mere skeleton of what I guess was the restaurant, just the foundation and part of a roof where two walls join at a corner, many exposed wall studs.

Despite what Sal says this place is kind of spooky and a creepy vision flashes behind my eyes; old spirits being cast about by yesteryear's wind. Dancing girls in decayed yellow formals that were once white. Boys in rotting black tuxedos, twirling the girls near the bandstand, their faces more skull-like, eyes hollow and unseeing.

I shake my head to dispel the gruesome caricature, move along the planking, glance back at Sal who still stands by the railing looking out over the bluff.

Suddenly I want to be away from this place, yet I gaze upon the skewed planking at the end of the walkway where beneath it the earth slid away, carrying the rest of the walkway into the churning waters below.

It is like I'm drawn to these rotting timbers, if for no other reason to peer beyond into the shadows of the abyss.

My legs carry me forward and my heartbeat quickens.

"Hey!"

I turn, peer back at Sal Donatello who is moving quickly toward me. My heel catches between the spaced planking. I hear a dry crack and the board beneath my foot collapses and my leg is impaled in the rotting planking.

Before I know it I go hard to my knee, my trapped leg searching for purchase, finding nothing.

Damn, that hurts!

Sal is running now. "Hold on, Laila."

I push with my hands, try to free my trapped my leg.

He kneels, tells me to relax, and looks at my leg. "Are you

okay?"

"Yeah, sure. I'm just clumsy." I smile weakly.

"Put your hands on my shoulders and I'll try and free your leg."

I'm looking into his face, so close. Close enough to see the lines of his lips. Close enough to kiss him. For a moment our eyes meet, then his drop and I feel his hands on my trapped leg.

"I'm going to push down on this broken board, release the pressure. Hoist yourself up if you can."

The board gives way and I use his shoulders for leverage but can't seem to raise myself.

His hands feel around my knee and he punches at the broken plank, lifts me clear and into his arms. My hands are around his neck and his arms are about my waist, his face at my bosom.

His arms feel safe.

He holds me and I look West. The sun is just sinking over the horizon and I don't want to move. It is a brief but almost magical moment.

I feel Sal's breath on my chest through the opening of my coat and inexplicably my nipples go hard - and that's not all.

His arms relax and he gently puts me down.

"How's the leg?"

His face is in shadow but I'm aware of his eyes, my own heartbeat.

"Okay I think."

"Try walking on it."

I take a tentative step, feel some pain in my ankle. Looking down I see that I've scrapped my knee. It's bleeding a little. "Fine. I'm fine." I start back but my leg buckles underneath and Sal scoops me up in his

arms.

"I'll carry you back to the car."