ANIL AGGRAWAL'S

Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology

The world's first online journal devoted entirely to forensic medicine and toxicology · Published 1 January and 1 July

VOL. 7, NO. 2

Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-8074 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/ij/vol_007_no_002/reviews/pb/page001a.html

Featured Books

(Review 1 - by Dr. B.D. Gupta, India, Asia)

FEATURED BOOK : QUIZ SECTION

A FASCINATING TALE OF MYSTERY AND TERROR



[Main page] Reviews | [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10]

[Interview with Sylvia Tomlinson] [Quiz based on *Plucked and Burned*]

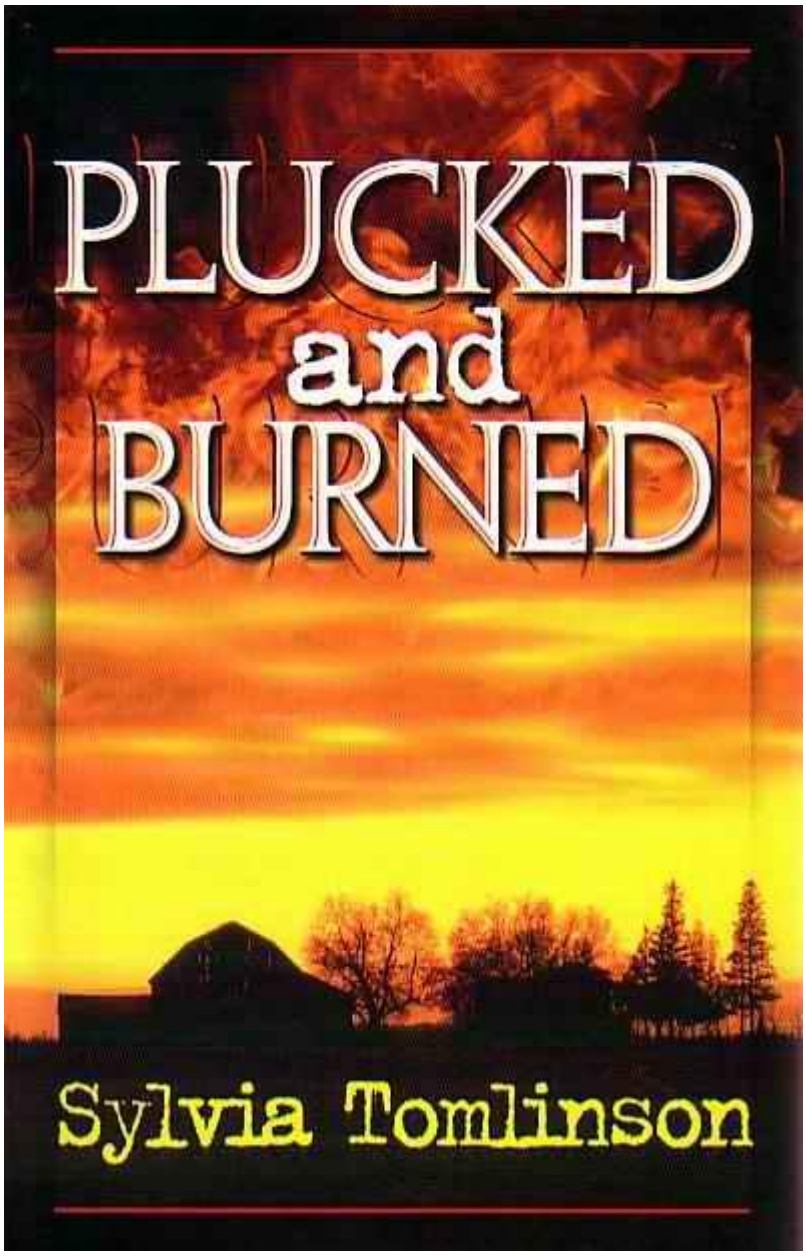
Rating : 9/10
★★★★★★★★★
(9/5)

Plucked and Burned *by* Sylvia Tomlinson. Paperback, 8" x 6".
Redbud Publishing Co., P.O. Box 4402, Victoria, TX 77903-4402, USA. E-mail: info@redbudpublishing.com Publication Date 2003. x + 237 pages. ISBN 0-9720293-2-X. Price $19.95

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The book is written in a fiction form and deals with the plight of the contract poultry growers in rural America. It was a surprise and shock for me that today in the USA such conditions exist. There are two parties in the contract. One is the giant multinational, PU (Poultry Unlimited), powerful in all aspects - money, muscle and political patronage - which can influence even the Supreme Court. The other party is the powerless/ineffectual/vulnerable (pick one), sometimes poverty stricken, independent farmer.

The representatives of the company lure the farmers by an exaggerated, unrealistic and false picture of the industry and how the farmers can be benefited. Once a farmer signs the contract his plight of sorrow begins. He finds that he has no control over the quality of birds and feed he is going to receive. Nor has he any control over the timing of when he receives these inputs. The net result is that he may receive either poor quality birds, feed or an irregular or untimely delivery of feed. In any case it is his responsibility to produce the best birds possible or else on any trivial pretext he may loose his earning.

Farmers are constantly kept under a mortgage by required upgrades to equipment in order to compete with other growers so they are anxious about a loss of earnings and the consequences

thereof if their contracts are terminated. The company then uses all of its clout to earn more and more at the expense (more idiomatic than "cost") of farmers. This includes even arm twisting and vengeance. Substances as toxic as benzene and arsenic (in the form of roxarsone which degrades to more toxic forms) are freely used but without even warning the farmers that they are exposed to such carcinogens. Farmers get hurt, injured, suffer diseases, commit suicides and are even murdered by the company hierarchy. The cheating and immorality is so blatant that the owner of the company does not even hesitate to use the name of God to justify his actions

The story is about the struggle of poor farmers to survive while maintaining their dignity, and ownership of the family farm.

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Frankly speaking it was all new for me. Here in India, we do not have any such poultry farming certainly not to that extent. Still I thoroughly enjoyed the book. Not only it was informative for me it was entertaining as well. The author also took good care of the emotional aspects of the characters in the novel. 'Dog', 'Hope' and 'Charity' have been used to good effect. Still, I feel while the struggle part is narrated elaborately and exhaustively the reform part, it appears, was dealt with hurriedly. Only the beginning of reforms is mentioned like formation of the association of poultry growers and the positive attitude and willingness of the Senator to work for their just cause. It would have been better had she shown some more achievements in favour of the struggling farmers. All in all it is a good book. Though, now I only wonder do chicken eaters suffer benzene and or arsenic poisoning?



-Dr. B.D. Gupta
Dr. B.D. Gupta is professor and Head of Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology at the M.P.Shah Medical College, Jamnagar, India. He is a veteran reviewer and has been associated with this journal since its inception. He can be contacted at bdgujn@yahoo.com

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