

"SilverWolf's Robin"*Author: D. Sanders*

=====

The bell rang letting out class for recess. It was Christopher SilverWolf's favorite time of day having the typical third grader mentality and being perfectly normal for a nine-year-old boy. He was returning his book to the bookshelf in the corner when he noticed a boy around his age sitting in the corner by himself, watching the other children run wild and spill out into the playground. His dark auburn hair shining a bright red in the light that spilled in from the window, his large blue eyes looking extremely sad, his cheerful freckles across his nose looking out of place on such a forlorn face.

He was the boy who had been sick and missing most of second grade and had just returned to school a few days earlier. Christopher walked over and smiled and said "Hello"; the boy didn't look at him.

Feeling snubbed, he poked the boy on the shoulder "Hey, I'm talkin' to you!"

The boy turned, looked up, and smiled; his voice sounded like he was talking in a cave and through his nose. It sounded funny and strange and was difficult to understand. "I'm sorry. I didn't hear you."

"What are ya deaf or something?"

The boy's smile vanished. "Yes."

"If you're deaf, how come you can answer me, liar?"

"I can read your lips stupid."

Chris looked taken aback, his dark chocolate brown eyes as round and wide as his pudgy, youthful, dark skinned and round face. He smiled and his eyes crinkled.

"Cool. How come you can talk? 'Cause I have a cousin who was born deaf, and she can't talk. You sound really weird."

"They say I can talk because I could before I went deaf. I sound funny 'cause I can't hear myself."

"You weren't born deaf?"

"No."

"How'd it happen?"

"They don't know. They think it had something to do with pre-dispo-something and gentikicks and the really high fever I had last year. I think. I don't know really. I just woke up after my fever, and I was deaf."

"That sucks man."

"Yeah."

"So you wanna go play or something?"

"You want to play with me?"

"Why not?"

"Nobody else wants to, they think I'm stupid 'cause I sound like an idiot."

"So you talk weird, big deal. They make fun of me 'cause I'm fat. The others are all dorks."

"Yeah."

"So ya wanna?"

"Yeah."

They got up, Chris walking backwards as he continued to ask questions as they headed outside.

"Do you know that sign language stuff?"

"Just a little. It's hard to learn. I'm lucky that I can read lips; that's easier for me. That is if you're looking at me."

"I'll remember to look at you."

"Thanks."

"No problem. What's your name?"

"Robin Wood."

"I'm Chris SilverWolf; I'm a Hopi Indian."

"COOL! I never heard of an Indian named Chris though, shouldn't you be like Geronimo or Tonto or something?"

"Well my middle name is Enapay. So yeah, most of us have like 'normal' first names 'cause that's easier for most people to say and Tribal middle names."

"I have no idea what your middle name is. I couldn't make it out."

"Don't worry about it, Chris is fine."

"Thanks Chris."

"No Problem."

The pair made their way to a vacant and rickety teeter-totter and began to play. While they faced each other and bobbed up and down, they talked and asked each other questions and began the first tentative bond of a friendship that would be the most remarkable of their lives.

~*~*~*~

As the months passed, the friendship grew stronger and if you found one boy, the other was nearby. Robin's mother, a single young mother, barely making ends meet still found the time to make cookies and let the boys make sheet tepees in the living room and do what little boys do.

Most of the time, however, Robin was at Chris's house. Chris lived with his Grandmother, Hope SilverWolf, and his little sister Mary. His mother had pretty much abandoned them with her mother and his father was unknown, but Grandma was there and one of the kindest women there was to be found. She ran a little Native American tourist shop on Main Street, selling beaded jewelry and rugs, pottery and all manner of Native American trinkets and artwork.

The boys usually walked there after school and helped her in the store and let her tell them all manner of stories, some true, some legend. Robin was hopelessly fascinated with her; he hung on her every word like the faithful at a stirring sermon.

She called him 'her little bird who could not hear his own song, but sang the sweetest.' She didn't treat him like he had a handicap; she treated him like a normal little boy, which he was in her eyes. He played; he laughed; he got into mischief; he just couldn't hear.

She watched the interaction between Robin and her grandson. She was proud of Chris; he was such a good boy. He never once let Robin feel different or left out. If Robin was picked on, Chris was there to back him up; if he was sad, Chris was there to make him laugh. They were the best of friends and inseparable.

Robin in turn stood up for Chris. Chris was naturally large. He did not over eat; he played as hard as the other boys, but he still was overweight in a pudgy sense; and he was teased. Robin got into more fistfights defending Chris than he did defending himself and his own honor.

And if any one dared tease Chris because he was Native American, if any one dared show any prejudice or hatred or said anything remotely derogatory concerning Chris' Heritage, Robin was fit to be tied and was usually sent home from school with a busted lip, absolutely livid.

Robin did not tolerate anyone who hurt Chris, and deaf or not he went in fists flying.

Hope looked up from her book as the bell on the shop door rang and in walked Robin, clothes askew, black eye and looking angry at the world with Chris right behind him, head hung low.

"Who had the fight this time?" She asked setting Robin down and going to the refrigerator in the back and bringing a Ziploc bag filled with ice out to place on Robin's eye.

"Robin." Chris answered plopping down on a stool.

"Robin?" Hope queried tilting Robin's eyes up so he could read her lips.

"Martin called Chris a fatso indy-nigger. I kicked his butt."

"Robin, people will always call you or Chris names. How many times do I need to tell you to ignore them? Fighting is only going to get you into trouble. I know it hurts to be called names, but people can be mean and names are only names."

"But..."

"No 'buts' Robin. If you acknowledge them that they hurt you, they don't ever stop. You can still be a warrior without fighting needless battles. A true warrior only fights when he has to, and he fights for a reason. Names are not a good reason." Hope admonished tenderly as she held the bag of ice to Robin's cheekbone.

"What is a good reason?" He asked and Hope smiled at him.

"To defend your home, and to protect your family from harm because you love them."

"I was defending Chris; I love him; he's my best friend."

Robin was logical, and Hope chuckled. "I mean harm from death or disease, something that is harmful to your health or life. Words are harmless even if they hurt."

Robin seemed to accept her explanation and nodded and looked at Chris. "Sorry."

