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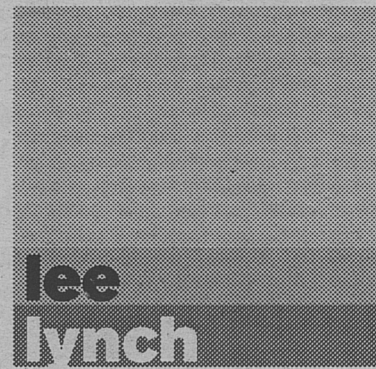
Amazon Trail: Home Arts For The Butchly

Every once in a while I wonder if I should turn in my butch card. It's not that I want to resign; far from it, this is the only way I know how to be. I am what is called a soft butch, or, a gentle butch. I'm not quite sure exactly what this means, but I know what it doesn't mean. I don't wear stomping boots or drive a motorcycle or tune the car myself or hunt or drink shots of tequila with beer chasers. It definitely means I'm not femme.

I have to fess up, though, that I loved cooking dinner for my girl last night. There's not much prettier on a table than a plate of spaghetti dressed up with vegetable finery: little fringes of broccoli, gems of golden shitake mushrooms, lengths of green beans, disks of pale zucchini and slices of bright red Lipstick Sweet Peppers. I took special care with the zucchini, peeling only alternate stripes from the green skin before slicing it to give the dish a carnival look. She seemed to enjoy it even though she had to take over the final cooking because I don't have enough experience in the kitchen to handle timing. I washed dishes instead.

As a callow youth I thought cooking was sissy work, so I got out of it whenever I could. I was just as insular about sewing and remember my utter disgust at the requirement of a sewing class in junior high and the mortification of having to create a skirt. I might have worn it once. Those skills disappeared from my memory banks almost immediately.

Or so I thought. I still remember how to sew a hem — I've had to do it often enough on jeans. My hems are a little unique though, as I also mastered the basting stitch and have managed to combine the two. So rather than a few dozen tight, neatly placed stitches, there are only about one dozen great big basting-sized hem stitches anchoring the hem of each leg. Butch basting gets the job done without



much fuss.

Every autumn I am overwhelmed with a desire to cook up apples into sauce and store it away for winter. I suspect that along with the gay gene I inherited from some wayward aunt or uncle, I got my grandma's canning gene. Too bad I didn't get her skill. The best I can do is crowd the stuff into the freezer rather than can it, but I love making it: peeling and watching the skins pile up in the sink, coring, quartering and filling a deep pot, then cooking the apples down, unsweetened and with no added preservatives or other gunk. Just plain apples, the way Mother Nature meant them to taste and the way you can't buy them any more. It gives me unbutchly warm fuzzies just to think of making applesauce on a blustery fall night with darkness hugging my home, the temperature dropping outside and Alberta Hunter shouting the blues on the CD player.

This year I had to give up that pleasure. I have another project started that needs to get done before the holidays. Do I dare to confess that I am crocheting an afghan for my mother? At 95 her eyes aren't good enough to notice the flaws. For some reason my afghans either gain or decrease stitches on an irregular basis — I end up with wavy edges that would disqualify me from

any country fair exhibition, even Lesbian Arts and Crafts.

Except for this lap rug, I'm pretty much retired from making afghans, since I've made them for everyone I could foist one off on. Now I crochet critters. These are definitely more of a butch product, if I may assume that any kind of needlework doesn't get me tossed out of Club Butch. There is no rhyme or reason to these critters. They start out as little dolls (yes, I make dollies) who get their character from color and what could loosely be called pattern.

Take the Christmas Critter. Her face and body are made with a rainbow yarn heavy on the reds and greens, and her limbs are either red or green, depending on what was in my

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hand at that particular moment. To jazz them up, I festoon the critters with buttons and thus, like some old maiden aunt, have a button collection of great proportions. The Christmas Critter has big shiny gold buttons down the middle of her chest which give her the air of being a gaily wrapped gift. Her eyes, nose and mouth are dark buttons like bits of coal. She's a cheerful critter and completely original. I never know what's going to come off my needle and neither do the hapless souls I gift with kooky critters of their own. These are not only femme critters either. Even the ones in blonde dreadlocks or the pink and >>

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