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**Farmaian, Sattareh
Farman with Dona
Munker**
DAUGHTER OF
PERSIA: *A Woman's
Journey from her Father's
Harem through the Islamic
Revolution*
Crown (448 pp.)
\$22.00
Feb. 1992
ISBN: 0-517-58697-5

An exotic, absorbing, rather odd life saga played out against the volatile politics of Iran. "Dispossessed of her Persian heritage," Farmaian (b. 1921) fondly recalls her harem childhood as the 15th of 36 children, the third-born to her 16-year-old mother, who was the third of her father's eight wives. Here, the author idealizes her father for his ability to recollect his children's names on Friday inspections and for teaching them to be "obedient" and grateful, to value education and service, and "never to accept a bribe." Discouraged—as a woman she had "no value"—from pursuing her own education, Farmaian nonetheless went to America in 1943, where she acquired a master's in social work, an Indian husband who abandoned her, and a daughter who, to her great consternation, was an American citizen. Returning to Iran in 1954, she began, with the Shah's approval, her school of social work, all the while condemning the US government for supporting the Shah, whose corruption she especially denounces here with her own particular form of snobbery: the Shah, she says, made people rich "whose fathers no one had ever heard of." But Farmaian objects equally to the Khomeini revolution, its excesses and injustices: her recounting of her arrest, her defiant response to her interrogators, and her escape is the best reading in the book. Throughout, many of Farmaian's attitudes no doubt will offend the "American friends" for whom, along with her grandchildren, she says she is writing, in order to warn them against "well-meaning efforts to remake the world in their image." Rejecting Western democracy, the constitutional monarchy of the Shah, and the religious state of the Ayatollah, the author seems to prefer the landed aristocracy of her father.

A seemingly naive but fascinating psychological document, then, with occasional lyric moments: "My country is a kingdom of fire, a carpet of sand and stone." (Eight-page b&w photo insert—not seen.)

Kraft, Eric
LITTLE FOLLIES: *The
Personal History,
Adventures, Experiences and
Observations of Peter Leroy*
Crown (448 pp.)
\$22.00
Feb. 1992
ISBN: 0-517-58543-X

Nine charming novellas of an all-American boy, all but one of which appeared individually in paperback in the early 1980's, here offered as a hardcover "serial novel."

Kraft (*Reservations Recommended*, 1990; *Herb 'n' Lorna*, 1988) is a veteran comic writer with an occasional dark touch. Here, he recaptures childhood for all of us, as a time of exploration, flights of the imagination, and sexual confusion. He also captures the small-town atmosphere of 1950's Long Island, with its innocence and easy living and yet also with its repression. In "Do Clams Bite?" Peter Leroy is staying in his father's old room when he discovers photographs of a naked woman whom he slowly comes to realize is May, a friend of his father's still but not his wife; May has never married. To twist the knife, Kraft has May tuck Peter into bed and caress him gently. It's a funny story, full of clamore, but there's also an underlying terror rather like that in John Knowles. Then there's the man in "My Mother Takes a Tumble" who, masquerading as a woman, writes to lonely men—with hilarious results. Most of the pieces are about sexual initiation in one way or another: in "Life on the Bolotomy," otherwise a kind of parodic salute to Mark Twain with its boy's river odyssey, May makes love to Peter's older friend; and in "The Girl with the White Fur Muff," Peter is introduced to female anatomy, if not quite to sex. But the mood is gentle and comic, innocent at heart, in the end far more reminiscent of Booth Tarkington than of John Knowles. Peter stays a child, and in "The Young Tars"—a sendup of Boy Scouts and 4-H and all those other clubs for youth—he's a boy rather like Penrod or the Tom Sawyer who can talk you into painting his fence.

Nine novellas do not quite a novel make, but these are delightful and satisfying stories from a sure stylist, sweet without ever being sentimental.