"Hey it was cool. You laid him out flat."

"CHRIS!"

"Well it was Grandma!"

Hope rolled her eyes, a-typical nine-year-old boy mentality at work. She made Robin hold his own ice as she went to go call his mother at work just a block away at the local diner where she waited tables to let her know about Robin's antics this week.

The following week had Chris holding the bag of ice to his face. Hope prayed they'd grow out of this behavior; it was hard seeing them picked on so much to the point where they got in so many fights. The only redeeming quality about these fights, they only fought defending each other. Their bond to each other was truly special.

~*~*~*~*~

It was Chris' tenth birthday, and Hope threw him a party. The living room of her small house was full of classmates eating cake and ice cream and playing musical chairs and pin the tail on the donkey. Robin was the hero for cracking open the piñata and showering the children in candy.

Everyone was laughing and having a good time when the phone rang and Hope answered and her face grew ashen. She immediately hung up and turned to her sister who nodded gravely.

Hope went over to where Robin was sitting next to Chris and knelt before him. "Honey, you need to put your coat on. We have to go to the hospital."

"Why? Chris hasn't opened his presents yet!"

"I know my little bird. But we have to go, your mama was in a car accident, and we have to go see her."

Robin looked like the entire world just dropped out beneath him; Chris, who had heard the exchange, ran and grabbed their coats.

"No Chris. You stay here. This is your party; I'm sure everything will be all right."

"No way. I'm going." Chris said pulling on his coat and making Robin put on his; he was still in a shocked state and didn't come back to reality until Chris took his hand. "Come on Robin, Your mom is fine I'm sure."

Robin nodded and Hope herded both boys into her beat up pick-up truck as she headed toward the small local hospital.

Sadly, Robin's mother was not fine. She was badly injured and just barely conscious as Hope and the boys arrived, and the Doctor greeted them. "She's critical I'm afraid, Mrs. SilverWolf. She can talk, but I don't expect her to..."

"No. Not in front of her son." Hope stopped the Doctor and turned to a now sobbing Robin.

"He can't hear."

"But he can read your lips, Doctor Parker. Can he see her?"

"She's quite badly injured; I don't recommend him seeing her in this condition."

"I recommend you let him say good-bye. He'd regret that more."

The doctor nodded, and Hope knelt before Robin and took his shoulders. "Listen to me Robin. This will be one of the hardest things you will ever have to do. But for your Mama, tell her how much you love her."

"Is she gonna die?" Robin sobbed, and Hope cupped his face in her arthritic hands.

"She might. I will not lie to you little bird. Show her you are a warrior who faces his fear, let her go onto the next world knowing she is loved and her only son is strong." She took Robin's hand and led him behind the curtain. Chris was at Robin's other side holding his other hand.

Susan Wood was laying there, her heart monitor beeping slowly and her breath labored. Her eyes were open and glassy wet with tears as Robin came into view.

Robin bravely walked up and took his mother's hand gently, the IV tubes coming out of the back of her hand made it difficult. She could not speak anymore; she just held her son's hand.

"I love you Mommy." Robin said, fighting his tears.

Susan squeezed his hand and turned her eyes to Hope.

"Never you worry Susan. I'll take care of him for you."

Susan took a deep breath, the tears falling from the corners of her eyes, and Hope gently wiped them away from her cheeks with a tissue.

"You'll be Okay mommy. You will." Robin said, adamant in his optimism. He refused to believe the worst. He'd lost everything in his life. He was only just starting to get some of it back, and losing his mother was not something he would believe would happen.

Susan squeezed his hand again and struggled to talk, the oxygen mask obscuring her mouth. Hope seeing the desperation, reached down and lifted it just enough so Robin could see her lips.

No sound came out, but Robin didn't need the sound, all he had to do was read. "I love you baby. I will always love you. Be strong, be good, I am so proud of you."

"I love you too Mommy." Robin, huge crocodile tears streaming down his face, replied.

Susan smiled, struggled to lift her hand to his face, and laid her palm against his wet little cheek. "My beautiful boy. Don't cry. I will always be with you." She said trailing her hand to his heart. "Right here."

Those were Susan's final words; she had held on to life just long enough to see her son, it seemed. Content he'd be cared for, she slipped away with a smile on her lips.

Robin was screaming for her in hysterics as the heart monitor began to sound an alarm, and the hospital staff rushed in. The alarm thankfully he could not hear, but he had seen her eyes; he knew she was gone before the heart monitor or the hospital staff did. Hope quickly picked Robin up and ushered him out; Chris in silent tears of his own running behind them.

She collapsed with the boys on the floor in the waiting room, holding them both tightly to her in her lap as Chris held onto Robin, who sobbed and struggled and railed against his grief. Chris was a rock of comfort, even through his own tears; he was there for Robin to lean on in his most desperate emotional turmoil.

Hope wanted to cry herself, but would have to wait to shed her own tears until Robin had cried himself out. He did not need the burden of her sorrow on top of his own.

~*~*~*~*~

The funeral was quiet and attended only by Hope, Robin, Chris and the few friends Susan had made through her job. Her husband had left her while pregnant, abandoning her in this small town, and she had taken the waitress job just to keep their heads above water and to try to pay off the mountain of medical bills for Robin.

Hope had her sons move over the few possessions Robin had so he'd not have to face the empty trailer he shared with his mother. Hope stored away all the photo albums and precious mementos of Susan's to give to Robin when he was older and could handle them and remember them fondly without tears; for now he was still too raw emotionally and heartbroken with grief and his losses.

He shared a room and bed with Chris, who amazed Hope. He was showing remarkable strength during this tragedy. He was a pillar of strength for Robin who clung to him desperately for support. When Robin awoke sobbing with nightmares, it was Chris who held him.

When Robin tried to give up, Chris refused to let him.

Hope said a prayer of thanks to the heavens, thanking them for bringing these two together. Chris was infinitely in-tune with Robin and knew precisely what to do almost instinctively to help him. He was very empathetic towards Robin as if they shared the same soul.

As the funeral service ended a tall, auburn haired woman, the same shade as Robin's came walking over, dry-eyed. "I'm Helen Smythe-Wood. I am the boy's aunt. I'll be taking him." She said coldly, Robin thankfully could not read her lips through her veil from her smart black hat.

