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All the Waking Things

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

ALL THE WAKING THINGS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

In

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Jonathan Duckworth

2016

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
Colleges of Arts, Sciences, and Education

This thesis, written by Jonathan Duckworth and entitled *All the Waking Things*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for your judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend it be approved.

Debra Dean

Maneck Daruwala

Lynne Barrett, Major Professor

Date of Defense: October 26, 2016

The thesis of Jonathan Duckworth is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2016

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to everyone who has believed in my potential and my dreams—my parents, my instructors, and my friends. A special dedication to my roommate and friend, Chris Cannella, may he rest in peace.

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I wish to thank the members of my committee for their support and for their invaluable criticism and suggestions. In particular, I wish to thank Lynne Barrett, my major professor, for her patience, vision, and sage advice. I also want to thank Les Standiford and John Dufresne, who helped me understand the inherent flaws of earlier versions of the novel and inspired me to reimagine the project in new and different ways, and I want to thank my friend, Miguel Pichardo, who was kind enough to listen to my ramblings about this project.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

ALL THE WAKING THINGS

by

Jonathan Duckworth

Florida International University, 2016

Miami, Florida

Professor Lynne Barrett, Major Professor

This literary fantasy novel is presented as the manuscript of a writer under the pseudonym of “Noisette,” who possesses the final writings of the revolutionary Cazimir Pazikov, a historical figure in the book’s world of whom little is known. In his journal entries, Cazimir Pazikov details the final days of his life. After accidentally murdering his lover, Varina, Cazimir buries her at a crossroads as part of a ritual to resurrect her. To complete the ritual, Cazimir must journey around his native Alban Province (a region of the wartorn Kingdom of Paradigm modeled off 19th century America with European influences) in search of physical artifacts that will serve as proof of his and Varina’s love. During his journey he contends with both human and supernatural obstacles, as well as his own innate flaws. In the end he makes the ultimate sacrifice to undo his ultimate sin and return Varina to life.

Influenced by Vladimir Nabokov, Gabriel Garcia-Marquez, and Neil Gaiman, *ALL THE WAKING THINGS* uses fantastic elements to explore human struggles: love, loss, and atonement.

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Noisette's Preface

~[N]~

Dear reader,

For the sake of history, this preface was written on Sabine 20th, the first day of spring in the year 622 Post Lapsum. Past this point, but for my footnotes and other minor interventions (all duly marked by the symbol [N] to distinguish my words from his), what you will read is the account of the death of Cazimir's beloved Varina de St-Crecét, and the three summer days in Valeria of 599 he spent trying to return her to life.

To head off potential confusion, I should point out that at the head of most of Cazimir's entries you'll find two separate time markers: first the stretch of time described in the entry and below that the time of the entry's composition as marked by Cazimir. While I've compiled and organized Cazimir's original journal entries, I've done little editing, except for some cases where Cazimir's haste (he wrote almost everything within the space of three days) led to minor errors in composition.

The name I use here, Noisette, is not my own, and I'll admit now so as not to abuse your trust, that this is a game of sorts I'm playing with you. I'm sure that well before the final pages you'll have guessed my identity, but for now I'd prefer anonymity. As you read, I ask of you only an open mind.

-Noisette, 622 [N]

Chapter 1: Late Night of the Night Before the Ritual (7th of Valeria, 599)

Written 5:00 PM, 8th of Valeria

Varina has been dead most of a day now. Feels like an instant. Feels like forever. If I'm killed tomorrow, or the day after (and that's not unlikely with the state of the province), I'll have endured too long a life without her. I only ever felt good about myself when we were together.

I'm writing this as an honest account of my undertaking, of this duty of mine to restore Varina de St-Crecét to life. I write this hoping that Varina may read it, and understand all I've done for her to make things right. It feels strange to write again after more than a year lying fallow, but my fingers are remembering their old strength. I have my old journal from my Royal Army days, recovered from the library Mrs. Black, my present host. There are at least two hundred empty pages—enough for my needs. Outside, the day is smoldering like a smothered campfire behind the slash pines to the west. I can see Mama's house and the big barn like tombstones standing against the orange horizon. Varina's blood was still wet on her temple when I made up my mind to take her to Mama, for Mama would know what to do.

There are forty miles of wilderness between Esodo, where Varina died, and the farm outside of Jolieville where Mama lives. I had to carry Varina the whole way, making the trip in a few hours thanks to my shortcuts. A few miles from the crossroads,

not far from the railroad tracks, I had a close call with a pair of Royal Army troops. I'd stopped for a short breather when they approached me.

