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Kraft, Eric
PASSIONATE SPECTATOR
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Middle age, mortality, and the meaning of life: all are examined with the lightest touch imaginable in this tenth in Kraft's ongoing *Chronicles* (*Inflating the Dog*, 2002, etc.).

Long Island clam-fancier and personal historian Peter Leroy and his splendid wife Albertine, now fortysomethings, have moved to Manhattan, where he, a freelance writer of such unfulfilling fluff as explanatory booklets for "Eager Readers," hatches the idea of a "memoir-assistance service" for prospective autobiographers. The project is put on temporary hold when Peter is summoned for possible jury duty, strikes up acquaintances with attractive female fellow citizens, and drifts into daydreamed experiences involving two of the alter egos who help populate his overactive fantasy life. Imagining himself simultaneously accompanied by them and *becoming* them, Peter—"as" his old school friend Matthew Barber—gets into a fight, suffers a mild heart attack, and recovers in a Boston hospital, aided by a gorgeous nurse who gives him (in no particularly logical order) a sponge bath, a provocative "theory of time," and an unruly erection. Then, "as" Matthew's opposite and nemesis B.W. Beath (the pseudonym Peter had used when moonlighting as a restaurant reviewer), he takes a vacation trip to Florida and points beyond, where he encounters several more fetching females, stimulates their intellects, and tumbles into bed with them. The Beath episodes are somewhat strained (more like middling Rushdie than vintage Kraft), but the novel rights itself quite agreeably as Peter, spared from jury duty after all, "returns home" like a very Odysseus to the comforts of Albertine, and a most surprising fulfillment of his wishes. Kraft woolgathers with an energy that would shame a sheep-shearer, and overhearing Peter's evening conversations over martinis with the ineffable Albertine is almost as good as listening to Fibber McGee and Molly on the radio again.

More of the same, and may it go on forever. Mark Twain and Will Rogers would have felt right at home with the Leroy's. (*Agent: Noah Lukeman/Lukeman Literary Management*)