"You will not. What makes you think you can waltz in here, at his mother's gravesite no less, and make such a statement? Susan left him in my care."

"I'm his father's sister. I'm family."

"And that argument is supposed to let me hand him over? I don't think so; your so-called family bond has been strangely absent these last nine years. Where were you for him then?" Hope said acidly as she stepped in-front of Chris and Robin protectively. Her small chubby frame standing defiantly in-between the children and the tall woman in the Chanel Business Suit and Prada pumps.

"Susan was a cheap whore my brother thankfully left when he came to his senses. He doubted Robin was even his."

Hope reached out and slapped her, knocking the hat off her perfectly coifed hair. "How dare you disrespect a wonderful woman at her own funeral. Take your pompous, self-righteous backside and leave. I'd sooner chew glass than let Robin leave with you. He needs people who love him right now, and he has enough worries then to have to deal with you. Chris take Robin to the car, now."

Chris nodded and pulled Robin, who was blissfully ignorant of the conversation that just took place and headed toward the car.

"Stop! Robin come back!" Helen called, and Hope stood her ground.

"Some family you are. The child is deaf, so screech all you'd like; he can't hear you."

"Deaf?"

"Yes."

"It figures with a mother..."

"It was a fever you vile woman."

"I can get him help for his problem."

"Where were you when that help would have made a difference? It's too late now. Get out."

"You'll be hearing from my lawyer. I'll not leave my dead brother's son here in some poverty stricken, Indian pow-wow. It's beneath him."

Hope was furious. Not only was this woman evil to the core, she was a bigot as well.

"I'll fight you tooth and nail for him. Bring your lawyer. I love that boy, and I refuse to let him go with you without a fight. This conversation is over." Hope turned around and walked away.

Helen snatched her hat off the ground and stormed off, catching her heel in the dirt and snapping it off in the process. "Get me out of Smallville, James." She said in disgust to her chauffer as she hobbled into the back seat and slammed the door behind her.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Things had settled into a routine after several long months. Chris and Robin would come to the store after school and do their chores or play in the back room until closing time. Often in the company of Chris' little sister Mary who had started school and was walked home by her big brother and Robin.

Robin had shown a talent and appreciation for the stone and bead jewelry, and Hope had taught him how to make the intricate tribal patterns. He had even made a few pieces of his own design that were quite beautiful. He had a real gift and a good eye for the craft, so Hope indulged it.

Chris, on the other hand, liked to draw. So while they sat in the back after school, watching television and after school cartoons, Robin would mess around with his projects, and Chris would sketch on whatever scrap paper lay about. Mostly tribal patterns that Robin would mimic in beads or stone. Mary was the only one who actually watched the television. They had stopped getting into fights at school and were just in a quiet and creative world of their own most of the time. They had become very close; Hope would tease them saying they were joined at the hip.

They had just gotten home, and Hope was in the small kitchen fixing dinner. Mary was with her cat on the front porch swing, and Chris and Robin were in their room playing with matchbox cars when a knock came to the door.

Mary came running in "It's the police!"

That caught Chris' attention, and he poked his head out of the door.

"What is it?"

"Sssh, and I'll tell you in a minute, let me listen." Chris said eavesdropping.

"Mrs. SilverWolf?" The officer asked politely.

"Yes."

"Listen ma'am. I really hate doing this. We all knew Susan from the diner, and we all know she wanted Robin with you. But we have an order from the family court. I guess the boy has some high falutin' Aunt in Chicago. She's got a court order. We gotta take Robin."

"No! It can't be! You've not met that horrible woman. You can't send him to her; she'll destroy him."

"I'm sorry ma'am; we've got no choice. You don't have no legal right, and Susan left no will. We have no legal leg to stand on here." The officer said handing over the papers to Hope who fell into a chair weeping.

Chris, in panic, grabbed Robin's hand and threw open a window. "Come on Rob. They're gonna take ya! We gotta run and hide!"

Both boys were out of the window and running out into the woods. They didn't stop until they were out of breath.

"What did they say?" Robin asked panting.

"That lady Grandma slapped. I guess she's your aunt, and she's going to take you to Chicago."

"Take me? I don't have an aunt!"

"Yeah you do. It's your dad's sister."

"I don't have a dad. He left."

"I know Robin, but I heard `em say they got a court order."

"I don't want to leave!" Robin began to cry, and Chris held him.

"I don't want you to go either!" Chris cried back, reaching down and picking up a sharp rock and cutting his palm and Robin's. He held their hands together.

"You're my blood brother now. You're family! Maybe they won't take you now." Chris said as they heard a twig snap and saw an officer standing there looking very sympathetic.

"I'm sorry boys, I really am. I don't want to take him either, but I have to."

Chris jumped in front of Robin, arms held out wide. "No, he's family; I made him my blood brother! He can stay!"

The officer sighed and squatted eye level. "I wish that could help, but it doesn't I'm afraid. We'll give you time to say good-bye and get his things together. But we have to go back boys."

Defeated and sobbing Robin and Chris packed what few things he had into a small suitcase. Hope was on the phone calling every lawyer in town all of them telling her the same thing. She had no case.

Even the officer's were teary eyed as the boys said their final farewells on the porch. Chris running beside the patrol car making every last second count as Robin drove off out of his life.

Chris, out of breath and sobbing, was picked up by Hope and carried back to the house.

Robin spent that night, cried out, exhausted, and on a red-eye flight to O'Hare airport - alone and terrified. His only companion on that flight was a stewardess who made him hot chocolate and walked him out to the waiting limo and the austere woman in blue, chattering on her cell phone.

She didn't even greet the depressed little boy. Just grabbed his hand, never halting her argument on the phone, and dragging him out behind her.

She stopped once to address him and her only words were "Stop dragging your feet! Honestly boy, I have a schedule to keep."

Thankfully Robin couldn't hear her.

