How does a frightened child overcome his fear of the world and Depression America? Amazingly the answer comes through sports, sex, help from the Church and a friendly Wizard. Set in the colorful era of the '39 World's Fair and WWII.

First Lights

FIRST LIGHTS

A Memoir Disguised as a Novel

by

Gerald F. Sweeney

THE COLUMBIAD—BOOK 2

Seven stand-alone Novels about an
Irish-American Family in the 20th
Century

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Chapter 1

On the morning that James-Francis Mahoney entered the streamlined city of man that was the 1939 New York World's Fair, the pure, uncluttered lines of the vista dazzled him. In the sensate eyes of the 10-year-old's vision, the landscape appeared pristine, as if Art Deco had the ability to remove excess and strip away the architectural slowpoints and impediments of his sweeping gaze. The World of Tomorrow spread before him, laundry-clean against the silhouetted background of Manhattan's grimy skyscrapers that would beckon him later with more adult enticements. Arriving that day on the Long Island Rail Road that had carried them in from the suburbs, he and his mother strolled through the fairground gates toward Rainbow Avenue, iridescent fountains everywhere tumbling colorfully aloft. If Jim had known then that his destiny was to climb rainbows all his life, he might have paid more attention to the rivers of colors spreading through the exploding watersprays springing upward in every direction.

He was too young to fathom that the sights before him were illuminated on a screen of American naiveté that censored out a world just months away from the trauma of World War II. But if adults chose to ignore the warnings, the marvels presented here offered a treasury of compensating gadgets for modern living—convenient contraptions like home air-conditioning, washer-dryers and television. But the peacetime production lines that were designed to manufacture these appliances would soon be retooled to make room for war work. Consumers would have to wait years for the arrival of these bulky brown and white goods and only after suffering a great deal of pain. The peace that would deliver them wouldn't arrive

until a down payment of horror tested the sanity of the human race.

But here and now, excitement streamed through Jim's fertile imagination. He drew in several quick breaths while his eyes dilated with wide-eyed wonder at the new city before him. *The Fair*, he said to himself. *Like the ones my family always talked about*. He felt encircled by unknown family arms, as if something in his psyche was satisfied, his gene pool awash with familiar whitewater.

Jim Mahoney was thin and wiry with a face framed by a mass of black, once curly, hair that had been liberally tangled before an early-age ear operation matted down his unruly coils. The doctors had dug a hole behind his left ear leaving his hearing impaired and then bandaged his head like a nun in her wimple. Those aware of the boy's ordeal and long hospital stay following the operation sensed that he accepted pain as a given and were sometimes able to detect on his otherwise open, freckled face, a glint of the vulnerability that masked his childhood shock, as if he were hiding something.

His mother was stylishly dressed from the better stores, traces of auburn hair swept up in the fashion of the times, confidant of her powers. Full bodied and curvaceous, she wore a broad-brimmed summer hat with artificial cornflowers, the Fifth Avenue label unable to disguise her Midwestern ebullience and wide-open gait. Grace Hill, her new name now that she had remarried, was about to come into her own. Having attracted a husband willing to support her widowed sons, she with her reconstituted family had just transferred from Chicago to the magical kingdom of the New York suburbs. With her new husband's approval, she had negotiated the right to allow her two boys to retain their Irish surname.

She said, "Seems prettier than the '33 Fair back home. Probably lots more history here. So much to see! We have to save time to see the important buildings, like the League of Nations."

"What's that—baseball?"

"No, no," his mother said. "More like civics. The nuns will be pleased you've come. The League is where they make peace."

"Pieces of what?"

"You'll see. Look! Here's an interesting exhibit. The guide says it's an art museum."

Some of her new suburban women friends were encouraging an interest in painting and she was planning to take a sketching class in the fall sponsored by the local art association.

"Mom, what's that?" Jim asked. "Must be angels. Like the ones in church—only dark."

