

LAILA'S QUEST

Book Three



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 Three

The Kill

Chapter Fifteen

Yesterday's snow is a fleeting memory, the rising temperature partner to crisp air and benevolent sun, leaving narrow white lines on sidewalks, streets and dead brown lawns. Naked tree branches look brittle and lifeless in breathless air.

Like the barren canvas of a starving, hollow-eyed painter.

The crime scene investigations team is packing up, leaving. They watch them pack and Steinberg remarks about CSI, the television series, how it's given these guys an attitude, like their celebrities or something, instead of evidence gatherers. Sal tires to remember if CPD's crime scene tech's ever cracked a case.

The two of them think about it, look at each other, shake their heads, Bert making a disparaging remark in Yiddish. Donatello doesn't get it all and doesn't ask.

Magnetic ferric oxide covers unburnt likely surfaces for fingerprints.

The detectives stand with their backs to the scene, watch these guys with an attitude depart.

A neighbor with insomnia saw the fire reflecting on windows from inside the place, called the fire department. They arrived quickly, put out the fire but there was still considerable damage. Donatello waited for the fire department's arson investigator to finish his prelim, then asked what he thought; an accelerant was used, probably gasoline. It went up pretty quick. The neighbor catching it was a bit of luck.

Some neighbors were awake and uniform cops were canvassing

them, getting their statements. Tomorrow they'd do a house to house. Maybe somebody saw something.

The guy looked back at the body, had said something about whoever did it being a sick fuck.

The medical examiner was a young oriental who told the two detectives what they already knew. One of them was a transsexual, looked like the fire had started around her anus. Ligature marks around the neck.

He knelt beside the body, Salvatore standing nearby, scraped something from her cheek into a small evidence bag. "What?" said the detective.

"A white kind of powdery substance around her eyes, on her cheeks."

"What is it?"

The tech looked at him, said, "Salt from dried tears."

Found undamaged by the fire were a pair of torn panties. Looked like they'd been ripped off her. Might get something usable from the panties. He had samples but the body needed to be moved to the morgue where they could perform a through autopsy.

Donatello hounds the young guy on the way out. They need to know - like yesterday. The oriental looks at him shrugs, it's out of his hands and up to the ME Donatello tells the guy to tell the ME that he'll be downtown to the morgue later this morning and expects results.

Scorched timbers still emit tiny tendrils of black smoke and charred furniture permeates the still air. Yet it's not enough to mask the singular horrific stench of burnt flesh.

The smell of broiled flesh is never forgotten by firemen and homicide cops.

Bertram Steinberg stands inside the smoldering ruins, looks out at the street as he lights the stub of his cigar and wonders about

inhumanity and the beasts that perpetrate such deplorable acts. Briefly he thinks about his ancestors, the ones who were lucky enough to escape the Nazi death camps.

His head and shoulders are soon encompassed in a grey wreath of smoky cigar tobacco, the stench not so noticeable now, as if the very act of lighting the cigar will somehow make all of what's behind him disappear.

He knows Donatello is sizing up the scene, senses his restlessness.

Three remote television crews are in the street, cameras pointed like fat stubby rifles, recording, two of them live since they broadcast 24/7, all of what their recording to be broadcast later for the morning news. The only thing holding them back is yellow crime scene tape and the cops who guard it. Overhead two TV choppers circle, their bright spots illuminating the scene.

Bert sees WHAZ's roving reporter arrive, can't remember her name, but she's a looker, very photogenic. He visualizes her from watching the local news; chin-length black hair with curly bangs like semicolons falling over her forehead. Large sexy eyes to go with a nose that looks too perfect, is probably the result of a skilled cosmetic surgeon. Full balloon-like lips that compliment a large mouthful of sparkling white teeth. And of course, a body that would look at home in a Playboy centerfold. A knockout, really. She huddles with her cameraman who's been cooling his heels, waiting for her to arrive. Together they approach the cops bordering the crime scene tape.

