

The latest installment (after *At Home With the Glynn's*, 1995) in the ongoing chronicles of Peter Leroy (whose early volumes were published separately in the 1980s, then collected in *Little Follies*, 1992). Peter--Kraft's admitted alter ego (as a disarmingly metafictional ``Preface" and ``Afterword" make clear, ``We are not the same person, though we share a mind")--has now reached middle age, and both career and midlife crises: His marriage is showing its age, and the small hotel (``Small's") that he and his wife Albertine run on an island near his hometown (Babington, Long Island) is failing and may not be easy to unload. A plan is hatched: Like a very Scheherazade, Peter will offer readings from his ongoing memoirs (entitled *Dead Air*) to guests, a chapter a night for 50 nights, ending on the occasion of his 50th birthday. The stories Peter tellsdeftly interwoven with the story of his and Albertine's rueful compromises with the facts of time and changemake up an endearing history of ex-urban American life that consistently evokes Mark Twain, James Thurber, and their kindred. The result is a compact comic Decameron, a deadpan fantasia woven around several important, not to say obsessive, present concerns (mainly, courting realtors and potential buyers) and memories (young Peter's preadolescent crush on a schoolmate's mother; mock-Tom Swiftian misadventures with photography, radio transmission, and a planned flying-saucer detector; and his interrupted progress on a detective novel, *Murder While You Wait*, are especially choice). And if that weren't enough, Kraft/Leroy has (have?) a positive genius for chapter titles (``Bivalves from Outer Space," ``Artificial Insinuation") and attention-getting understatements (``I decided to believe in flying saucers after seeing five of them and a naked woman while I was carrying the garbage cans out"). Add in an unsentimental and perfectly convincing portrayal of a happy marriage, and you have the recipe for a minor masterpiece: one of the most delightful novels of the decade. -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*