In front of a circular wooden structure dedicated to Contemporary Art stood a sculpture by Augusta Savage. A 20-foot tall shape of a harp loomed over them, but instead of strings, a vertical line of black choristers stood in a row singing out their spirituals. *Down by the river, crossing over—sweet Jesus kind of singing.* Kneeling in front of the instrument-choir was the stone figure of a black man offering the gift of music to passersby's, the music of his people—gospel, the blues and jazz.

"You can almost hear them singing," Jim said, looking up at his mother.

"Yes. Yes you can."

After digesting the latest in fractured art, they entered the Russian exhibit next door with its monumental Soviet statues showing Lenin and other muscular persons leading serfs out of

the nightmare of their long-suffering history. Inside, they found a model of a Soviet palace under construction in Moscow with a planned 100-foot statue of Lenin on top; an edifice that strove to soar higher than the Empire State Building, the world's tallest. Visitors in 1939 were fortunate to view these heroic scenes because the entire building would be flattened when Stalin made his pact with the devil later in the summer and invaded Poland, co-authoring the catastrophe that darkened Europe for six crazed years. Nazi Germany itself had originally intended to show at the fair but cancelled after Hitler determined he had more gruesome business to conduct that year.

"Mom, we can't forget to get one of them Heinz pickle pins." They were all the rage. Kids had begun wearing beanie hats sprinkled with souvenirs gathered at the fair.

They strolled by the Palm Gardens, sponsored by Schlitz Beer, replicating the beergardens of an older America where rollicking ragtime ruled. They passed another exhibition, one sponsored by those inveterate fair-givers from Paris, whose Gallic spirit often marked the highest form of human civility, though by next year there would no longer be a real France left to celebrate. Soon mother and son arrived at one of the principal vantage point offering an openeye camera opportunity along grand boulevards. Looking past a lagoon, there arose an enormous statue of Mister George Washington in civvies, and further along the emblematic Trylon and Perisphere, the fair's most powerful symbol—a gleaming white spheroid eighteen stories high standing next to a narrow shaft looming 600 feet into the blue June sky—taller than Washington's monument in D.C. Behind them sparkled a basin splunging huge, gushing fountains and farther back a plaza—the long, wide and elusive Court of Peace. They stood in awe of the esplanades front and

aft, turning again to the central sphere and spike—marveling at their unbelievable whiteness. Not since the brightness of the White City of the Great Chicago Fair had such light reflected the vision of those seeking a trail to the future.

"What's inside that big white ball and bat thing?" Jim asked, pointing to the perisphere.

"Come, let's find out," his mother replied.

A long escalator ride landed them in the vicinity of the Perisphere's equator. Inside they entered a vast circular diorama, more than half-a-football-size-field across, displaying a model for an urban center called *Democracity*. It was a preview of the modern metropolis—complete with traffic beltways laced with inner loops, and a huge mall in center city. From their moving walkway that circled the perimeter, mother and son marveled at the urban garden below them.

As they watched, William Grant Still's *Song of the City* floated through the immense sphere. G*randchild of slaves, W. G. Still, a student of Chadwick, Varese and bluesman W.C. Handy, succeeded in hearing his own music, like Amy Beach fifty years before, featured on the opening day of a world's fair. This at a time when most blacks and women were still waiting their turn for equal treatment. Still's* First Symphony, *the* Afro-American, *and his vocal work were the first black pieces performed by a major orchestra and City Opera—not abandoned like Scott Joplin's aborted ragtime operas that had suffocated in Mississippi river towns years before*. W.G. Still's music soared through the vast round.

They crossed to the Transportation area and waited on line to see the fair's most popular exhibit—GM's Futurama, another look ahead at the fantasy that would become automobile-mad America. The promise of sirloin on every grill, each family in a single-occupancy home and each with a two car garage—it was the brave new dreamworld of the post-Depression. As he rolled

around the exhibit's landscape in a movable chair, Jim thought it looked much like the colorful portrayal of life found in the futuristic comic books stacked in the corner of his bedroom back home in Manhasset, fifteen miles away. Much like Buck Rogers's hometown, a vision in a future century.

Midday, they visited Alexander Calder's *Water Ballet*, a waterfall of streaming, dancing fountains that lifted Jim's spirit with its combinations of movement, color and music.