~*~*~*~*~

FIFTEEN YEARS LATER

A beat up and badly running Volkswagen bus rolled down Main Street, the driver looked at the shops - some were new, some hadn't changed at all. He didn't dare hope until he saw the brightly painted sign, slightly sun-faded that read "Tribal Treasures". It was still there, and the Volkswagen bus parked. The driver stepped out and just stood there a moment taking it all in like he'd died and gone to heaven. Beside the shop used to be a barbershop, that was gone and now there was a Tattoo parlor, the windows advertising "Skin Art and Body Piercing". That was new, and the flash artwork decorating the windows actually complimented the neighboring shop. It was obvious whomever the tattoo artist was; he was heavily influenced with tribal design.

"Tribal Treasures" was sandwiched between the tattoo parlor and another new shop. Years ago that shop had been a pawn shop, now it was a clothing boutique that sold bright and colorful tribal clothes and tie-dyed wonders that would make even the most die-hard hippy proud. This end of the street was certainly more colorful than it had been and both shops on either side of Hope's seemed to showcase and go hand in hand with hers.

A petit and beautiful young woman stepped out of the clothier shop, pushing a rack of sarong style dresses hanging on a rack with a sale sign. All the dresses as bright as peacock feathers, she paused after she placed the rack in front of the window and looked at the handsome young man standing on the sidewalk. His dark auburn hair, short and badly in-need of a trim and a comb waved in the light breeze. He was slightly taller than average and beautifully shaped in a slender, trim athletic build. His face was handsome in that fresh boy next door way, his lips were curved in a longing smile and his gorgeous bright blue eyes were on the verge of tears.

He looked frozen in place, afraid to take another step. He was dressed in faded and thread-bare blue jeans that were frayed at the cuffs, he was barefoot in equally worn Birkenstock sandals, and his white t-shirt had a rainbow stripe across the chest with the word 'PRIDE' stamped across the chest on the rainbow stripe.

The woman had made quite a bit of noise, yet the man never reacted to the noise. He just stood there.

"Can I help you?" She asked and again the man did not turn to face her. Her heart began to pound, and the hair on the back of her neck stood on end. She had only been six, but she remembered vividly, and this man's coloring was right. She stepped forward and gently tapped his shoulder to get his attention.

It was as if time slowed as he turned his face to her and smiled, tears making his eyes shine.

"Robin?" She asked, and his face came alive and he nodded, trying to place her.

"Oh my GOD! ROBIN! It's me, Mary!"

"Mary? Little Mary?!" The voice, the sound that came from a cavern and out his nose, it was Robin. She leapt into his arms squealing and he laughed, and swung her around, crying and laughing making them both dizzy. He set her down and held her shoulders at arms length and just looked at her.

"You are beautiful. Absolutely stunning."

"Oh tell me that again, and I'll be your new best friend, Handsome." Mary grinned taking his hand and leading him into the shop. "Come on, Grandma will be thrilled to see you!"

Hope looked up from her ever-present romance novel as the door chime rang, and she saw her Granddaughter dragging a handsome young man behind her. Hope gasped and dropped her book; she'd know that hair and those eyes anywhere. "ROBIN!" She sobbed hurrying out from behind the counter and into his arms.

He was sobbing and holding her tightly, his shoulders shaking with the force of his weeping. Hope pushed him down onto a stool and cupped his face in her even more gnarled hands. Smoothing his hair from his face and kissing his cheeks. "Welcome home Little Bird."

"I missed you so much Grandma." Robin's voice was filled with joy and anguish at the same time. His hands held her close, afraid to let go.

"We all missed you Robin. I tried to get you back for years. We lost a piece of our soul when you left." Hope said still fussing over him, wiping his tears and her own with her sleeve.

"I know and I wanted to write to you so badly and thank you and tell you how much I loved you. Helen burned my letters."

"She didn't!"

"She did. I won't bore you with the bitchy details. I finally managed to get out of there, and I came straight home, where I belong."

"Ah Robin, no wonder you look like you've been ridden hard and put away wet. How long have you been on the road, Little Bird?"

"Four Days non-stop. I'm exhausted, but I gotta see Chris, tell me he's still here."

"He is, he owns the Shop next door, we SilverWolf's have taken over this block." Mary piped in, bouncing with excitement.

"He's next door?" Robin asked almost falling out of his chair wanting to dash next door.

"Nope, not today. He closes on Sundays and Mondays. You really left your mark on him Robbie. You've influenced his life more than you know." Hope said patting Robin's hand.

"I don't get it." Robin said looking confused.

"He spent years studying and learning sign language and now runs a Big Brother program in town for handicapped kids. Sundays, he's in the park with the kids, and Monday is his day off." Hope said, and Robin looked proud and about ready to cry again.

"He always had the biggest heart of anyone I have ever known. Is he in the park now?"

"He is; he is having a softball game there today for the kids. Want me to take you over?" Mary asked, and Robin smiled and nodded.

"Before you fly out of here Robbie, where are you staying?"

"Nowhere yet. I've been sort of living in my van for the past month. I was saving up everything I had to pay for the gas to get here. OH, I almost forgot!" Robin said getting up and dashing to his mini-bus bringing back in a small paper bag and handing it to Hope. "I was influenced by a SilverWolf myself. I've been making and selling these to get by, but when I made this one, I just couldn't sell it. It was my best work, and I owe it to you Grandma."

Hope opened up the bag and pulled out a gorgeous silver and turquoise necklace. The chain was like a pack of tiny running wolves falling into an intricately detailed wolf's head with turquoise eyes. It was stunning, and Hope held it in shaking fingers. "Robin... Where did you find a mold this detailed? It's beautiful!"

"I made it." Robin said proudly, to hear his "teacher" compliment his work was a great boost to his ego.

"You made the mold too? I never taught you how to do that."

"I know. I experimented around with different things. I make it with clay first, then I pour cement on it cause it's cheap and holds up to heat. When it's dry I chip out the clay, set in the stones where I want them, then pour in the metal. That one is a one of a kind, like an idiot, I dropped the mold taking out the jewelry." Robin said rolling his eyes at his accident. "I'm a klutz."

"But a talented klutz. It's beautiful; here put it on me." Hope said turning around and offering her neck to Robin who fastened the piece around her neck. She turned around beaming. "So how do I look?"

"The most beautiful woman in the world naturally." Robin smiled, and Hope pinched both his cheeks.

