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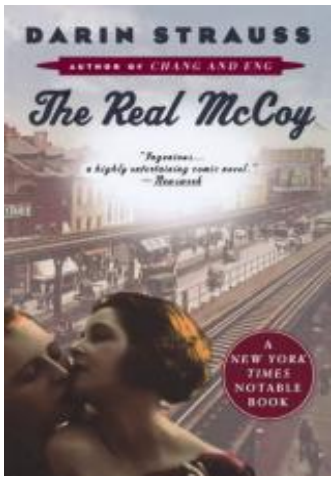
The Real Mccoy

by Darin Strauss



About the Book

Loosely based on the real life of an enigmatic turn-of-the-century icon and charlatan, **The Real McCoy** introduces a character like no other in recent contemporary fiction. "Kid" McCoy was a man of many talents and faces: championship boxer, jewel thief, scam artist, and one of the most married men in America. Unfolding against the tumultuous backdrop of history, his story is a fascinating mirror of the times as he becomes a legend and a symbol of all that's true in America. **The Real McCoy** is an audacious and unforgettable novel about identity, illusion, and the pursuit of life long love.

Discussion Guide

1. What gives Selby the idea and the confidence to take over McCoy's identity? Is it his family; the town; his insecurities?

2. Would Virgil Selby have gotten away with taking McCoy's identity today? "Would it even be possible to pull that classy a swindle in today's gleaming world where everybody knows everything?"

3. "In the big flimflam, the bolder the fiction, the better. Preposterousness makes a lie more believable." Is this true?

4. Selby is trying to be someone else. Susan is an actress trying to always appear confident and strong. Are Susan and McCoy drawn to each other because they are so much alike?

5. Why did Susan stay with McCoy during their first marriage, especially after hearing all of the lies? If McCoy had not have left her, do you think they would have been happy?

6. "Susan was an angry person and she was kind, she was blustery and she was shy; she was loving and not; she was something else, he thought. No one woman could be drawn from all those traits. Maybe the Susan he'd chosen to shadow

out from the jumble was just his invention." Was this true? Do you think that in most relationships people choose to see what they want to see?

7. Why did McCoy marry Rosella Bunker? Do believe Rosella meant to flimflam McCoy from the beginning? Is McCoy more upset about being flimflammed than about Rosella leaving him?

8. What was it about McCoy that made Susan keep loving him and forgiving him? Would Susan have loved Virgil Selby if he wasn't trying to be McCoy?

9. Why does Virgil Selby trust Johnnie Gold, even when Selby knows Gold is one of the best flimflammers around? Discuss their relationship. Do you think Johnnie felt the same love for his friend as McCoy did? Do you think Johnnie knew what the outcome would be when he ruined McCoy's image? Was Johnnie trying to prove his ability to flimflam better than McCoy?

10. Johnnie says, "McCoy, he who has fallen from a height is lower than his neighbor who has never climbed! And your life will be a sad echo of a sad shell of a past glory!" Is this just another of Johnnie's philosophic thoughts or is this statement true? Is it better to lead a life without risk or to take risks and fail? Was McCoy's time at the top worth all the trouble?

11. When McCoy/Selby returns home to live, he becomes a very different person. What kind of life do you think Virgil Selby would have led had he not taken on McCoy's identity? Do you think that the people of Bluffton Creek would have treated Selby differently if he had kept up the personality and charisma of McCoy? Is it true that you "can't go home again?"

12. Discuss Selby's relationship with his father. Does it make Selby ashamed to have his father see him as McCoy?

13. "In a flash of lightning, McCoy could see there was something vulgar about her. Mostly it was her marriage to successful, filthy rich, ugly old Utnap." What else about Susan did McCoy find to be vulgar?

14. Why do you think McCoy pulled the last flimflam? It was more elaborate than anything he had done in the past. What was he trying to prove? Why did Susan join him in planning this scam? Is having Susan's love not enough for McCoy?

15. McCoy is searching for "The Why" throughout **The Real McCoy**. Why is this so important to him? Near the end of the novel he thinks, "It turns out The Why hadn't been about the fame of deathless fame, or even the money..." What does it turn out to be for him? Is it the same for everyone?

Author Bio

Darin Strauss is the bestselling author of several books. The recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in fiction writing and numerous other awards, Strauss has seen his work translated into 14 languages and published in more than 20 countries. He is a clinical associate professor of writing at New York University, and he lives with his wife and children in Brooklyn.

Critical Praise

"Irrepressible?**The Real McCoy's** strength, dynamism, and sorrow will make it one of the most quintessentially American novels published this year."

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