Donatello comes up beside him and they watch as she confronts the uniforms at the crime scene tape, working her magic while the camera rolls. The cops shake their heads and she asks a few more questions, turns with her back so the crime scene is framed by the camera, her in the forefront.

Bert looks at his partner. "I bet the lieutenant gives that babe an

interview."

Donatello watchful, smiles grimly, turns and goes back inside.

Later the sun is up and it is late morning and the two detectives are downtown in the Canyons at CPD headquarters. Both of them pace the terrazzo floored hallway in what some cops refer to as "The Tombs." The morgue is in the basement a couple of levels above the underground parking garage. They're waiting for what they're sure is a DNA and fingerprint match, hoping there is a match.

Steinberg, ignoring the no smoking signs, puffs on a stubby stogie, leaving a trail of pungent grey smoke in his wake, while Donatello walks a slower pace in the opposite direction, hands thrust deep into his front pockets, head downcast, face creased in consternation.

Steinberg looks at his watch, stops, pokes his cigar at his partner. "We know what he's gonna say, dammit. Why don't he just come out and tell us?"

Donatello smiles ruefully. Waiting is the hard part. They see this as time wasted, being off the street. He offers encouragement: "Maybe one of the neighbors saw something. A car, a license plate number. Who knows?"

"Yeah. We gotta nail this monster, Sal. You heard the lieutenant, the commissioner and now the mayor's on his ass. This news conference . . . ," Bert looks at his watch, "I don't like it. Why do we have to be there?"

"We're the investigating officers. You know that." Donatello pauses at the double swinging doors that open onto the morgue, peers through one of the narrow windows, searching for the ME. "That and somebody's gotta take the fall for this if this asshole gets away. Shit runs downhill, Bert."

"We should be on the street doing something." Bert waves his cigar which has gone out, resumes pacing, looks at the stub of the cigar

and almost throws it on the floor before secreting it in his coat pocket. "Did you see that remote crew from one of the New York's stations?"

Donatello nods, moves down the hall away from his nervous partner, his mind at the scene, going over what he saw, thinking he missed something but not knowing what.

Bert catches Sal's eye. "This is going national, pal."

The ME pushes through the double doors, fixes the detectives with a neutral stare. He waits until they're right in front of him.

"Well?" bites Bert.

"We got good samples from the panties. Two," he holds up two fingers, "DNA samples. One's a match with your perp." He allows a faint smile, looks from one to the other.

"You're sure?" says Donatello.

"Yep, matches the DNA sample sent down from Rockland Prison. It's the same guy. No doubt about it."

"And the other sample?" Bert says.

The medical examiner shrugs, "Don't know yet but I'd bet my wife's drawers it belongs to the tranny. If you wanna stick around I'll know in a little while."

"Nah, we gotta go upstairs, meet the lou," says Bert. "There's gonna be a new conference with the chief."

Upstairs Sal and Bert wait to be called for the news conference. A cop comes up to them, asks if one of them is a Salvatore Donatello. Sal nods and the cop indicates he should pick up the phone on a nearby desk, punch the blinking line, which he does, says his name and rank.

"Detective Donatello?"

"Yes." The voice is familiar but the face that goes with it alludes him.

"This is Jill Martin from the Cyrenaica Journal. We've worked together before. The Verdone River murders the last time, remember?"

Donatello pictures the attractive redhead, feels his pulse accelerate. "Yes, Jill, I remember."

"I'd like to talk to you about the Tranny Slasher."

"The Tranny Slasher?" Jill Martin, about three years ago, a couple of cases before that, what happened and didn't happen between them, wonders now why it didn't and misses what she says. "I'm sorry, what did you say?"

"We didn't tag it, Detective Donatello," she says. "It was The Globe called him the Tranny Slasher. I'd like to interview you about this case, run it on the front page for the morning edition."

Sounding so formal, Sal thinks, remembering....

Donatello glances at his watch. "There's a news conference in the antechamber in about twenty minutes, Ms. Martin. Aren't you there?" Absently he traces the scar on his cheek, sees a mental image of Jill Martin from three years ago. Not pretty in the face. An ex-husband broke her nose and she elected not to have plastic surgery, told him in an intimate moment she thought the blunt crooked nose gave her a little character.