"Now I remember why I loved you so much little bird!"

"I have more in my van. Would you like to see them? I want Mary to pick out one she likes too. Some big brother I'd make if I didn't dress her up too." Robin said going back out and bringing in a large box that held a fabulous array of handmade jewelry.

"Robbie, those are all gorgeous! You'd make a mint in the shop with these. Why the hell are you only charging five dollars a piece? These are easily worth five times that."

"I didn't spend much on them." Robin shrugged.

"But they're works of art; a part of your soul is in these." Mary asked eyeing a beaded choker with a silver medallion sunflower in the middle.

"Mary's right Robin, I hope you plan to work for your grandma."

"I'd love to. Can I?"

"Can you? I want someone to take over for me when I'm gone. Mary's got her shop, Chris his. I need my little bird, I'm getting old."

Robin kissed her cheek "You're not old, and you will live forever. I feel like I never left."

"You didn't. You've always been in our hearts." Hope said rifling through his jewelry and making space for them in the front display counter and taking off his price stickers. "You watch little bird. No price tags, you'll be amazed what some folks will offer." Hope winked as she began setting the pieces out to display them best.

"I'm not a business man; that you have to teach me still." Robin said feeling overwhelmed with joy as he fell back into the family he had always thought of as his own. He rubbed the scar on his palm, and Mary raised her eyebrows.

"How did you get that?" She asked looking at the small jagged scar.

"Chris." Robin said fondly, a smile of a memory on his lips.

"When they came to take me, and we ran out into the woods. Chris took a rock and cut our hands with it and made us blood brothers thinking they wouldn't take me then. I can't tell you how many times over the years this simple little scar got me through the hard times. Because every time I looked at it, I remembered all of you and because of this mark I have a little

SilverWolf running in my veins. Chris was always with me and that scar would remind me of it when I felt like I wanted to give up. He'd kick my ass if I gave up fighting." Robin said rubbing the scar and reminiscing blind to the look Mary was giving her grandmother over Robin's shoulder.

"I always said they shared one soul." Was all Hope said, smiling to herself as she set the last of the Jewelry in the front counter, humming to herself. Mary grinned and took Robin's hand and led him toward the door.

"I want to show him Chris' parlor before we head out." Mary said, and Hope waved them off. Mary led Robin through a beaded curtain side door that led into Chris' tattoo parlor.

"Chris' domain. Have a look around." Mary said letting Robin take a look at the pictures that lined the walls and the various body jewelry in sterile display. Robin paused when he noticed a small sticker on the cash register. A simple blue square with a yellow equal sign, the symbol for marriage equality support, Robin had one on the bumper of his min-bus.

"Mary? Is Chris Gay?"

"Yup."

"Then I guess it's true then what they say. It does rub off." Robin said grinning and laughed. "I wonder whose fault it is, his or mine." He added winking at Mary.

"You nerd." Mary laughed, it was quite obvious Robin was gay; his shirt was a dead giveaway. It was a lot harder to tell with Chris unless you knew him. He didn't advertise quite as much as Robin did.

"Yes, I was the apple of my aunt's eye. Not only was I deaf and a retard to her, but add flaming gay and well you can guess how proud I made her." Robin rolled his eyes in disgust. "She had me fucking committed for it, can you believe it? I was seventeen, and for a year I lived in a rich businessman nut house until a doctor could not find anything wrong with me and finally asked me why my aunt sent me there. When I told him she put me in there because she wanted to 'fix' me because I was gay, he was livid. Needless to say I got out, she wasn't happy when the doctor tore her a new asshole and set her straight. No pun intended." He spoke light about it, but Mary could tell it was one of those things that crawled under his skin. She had to think of a distraction and tossed him a sample book.

"Take a look at that."

Robin flipped open the photo album; they were photos of tattoos and piercings. The first page was close ups of a large well-defined chest. Round and firm pectoral muscles, both nipples

sporting silver hoops and the chest a tribal stylized eagle, wings spread and spanning the chest. "Wow, this guy is built. Nice." Robin commented turning the page.

It was obviously the same man, his large arms, again defined with well toned muscle, not grotesquely large from too much pumping iron, the man, whomever he was, was just naturally large and was packed with natural, usable muscle. His upper arms above the bicep were banded all the way around in an intricate tribal pattern. "Amazing, this guy is hot stuff. Talk about your brick shit-houses."

Robin turned the page and visibly cringed. "Oh my fucking GOD! What has he done? OUCH!"

Once again, the same man, this time the photo was taken much farther down, and sporting a Prince Albert piercing through his penis adorned with a silver hoop. "My dick hurts just looking at this. Why on earth would a guy this insanely hot, and so massively well endowed do that to himself? I don't want to even think about it, how can Chris do this to someone without his own balls crawling up into his body?"

Mary was in hysterics laughing. Robin looked up, and she grinned. "Robin, that IS Chris."

Robin went back to the book eyes wide. "That's CHRIS? Is he insane? Good god, this body belongs to Chris?" Robin turned the page and there was a full body shot, handsome fell short in describing him. He was incredibly tall; his hair had grown and hung in a braid that fell to his waist. He looked like an Indian warrior from a Hollywood western. He was the perfect Native American specimen, every feature sang of exotic beauty, his sharp chiseled face was flawless male perfection, and Mary thought she'd have to pick Robin's jaw off the floor. He just stared bug eyed for about five minutes before he said anything.

"He's a GOD!"

"Yeah, he did turn out nice, didn't he? Who'd have thought my chubby brother would turn into that, huh?" Mary said watching Robin's reaction to the photos; she was getting a sick thrill.

Robin looked up, and she could see a dark cloud of worry. "Listen, tell me something honestly. Because I'd kick myself for hurting someone inadvertently here, I've seen it happen. When an old friend turns up and there's a lover involved, things can get ugly, and I don't want to upset someone Chris cares about. I don't want to force him to choose between our friendship from his past and his current lover..."

Mary interrupted him, "Stop Robin, this is painful to hear. Stop worrying, Chris is single. Just be you, he's been waiting for you forever anyway."

"Now you're being just silly."

"No, I'm not. I'm serious. Robin, you've no idea how much he loves you."

