

Eagles Rising chronicles an Irish-American family's transition from rural Iowa to Chicago where they confront labor, gangster and race wars. The WWI hero, haunted by a youthful anarchist plot, seeks support from his moxie wife and a Wizard. Eagles Rising is one of several stand-alone novels about the lives of an Irish-American family in the 20th century.

Eagles Rising

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EAGLES RISING

THE COLUMBIAD—BOOK 1

One of seven stand-alone novels about the lives of an Irish-American family in the 20th Century

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PROLOGUE

The day Frank's line of the family somersaulted into the modern age occurred the afternoon that his son Martin was transformed by the sight of the White City.

At seventeen, Martin, the eldest son, was entrusted by his father to accompany livestock to the Chicago market where the family was able to bargain for better prices. It had been his father, standing beside him, who taught Martin everything he knew about farming and living with animals. With Frank supervising the round-up, his farmhands drove the doomed cattle across the Iowa fields to the Mississippi river landing at Long View. There, instead of taking his freight over the rails, Martin boarded the cattle boat to Dubuque where he could link up with the through-train that eventually spilled the dizzy animals alongside the Windy City's yawling stockyards and packinghouses.

In 1893, on one of those journeys, Martin was dazzled by a sidetrip to the World's Fair. After delivering his herd, he found his way to the lake. From there he rode the new elevated train to the fairgrounds and entered the shimmering mecca that was the Columbian Exposition, built to celebrate, a year late, the 400th anniversary of the discoverer's voyage.

Rising from the shores of Lake Michigan, the eye-aching whiteness of the Great Chicago Fair provoked expectations of civic grandeur so tangible that its impact remained with Martin for life. This shining city that bobbed on the sands of the inland sea became a magnet for the young of the midwest, and bound them together by the power of its imagery and the possibilities of its dream. Before them soared the city beautiful, sparking their imagination and hopes. Framed by classical buildings erected alongside lagoons that circulated through the fair, the canals were patrolled by Venetian craft festooned with flowers. In the evenings, Sousa's band serenaded the crowds from a string of gondolas, the melodies drifting under the crowded bridges and across the water. Tuned by American music floating across an enclosed lake, the gleaming white metropolis became the signature vision of Martin's generation.

When he walked into the beaux-arts complex, the contrast to his ritual farm life was startling. Carrying the aroma of the stockyard pens with him, he stepped off the el and stretched out his arms to shower in the fresh lake breezes and after finding a wash-up room was soon windblown and refreshed. Making his way through a turnstile near Sullivan's Transportation Building with its golden arch, a concoction of old Spain and the Alhambra, he was seized by emotions as spiritual as they were

aesthetic. Within Martin's Catholic soul, the deep clanging of a cathedral-sized ringing produced a reverberate response that stirred his insides.

Distinguished by his country cap amid a sea of derbies, Martin viewed the Court of Honor with its Pantheon-size edifices. The scene gleamed like a wondrous white confection, a rebellion against the grimy city outside the gates and the mud of his Iowa barnyard. Here, for a few hours, the unreal became palpable and Martin, overwhelmed by its impact, was filled with awe. Approaching the waters of the statue-encircled basin, where the idealized women of his time were represented in heroic stances, he first viewed the monumental fountain in stone of symbolic *Columbia* skippering the ship of her American state through a pond of geysers. Above and beyond, he viewed Saint Gaudens' rendition of the archer *Diana* on top of the Agriculture Building and French's colossal *Republic* at the other end of the reflecting pool. Emotions struggled through his body, physically testing his bucolic beliefs. He felt a visceral alliance with the artists' aims to meld feminine virtues with symbols of power—the torch of liberty, the longbow, the orbed eagle. Within him, there was an emotional transformation. He began to equate the beauty of what he felt and saw with the goddess spirit captured in the statuary—the revelation that

women were not only the seed of life but also the antibody against industrial decay. He and smoke-stale America were acknowledging the gender of their ideals.

