

I'm Not the Indian You Had in Mind

I'm not the Indian you had in mind
I've seen him
Oh, I've seen him ride,
 a rush of wind, a darkening tide
 with Wolf and Eagle by his side
 his buttocks firm and well defined
 my god, he looks good from behind
But I'm not the Indian you had in mind.

I'm not the Indian you had in mind
I've heard him
Oh, I've heard him roar,
 the warrior wild, the video store
 the movies that we all adore
 the clichés that we can't rewind,
But I'm not the Indian you had in mind.

I'm not the Indian you had in mind
I've known him
Oh, I've known him well,
 the bear-greased hair, the pungent smell
 the piercing eye, the startling yell
 thank God that he's the friendly kind,
But I'm not the Indian you had in mind.

I'm that other one.
The one who lives just down the street.

 the one you're disinclined to meet
 the Oka guy, remember me?
 Ipperwash? Wounded Knee?

That other Indian.
 the one who runs the local bar
 the CEO, the movie star,
 the elder with her bingo tales
 the activist alone in jail

That other Indian.
 The doctor, the homeless bum
 the boys who sing around the drum
 the relative I cannot bear
 my father who was never there
 he must have hated me, I guess
 my best friend's kid with FAS

the single mum who drives the bus
I'm all of these and they are us.

So damn you for the lies you've told
and damn me for not being bold
enough to stand my ground
and say
that what you've done is not our way

But, in the end the land won't care
 which one was rabbit, which one was
bear
 who did the deed and who did not
 who did the shooting, who got shot
 who told the truth, who told the lie
 who drained the lakes and rivers dry
 who made us laugh, who made us sad
 who made the world Monsanto mad
 whose appetites consumed the earth,
it wasn't me, for what it's worth.

Or maybe it was.
But hey, let's not get too distressed
 it's not as bad as it might sound
 hell, we didn't make this mess.

It was given us
 and when we're gone
 as our parents did
 we'll pass it on.

You see?
 I've learned your lessons well
 what to buy, what to sell
 what's commodity, what's trash
 what discount you can get for cash

And Indians, well, we'll still be here
 the Real One and the rest of us
 we've got no other place to go
 don't worry, we won't make a fuss

Well, not much.

Though sometimes, sometimes late at night
 when all the world is warm and dead

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I wonder how things might have been
had you followed, had we led.

I can't.

So consider as you live your days
that we live ours under the gaze

of generations watching us
of generations still intact
of generations still to be
seven forward, seven back.

Yeah, it's not easy.

Course you can always go ask that brave you
like so much

the Indian you idolize
perhaps that's wisdom on his face
compassion sparkling in his eyes.
He may well have a secret song
a dance he'll share, a long-lost chant
ask him to help you save the world
to save yourselves.

Don't look at me.

I'm not the Indian you had in mind.

I can't.



Table Discussion Questions

1. What does the title of the poem mean?
2. Define the term stereotype. What stereotypes does King's poem evoke?
3. What is the impact of the repetition of the phrase "I'm not the Indian you had in mind"?
4. Do you experience a gap between how you see yourself and how others see you? What is the danger of stereotypes? What are effective ways to respond when you or someone you know is the target of stereotyping?