"I've a pretty good idea actually. I've been in love with him since we met. But it was different then, we were different then."

"And neither of you have changed other than hitting puberty and getting older. Tell me, how often did you compare your lovers to his memory?"

Robin looked guilty as charged.

"He did the exact same thing, Robbie. Grandma always said you two would be forced back together; you two share a soul; she's dead right. You belong here Robin, and Chris belongs with you. Grandma always knew it; I always knew it. What brought you back here, really?"

"Chris."

"What kept you going after you left? Who did you think of most?"

"Chris."

"Ask those same questions to Chris, and he'll answer 'Robin' every time."

"The park, is it the one on Elm?"

"Yes."

Robin was out the door and in his van and driving off sobbing for joy and hope. His heart pounded, and his chest hurt. He'd always felt empty without Chris, and Mary's words struck a chord and hit home. He was and had always been in Love with Chris, and he had to find him immediately to stop the ache and pain in his chest for good.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Chris was behind the plate and behind the umpire as he coached and cheered on his "kids". His assistant coach nudged his arm. "There is a hot red head in the bleachers checking you out man big time."

"I doubt it." Chris mumbled using sign language to communicate with the girl on first base.

"I'm serious Chris. He's practically drooling."

"Martin, the chance of there being a gay man in this town I don't already know is practically zero. We live in the middle of nowhere." Chris rolled his eyes and kept them on the game.

"Let's see, white t-shirt with a huge rainbow stripe on the chest and the word PRIDE, gee, straight men advertise like that all the time. Chris, you'll regret not turning around man; he's seriously good-looking. If I weren't het, I'd bone him."

"Jesus Martin, will you stop it."

"Dude you are so dense; you get laid about half as much as you should man."

Chris knew he wasn't going to get any peace until he looked so he turned around, and Martin was right, he was indeed a handsome man, quite obviously open about his preferences. He was sitting in the center about three rows up, directly behind Chris. As Chris turned, the man smiled at him, the most beautiful smile Chris had ever seen. Big blue eyes looked about ready to cry on a face alive with what looked like sincere affection.

The man winked and then used sign language to speak to Chris. "Are you just going to stand there? Or don't you recognize me gorgeous?" he signed, and Chris' heart rate increased.

He signed back. "Do I know you?"

"Yes. Better than anyone."

Chris read the signs, and he thought of all the men he'd dated and not one of them had looked like this. "I'm sorry, but where do I know you from?"

"Here."

"Can you just tell me?"

"No. You know me, think harder beautiful."

Chris wracked his brain, where did he know or where had he met a redhead with big blue eyes? Then suddenly it was as if time stopped, and Chris looked up, eyes wide in disbelief, jaw dropping in astonishment.

"By Gum I think he figured it out."

"ROBIN!" Chris' declaration made everyone's head turn as he literally leapt over the low hurricane fence and made a beeline toward the young man now standing in the bleachers and holding out his arms, smiling and crying simultaneously.

"BINGO" Robin said back as he fell into Chris' arms from the bleachers, and Chris grappled Robin to him sobbing.

All activity ground to a halt around them as every eye turned to watch the scene unfolding before them. Chris was crushing Robin in a hug, sobbing great huge heaving tears. The smaller man holding back just as tightly, his tears no less severe, and they were tears of overwhelming joy.

Chris let go and placed his hands on either side of Robin's face. "I missed you."

"Really? I couldn't tell?" Robin said back chuckling through his tears and smiling up at Chris.

"When did you get here?"

"About an hour or two ago. I stopped by Grandma's shop first; Mary told me where to find you."

"Tell me you're here to stay."

"I'm not going anywhere anymore. This is where I belong."

"Damn straight." Chris smiled, noticing the eyes on them, and he took Robin's hand and addressed the crowd.

"Everyone, I want you all to meet the man that is responsible for all of this. The person who taught me that handicaps only stop you if you let them." Chris began proudly speaking to everyone and signing at the same time. "You've all heard me talk about my best friend Robin from my childhood, I haven't seen him in fifteen years, until today. Everyone, this is Robin Wood, the most amazing person I've ever had the honor to call my friend and my inspiration."

Everyone clapped, and Robin smiled and never one to miss a cue said his own little speech. "Don't let this big guy fool you. I didn't do squat; he always had a heart the size of a mountain. I was skinny, too quick to fight and hated the world. It wasn't until Chris came along I even started to try to live. He never once treated me like an idiot or worse. All he offered me was his hand in friendship, and he wouldn't let me quit living. He treated me like he treated everyone else, and that's the key right there. We are no different where it matters most. And that's what he taught me. It was those lessons in life from a ten-year-old boy that helped me keep going all these years. Don't you dare thank me Chris, you did this yourself." Robin sniffed and rubbed his eye. "And I'm gonna ball like a baby again in a minute."

Everyone laughed and cheered, and Chris pulled Robin back into his arms for another hug. Robin held tight and buried his face in Chris' chest. "You make me so proud. I love you." Robin said into Chris' chest, and Chris stepped back and smiled down at Robin.

"What did you just say?"

"You heard me; I love you Chris. I always have and always will."

Chris closed his eyes and fought more tears. "I cannot tell you how much how long I've wanted to hear that from you."

"It's true. As much as I love Grandma and Mary, they are not the reason I am here."

"I love you too, Robin."

"I know you do; I could see it in everything you were doing here today. I cannot tell you how that makes me feel."

"Try, please."

"Proud, happy, overwhelmed, thrilled, sappy, and the rest I should censor in public."

Chris laughed tucking Robin under his arm. "You always did say exactly what you thought, when you thought it, all of the time. Don't ever change Robin; I beg you, don't ever change."

"I hadn't planned on it." Robin replied with a grin as Chris walked over to Martin, Robin still under his arm.

"Glad to see you back, Chris talks about you all the time." Martin spoke and signed and then held out his hand Robin shook it still smiling.

"Thanks, it's good to be back again." Robin said back content never to leave this spot he was currently tucked into.

"You won't miss me for the last inning, will you?" Chris asked, and Martin shook his head.

"If you had stayed, I would have thought you had gone loco. Get outta here and have fun kiddies." Martin winked and handed Chris his duffle over the fence.