"No, Detective Donatello, I'm not downtown. I'm in the Barrows looking for the real story."

He flashbacks three years or so, sees Jill Martin, thinks about they did and didn't do.

"If you want a story, Ms. Martin you should be in the rotunda with the other media people." He could sound just as formal. He pictures her, seeing her that first time in just her underwear, petite and stacked. "How did you know I was here at Police Central?"

"The commissioner announced the news conference, Sally, said the investigating detectives would be present."

"Huh."

That first time they had been to Izsak Tabor's Restaurant, lingered over too much wine and somehow he'd ended up in her apartment. It was small and messy. He remembered Jill not being apologetic about clothes being strewn about... but then her face colored a bit when she saw him looking at a pair of black panties on the sofa and one stocking on the coffee table. She snatched them up, told him to take a load off and came back with another bottle of wine. He noticed another button on her blouse was open and when she set the bottle and glasses on the little table in front of the couch he could see a lot of creamy cleavage and more than a hint of one puppy's "brown nose."

Just what they didn't need...

Again he misses what she just said.

"What?"

"Sally, you bustin' my balls here?" Personal, sounding sexy. Bert catches his eye and he realizes he's smiling, grinning actually. He shakes his head, turns away from his partner.

The smoky voice stirs him and he remembers she's a chain smoker. After he got to know her he called her a ball-bustin' feminist. She'd looked at him, said, "Yeah, handsome, that's right. I'd bust your balls and you'd like it."

"Jill, you got more balls than some cops I know," he now says.

"So, give me an interview. You know I don't go in for that tabloid stuff like The Globe."

"Ah, hmm, Jill, I can't. Heat's on us and it's not just from the fires this wacko is setting."

"Sally, Sally, this is me, Jill you're talkin' to. We go back."

Calling him Sally like his wife and mother do.

"Hmph, I don't know, Jill..." he curses his weak voice, thinks of

that first night in her apartment.

"You never did find out you know." The smoky voice tickles his ear and he wonders if she ever quit. She was always going to quit.

"Find out what, Jill?"

"You know ... about my balls. How big they are."

"Stop fuckin' with me, Jill."

"It's your call, Sally. I know that. But I'm relentless. That's why I'm still working for the Journal. I'll get a story one way or another." Pause. "But jeeze, Sally, it'd sure be nice to see you again. Story or no story."

The lunch crowd is in Rower's Tavern, a mix of blue collar, store owners and business people. Despite its slatternly facade and drab interior, Rower's serves a good lunch, thanks to the two old sisters who've cooked there for as long as anyone can remember. Both of them are widows. Many years back their husbands used to work along the docks and in the warehouses that bordered the once bustling Barrows River.

Estelle puts a plate of steamy beef stew on the table, asks him if he'd like anything else. His "no thanks" is a bit cold and she glances at the television high on the wall. Everybody's watching it, the goings-on in the entrance hall of the city building downtown.

"Where do they get all that money for all those steps and all that marble?" she wonders.

"Bleeding us taxpayers," says the man in the horn-rim glasses.

"I suppose so," she says. "You could fit four or five houses inside that place. Still I wouldn't want to climb all those stairs. My tired legs couldn't take it today."

Get away from me you fat old cow, go back to what I'm sure is a dirty greasy kitchen!

"Hope you like the stew, sir. It's the specialty of the house." She glances at the customer again, is about to add something, thinks better of it and waddles away toward the kitchen, checking tables as she goes.

He still feels the elation of the kill, is actually giddy from the high. He's played it over and over again in his mind, didn't realize he was touching himself while thinking about it. He knows this euphoria will carry him for days.

He looks at the television, all those news people gathered in that great room, setting up cameras and microphones, crowding around the foot of one of the two wide marble staircases, waiting for the chief and the... detectives.

All of this publicity for him.

In honor of him.

He smiles and feels the whiskers of his new mustache tickle his lower lip. Absently he smooths the mustache with his fingers, touches the beard, both of them a good match to his dyed hair. The dark horn-rim glasses were a last touch. All of it he purchased from a theatrical shop near the theater district.

