

“I’m Not the Indian You Had in Mind”

Thomas King

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?
Ippeewash? 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 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.

I can't.

A Conversation with a Massage Therapist

Francine Cunningham (Cree and Métis)

What are you?

Excuse me?

You don't look all white.

I'm Indigenous.

Oh, well what kind of native are you?

Cree.

You don't really look it.

I am also Scottish and Métis on my dad's side.

Were you raised on a reserve?

No, I was raised in the city.

Oh, well I guess you're not a real one then, right?

...

What do you do?

I'm a student.

High school upgrading?

No, I'm getting my masters degree.

Well, good thing you got the taxpayers to pay for it right? Wish I could go to school for free.

...

Anyways, I guess you're one of the good ones, right?

What?

Well, you're not a drunk or anything, good for you.

...

Ok, turn over let me get to your back.



The Invisible Indians

Shelby Lisk (Mohawk)

IT'S STRANGE TO ME HOW PEOPLE ALWAYS WANT ME TO BE AN "AUTHENTIC INDIAN" WHEN I SAY I'M KANYEN'KEHA:KA.

THEY WANT ME TO LOOK A CERTAIN WAY, ACT A CERTAIN WAY. THEY'RE DISAPPOINTED WHEN WHAT THEY GET IS... JUST ME. WHITE FACED, LIGHT HAired. THEY SPENT HUNDREDS OF YEARS TRYING TO ASSIMILATE MY ANCESTORS, TRYING TO CREATE INDIANS LIKE ME, WHO COULD BLEND IN, BUT NOW THEY DON'T WANT ME EITHER. THEY CAN'T MAKE UP THEIR MINDS.

THEY WANT BUCKSKIN AND FACE PAINT, DRUMMING, SONGS IN LANGUAGES THEY CAN'T UNDERSTAND RECORDED FOR THEM BUT WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES, OF COURSE. THEY WANT EDUCATED, WELL SPOKEN, BUT NOT TOO SMART. CHRISTIAN, WELL BEHAVED, NEVER QUESTION. THEY WANT TO LEARN THE HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE, BUT NOT THE ONES THAT ARE HERE NOW, WAVING SIGNS IN THEIR FACES,

ASKING THEM FOR CLEAN DRINKING WATER,

ASKING THEM WHY THEIR WOMEN ARE GOING MISSING,

ASKING THEM WHY THEIR LAND IS BEING RUINED.

THEY WANT FANTASTICAL STORIES OF INDIANS THAT USED TO ROAM THIS LAND. THEY WANT MY CULTURE BEHIND GLASS IN A MUSEUM.

BUT THEY DON'T WANT ME.

I'M NOT INDIAN ENOUGH.

stereotype this

MELANIE FEY (DINÉ)

Today I couldn't handle the pain of being an American Indian.

There's a clawing deep inside,

Like a spider in a thirsty drought

And it screams in broken lullaby;

I don't want to be a drunk Indian

I don't to be the drunk Indian

Today a boarding school sat like a lump in my throat

And the ghosts of dead Indian children

With butchered hair and broken Christian wings,

Shattered bottles down on my feet and screamed:

We don't want to be drunk Indians

We don't want to be the drunk Indians

Today I walked away from my lover

How do I tell him that I feel the Trail of Tears like sand in my veins?

That I feel Wounded Knee like a frozen battlefield in my stomach?

That I feel the Long Walk like snapping branches on my legs?

I feel it all every time I sip from another bottle of burned memories --

The residue of genocide

And it hums in broken lullaby:

You are a drunk Indian

You are the drunk Indian

And I feel coyote pull in my finger tips

Porcupine in my skin

Crow in my hair

My feet like broken stairs

Because history moves like a fevered heat down through the arteries of generations

Because PTSD to the family tree is like an ax

Because colonization is the ghost of buffalos with broken backs

Because today only burning flags could be found at the ghost dance of my people

And they all chant in unison:

We are not a stereotype

We are not

Your stereotype