"Where are you parked?" Chris asked as they strolled through the park.

Robin pointed, and Chris changed direction slightly and began walking Robin to his van conveniently parked in the parking space next to Chris' truck.

They had just gotten to the van when Robin turned to walk to the back and climbed in, settling in a very come hither pose. "If you don't crawl in here with me in five seconds, I'm coming out there and embarrassing you in front of everyone."

Chris did not need to be told twice and joined Robin, who promptly settled himself on top of Chris' broad chest. "I'm going to kiss your socks off. I've been waiting for this for years. I'm done waiting," was the only warning Chris had before Robin seized his lips.

Chris was rock hard by the time Robin was done kissing and sat back up with a smug look on his face.

"I have a bone to pick with you." Robin said, and Chris looked puzzled.

"Mary showed me your photo album."

"So you've already seen me naked."

"Yes, and why on earth when you have a dick that nice would you POKE A HOLE IN IT!?"

Chris busted up laughing.

"Don't laugh asshole, I'm serious. I thought my balls were gonna shrivel up never to be found again when I saw what you've done. That had to have hurt like a mother fucker."

"Not too bad."

"Right, sure. If you recall, I have my own dick, and I've been slammed in the nuts by countless purses in supermarkets and have had to walk around with bags of frozen peas on my nads. I'm pretty sure POKING A HOLE IN IT is about a million times worse. What possessed you to do that?"

"It has its uses."

"Care to enlighten me? And it better be good Christopher SilverWolf."

"I'll show you the benefits later handsome."

"You had better have lube, because you have a cock that would make horses feel inferior, there is no way in hell you are touching me without it."

"I have it."

"Then I'm all yours big boy." Robin grinned, and Christopher was laughing again so hard he had to wipe the tears out of his eyes.

"Jesus Christ I missed you and your smart ass comments."

Robin grinned and once again leaned in for a kiss. "I love you."

"I love you too. Let's go home."

Robin nodded as Chris slid out of the back and fished his keys out of his pocket. He hopped into his F-150 and Robin followed close behind.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Robin was amazed to see Chris drive past the little house he remembered them all living in and had to remember to leave his eyes in his sockets when Chris rolled up and parked at a fairly new and rather sprawling ranch. Complete with a horse corral and horses. Chris seemed to be doing well for himself. It was almost like a compound, and the entry gates of wrought iron had a silver wolf pack worked into the metal.

Robin got out of his van and just surveyed the layout, Chris came over and took his hand and pointed around the premises.

"That's the wing I built for Grandma and Mary. That half is ours."

Robin quirked an eyebrow and smiled at the last word in Chris' statement.

"Like after today you're not living here with me? You have another thing coming little bird."

"Nice to know I'm wanted."

"Wanted for years." Chris said kissing Robin's forehead as he led him over to the corral fence.

"Naomi loves the horses."

"Who's that?"

"Mary's daughter."

"She's got a KID!"

"Almost five now."

"I feel old."

"You look good to me for an old fart. And Hey, today's your birthday Robin."

Robin paused he'd lost track of days, and not that his birthday was a special event, he hadn't celebrated it in a decade or more, but Chris was right. "I forgot. And I can't believe you remembered."

"I never forget dates. Happy Birthday Robbie, what sort of Present would you like?"

Robin smiled a truly wicked grin. "I'll have an order of Tall, Dark, and Handsome please."

Chris winked and scooped Robin up like he weighed nothing at all. "Coming up." Chris said as he literally carried a laughing Robin into the house.

Once inside Chris kicked the door shut behind him and headed straight toward... the kitchen.

"I'm all for kink, but counter-tops already?" Robin teased as Chris set him on the kitchen counter.

"Dork. I've been listening to your stomach growling long enough. You eat first."

"I am hungry; I forgot that you could hear that."

"When was the last time you ate?" Chris asked as he raided the fridge for sandwich fixings.

"A day or two."

Chris dropped the loaf of bread. "A DAY or TWO?"

"That's what happens when you're broke. I have two pennies left. I couldn't even buy dog food, and I rolled into town on fumes."

"You're that flat broke?"

"Unfortunately. Last meal was brought to by Purina Dog Chow."

"Don't even joke about that Robbie."

"Who said I'm joking?"

Chris looked angry "Don't look so pissed off Chris. Would you rather me make jokes or cry? I'd know what I prefer."

"I'm not pissed at you Robin. Just at the situation."

Robin reached over and squeezed Chris' hand. "I chose it Chris. I had two choices. One, stay where I was miserable with the biggest bitch in the known universe but have three meals a day and not much else or Two, struggle for a while to get back to the place that made me happy." Robin leaned over and kissed Chris' cheek. "Which would you choose?"

"Was she that bad?" Chris had wondered for years what Robin had been going through and had to ask and had to know. He busied himself making sandwiches as Robin sighed and looked exhausted.

"I guess I'll have to tell you eventually. Now is as good a time as any. I think it can be summed up pretty easily. She had little tolerance for people in general, let alone a deaf kid. I cried for the first week I was there non-stop. That pissed her off, so she dumped me in a boarding school for handicapped kids. I think that's the only good thing she did for me. It forced me to learn sign language and not rely solely on reading lips." Robin began as Chris handed him a sandwich, and he took a break to devour the first half.

Chris fished out two beers from the fridge, and they moved to the couch to finish eating and talking. "Go on."

"Came home at about fourteen to attend high school. Where I became her most wonderful nightmare. I was not the best student, I didn't have any real friends, I came out of the closet, she had me committed for it, got out a year later, finished high school and just became another piece of furniture in her house. I wasn't allowed to get a job, wasn't allowed to drive, wasn't allowed to go out, let alone date, I had to sneak out windows and all that got me was sleazy one night stands because I was eighteen, normally hormonal and desperate to get out. I hoarded money like you wouldn't believe. She never cleaned out her pockets, I took to doing the laundry regularly so I could pinch it." Here Robin winked before continuing.

"It took me five stinking years to make up a crap load of jewelry, the only hobby she let me indulge without bitching and to save up a five hundred, I bought the bus with that. Then started saving again for gas, I was hell bent on getting out. I left six months ago, no note, no warning,

and whored myself cross-country selling my jewelry on street corners to buy food and gas. Now here I am."