He's aware of the phony wrinkled cheeks, hopes the gummy glue holds the elaborate disguise together.

He congratulates himself on having the forethought to have these items on hand before the last kill. ..

Thinking about it now, feeling the intoxicating euphoria infuse his body, make him hard.

He sees the reporters press forward on the steps, TV cameras zoom in at the top and he sees him and his partner, wonders what the man thinks. Not for the first time he's thought about calling this Detective Donatello, tell him how it is.

Does he understand or is he blind like all the others?

He absently strokes the faux beard as some cop steps forward,

some guy he's never seen before. He's introduced by the chief as the lieutenant of the one-seven borough and in charge of the investigation. He reads a short statement and is interrupted by a TV reporter, a real looker who moves up another step:

"Detective Donatello, will you tell us how she was murdered?"

The camera focuses on a frowning Donatello who appears uncomfortable.

"Like the others. Suffocation by strangulation."

From another reporter: "Detective, the lieutenant states you have a suspect. Is there more than one?"

"We are looking at all possibilities. The investigation is wide-ranging and thorough."

"Can you tell us about the prime suspect? Who is he? Why is he preying upon the transvestites and transsexuals of this city?"

"As to the psychology of the prep - er, suspect, you'd have to talk to the department shrinks about that. Why he's doing this to these people..." the detective shrugs, looks to his boss, "we don't know why. We think we have identified him. Sketches of this man are presently being circulated in and around the Barrows." The cameras catch the detective's frown and his eyes sliding away. He is clearly troubled about something.

Random questions come from the crowd of reporters gathered:

"What's his name?" "Where's he from?" "Who is he?" again and again. "Why does he do this" "Is the FBI's behavioral science department getting into the investigation?" "Since you think you know who he is why hasn't he been apprehended?" "Does he have a record?" "Has he killed before, and if so, why is he on the loose?"

The questions coming rapid fire, the conference getting out of hand, the group of news media people like a pack of frenzied dogs, frothing at the mouth.

Finally: "How do you know, detective, you have the right man?"

"DNA samples match our suspect with the killer."

"When do you expect an arrest?"

Donatello looks out at the pack of reporters. The cameras catch his squint, the faint diagonal scar across his cheek, the hardness in his dark eyes. "Soon."

The lieutenant steps forward, takes Donatello by the elbow. "The city is offering a twenty-five thousand dollar reward to anyone who has information leading to the arrest and conviction of this suspect. That's all for now. The mayor and chief are appointing a task force to catch this criminal and no stone will be left unturned. The media will be informed of any new developments."

The chief steps up: "Thank you all for coming. Any further inquiries should be directed here to Police Central to Lieutenant Thomas." He reads a number, says thank you again.

More unanswered questions are hurled at the backs of the police as they turn away.

He looks at the plate of stew. It's hardly been touched, is cold. Glancing around he notices with some satisfaction that everyone is watching the television, some attractive on-scene reporter wrapping it up, commenting about the news conference, referring to him as The Tranny Slasher.

He mulls it over, smiles. They don't have it right but he likes it, pictures himself with a gleaming sword, wearing a brilliant silver metallic uniform.

A uniformed cop walks in the front door, hands out eight by ten page size posters, advances into the interior. He tries not to stiffen but it isn't easy. He sits there, forks some cold stew, watches the cop from the corner of his eye. The cop stops at his table, leaves a poster, and says, "This is the guy we're looking for. If you see anyone matching this

description please call the number at the bottom."

He looks the cop in the face, smiles and thanks him.

The cop moves on to other tables, leaving posters and instructions.

He glances at the black and white photo and smiles. Not a very good likeness. He tries to recall this photo, searches his memory, can't quite grasp it. It is not his mug shot. It didn't turn out so well. No, this is a personal snapshot from when he was a kid and ... it hits him.

His mother.

She gave the cops this photo.

He suspected she lives in the city and wonders how to find her, pay her a little visit.