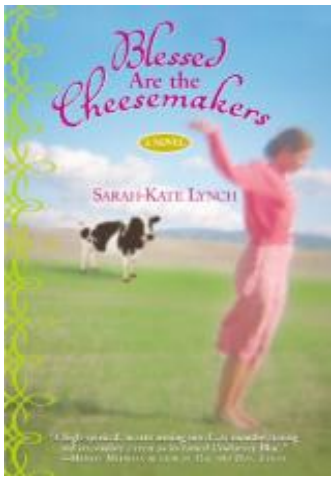
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Blessed Are the Cheesemakers

by Sarah-Kate Lynch



About the Book

Joseph Corrigan and Joseph Feehan, better known as Corrie and Fee, make the finest Coolarney Blue cheese in the entire civilized world. But Corrie still pines for his long-lost granddaughter, whisked away from her Ireland home as a child by her gallivanting mother. At this very moment, in a primitive hut on a remote South Seas island, his twenty-nine-year-old granddaughter Abbey is getting ready to leave her irrigation-obsessed husband after discovering that he has gone biblical with several of the natives.

A continent away, Kit Stephens is struggling with the loss of his wife and his career as a high-flying Wall Street broker. What this lonely, hungover, and burned-out New Yorker needs is a miracle-fast. Where better to find one than in a distant corner of Ireland, on a dairy farm run by the unlikeliest pair ever to preside over a vat of unpasteurized curd?

As Abbey and Kit converge on Coolarney House in County Cork, they discover a marvelous kingdom where something wonderful is always fermenting?where pregnant, vegetarian dairymaids milk cows to "The Sound of Music"?and where a cat named Jesus realizes she just isn't cut out for motherhood. While Corrie and Fee zealously guard the secret of the renowned Coolarney Blue and shelter an odd collection of whisky-soaked men and brokenhearted women, a tantalizing mystery surfaces from the aromatic depths of the factory. Soon Abbey and Kit will find out whether they have what it takes to become master cheesemakers. And something more. For in this magical place where wounds miraculously heal, falling in love is what makes us come truly alive.

A book to delight your heart, taste buds, and funny bone, **Blessed Are the Cheesemakers** is an irresistible tale about taking life's spilled milk and turning it into the best cheese in the world.

Discussion Guide

1. The author hails from New Zealand, but she has spent time in Ireland, and she has made that land the location of her

fiction. What does the Irish setting contribute to this novel? In other words, are there events or people that are unlikely to have occurred somewhere else?

2. Before the female protagonist, Abbey, leaves her marriage, the author says: "It wasn't a bad life, but she wasn't entirely sure it was her life. She clung to her love of Martin like a drowning man to an inflatable life raft....She wasn't herself, Martin was right about that. But then who the hell was she? She didn't belong in this paradise, but she didn't belong anywhere else, either. She was nobody. Nowhere." (p. 42) It seems that Abbey feels lost. What has she done to lose herself? How can she find herself? How typical do you feel this situation is for married women?

3. Both main characters Abbey and Kit have had failed marriages. What was wrong with their relationships? In your opinion, when should you fight to save a marriage or when should you walk away from it? Will Abbey and Kit's marriage to each other endure, do you think? Why or why not?

4. One of the oldest themes in fiction is to have someone who is dead or thought to be dead return. Why do you suppose that idea is so appealing? Who returns in this book? What are the consequences of those returns?

5. A related theme in this book is that of change or transformation. Who or what changes? Does change always involve loss?

6. The book has been compared to Joanne Harris' **Chocolat**. Besides the focus on a food, both novels have a "whiff" of magic. In fact, magic abounds in this book, from "the magic of coincidence" (185) to the magic of cheese-induced attraction. What does magic, by its very nature, do? Is magic real or just fiction?

7. One reviewer of this novel compared it to the old TV show *Green Acres*. The author says one of her first books, written as a child, was based on **Anne of Green Gables**. Does this book have anything in common with either of those "green" works?

8. The book begins *"You can't hurry cheese. It happens in its own time and if that bothers you, you can just feck off." (1).* What else in life can't you hurry? What is the purpose of the opening quotations for each chapter?

9. Much of this book has to do with finding a place to belong. What is the secret of belonging? Is family or heritage part of belonging? Can you create your own family or are you stuck with the one you were given at birth?

10. Although often disguised by humor, symbolism looms large in this story. In other words, what does the cheese represent? What is the connection between the setting and Pregnasaurs? What are some other symbols?

11. What do you make of the Pregnasaurs? Why are they in the story at all?

12. Corrie and Fee are aging. What "issues" has facing death brought up for them? Do you believe these are universal concerns?

13. The book has a happy ending. Is that only possible in fiction? Can real life have happy endings or are there only happy beginnings?

14. Do you think this book, underneath the humor, is saying today's mass culture is not a fulfilling way to live? What is the author critical about, in particular, and what does she suggest might be a better alternative for the direction of today's world?

Author Bio

Sarah-Kate Lynch is the author of eight novels and travel editor of *New Zealand Woman's Day*, New Zealand's bestselling weekly magazine.

Critical Praise

"This high-spirited, heartwarming novel is as mouth-watering and irresistible a treat as its famed Coolarney Blue. Blessed, indeed, are the lucky readers of **Blessed Are the Cheesemakers**."

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Publication Date: October 1, 2004
Paperback: 368 pages
Publisher: Grand Central Publishing
ISBN-10: 0446693014
ISBN-13: 9780446693011