



Floodwall Magazine

Volume 2 | Issue 2


Article 15

2021

Listen

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Recommended Citation

Previti, Shilo (2021) "Listen," *Floodwall Magazine*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 2 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/floodwall-magazine/vol2/iss2/15>

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Listen

I heard a song in the marsh: knives on pfaltzgraff grinding like cracked, clumsy teeth. Listen.

Once upon a time, when grandmother married my grandfather
Her people told her to guard against Winter. They told her to fear
A man who wears the fur of animals to hide from the chill.
Who eats from the soup first when he is hungry. Who might turn
From ash-white to gray-ash, like the obverse of the fire that cooks
The food and boils the bathwater, whenever he is unwell inside.
Imagine: her fright when one night surrounded by cold cans of processed
groceries

Stacked high on shelves up off the floor, she turned in bed to her husband
And in the stead of the man, the man who went to sleep there, after
A long day of asking for work and doing work and asking for money
For food for son and wife and baby and baby-to-come, there was only
A cold spot like the ghost that lives and haunts at the back of the electric
Fan, buzzing when it sucks you in and chills you, both. Listen.

They call it further south the *wīhtikōw* and in the north the *Wiindigoo*
And **wi·nteko·wa* before the people split on the turtle's back.
Windigo, Wendigo, Wetiko...fe, fi, fo, fum, I smell the hunger of
Winter's untouched body--bony, black rot-marked and skinny, so much
Bigger than her husband, the man who fathered baby-to-come, who fathered
me.

Watch: shadows stretch long under wooden doors shriveled by cold air.
That's what happens to the man who does not share, they say. Listen.
Haven't you heard? The Wendigo is hungry and eats and grows and
Starves and eats and lives only and always in the winter at night
With the yellow eyes of jaundice and the thin black lips of cold sores
Gone rotten from cigarettes, which is not how grandmother was taught
About tobacco, and the sharp teeth of someone who has lived close
To the bone and eaten even closer to it every day of their life. Look:
Gaunt skinned monsters still lurk, large and looming, near the seaside
Where they once lived, my grandmother and grandfather. It is always
Cold out on that marsh and I fear in the howl of the salt-wind the call
Of the Wendigo who wants and wants and wants to eat because he is
hungry.

Ask yourself: What do monsters eat after the end of the story?
Grandmother's people told her to be wary of the man she married,
But she said only that she heard a story once upon a time of a boy
Who was born to an Italian mother and neither of her husbands
As *pater* to name and five brothers and four sisters in total, but
Being born between the death of the Goldstein and the meeting
Of the Novak had neither *famiglia* nor *mishpachah* nor *rodzina*. Listen.
Not kin nor kindness and nothing in the cabinets of sub-basement kitchens
But hunger and cold in those days between work and school and sea-flooding
With one mother and so many sisters and brothers, all with mouths to eat.
Grandmother says only and always that those days were hard
For the boy. A boy who was hungry and cold and wanted only and
Always to ensure that none of his own blood would go hungry or cold
And never forgot what it felt like to feel himself rot away, fainting death,
And his skin grow drum-tight taught over long, brittle bones
And his lips bloody with raw meat and his own cracked gums
And his sweat began to stink like decay as even that became corrosive
Eating at him as he ate and drank and fought at what was around him.
Imagine: what do monsters eat after the end of the story?
Do you know? Nobody will tell me: if grandmother took him
Out with the tide into the bay, if grandmother with a blade of Beachgrass
And frozen bits of Seaoats cut out his icy heart the way the song says to kill
Wendigo, if grandmother painted her own lips red when she left him there
Giving kisses so soft to his desiccated skin, so brittle anyhow
It cracked and bled, wounding her own mouth forever. Tell me:
How do you know if an image in a story is a symbol or if it is real?
Nobody will tell me if the whistling wind at the edge of the frigid water
Is the howl of my grandfather who never had enough of anything
Except for work and work and salt-water destruction and cold cans stacked,
never
Anything except fear for having-not or if it is just swamp reeds stage-
whispering
In the lowland's marshes and the eastern shore wind's cry. Listen.
Remember: this story of the fear that lives in bellies out on the marsh,
Of greed and monsters who grow hungry in the famine-night and,
Emaciated, eat and gnaw at themselves and grow hungrier.
Do you hear it? Tell me: what do monsters eat after the end of the story?
Remember, they sing: hunger is bitter-winter; guard against the wendigo.

About Shilo Previti

Shilo Virginia Previti was born near the marshy outskirts of no Irish Atlantic City, NJ and raised in a cedar bog during a natural Pygmy Pines wildfire deep in the Pinelands reserve. They have held various jobs on the east coast, including teaching English in county jails, assisting with writing workshops for Murphy Writing, and moonlighting as a waitress & a newspaper deliveryman, but they have recently moved away from the sea to complete an M.A. in English at UND. In their writing, they are particularly interested in meditating on the environment, animal rights, queer identity, narratology, class warfare, and radical dreams. When you see something beautiful, look and then look again.