"It's like dancing water," his mother said. "See how the water moves in time with the music."

The water pressure like unseen chords spiraled up in twitters and jitters into columns of spray—undulating candles of water. When the music softened, it caused the waterfall to tumble down a plunging chute, all in color. Then the flumes would rise again in crescendo, singing up in rushing ascent. The spontaneous rapture of a musical rainbow.

They stopped at the GE Building and watched laboratory-made shards of lightning streak across a 30 foot gap, a feat seen once before at a world's fair when Nikola Tesla, sparking and snapping with electricity, ran a barnbusting storm right through his own body.

Afterwards, mother and son had lunch at Toffenetti's, where they enjoyed Prime Blue-Ribbon Filet of Beef from the Pampas of Argentina on a Crispy Sesame Bun, topped with Fresh-Cut Sweet Vidalia Onions, and served with Creamy Farm-Garden Spinach from New Jersey and Golden Idaho Potatoes au natural topped with mouthwatering Land-'O-Lakes Butter. They finished with a huge scoop of Breyer's Georgia-Picked Peach Ice Cream. Jim Savored all these Succulent Tastes and Delicious Aromas.

They went and listened to the Coldstream Guards band, dressed in their toy-soldier uniforms, playing in the English Garden. Even their king and queen had come by to see them.

To ensure that a minimum number of educational exhibits had been visited, they stopped by the Science and Education Building, where they viewed a movie with a score extolling *The City*, the music by Aaron Copland, a pastiche of urban sounds including police whistles and the hooting of fire engines that his elder colleague Ives loved so much.

As young as Jim was, some vague urban concept was born in him this day. It was the future of the city that principally concerned the fair, and he absorbed—curious, a little frightened but excited—its impact. This future city would be located in America with him as a resident, not in Europe where the old cities would soon begin to crumble in war's ashes.

A guard said, "The boy seemed to enjoy the music. If you want to give him a treat, Miss, take him over to the Hall of Pharmacy to see the puppets. Same man as wrote the music for this show did the one for the marionettes."

They took his advice and sat and watched the puppets advance the cause of modern pharmacy by depicting such antiquities as Chinese medicine men, witches, alchemists and voodoo doctors—all lumped together—that soon transfigured into the modern white-coated specimens that would provide the medicine chests of the world with penicillin, sulfa and other new wonder drugs. At the end of the show, composer Copland showed that he could let out all the stops with an *American March.* Jim was enthralled by the performance and was curious about how the dancing puppets worked.

"Let's go see that radio-picture thing in the RCA Building before we go by the amusement area," Grace said, and they strolled off to visit the electric company's exhibit that sat under

a large transmitter capable of sparking its communication signals across half the world.

After viewing the latest phenomenon—moving figures from a mirrored box called television—they were attracted to a row of new phonograph models, a retail type presentation. Patrons were invited to listen to recordings in small individual booths lined with soft benches. Grace chose to listen to a work by an American composer, Samuel Barber, a troubadour who traveled in and out of Italy in those years. They picked *The School for Scandal Overture*. As they listened, Jim expressed more interest than his mother anticipated, giving her a comfortable feeling that perhaps she had opened a door for him.

When the music finished, his mother said, "That second theme with an oboe sounds like a lullaby. It would make any nursery happy. Peaceful and all. If only we could embrace it."

"Angels probably sing like that too," Jim said for the second time that day, seeing as how he had received such a favorable response from his mother the first time when he viewed the black choir in front of the arts building.

They followed a sign that beckoned them to a live radio broadcast. RCA owned and operated one of the first radio stations in New York and now had the capability to broadcast nationwide through dozens of NBC affiliates. It was the heyday of both the movies and radio, 1939, and their often-interchangeable personalities starred in both mediums—Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and others, not to mention Phil Spitalny and His All-Girl Orchestra. Jim and his mother entered the studio and were crowded into a small audience listening space that looked out onto a broadcasting studio and a control room filled with radio equipment and microphones.