He entered the Electricity Building where he inspected the massive dynamos, much preferring the full-bosomed marble virgins outdoors. Viewing Edison's kinoscope, he watched hootchy-kootchy images dance before his eyes. Then on to the Agriculture Building, where he asked his best questions, mostly concerning corn and its generation. Later, he wandered into the Krupp Gun Works exhibit to be iron-struck by the potential destructive power of the enormous cannons that waited ominously to decimate an entire generation of English and French youths still in their infancy. Martin hoped no relative of his would ever face these railway siege guns.

Later in the afternoon, steps away from entering the Midway amusement area, Martin was again distracted by the decorative female forms surrounding another of the imposing halls. On the facade a flag fluttered, announcing a free concert inside. Curious, he entered the Women's Building, and was soon informed by its gentle atmosphere, which contrasted sharply with the castings and mechanical contrivances of the other exhibits. Its spacious central atrium was filled with music. Above on opposite archways, he admired the large-scale wall

paintings, one labeled *By Mary Cassatt*, which depicted modern women harvesting the tree of knowledge. The other, illustrating primitive women, was fleshed out by Mary Fairbanks, wife of the sculptor of the central statue sailing above the waters outside depicting Columbia as the country's helmswoman.

Observing the Cassatt, Martin thought to himself, "She makes faces good. Has an eye for caring women."

As he listened to the music and absorbed the soft feminine milieu around him, he began to doubt his own beliefs concerning the female's solely domestic role.

"Too bad Ma didn't have many chances in school," he said to himself. "She's smarter than all of us."

His father would also have been amazed by the splendor of the fair. But who was to teach Martin what these images and impressions meant?

The music's echo resounded as it lifted through the open hall, the harmony of the chorus and instruments a wonder to Martin. Familiar with pump organs and church singing, he had never heard the sumptuous sound of a symphony before; his only previous experience with tuned instruments rested on the quartets played back home by his cousins, the nuns. Beneath the Cassatt mural, the women's orchestra was playing the *Festival Jubilate* that Amy Beach had composed for the Fair's opening

day. Enthralled, Martin sat until the end of the concert. As a finale, the women played *America the Beautiful* inspired by the White City itself. The female chorus sang of amber waves of grain and alabaster realms.

After the final notes faded away, he strolled through the hall and fell in behind two attractive women, each with an unblemished complexion. They balanced small tilted hats on their heads that offset their ankle-length skirts and puffed-up sleeves. Martin had never seen such clear-skinned women before.

“What a relief to hear music other than the usual Chadwick,” said the taller of the two, mentioning the country’s favorite composer.

“I’d have preferred something more modern.”

“Something Wagnerian that would make us tremble? Our poor frail bodies couldn’t stand it.”

“Sweet sister, the two of us left fragility mooning by herself on some back road long ago.”

“Cynic! You’ll be telling me next that you agree with what Mister Sullivan said at dinner the other night about the fair’s architecture.”

Martin, walking behind, didn't understand their references, but was fascinated by their refinement, their air of gentle force, unfamiliar traits in the farmwomen he knew.

"You mean about all those fake Greek temples and oversize bank buildings around the Court?" the taller one asked. "What did he call them? Decorated sheds?"

Martin followed the women like a silent shadow.

"Young man, are you trailing behind us?" the taller woman turned and asked.

"Why no. . . . Actually yes. I mean no harm," he said, cap in hand.

Though in farm clothes, Martin displayed a hardiness sufficient to attract most females his age. Tall and thin with muscled limbs, there was a yeoman's honesty sculpted in his face. Fortunately, Chicago women were sympathetic to rural ways, aware that they were surrounded by a thousand miles of farms in every direction—plow fields that needed civilizing. Many of these modern millies took their country cousins into protective custody once inside city limits, especially suffragettes like these two, born proselytizers, who reacted favorably to incipient male sensitivity captured by the aroma of their seductive perfumes. That's how Martin Mahoney for five

full minutes entered the emancipated sisterhood of these North Shore beauties.

“What made you stop by?” one of the women asked.

“Mostly the music and the statues,” Martin answered plainly.

“See, it works,” the smaller woman said. “We need something to entice people. We should give concerts every day. Maybe twice a day. Serve refreshments. Even charge.”

“It’s fine to snare this young man but women shouldn’t require an invitation. They should be motivated to come on their own,” her sister said. “Aren’t they obligated to visit their own exhibition?”

