

Untitled

By Eleanor Gorman

I met Jack McRoy on a cold day in March, one that was not quite yet spring but not entirely rid of the winter chill for small patches of snow browned with the mud of the boots of the passerby still scattered the streets. Jack was not a friend of mine nor was he an enemy. Everyone knew Jack, his name rang throughout cities and towns for miles, yet no one knew him at all.

Mid October, 1903

My older brother Charlie helped me pick up a job at the publishing company a few blocks from our house, The Boston Press, after I had finished my senior year of highschool. I have worked there for nearly four months and it has been the best opportunity I have ever received. See - my brother Charlie is a writer too, perhaps him being the reason I took a fondness to the art at such a young age. Charlie writes columns and informative articles for The Boston Press while I have more of an eye for poetry. Fortunately for me, The Press is unique in the sense that not only is it a daily newspaper, but another branch of the company edits and publishes all other kinds of literature. My position at the company has quite literally nothing to do with the actual writing - I work as a receptionist, one of many throughout the building. Now, I must confess, when Charlie had told me that he had found me work at the Press, my original belief was that it had some correlation to writing. But of course, that dream quickly faded almost as swiftly as it had come to be because I could never be a writer. My writing (and while I am not one for bragging, I cannot help that it is the

truth) is quite superior to those who surround me. Yet, I am told that I will never become a writer and even if I do manage to get published, then there would be no one to read it. All because of the unarguable fact that I am a woman. So I am told to crush my dreams and sweep away the pieces and be grateful for my opportunity to even work in such an establishment. My job may be to sort papers and file them away, but my favorite part of the job is when I read an unpublished story. It is not my job to read them, but my office is stationed in the section dedicated to publishing novels, and sometimes I will be given permission to read sections of stories being sent in. And even sometimes when I am feeling overly zealous when I walk into an office of a kind editor who will let me read the text, I will offer my own suggestions for improving the piece. They may act like they dislike my assertive editing skills (and I am sure without a doubt that some of them do not), but I do take note that in the end they always accept them and I am left feeling as if I had made my mark on the world. Sure, I may have just offered a few stylistic or technique changes, but it felt as if my impact was so much more.

Everyday after work Charlie and I would walk the 20 minutes that it took to get home together. I quite enjoyed those walks because our conversations drifted from what Charlie was currently writing to politics to even local gossip and to whatever else there was to say. Charlie still lived at home, but not for long - he had plans to move out into an apartment with his fiancée Marie in a year - apartments for rent near the Press at a reasonable cost were challenging to find. We still had dinner every night at the same time - father's favorite thing was a consistent schedule. Today the conversation that carried Charlie and I centered around baseball. Charlie loved sports and his dream was to be a full-time sports reporter. He talked

about baseball - the Boston Americans and the Pittsburgh Pirates competing in a new competition, the World Series, and I listened. We got home, washed up and ate dinner with mother and father. And after that, if there was nothing else that had to be discussed or done, Charlie would either go to the small bar a few blocks down from our house, near the Press, which I knew my mother disliked, and have a drink or stay at home and pore over sport articles and stories in hopes of bettering his own writing and I would help mother bake something for the next day or assist in her sewing room and then I would creep up the stairs to write in my room. Nearly the same events every night, perhaps my father's obsession with regularity affected all of us. Tonight I was helping my mother make a pie for our neighbors, The Lewises. I knew what she was doing. She tried to place emphasis on me developing my other skills, skills that society deem useful to me becoming a functioning adult, instead of writing because no one would read a female writer.

Early March, 1904

No one ever saw when Jack McRoy dropped off the copy of his first novel at the Boston Press. It would have been disregarded if it were not for the fact that the editor whose desk it was placed upon, Sam Carmicheal (my favorite editor at the Press) had opened up the manuscript and seen the quality in the words inked onto the page. Only three sheets of paper were attached, a note requesting for its publication, a document granting the Press access to all the profits from the book, and a signature; Jack McRoy. It was an adventure novel. One with underlying themes that allowed it to be enjoyed by quite any age. But it was not necessarily the plot that made Jack's debut novel such a hit - it was the way in which he wrote. His sentences were so vibrant and his style was so unique that it attracted all people

