

Fiction

A tinted review in adult Forecasts indicates a book that's of exceptional importance to our readers, but hasn't received a starred or boxed review.

INFLATING A DOG

ERIC KRAFT. Picador USA, \$25 (256p)

ISBN 0-312-28804-2

Kraft's eighth installment (after *Leaving Small's Hotel*) in the winsome series featuring the charming Peter Leroy is a cheeky, amusing look at the nature of the entrepreneurial dream. Narrated by the now adult Peter, the story takes place during his adolescence, as his mother, Ella, gets yet another idea in an endless string of outlandish business schemes. This time her fantasy is to establish a cruise line for the bay near their hometown of Babbington, Del. Despite her husband's smirking disapproval, she buys a clam boat and, with the help of Peter and his sexy girlfriend, Patti, begins to fix it up. The cruise line makes a splash in the community when Peter hits a channel marker during their elegant maiden voyage, dumping the mayor's wife in the bay. Their venture struggles after their first outing, until they get the idea to go downscale and paint the boat in garish tropical colors, a move that makes them a wild local hit. The rags-to-riches plot is a bit on the generic side, but Kraft turns the concept up a notch in the preface, in which Peter Leroy reveals that the happy ending is one he created to compensate for his mother's endless "real life" failures, a gambit that allows room for plenty of tongue-in-cheek games with the reality-versus-fantasy theme. The book has some slow moments during the rather ordinary coming-of-age narrative in the early going, but once Kraft begins to work his clever conceit, this novel emerges as another memorable installment in his innovative series. *East Coast author tour. (July)*

Forecast: *This title is comparable in style and quality to previous Leroy novels. Expect similar sales figures as well.*

THE LAST SUMMER

JOHN HOUGH JR. Simon & Schuster, \$25 (352p) ISBN 0-7432-2705-0

A beautiful woman jumps from Washington politics into a Cape Cod murder investigation in Hough's latest, which begins in 1968 when 39-year-old Claire Maleck suddenly walks out on her secretarial job for a prominent senator after her affair with him puts her on the short end of a criminal coverup. With her 14-year-old daughter in tow, Claire takes a brief but difficult hiatus with her mother in Cambridge, then heads