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Book Review: Write Me a Verbal Contract

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BOOK REVIEW

WRITE ME A VERBAL CONTRACT. By W. Robert Abbott. Charlottesville: The Michie Company, 1962. Pp. 160. \$3.50.

Lawyers seldom tell jokes to other lawyers. The stuff of intra-professional humor is the infinite variety of humanity migrating through the lawyer's world leaving spoor through the pages of the National Reporter System. To the non-initiate in the legal fraternity the punch line of this brand of humor is often lost in a morass of technical terminology not part of the public domain. Occasionally lawyers condescend to spin tales for the mass audience. *Anatomy of a Murder* is an outstanding example of the best of this condescension. The used book stores are full of privately printed first edition copies of the worst. Thus when one hears of a new book by a lawyer, especially a new book of amusing anecdotes from the practice of a small town lawyer, all of the defenses are thrown up and a "show me" attitude comes to the fore. *Write Me a Verbal Contract* is one of the very latest efforts by a lawyer to tell lawyer tales to the general book buying public. This time the setting is the West Virginia hills and the lawyers and their clients are the descendants of the original mountain men who took the first giant steps west from the tide water colonies. One would expect to find in such a book a soggy collection of hillbillies and stills with Snuffy Smith overtones. Yet such is not the fact. Instead of broad slapstick one finds between the covers of this little book a very human collection of quiet good humor. The stories can be understood by the laymen yet clearly they are written by a lawyer for other lawyers; they smack of truth. The lawyer reader is more apt to be reminded of his own experiences and derive pleasure from such past remembrances than is the lay reader. Thus this book functions on two levels — to the lawyer it is a spring board to pleasant recollection, to the non-lawyer it is a collection of funny stories about lawyers and their clients.

The reviewer has a special interest in the book stemming from two facts: He knows the lawyer and has substantial personal admiration for Mr. Abbott, its author, and he saw many of the stories in the book as they unfolded. It is thus somewhat surprising to find Mr. Abbott including among these choice few tales one discordant note. He inserts a story about a lawyer and a toy satellite that strains the reader's credulity. Surely such a chain of events could never have happened and Mr. Abbott should be taken to task for its inclusion. Aside from this one obvious fabrication Mr. Abbott has compiled a most pleasant collection of tales. Too many reviews suggest that the reader should rush out and purchase the book immediately for without it no library would be complete. This reviewer shall not thus bow to true tradition. He flatly states that you could spend the balance of your life without purchasing the book—while you are at it why not give up women, cigarettes and liquor too? Or if you prefer the hedonistic existence then rush right out and buy *Write Me a Verbal Contract* for without it no gentleman's library will be complete.

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