



The Vale of Laughter: A Novel

Peter De Vries

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A brilliant, fiercely funny novel that ponders the eternal question: is it better to laugh or cry?

Joe Sandwich is a clown. Not literally, but what else do you call an eleven-year-old who goes to church to confess his good deeds: “I did my homework without being told”? A stockbroker who gets seasick watching the market tape and claims the gross national product is “deodorants”? A father who mows curse words into his lawn and names his son Hamilton because, well, who can resist a Ham Sandwich?

Prankster, punster, cut-up, card—Joe *needs* to crack wise about everything. Has he figured out the secret to embracing the inherent absurdity of life, or is there some terrible anxiety at the root of his compulsion? Lots of people want to know, including his wife, Naughty, who is anything but; his mistress, Gloria Bunshaft; and her husband, Wally Hines, a humorless professor who specializes in the philosophy of humor.

“If you look back,” says Joe, “you turn into a pillar of salt. If you look ahead, you turn into a pillar of society.” He prefers to live in the moment, from one gag to the next, but the joke he doesn’t see coming may get the biggest laugh of all.

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