“That’s unrealistic. Not with a Wild West show and a Pygmy village just around the corner—to say nothing about that big iron wheel flapping around out there. Or those Arabian persons! Or that wild-looking locksmith. And Professor Tesla—all lit up like a firebug—creating home-made thunderstorms right through his body over in the Electricity Building.”

“I liked that one,” Martin mumbled. “Scorched his collar running all that electricity through him.”

They weren’t listening to him. The taller sister was saying, “Why are we always competing? Confrontation is such a nuisance. We need to take charge of ourselves instead of arguing and begging for everything. It’s so distasteful. . . .What

do you think?” turning full face to Martin, who had never been so close to such beauty before.

“I hate to fight,” he said. “Unless I have to.”

“But what do you do when you’re forced to?”

“Punch first. Then run like a scared hare,” Martin said.

“That doesn’t sound very gallant.”

“Saves a lot of doctor bills.”

“Do you have any sisters you could bring to the fair?”

“Only brothers—five of them. That’s how come I know about fighting. I had a sister but she died. She had problems.” He didn’t want to say they were mental.

“I’m sorry. . . . Perhaps you could invite a cousin or someone. Bring them along to see all the possibilities opening up for women. . . . Don’t forget,” she said, bidding him goodbye.

The language of the feminine future wasn’t the only new voice he heard that day; he was soon introduced to the latest in popular music as well.

A variety of sounds stirred the evening air as Martin drifted through the Midway carnival, the summer home of Buffalo Bill, as well as belly dancers from the Mideast, and a certain Mr. Weiss from Brooklyn who called himself Houdini. Soon enough, amid the pennywhistle sounds of Irish bands and the

drumbeats of the African Village, there came a flight of music that startled him with its quirky surprises. An altogether new sound—a piano with a sparkling kind of rhythm, one of the first ragtime numbers—*Elite Syncopations*. The music lit up Martin's spirit as no music had ever done—rollicking rhythms so disguised that the listener could barely discern the soul of released slavery in it, didn't know that the beat partially derived from the slave dance tunes that his immigrant father, Frank, had heard as a boy in New Orleans, the same sounds that would lead to jazz and all its progeny.

The rambunctious rhythms sprinkled on the summer air, the music reminding Martin of high-stepping trotters, or arched-back minstrels shuffling along with a shoulder-shaking strut, parading toward a jamboree, cake walking. Martin felt an eruption in his body that set his spirits tapping. Even the new electric lights seemed to jitter. Though Martin was unaware, the kinetic energy that was to burn up the twentieth century was here and in the nervous images of the moviola—flickering mechanical marionettes inside black boxes that illustrated the stuttered, frenetic life that was on its way. Hurry up, *wah-wah*; it's a, *wah-wah*, new century coming. With a herky-jerk to it.

The music came from a beergarden beneath Mister Ferris's giant wheel. Entering the grove, he saw a Negro gentleman

banging away on a tin-pan piano. Martin took a seat nearby and began swaying to the rhythms, listening to the cascading ragtime tumble out of the upright like starshine on a clear black sky, twinkling with the boisterous urban patterns of postfarm America. The black man noticed Martin's reaction and played to him, acknowledging Martin's interest with a tip of his derby—the shy of the world improvising their special signals. Martin sat with his schooner of beer for twenty minutes until the ragtime man arrived at a natural break.

Martin rose and walked over to him, "Your music woulda made my grandpa dance."

"I try to give it a lot of sass," the pianist replied.

"Can I buy you a beer?" Martin asked. "Only right after such fine entertainment."

The Negro smiled, "Not in here you can't."

"How 'bout next door then?"

"There neither. Maybe sometime in August when they have Colored Day."

"Why don't I just buy a couple mugs, and we'll sit someplace?"

"OK. I'll meet you out back. You can walk around by the fence."

They pulled up camp chairs when Martin returned and sat in the evening shade of a kitchen oak that backed up onto other attractions. Jugglers lounged there along with cooks and chorus girls. Martin failed to observe that his companion never touched his brew.

