

Dryden: Royal Flush

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BOOK REVIEWS

Royal Flush. By WILLIAM DRYDEN. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, Inc., 1964. Pp. 344. \$4.95.

In a novel without a theme or a memorable character, Dryden gives an interesting transcript of the International Broadcasting Company suit against the Sherman Enterprises to recover three and one-half million dollars worth of stock invested in the quiz program, Royal Flush, which had been exposed as a fraud. The author uses the first half of his story for background and for the introduction of many characters; he vividly presents the court case in the second half. Throughout the entire story, the recent case of the exposed quiz program never leaves the reader's mind. Sherman Enterprises agrees to a retainer of \$5,000 and a generous hourly rate for the services of young Gerald Simons and Ted Browning to present the defendant's case to the jury in Federal Judge Rudolph Steiner's court. They have five weeks to prepare their case which centers around Rule 10B (5) of the Federal Securities Act which forbids the use of any fraudulent device to obtain securities. Simons and Browning hope that Judge Steiner will rise above his friendship with the Chairman of International Broadcasting Company, Max Hartfield, because of the vital public interest involved in the case and its consequent publicity.

The burden of proof, that I.B.C. knew Royal Flush had been rigged, appears most difficult for the young lawyers to sustain successfully. Everyone feels certain that Dr. Howard Bok, a learned professor who had won \$250,000 in prizes, had been given his answers for the weekly programs. Ted Browning had to have definitive evidence, for hearsay and letters of listeners' complaints avail nothing by way of legal proof. He does obtain documentary proof from Kathaleen Bennett, a former contestant and a discarded friend of Horace Billew of I.B.C., which Browning keeps as his "ace in the hole."

There is suspense throughout the latter half of the story, but one grows impatient for Dryden to end the case. In his description of the selection of the jury he injects a note of irony: the favorite jurymen of Simons and Browning ultimately becomes the only hold-out against their cause. The presentation of two Royal Flush programs to the jury is convincing proof of I.B.C.'s knowledge of a fixed show, but it is not as impressive as Ted Browning's graphic commentary to the jury. It is most amusing to find even Judge Steiner unable to cope with it.

A softening touch in Ted Browning's conduct is his visit to Kathaleen's college town where he engages in a snowball affair with small boys and wins her attention. Browning's method of using Kathaleen's confidence to obtain evidence against Horace Billew is as unpleasant as much of the rest of the personal motivation in the novel. When the jury rules in favor of Sherman Enterprises, Judge Steiner withholds his verdict, for he must consider his friend, Max Hartfield.

Royal Flush is propaganda directed against the uselessness of quiz shows, unethical lawyers and dishonest judges. It is slow reading, for Dryden employs a multitude of details in preparing for court trial, and for its presentation.

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