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BURRELLE'S

The Recombined Peter Leroy

LITTLE FOLLIES *6509*
*The Personal History, Adventures,
Experiences & Observations of Peter
Leroy (So Far)*
By Eric Kraft
Crown; 437 pages; \$22

REVIEWED BY DAVID DODD

At last, all eight of Eric Kraft's delightful Peter Leroy novels, issued serially as eight thin paperback novellas in the early 1980s, are here gathered into a single volume, together with a new installment. No longer must the fan of Kraft's work poke through shelves of used books, searching for the scarce paperbacks. And reaching the end of the book, we are pleased rather than threatened to find the promising words, "To be continued."

Each installment of the Peter Leroy series is a discrete tale, cumulatively describing the childhood of Peter, from his infancy through roughly sixth grade, growing up on Bolotomy Bay in the clamming town of Babbington, Long Island.

Childhood for Peter is a mixed bag. He is intelligent, anxious to please the grown-ups around him who are often in need of cheering or shoring up. Their world is one of lurid intrigues and quiet desperation, while Peter's world is one of fear of the unknown. He longs for the adult world, for the world of Knowing, where he will be accepted as the equal of his parents and their friends and parents.

"You mustn't let little things bother you so much," says his mother. "Why, when you're grown up you probably won't

Clamshells --
the answer to family boredom!



FROM 'LITTLE FOLLIES'

even remember any of this."

Peter, writing these autobiographical memoirs at about age 40, remembers all too well, and when his memory fails, or the fictional situation demands, or when the past is simply in need of some good rewriting, he makes the rest up. "Surely" he says, "this is one of the motives behind any fiction: the desire to correct the errors of

the past."

Each book has a short preface in which the adult Peter tells how he came to write the story that follows, and what parts he made up. The preface to "Do Clams Bite?," for instance, explains that "at heart, though, 'Do Clams Bite?' is not about events or people. It is about fear. It is about several boyhood fears: the fear of saying

the wrong thing, fear of sex, fear of oblivion, fear of becoming like one's parents, fear of other boys (especially those who carry knives), and — most of all — the fear of having a hunk of oneself bitten off by a clam."

A dinner-table discussion of the early exploits of his great-grandfather, Black Jacques Leroy, brings a reprimand from his parents: "That's something that will have to wait until you're a little older," said my mother. . . . I was embarrassed. I knew that if it was something that had to wait until I was a little older, it had to be about boys and girls. . . . I didn't realize, couldn't have realized, that the boy-and-girl business went right on being embarrassing when people got older."

"Little Follies" is, first and foremost, a consistently funny book. Kraft seems to have taken to heart Peter's grandfather's advice on writing, "make sure there's a laugh on every page." There is. Sometimes it's a short, sympathetic, share-the-remembered-pain-of-childhood laugh, sometimes a belly laugh at the absurdity of the situations in which Peter finds himself, or any of a range of variations of kinds of humor.

This makes Kraft, also the author of the comic erotic novel, "Herb and Lorna," difficult to categorize as a humorist, just as he can't easily be lumped into a group as a novelist. (Marcel Proust, Ring Lardner, Anthony Powell and Garrison Keillor come to mind.) But it's certainly great fun. ■

David Dodd is a reference librarian at the Benicia Public Library.