

Calvin's Ghost: A Novel

by Peter Hammond Schwartz

Table Of Contents

THE SPIN	- 6 -
ACT ONE.....	- 8 -
1 / NO MAN’S LAND.....	- 9 -
2 / GIANT BEAST	- 13 -
3 / PINOCCHIO REAL BOY	- 17 -
4 / FREEDOM.....	- 22 -
5 / ORLANDO PATTERSON	- 25 -
6 / NORTHEAST CORRIDOR	- 30 -
7 / BROKENNESS BREAKING	- 39 -
8 / GYM RAT.....	- 46 -
9 / RIPPED BALLOON	- 55 -
10 / JASPER.....	- 60 -
11 / GOOD NIGHT MY RABBIT.....	- 64 -
12 / HELL NIGHT	- 71 -
ACT TWO.....	- 75 -
TOBIAS – LETTER 1	- 76 -
13 / INJUNS.....	- 78 -
14 / FALSE PROPHETS	- 87 -
15 / NAME OF THE ROSE	- 105 -
16 / BLADE WON’T SIT DOWN.....	- 119 -
17 / SQUEEZE THAT CHARMIN.....	- 137 -
TOBIAS – LETTER TWO.....	- 158 -
18 / VACANT HEARTS	- 160 -
19 / CARNIVOROUS PLANTS	- 178 -
20 / PACE MAKES THE RACE	- 193 -
21 / STOOPING	- 206 -
TOBIAS – LETTER THREE.....	- 223 -
22 / PARSONIC VIRTUES.....	- 224 -
23 / STIGMATA.....	- 245 -
24 / GWENDOLYN	- 259 -
25 / THE ORIGINAL LIBRARIAN	- 267 -
26 / OTHELLO.....	- 270 -
27 / AMERICAN THUCYDIDES	- 280 -
28 / THE SYSTEM.....	- 304 -
29 / CHEKHOV’S GUN.....	- 320 -
30 / THERE IS NO CARD CATALOG.....	- 321 -
31 / THE FAST LANE	- 329 -
TOBIAS – LETTER FOUR	- 343 -
32 / DAWN OF THE SHADOW PUPPETS.....	- 345 -
33 / JUMBLE	- 353 -
34 / VANPORT	- 375 -

35 / PRAYING MANTIS	- 398 -
TOBIAS – LETTER FIVE.....	- 423 -
36 / END GAME	- 425 -
37 / SEVEN BRIDGES.....	- 442 -
38 / A DREAM OF A WONDROUS SORT	- 459 -
39 / PRESENCE OF THE BOARD.....	- 466 -
40 / THE MAGNUS EFFECT.....	- 490 -
ACT THREE.....	- 502 -
41 / LISTEN TO YOUR JUNKMAN	- 503 -
42 / BULKINGTON.....	- 518 -
43 / ALBUMEN	- 541 -
44 / VALEDICTORY	- 556 -
HOGBACK BLUES	- 579 -

I an' Satan had a race,

Hallelu, hallelu,

I an' Satan had a race,

Hallelu, hallelu

Win de race agin de course.

Satan tell me to my face

He will break my kingdom down.

Jesus whisper in my heart

He will build 'em up again.

Satan mount de iron grey;

Ride half way to Pilot-Bar.

Jesus mount de milk-white horse.

Say you cheat my fader children.

Say you cheat 'em out of glory.

Trouble like a gloomy cloud

Gader dick an' tunder loud.

- Slave Songs of the United States (A. Simpson & Co., 1867)

The Magnus Effect refers to the generation of a sidewise force on a spinning cylindrical or spherical solid immersed in a fluid (liquid or gas) when there is relative motion between the spinning body and the fluid. Named after the German physicist and chemist H.G. Magnus, who first (1853) experimentally investigated the effect, it is responsible for the “curve” of a served tennis ball or a driven golf ball and affects the trajectory of a spinning artillery shell.

- Magnus Effect (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2006)

The Spin

In the greyly dawning aftermath of the attack upon the racetrack and the bridge, a sputtering police boat, prow high and facing west, hovered just off the western bank of the Willamette, perhaps 500 yards north of the bridge pilings. While public attention focused on the rebel hosts who occupied the northern regions of Forest Park, the police boat patrolled the waters that had been the immediate site of the attack, assessing collateral impacts of the fire and the explosion.

At this moment, with an ominously vermillion haze beginning to tin the eastern sky, police on board the boat monitored the investigation of two detectives. Standing ankle-deep in mud rimming the shore, the detectives were hoisting into a heavy-duty polypropylene bag the body of a young adult Caucasian male that under cover of darkness had floated facedown into this shallow bog – a fen really, stank with cattails and tuberous flowering plants.

The detectives were mindful of the ooze seeping into and stench-inflecting their shoes. They worked with some haste to settle the corpse inside the bag. They zipped it shut and slid into an attached waterproof pouch the contents of the man's trouser pockets, which included only a sodden leather wallet with no cash but a handful of bank and credit cards. A driver's license disclosed meager details of the man's identity: Eli Wheeler, DOB May 23, 1960, six feet tall, 155 pounds, brown hair, blue eyes. A faculty identification card indicating that Eli Wheeler was an assistant professor of Western Culture at Tillamook State University.

One of the detectives unfolded a waterlogged sheet of paper that had also been retrieved from the man's trouser pockets. He peered at the page with interest. "This is curious, Monte," the detective drawled. "Seems to be from an old book. Has a strange, pale typeface. From before my time, that's for

sure.” He refolded the page and slipped it into the pouch.

“Everything about this guy’s a puzzle, George” Monte said. He peered north, where the Willamette flowed beneath the gothic spires of the St. John’s Bridge toward its convergence with the Columbia River. “He floated in from the river,” he said. “Six or seven hours ago, from the looks of the skin. But it’s strange the body would beach itself in this bog. It’s a dead pool. The only angle into this part of the river is from the north. Which is downstream and downwind. He would have been fighting the river and the wind to get here. He also comes from the opposite direction of last night’s mayhem. Makes no sense.”

Monte signaled the police boat, which idled a bit closer to shore, escaping the chop. The detectives lifted the body bag on to their utility dinghy. The two men clambered into the dinghy alongside the body bag. The dingy sank low in the water. Monte placed one hand on the body bag and the other hand on the tiller and piloted the dinghy through the thinning fog and beyond the muddy shore and tidal wetlands toward open water.

* * *

Collateral impacts, indeed. Is it not the shadowed, glancing collisions in our lives that most matter? The fractional, incidental events and moments that poleaxe us, knock us off our feet, knock us to our knees? Is it not this randomness that skids us sideways like a rockslide perseverating? Overcoming all matter of ridges and valleys. Extending well beyond the writ of reason and rule.

The question remains. How does a bouncing, skidding, spinning man find his resting spot? We are not humpback whales. We cannot breach ourselves. The child lives. But the innocence dies. That is the spin. The turbulence upon a person when the living runs up against the dying.