"It's like the client booth that Bob's going to treat you to," Grace said. Bob was her husband and Jim's new step-father,

whose work with an advertising agency brought him into weekly contact with broadcasters.

The demonstration would be in the form of a musical program, and an announcer came out to warm up the audience. A personality from Chicago would replicate his half-hour classical music show that aired throughout the Midwest. . . "and won't you welcome Allen Osprey." Grace was amazed to see a man with a rather large head, an old friend, come out and take a bow.

"Jim. Look! It's Al from Chicago," Grace said. "I'll be darned. Look at him—all slicked down. Mustache and all. A real magician. You wouldn't believe the tricks that wizard can do."

The host welcomed his audience, "Thanks, folks. I'm Allen Osprey and my job for the next thirty minutes is to bring some popular American classical music your way. Well, at least it's popular around Carnegie Hall and maybe a block or two on either direction."

The audience rumbled appreciatively. The announcer seemed nice, even with his big head and all. Probably wouldn't embarrass the audience by being nervous or cocky or telling off-color jokes. His voice sounded familiar to Jim.

Allen continued, "I've been wandering through the fair, and I keep looking for eagles and images of Miss Columbia—searching for American symbols that used to turn up at the old fairs. I've looked up and down buildings and doorways and all I see are these murals that look like they came from a Mexican cantina—every Indian color and Mayan pattern going. Look like blankets on the wall. Mostly I see pylons and Trylons, and I was afraid I was never going to see anything familiar, until I finally came across that statue of Walt Whitman done up by Jo Davidson, and then I knew that New York hadn't forgotten its

first citizen. I mean either Walt or FDR has to be the Empire State's finest, right? I don't think it's likely to be J. P. Morgan or any of them Whitneys. The old poet has more America in him than all the eagles and Miss Liberties combined. You can see him out there, strutting along, hat in hand, walking his open road.

"For years, American composers have been putting Whitman's poetry to music. They could set up a whole music library with tunes made from his verse. Here's a new one from Roy Harris, a composer from out west where music's open to the sky. You'll recognize the title."

Out came the choral strains of *America*.

Centre of equal daughters, equal sons
All, all alike endear'd, grown, ungrown, young or old
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love
A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother
Chair'd in the adamant of Time.

When the song was finished, Al said, "Best listen to your Mother, children. Smart to recognize that women are better at representing America. Like old Columbia with her starlit skirt."

After the show, Grace and Jim went around to the studio side door and waited until the broadcaster came out.

"Al," she said. "I can't believe it. You here in New York."

"My god! Gracie!" he said and they gave each other a hug. "I heard you were out here, but I didn't know your married name. Let me look at you. And who's this big guy? This can't be James-Francis?"

"We call him Jim now. Isn't he a size?"

"Must be about the same age as when I first met John-Arthur."

John-Arthur was Grace's dead husband and Jim's father.

He gestured, "Come on. Let's go outside where we can sit and catch up."

They chose the park area by the Trylon and Perisphere, and talked of old friends and Chicago's earlier days and how they had kept themselves busy between times.

"Tell me everything," Al said, once they were seated in the outdoor pavilion.

Grace said, "Where to begin? I guess the last time we saw each other, must have been five years or more—around '33, about the time of our own fair. A few years after John-Arthur died. When we were working on Michigan Avenue."

"Those were hard times for you, Gracie. I don't know how you got through it."

"It was god-awful to lose him so young." An illness called Addison's disease.

They had become close during her husband's slow death.

"Tell me about this new guy you married."

"He's doing really well. Name is Bob Hill. He's an account exec at Benton & Bowles—working mostly on food accounts. They brought us out to New York once before—in '36—just after we were married. But this second trip looks like it might be permanent, so we've rented a house out on Long Island."

"And all this time, I thought you were saving yourself for me," Al ribbed her.

"Well, I was," Grace shot back. "But I lost you to radio."

"Hard to beat those electrical waves," Al said, his hands fishing through the ether. "We had good times, Gracie, didn't we?"