My first warning was lantern light beaming off mothwings. Then came the sound of two sets of boots squelching through the packed mud of the cypress swamp. I hid Varina's corpse in a thick patch of rushes and reeds. The two men appeared just as I was standing up. Even in the dark, the orange uniforms were unmistakable. One of them, the taller one, had a kerosene lantern, which he shone at me.

"You there," he called, "Loyalist, Zealot, or Graybird?"

"None," I said. "Just a civilian."

The soldiers closed the distance, coming close enough that I could smell the sour cabbage and salt pork on their breath. If they'd come any further, they might have stumbled over Varina. That scared me: would they try to take her away? I balled my hands into tight fists and stuffed them into my pockets so that the soldiers wouldn't see my fingers shaking.

"There ain't no civilians in a civil war," said the shorter one.

"Maybe so, but a civilian is what I am," I said.

The short trooper poked my chest with the muzzle of his rifle. "Well you ought not be here, Mr. Civilian."

I had to choose my words carefully and keep my tone level. It was hard; I kept thinking that, at that moment, the ants and yellow flies were probably crawling all over Varina, nesting in her black ringlets, infiltrating her nostrils and ears, and her open lips that had pronounced words in her trilling lilt.

“With respect, sirs, you’re the ones in the wrong place,” I said. “You’re over the truce line.”¹

“Bullshit,” they both said.

I pointed to the river gleaming beyond the cypress trunks. “Look at the moon. It’s setting on the opposite bank. You’re east of the river. East of the truce line.”

“Shit, he’s right,” said the lantern man.

“The hell? We never crossed no river.”

“Perhaps you didn’t cross ‘no’ river, but you had to cross *a* river to get here,” I said. Sometimes I can’t help myself. I was still a bit drunk from the half-bottle of whiskey I’d downed on the beach.

“This one’s funny enough to shoot,” the short one said.

But the man with the lantern, evidently the superior, was in no mood to shoot anyone. He no doubt wanted to get back on the right side of the river before some zealots could find them and cut their eyes out. He asked me where they could cross, and I told him about the sandbar a few miles south shallow enough to ford. They thanked me and headed off, but turned around before I could even think of taking Varina from her hiding place. They wanted to know how they could have crossed the river without getting wet.

I said things happen in Alban. Strange things you can’t explain. Like how the pine trees remember the sounds around them, and how when the pine needles fall, sometimes

¹ [N] In the summer of 599, the Royal Army and the Graybird Army negotiated a temporary ceasefire in Alban Province (fighting continued unabated in neighboring Hurlburt). The truce designated the Alban River, which bisects the province, as the truce line, and furthermore stipulated that both sides had to withdraw from positions within 15 miles of the river. Of course there were many violations from both sides, most notably the Royal Army garrison in Esodo, which was actually increased from 2,000 to 5,000 men. The Royal Army had agreed to the truce in order to prepare for a planned winter offensive, while the Graybirds needed the truce so as to avoid complete collapse.

you'll hear a word, or a sneeze, or a gunshot. But I didn't tell them about the Ways of the Woods, lest they learn to abuse them. Instead I just rambled on about the pines and the wandering ghosts until the short man lost his patience.

"Y'all locals sure like your big talk when you're drunk," he said.

"Not sure this fella's a local," his superior (in many senses of the word) said. "He doesn't talk like a local. Doesn't look much like one either."

"Hell, he don't look Paradimian," said the short one. "You some foreigner, friend?"

I'm not sure why I said what I said next. A death wish, perhaps?

"Truth be told, I'm Colonel Cazimir Pazikov, erstwhile commander of the Graybird Army of Alban, the man who killed King Brian."

At the mention of the regicide's name, the two soldiers' heads tilted back. But the shorter one said, "Bullshit," and the lantern man added, "Cazimir Pazikov's dead."

"Next he'll say he's the prophet," the shorter one said. "He's got the nose² for it too."

The lantern man shook his head and chuckled. "The prophet traded in his zebra pelt for a milled-cotton shirt."

They'd had enough of me. They went off again, this time for good. Their boots padded away, leaving me with the night song of crickets and cicadas. I took Varina from her hiding place and peeked under the sheet to see if any bugs had gotten on her. With her eyes half open, her lips parted, and her hair tousled, she still looked so alive, a beautiful dreamer. Except for the gash on her temple and the stillness of her breast,

² [N] In the Blessed Compendium, Melchizedek is described as having a nose "of a scimitar's shape and edge."