“Your music sure does sting the senses,” Martin said when they sat down; unaware of the looks the pair were receiving from the other performers and potato peelers. “Did you make up some of those tunes yourself?”

“Most of them. . . .But a few of them,” the black man said with a smile, “I repossessed.”

“What do you call that kind of music?”

“Part minstrel. Some African. All spliced together in Saint Louis—mixed up in the ginmills on the back side of town.”

“I don’t know much about music,” Martin said. “But yours has a nice finish to it—like a well made cabinet.”

“I hope the tunes take with the crowds. People don’t always actually see us coloreds. But maybe we can at least get them to listen. Later on, we’ll help them grow eyes.”

The pianoman had to return to work and they soon parted. With the sound of ragtime skipping in his ears, Martin stepped out onto the raucous Midway and gazed up at the giant Ferris wheel turning on high. The cars above came tumbling over the

top of the sky and seemed to overflow like a song. They came dancing down, cartwheeling into the new times.

It had been a wonder-filled day. But he came to the realization that he would have to teach himself more about the world, learn about things beyond his father's comprehension.

Some of America's dilemmas were beginning to unravel at the Chicago Fair. Choices between gold or silver currency, between an indentured southern class or not, art versus commerce, voting women or domestic slaves, isolation or world power, native music or Europe's. Decisions would soon arrive that would burden and excite the lives of its youngest generation.

The nineteenth century had been one of the most prosperous times that any country had ever known—America sitting high and dry on the western ocean. Its tenets already laid down by Jefferson and Emerson, its basic literature established by Melville, the younger James, and Twain. Its new music was about to explode with Ives, who would acknowledge the black-inspired folk music already fingered by Joplin in his Chicago beergarden. Sullivan's Auditorium downtown glowed with the possibility of native architecture, Wright not far behind. Poetry redefined by Whitman. Its Civil War already fought. Legal slavery, the ugly crack in the Liberty Bell, behind. All the

country had to do now was build on its foundation, match the deeds of the doers that would not be denied—the Irish who dug the canals, the Chinese who built the railroads, the Germans and Scandinavians who tilled the midwest, the Slavs who worked the ore furnaces—the active ethnics. Foreign-born and first-generation immigrants—forming three-quarters of the population—were reworking the continent. America was stretching awake, opening its front door and gazing out on a bright morning of achievement. It was a country set up and ready to do the business of the twentieth century.

But in the back of the American house, there was a cramped door low to the ground—crabbed out of the muck of the yard, the dark side already visible in the despair of unreconstructed blacks who were being thrown back into servitude by southern legislatures. Women everywhere in cotton chains. The government interfering with brown breeds below the border. Union-busting monopolies. Chinese exclusion. And maybe worst of all, the final fencing in of the Indian nations.

And in between the light and the dark, the front door and back, between the hopes and doubts, dreams and nightmares, intelligence and stupidity, nobility and corruption, most people like Martin, his father Frank, and his future son, John-Arthur, would be divided by courage and fear, with few answers except

those offered by religion or a fifth-grade education. People suffering in confusion. But in that middle room, humor, civility, frilly curtains, a player piano and pictures of Abe Lincoln offered stability and a moment's joy between a dirt hard life on the one hand and the search for economic and social freedom on the other.

One of the first things Martin saw on this day of his whitened vision was the sight of MacMonnies's *Columbia Triumphant* riding her ship of state above the fountains alongside the gleaming splendor of the Court of Honor, and before the day was out, he came to feel that America's future could only be achieved by the full participation of its women and the creative force of its blacks. *Dynamis* be damned.

When Martin left the White City that night to catch his westbound train, he could see the lights of the fair blazing in the sky for miles. Tesla's new electrical reflections, radiating from the immense glass roofs and from the light bouncing off the white surfaces, shimmered in the summer haze. He knew that he had to redirect himself, even though his only points of reference were his affinity to his family and the sacristy of his Catholic beliefs. As he rode the night coach back to Iowa, he was ready to admit to himself that he wasn't cut out to be a farmer. When

he arrived home, Martin told old Frank he wasn't going to work the crops much longer.

That fall, he entered the seminary, the sacrificial eldest son.

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