Al looked at Jim and said, "Your dad was a special friend. Quietest, gentlest man I ever knew—except when he got riled

up. I knew him since I was a kid back when I was traveling with the circus and Chautauqua tents—doing labor preaching and reading people's mind on the Keith circuit. He was a gem, your dad. Played a mean piano. And ice-skated like a pro."

"I don't remember him," Jim said. His father had died when he was barely two.

"We were in the war together," Al continued unabashed, "and you should know he was a hero over there during the big offensive. And how about your brother Matt? He must be in the doghouse to miss coming to the fair."

Grace said, "He's staying with friends in Chicago while he finishes up his eighth grade parties."

Not familiar with the details of their nostalgia, Jim felt his attention begin to wander. He noticed an unusual pair—a white mother and cocoa-colored daughter resting nearby under the trees. What was striking was that the girl appeared to be jabbering on at a great rate while her mother seemed to ignore her, seemingly more interested in the passing parade of men. The girl, with a soft chocolate light upon her, seemed so different to Jim, so expressive, that he couldn't keep his eyes from surveying her sturdy, mini-muscled body and animated face. He was drawn to her; he wanted to hear what she was chattering about, so he excused himself and made a circuitous way to the public restroom.

Grace and Al were so deep in their conversation that they didn't observe Jim's route through the pocket park, where he now took a seat on the bench next to the mother and girl. The woman, overdressed and seeking attention, didn't notice Jim's arrival. The girl looked fleetingly toward him and inspected him from head to toe and then went on talking.

"What about art?" the girl asked. "There must be a reason why people paint pictures. Must be more than just drawing

lines. More than just taking a crayon and making an outline of a fish. Or just showing some birds twittering."

"You mean, like you do all day."

"They must be trying to say something with their paint. Tell us something we don't know, wouldn't you think?"

"I surely can't imagine," said the mother, smiling at a gent with a straw hat.

"And think about the people making up all this music. It's everywhere we go. It's just not for dancing, though it'id be fun to see everyone twirl around."

She rose and pirouetted. Jim's eyes followed her steps.

She continued, "There must be some other reason. People who play music have a different language that lets them tell a story—a story told in a mirror made of music. Why is that, Ma? That someone should use colors and music notes, and what about dancing. I could make up a story from nothing. I don't even need to tell it with words. Just dance it. See what I mean?"

"You and your questions. You're looking for answers nobody knows."

"I'll find them. Someday I'll dance at a fair like this. Maybe tap dance."

The girl kept on. "When we get home to Bay Ridge, I'm getting out all my paints and put down paper all over the floor and I'm going to write a story with pictures and I'm going to make them up into a little book. Maybe I'll give it to you as a present. Or give it to that boy there."

Jim was abashed as both females looked in his direction.

"Sure, sure," said her mother.

"There's meaning out there and I'm gonna find it. And then I'm going to…." and off she went on a new vocal adventure.

Jim watched her intently, not even trying to hide his curiosity.

"There you are," said Jim's mother. "C'mon. We're moving on."

Jim rose and looked again toward the brown girl. This time she was watching him too. She smiled. Then turned back and began asking more questions.

As he walked away, he wondered how she could be so interested in things—painting and music and stories. What made her ask about them? And why was she a different color than her mother? If only she lived nearer to him, then maybe he'd find out. And why did she want to know if unseen things had meaning? There was, of course, the mystery of the bread turning into the Host. And hovering, the idea of the Holy Ghost. They had meaning. The nuns said so. Why was this girl so interested in what things meant?

Al said. "Let's check out the Marconi display at the Italian exhibit. He's one of my radio heroes. Electricity and wireless—those are my gods."

Jim looked at him in puzzlement. *No false gods before me*, he remembered.

They approached a temple with the statue of *Roma* sitting in majesty on top. From on high, a waterfall cascaded down into a pool where a monument to Marconi stood in three feet of water. Inside, they found the display of wireless equipment spawned from the fevered mind of the Italian inventor, who had recently died and who, because of his political leanings, had been relieved by world opinion of his title of radio's inventor. The crown had been returned to Tesla.

