

Excerpt from the short story "Brothers" by David A. Robertson

"It's just ... I thought when I came here maybe I'd feel more at home or something. but I feel just as different here as I do at school in Winnipeg. It's like I don't belong anywhere."

"What do you mean that you feel different? What's wrong with that?"

"I just want to feel like I belong."

"But Aiden, you do belong. And everybody's different. It's not on you to feel the same, it's on others to accept you because you're not," Vince said. "It's on you to be okay with being different."

"That's super confusing," Aiden said.

"We're all a community, that's what I mean. And everybody's here from all over, and they all come together to do this as a big family."

"I just wanted to see my real family."

"Me too," Vince said. "But you'll find out, if you keep coming to things like this, that your family's even bigger than you think."

"What about them?"

"Your foster parents?"

"Yeah."

"They're family, too, aren't they? They hooked us up together, right? They'd be welcome in our circle."

Aiden felt the anger pressing up into his chest again.

"Maybe. But they wouldn't even get me an outfit to dance in.

That's mostly why I'm hiding."

"They didn't get you an outfit"—Vince brought out the suit bag he'd been carrying over his shoulder—"because they knew I was going to give you this."

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Vince handed Aiden the suit bag. Aiden just stared at it at first, like the gift was the bag.

"Well, go ahead and open it." Vince laughed.

Aiden unzipped the bag to reveal a Grass Dance outfit. It was bright lime green, with blue, black, green, red, orange, and yellow ribbons connected to the arms and legs and chest. On the legs and arms and chest were designs that looked like flames. They were outlined in black and layered with colors: orange, then yellow, then red at the center of each design.

"This is amazing!" Aiden said. "The flames are so cool." "Look closer at them," Vince said. "They look like flames, but they're animals."

Aiden did look closer and saw that Vince was right. He could see an eagle on each leg, its wings rising upward and turning into flames. On the chest, the flames were squirrels, Aiden thought, the tails becoming flames, like the eagles' wings.

"Is this really for me?" Aiden asked.

"I mean, it's too small for me," Vince said. "Yeah, of course it is, brother."

The drums, which had fallen silent since the Grand Entry had ended, started up again. "That's us!" Vince said.

Minutes later. Vince and Aiden were standing in the middle of the gym. Aiden's feet pressed against the hardwood floor. In the middle of the dancers. in the middle of the huge crowd of onlookers. Aiden felt like everybody was watching him. He was nervous, but with the regalia on that Vince had gifted him. he was proud too.

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