of different interests. When my brother found out about how Jack had gone about delivering his novel to the company, he could not stop remarking on the amount of confidence that it took from Jack to have in the quality of his novel to just assume that it would be published. He immediately understood after the first time he read it. And perhaps the mystery of who Jack McRoy is draws interest to his books. I like to think of Jack as a man in his mid thirties who lives in a small brick house in the town of North End. He does not have a particularly large home, but he is able to sustain a healthy way of living and decided that his ability to stay anonymous is more important than the large sum of money that he would undoubtedly have earned from his best-selling book. But sometimes I wonder how similar the idea of Jack McRoy that I have created in my head is to that of all the others around me. Early July, 1904 Unlike any other novelist with the popularity that Jack had gained, a mere two months after his novel was published and stocked on shelves, Jack surprised the public by leaving a book of poetry on Carmicheal's desk. This came as a surprise because no author could succeed at being both a novelist and a poet. Until Jack McRoy did it. His poems were long, used colorful detail, and had deeper messages than most authors dared to publish. Poems of discrimination and fear. Prejudice and hope. A month later, the air was warm the day that his poems appeared on shelves in their tight binding and spines and after dinner Charlie and I broke routine and sat on the small front steps of our house that led right out to the edge of the street. He was moving out in three months and I could see that time slipping right away from us. The night before, mother and I had gotten into an argument. She was too worried that I spent too much time focused on writing and the Press and that I should be partaking in activities that would help me in life such as sewing and cooking. And she was not wrong - it

would be unacceptable for a lady to be a writer, and even if I tried I would not succeed because no one would read stories from a woman.

“I don’t want to live the rest of my life waiting on others.” I complained to Charlie as I told him of this back and forth between my mother and I.

“I know,” he laughed, “but do you think that perhaps you could find something else that you are passionate about that may be deemed a bit more acceptable in the eyes of others?”

“No.” I did not care about seeming stubborn - I wanted him to know that writing is what I wanted to do. He shifted the topic of the conversation.

“How do you think that Mr. Jack McRoy is delivering his text to the office and leaving without anyone noticing?” I pause. “Well probably through the front door.”

My crack at humor does not amuse him and as he stretches out his legs on the steps he responds with, “Well I can tell you for sure right now that Jack McRoy will never reveal his true identity to us - especially now.” I shoot him a quizzical glance. “I mean people either love him to death or hate him enough to want him dead. Especially down south, they hate it when traction gains around someone speaking out against prejudices. And you’ve seen how he dances around inequality, racism, and prejudice - I mean they’re going to hate how beautifully he expresses a need for equality.” A pause. “I can’t yet tell if I think he is a coward for not showing his face, or a wise man for not having to face angry crowds every time he simply leaves his house.”

“Don’t you think that for every person who hates what he writes there will be two who are inspired by him?”

He smiled. "Well, I guess that's true." "And I think there could be a million reasons why he keeps himself hidden."

Early January, 1905

By Christmas, Jack had another published book of poetry - just as loved and hated as the last. There was even talk of banning his books in certain states. But everyone was anticipating his next move - whether it was to critique it or to praise it. It was a few days after the turn of the new year when I heard a knock at the door. I opened it to find Charlie standing on the long cement steps. He and Marie had moved into their apartment, and being only a ten minute walk away, it was not rare for Charlie to show up unannounced every once and a while, so seeing him did not alarm me, but the mix of shock and worry etched across his face did.

"You won't believe me when I tell you this." He ushered me inside and shut the door, and we took a seat at the kitchen table. Mother and father were at a function for father's work, so the house was only occupied by the two of us.

"Jack McRoy was killed not two days ago."

I could feel my pulse stop and my blood run cold through my veins. Jack McRoy was not dead. Jack McRoy could not possibly be dead. Jack McRoy did not exist.

"How?" I whispered. "How can they be sure that it was him?"

"There was a man in Georgia who had been claiming for a week or so that he was the writer of the McRoy pieces. Apparently he had unpublished poems that matched McRoy's closely enough that the small ring of people he told believed him. He must have sent someone the books to send to the Press up here in Boston. But two nights ago he was killed

when people who strongly disagreed with what he wrote about had a run in with him at a bar.”

I felt ill - it had been all my fault. Jack McRoy did not exist. Jack McRoy's books and poetry were very much real, but Jack was not. The only purpose that Jack McRoy was supposed to serve was to hide me. If I could not be allowed or accepted in society to write my own stories, then instead of hiding my words I hid myself. I let Jack speak for me, and now an innocent man has died. If I confess, even if no one truly believes that I could have done what Jack did, I may just reach the same fate. But if I do not then not only will that man have died for nothing, but Jack could never write anything again. So I know what I must do. I will not allow myself to be hidden by the name Jack McRoy and I will not leave to fate the chance of something so tragic ever happening again.

Mid March, 1905

I saw Jack McRoy for the last time on one warm day in March, one that promised an early return of spring; small buds began appearing on each tree as I passed down the street. Jack was not a friend of mine nor was he an enemy. Everyone knew Jack, his name rang throughout cities and towns for miles, yet no one knew him at all. Another name, Evelyn Walker - my name, was quite similar to Jack. Only Evelyn would no longer be hidden in Jack's shadow.