Al's eyes lit up when he saw Marconi's tools. A telegraph machine that talked in code over an ocean. Al's skin began to

shine brighter. There was even a minor tremor like he was on the receiving end of some faraway message.

"You always said radio was filled with magic," Gracie said.

"It's such a unifier. Brings people together. And just wait until that television thing catches on. We already have concerts in living rooms. Wait until you can actually watch the flute player scratch his ear and the kettle drummer bang away."

Al had enough time before his next broadcast to accompany them to the amusement area where Jim would be rewarded for his attentiveness earlier in the day when he had endured the sight of industrial dynamos from power companies and moldy tapestries from broken-down European castles. They entered the untidy carnival area sprawled along the eastern shore of a dammed-up lake that had once been the headwaters of Flushing Bay, cut off long ago by the ash-heap and garbage dump that Fitzgerald described as the wasteland emerging in modern America—now transformed ironically into the World of Tomorrow, thus confirming the principle of redemption and New York's ability to reinvent itself. Here in the amusement area, a giant steel structure arose high above them. Just as the Ferris wheel at the '93 Fair and the Rocket Cars in '33 had loomed over Lake Michigan, so the Parachute Jump did here. A towering 200-foot rig, with a spidery iron web on top, the thrillride lifted then released its passengers in balloons that cascaded down its metallic skeleton. The floating silks flared down guidewires that brought screaming passengers back to earth. The steel tower soared over the plugged-up pond.

They visited Frank Buck's Jungleland. That pleased Jim because Frank was one of his favorites whose serial exploits were screened at Saturday matinees in his local movie house. They hurriedly passed by a booth where barkers presented a

half-dozen buxom young women in bathing suits who stood with arched backs. Jim showed an interest in stopping to watch but was hustled forward. There were Indian shows as well, reminiscent of Buffalo Bill's Rough Rider extravagances. Western gunmen like William Cody, along with Wild Bill Hickok, friends in life, provided Jim another pair of heroes. Actually he had dozens of them, some from his comic books—the latest was Superman along with Captain Marvel and the other Buck, Buck Rogers, who flew around in space ships.

When they scrambled for seats on the Cyclone rollercoaster, Jim wanted to sit between the two adults but there wasn't room, so the boy shared a car with Al, holding the bar so tight that the veins stood out in his neck. He was terribly frightened. The older man put a protective arm around Jim, and said, "Let me give you a hand."

When Al suggested to Jim that they go on the parachute jump together, Jim took a long look up at the towering structure. He watched as one of the multi-colored parachutes, looking like a floating mushroom, exploded from the top with a thump. Jim froze as the courage rushed out of him and he stood there immobilized looking at the huge monster. He shook his head and said no thanks.

"*The kid needs a father to buck him up*," Al said to himself.

Gracie bade Al goodbye, not knowing if this was to be a permanent farewell or whether her dead husband's old friend might figure out a way to stay close to her family. She wondered if the magician could find a way to reach her boy—support Jim in the same way that Al had tried to protect her John-Arthur.

On their way home, standing on the train station platform, Jim looked out across the Fair to the far reaches of the

amusement center toward the parachute jump, and he shivered, ashamed of his fears. To make matters worse, his mother had forgotten to get him the Heinz pickle pin. But he had perked up when she and Al talked about his father. He had listened closer than she thought. He had also paid attention to the music they heard that day.

Once on the train, Jim asked, "Mom, would it be hard to learn the piano?"

* * *

A short train ride home. Douglaston. Little Neck. Great Neck. Manhasset.

Arriving at the station, they had a fifteen-minute walk through town and were soon home. Jim retreated to his attic lair, turned on the radio to pick up his late afternoon adventure stories, and lay down on his bed. Normally, he would have paid more attention to the plotline, but his trip had tired him out. Even though the detective program to which he was listening assaulted his interest with gunshots and mayhem, he began to drift off even while the bullets were flying.

