

My Standard Response

By Karenne Wood

I.

The first question is always phrased this way:
"So. How much Indian *are* you?"

II.

We did not live in tepees.
We did not braid our hair.
We did not fringe our shirts.
We did not wear war bonnets.
We did not chase the buffalo.
We did not carry shields.
We were never Plains Indians.
We tried to ride,
but we kept falling off of our dogs.

III.

A local official came to our office to ask our help with a city event. He had a splendid idea, he said. To kick off the event and show everyone in town that our tribe was still around, we should go up to the bluff overlooking the city and make a big smoke signal. Then they would know we were here.

Who ever heard of smoke signals in the forests? I imagined us upon the bluff, lighting one of those firestarter bricks. We haven't made fire since the Boy Scouts took over. And how would the citizens know it was us? They'd probably call the fire department.

IV.

As they ask, they think, *yes,*
I can see it in her face. High cheekbones
(whatever those are) *and dark hair.*

Here's a thought: don't we all have
high cheekbones? If we didn't,
our faces would cave in.
(But I do have a colonized nose.)

I'm sick of explaining myself.

"You know," I finally say,
"It doesn't matter to my people."
I ride off to my ranch-style home.
Time to weave a basket, or something.

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