
books/paperbacks

New and Notable

By John Gabree

"My Mother Takes a Tumble" and "Do Clams Bite?" by Eric Kraft (Applewood Books, Box 2870, Cambridge, Mass. 02139, \$4.95 each). These are the first two volumes of a serial novel whose overall title is "The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences, & Observations of Peter Leroy." Applewood, a small, adventuresome Boston publisher, plans to issue the little books at a rate of one a quarter. The third, "Life on the Bolotomy," will be out next month.

The series is set in Babbington, New York, a fictional enclave not quite libelously similar to Babylon, L.I. Nearly everyone in Babbington hunts clams for fun or profit, lives in a stucco house and parks a Studebaker (thanks to the salesmanship of Peter Leroy's maternal grandfather, Guppa) at the end of a crushed-shell driveway.

In "My Mother Takes a Tumble," Peter recounts some character-building moments of his early life, including the day his mother falls off her lawn chair. The greatest part of the book concerns the odd relationship between Peter's neighbor, Dudley Beaker, who places a lonely-hearts ad in the Daily News using the name Mary Strong, and Eliza Foot who, as John Simpson, answers it. "Do Clams Bite?" introduces Peter's paternal lineage, Big Grandfather and Big Grandmother (his mother's mother is known as Gumma), and his rites of passage in the Clam Flats of Bolotomy Bay.

In Peter Leroy, Eric Kraft has created an easygoing, off-the-wall comic persona similar to that of Keillor (whose collection of humorous pieces, "Happy to Be Here," has just been released by Penguin at \$4.95) in which folksiness dresses up (or down) sophisticated social commentary. The cockeyed saga (or is that clam-eyed?) of Peter Leroy introduces America to a major new humorist.