

THE KING

SCOTT RUESCHER

For a minute there, squinting up at Elvis's mansion
Through the padlocked iron gate of Graceland, *closed*
On Mondays and holidays, I imagined myself
An iron-red Choctaw brave, young, proud, and virile,
Body rubbed down with a thin coat of bear grease,
Moccasins and loincloth embroidered with seed-beads,
Out on a hunting trip one innocuous Monday
In January, at the turn of the sixteenth century,
Around the time the Spanish have conquered the Caribbean
And are settling New Orleans, exploring the Mississippi,
When he sees the padlocked gate, the blacktopped driveway,
And the portico of the house with the four white columns,
And thinks he must have stumbled upon the hogan
Of some prophesied king they haven't told him about yet—
Not the Corn King, the Sun King, the Tobacco King,
Or the Rain King, or any one of those other kings
Of any of those other indispensable earthly things
From Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and Mesoamerican history
Whom we've read about in college in used mythology books,
Unforgiving authoritarian superhuman beings
Who demand the sacrifice of infants, heifers, and virgins
(Because they would never live in palaces like that
With a manicured lawn and a limousine out front),
But not the Muffler King, the Burger King, or the husband
Of the Dairy Queen, either (because those divine beings
Have yet to be born, have yet even to be conceived
By Madison Avenue marketing departments
At Monday-morning board meetings), but, from the looks
Of things, as the chubby night watchman appears on the scene,
Coming around front in his polished, steel-toed shoes,

His dark blue uniform, and his plastic-brimmed watch cap,
At the end of his shift, jangling his key bangle,
Tucking in his shirt, whistling Dixie, and checking doors
For signs of intrusive burglars and deluded groupies,
Then the king of drab, all-too-terrestrial beings,
Of middle-aged white men who never made much noise,
Caused much commotion, or took complete advantage
Of their many opportunities—of guys who found their voices
As grandfathers and work buddies, military grunts,
And third-base coaches for Little League baseball teams—
Someone a Choctaw hunter assumes he's supposed to kill
If he can't quite account for what exactly he's the king of
If he ever runs across him on his monthly hunting trip,
Sliding with a noiseless over-the-shoulder movement
A sleek hornbeam arrow from his rawhide quiver,
Drawing his ash bow, and aiming the flint arrowhead
At the cheap tin badge that the poor unwary guard wears
On his heart like a target, as he would at the heart
Of a buck nibbling saplings at the edge of a meadow—
Killing him instantly, in the middle of a nice routine
That has made his long workday just fly right by
Since he quit that dull job guarding the bank last summer.