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
I’m Not the Indian You Had in Mind

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

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?