Dozing off, he entered one of his radio swoons, an imaginative funk that led him into an inner space, filled with sounds stirred up in his unconscious. Deep inside himself, he found a guide through the maze. Met by a familiar-sounding voice, Jim was escorted into a dream space, a personal version of Radioland. He didn't know or couldn't care whether they were hallucinations; he only knew that someone from the radio sphere reached out to him when he drifted off. The male voice that echoed in Jim's mind was gentle and helpful and had access of an amazing machine. With its echoes of the Midwest, his invisible friend's soothing voice permeated his dreams, a clarifying voice that guided Jim.

"That you, James-Francis?" his mentor's voice came floating along the airwaves.

"Been to the fair," the boy answered.

"Care to listen to some fair sounds you might have missed? You probably had enough of 'East Side-West Side,'" his guide said. "Want some other music?"

"Can I hear some? I'd like to hear some of that stuff I heard today."

"Good music? Swing music? *The Hot Mikado*?"

"Good."

"Dialing up."

Jim's mentor was able, quite remarkably, to capture voices from the past via a magical Outer Voice Machine, sounds that floated around as electromagnetic waves in the atmosphere, old sounds re-fired up and retrieved from space. His wizard guide was able to tune into sounds emanating earlier in the day from the fair. A rendition of Ferde Grofe's Mississippi Suite *from the Ford Pavilion sounded out as if the great river opened up its wide arms to let its native music in.*

Jim had been reading *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* in the gold-edged editions that his mother had given to him for his birthday. So when he heard Grofe's music, he blended into the music. But it wasn't the second section about Huck that he responded to, but the first section called *"*Father of the Waters." Something in the music reverberated in him—some expansive expression of riverbank memory, something soaring high above in the air.

"What am I listening to?" Jim asked, still in a swoon.

"Just an old radio. Just say it's your imagination. Do you like the music?"

"I do."

"Anything else you want to hear?"

Jim hesitated. It wasn't the art show that came to mind, or a discussion of the geometrical intricacies involved in constructing the Trylon and Perisphere. Nor was it the science exhibitions or television.

"You know that park under the bat and ball thing. There was a girl there who talked and talked."

"Let me see," said the radioman. "See if I can pull something in here."

He dialed the magic radio and finally said, "Here's a girl now."

But instead of the brown girl, his guide had picked up the women from the peep show, the girls in bathing suits who had been standing in front of the hootchie-kootchie tent.

"Lola hon, cock your hips like this. See?"

"Betty, are my nipples showing?"

"What the hell. Give 'em a treat, the rubes."

"Step up gents and see a beautiful girl frozen in ice, featured just last week on the ray-dee-o. Talk to her. Walk right up and give her your warmest regards."

"Thank goodness, I don't have to climb into that ice cake until six."

"Gives me goosebumps."

"Goes with the nipples."

"Whoops! That's not it."

Jim said, "The one I'm looking for talks a little English like her mother."

"Broad 'A', is it?"

His guide fiddled with his receiver, eventually catching some of Still's music.

"Think we're in the right neighborhood now."

He soon dialed into a girl's sing-song jabbering.

"That's her," Jim said.

"And what about all these statue things around here? What do they all mean? And why doesn't George Washington have his war suit on? And Ma, how about that big sculpture thing we saw—the Spirit of Electricity. What does that mean? Is all meaning magical."

"Can't you just accept things?"

"No. And MUSIC. What about MUSIC? And all those colored singers made up out of harp strings? You gotta tell me, Ma. About the meaning. Is meaning invisible?"

Then the signal weakened.

"We've got her voice footprint now. Maybe we can check her later. Where's this baby oracle from again?"

"Some place called Bay Ridge."

"Wouldn't you know it. Won't be easy finding her." The bewilderment of Brooklyn.

Jim in a mid-daze opened his eyes,

Chatty girls and good music. Something in him was swaying in that direction.

Then he thought about the Parachute Jump hovering over the fair and shuddered.

How does a frightened child overcome his fear of the world and Depression America? Amazingly the answer comes through sports, sex, help from the Church and a friendly Wizard. Set in the colorful era of the '39 World's Fair and WWII.

First Lights