

BOOKS

Sweet and Filling

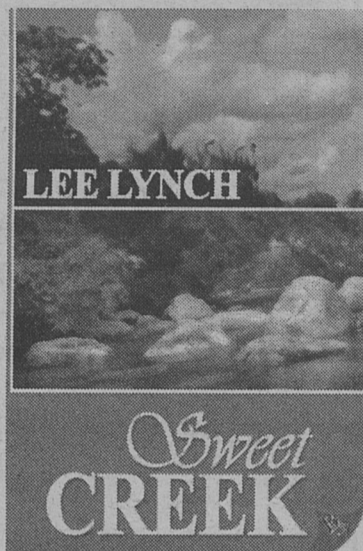
BY E. LYNN LEMONT

Sweet Creek
By Lee Lynch
Bold Strokes Books
January, 2006
Paperback, 351 pages

It's amazing to me how many lesbian detective novels and murder mysteries there are. It's a major dyke trash genre – which is not to pass judgment on the entertainment value of those books. I've read plenty of them, and some are worth the time: good character development, skillful plotting, life lessons, enough good research into an area of expertise to satisfy my curiosity without overwhelming the other elements of the story.

But even when the whodunits are good, they can't be the only item on the LGBT literary menu, though living in our currently massively disordered world cries out for fantasies of order restored. And thank goodness

they're not. Perhaps it doesn't matter what *genre* Lee Lynch's new novel *Sweet Creek* falls into. It's not a mystery, and it's just plain good.



Sweet Creek is the stream that flows through Waterfall Falls, Washington, the home of dyke-owned Natural Woman Foods, several women's land

settlements (mostly populated by lesbian separatists of a greater or lesser degree of stringency), a closeted horse-riding female sheriff, a pensioners' posse, vigilantes of various stripes, a transient tranny, and a few drug makers-growers-sellers up in the woods.

The couple that owns Natural Woman Foods is interracial, the rest of the population over-

whelmingly white. The woman who actually owns the land on which the lesbians are settling is enigmatic (she doesn't even have a name for much of the

book, just the initial "R" for "Rattlesnake") and uses her "spirituality" to power trip the others, who eat it up and either do what they're expected to or are shunned.

The goodness of *Sweet Creek* comes from the portraits of the characters, primarily Chick and Donny – who own and run Natural Woman Foods – and Jeep, the newcomer who man-

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ages to settle in through trials, separations, and lots of floundering around. Chick is the earth mother, who, unexpectedly, is suffering from depression. She combats it by offering compassion and love to nearly everyone who walks through the door, whether they want it or not. Donny is a classic butch from the big city who wants her spouse to be happy, though she wouldn't mind if a few more black women decided to move into town.

It's Chick's attitude toward life, the way she approaches and conquers her fears, the way she sees even the most unsympathetic people, that is the real heart of the novel, its spirit, its hope for the future. There's a sense of the power of the Crone to shape the world in Chick's character. And the twenty-something Jeep represents part of that future, finding a niche and working her way from devastated abandonment to self-employed stability and foster-parenthood.

Okay, okay, there is indeed a cynical part of me that says, "Yeah, yeah, and everybody lives happily ever after. Right." And there is also a part of me that still hopes (a cynic, after all, is just a disappointed idealist) for positive resolutions, that needs that hope to carry on. Novels like *Sweet Creek* feed that hope.

Anyone who has read Lynch's column (the nationally syndicated "The Amazon Trail,") knows that Lynch has been through some emotionally harrowing times herself while finishing the novel. She was writing *Sweet Creek* while she found a love, moved in together, discovered her new love had ovarian cancer; she was editing it as she went through treatment with

Marcia, and held her while she died. Lynch the columnist has an acute sense of being an alien – a queer-lesbian-dyke – in a straight world. She observes the ways those nearly separate worlds touch, overlap, interact. In her column and in her novels (this is number 12) her heart is still open to surprise, and joy, and contentment. She searches for ways to reach across divides between lesbians and gay men, separatists and assimilationists, straights and queers, young and old, coupled and polyamorous, professional and working class.

There were just a few distractions, items likely caught later by an editor or proofreader ("prostrate cancer" "washboard bass" for two), which is actually pretty good for the relatively new Bold Strokes Books (boldstrokesbooks.com). The lesbian-identified publisher has a slew of titles lined up for release this year, and an inadvertently (?) funny style guide section on euphemisms for sex and body parts.

Sweet Creek is not deep, but it is filling, less sweet than sugar, more like real maple, with nuances and flavors that keep your tastebuds busy after the treat is gone. t

E. Lynn Lemont lives and writes in Franklin County.

BOOKS

M or F? out author Chris Tebbetts at a recent reading at Barnes & Noble in South Burlington.

Tebbetts lives in Chittenden County and co-wrote the young adult novel with Lisa Papademetriou. The novel features everyday life in a not-too-oppressive high school for Marcus, who is matter-of-factly gay, and his straight best female friend Frannie. On her behalf and at her request, Marcus corresponds with Frannie's love interest Jeffrey via the Internet. But everything is not quite as it seems, thanks to identity confusion.

M or F? was published by Razorbill/ Penguin Young Readers Group.