"She had you committed for being gay?"

"Leave it to you to focus in on that throw away comment. Yes, it was stupid, it was cool watching the doctor bitch her out over it after he figured out I wasn't in there for being suicidal."

"Bitch."

"And Good riddance."

"We tried to get you back."

"I know. She'd rant about you all constantly. On one hand I wanted to kick her ass for being derogatory, but I got a sick joy of watching her cuss and rant that Grandma was a persistent old hag. I love you all so much it made me happy knowing you cared enough to fight for me. That was enough, it got me through."

Chris was looking dark and brooding, and Robin finished his beer and took Chris' empty. "Let's change the subject now please. That's over, I want to go forward now." Robin said tossing the cans away after he hunted around the kitchen to even find where Chris had hidden the garbage can under the sink.

Chris watched Robin with a mixture of sadness and joy. Robin was a little harder a little more cynical due to his life, but he was still the first to make a joke out of the bad, and he still smiled easily. He was the same where it mattered most, but the little boy full of unspoiled magic was gone.

The same could be said of Chris. They had both changed, in some ways for the better, in other ways for the worse. But they had changed in parallel ways; they still fit together like hand in glove. When Robin had left, Chris had felt like half of his soul had been ripped out. He had grown accustomed to that emptiness.

The moment he had laid eyes on Robin, it was like suddenly being whole again; Robin was his soul mate, there was no doubt in Chris' mind. He wasn't the type to go about saying something that cheezy out loud, but he knew. And if he knew, Robin was sure to feel it too, it didn't need to be said, it needed to be felt. He felt complete at last, Robin was home to stay for good, and Chris would never let someone take him away again.

Robin sat back down on the couch, and Chris could see in his face the day was beginning to take its toll. "You look exhausted."

"I am. Been up for days, I slept maybe four hours in the past four days."

"Then why don't you crash? I'm not going anywhere."

"Nap with me?"

"Absolutely."

Robin followed Chris into the bedroom fell on the right side of the bed. The side he had always slept on when he had shared a bed with Chris in their youth.

"I still see you like the right." Chris chuckled; he always slept on the left anyway.

Robin smiled and sank into the soft mattress and into the very large man who wrapped around him from behind. "I always sleep on the right. You know that." Robin grinned rolling over to face Chris and use him as a pillow.

"I do." Chris said kissing Robin's forehead and stroking his back. "Sleep some, you need it." Robin nodded, lowering his eyes from Chris' face, the conversation was over, Robin was out like a light.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Chris just lay there watching Robin sleep for a while, letting the joy sink in and become a nice, comfortable contentment. He studied Robin's adult face; he could still see the boy there. He hadn't changed much; he had just refined as he grew into manhood. He was fresh-faced and handsome with clean lines and perfect proportions, and Chris knew if he stared any longer Robin's sleep was going to be interrupted so Chris regretfully rolled out of bed to let Robin sleep while he went into the living room.

He left the door open; it wasn't like noise was going to disturb Robin after all, and he picked up the phone to dial his grandmother at the shop.

"Chris, so how's Robin?"

"Sleeping, he's exhausted."

"I know, he was running purely on adrenalin this morning. He had suitcases under his eyes. Poor dear."

"He's had it rough; he's flat broke."

"Not anymore."

"Eh?"

"I took his price stickers off his jewelry. He's so talented Chris, and he was charging next to nothing for his work. No wonder he was flat broke. I laid his Jewelry out in the case here, and it's almost gone. He had thirty pieces, and one woman bought almost all of it. Frances Walker, you know my very good client? She almost died of orgasmic joy. She left maybe five pieces, I have seventeen hundred, in cash, and she thought she was getting the best bargain ever." Hope cackled. She knew they cost Robin just a few dollars in materials, but his gift was worth every penny that Frances had not even batted an eyelash at to pay.

"He that good?"

"Fabulous. He'll have to make more soon; Frances loves her jewelry and so does her rotary club. The minute the rest of those ladies see what Frances is wearing; Robin will have a backlog of orders."

"Daaaaamn. That's good news; Robin will be relieved no doubt. Speaking of Robin, can you and Mary stop at the bakery on the way home and grab him a cake? It's his birthday."

Hope paused and looked at the calendar. "Well I'll be it sure is."

"He forgot his own birthday."

"He was only thinking of you today." Hope smiled into the phone.

"I know. God Grandma, he's fantastic!"

"He did turn into a handsome boy. I take it Robin is staying with you and not me."

"Naturally."

"I knew I'd lose there. Are you happy Chris?"

"At last."

"Good. I always knew you both belonged together; your souls are not complete otherwise. I won't worry about you anymore." Hope sighed. Chris had been so unfulfilled in life, and he'd never known a real love other than Robin. Now that Robin was back where he belonged, Chris would no longer be so sad. Hope was thrilled. She had never once cared that Chris was gay; she had cared about his love life and his lack of emotional commitment and lack of attachment to anyone. He was distant, a shell to anyone other than his immediate family and the kids he worked with. That certainly would no longer be an issue; Chris' voice even sounded stable and secure and content. He was whole.

"He's everything to me; he always was. I'm gonna start fixing dinner, if you and Mary will grab the cake, we'll be able to have a nice quiet party for him tonight."

"Sounds good, I'll get the cake and see you in an hour or two."

"Thanks Grandma." Chris hung up the phone and started preparations for dinner.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Robin slowly began to awaken. He felt groggy, but better for having a nap, and he stretched out his limbs and yawned as he slowly opened his eyes and felt thrown back fifteen years. A small girl was standing there just smiling and staring at him. He was ten years old again, looking at Mary at the same age. Robin smiled back; she was adorable and obviously as curious as her mother who chose that moment to come in the room.

"Naomi! I told you not to come in here and wake him up." Mary scolded, and Robin smiled at her.

"It's okay, I woke up on my own." Robin said sitting up and ruffling the child's hair. "You look exactly like your mother." He said, and the girl smiled at him.

"Mama says you can't hear."

"That's right."

"But if I talk slow and look at you like this it's okay and you hear me by looking at my mouth. Is that true?" She said talking slowly, and Robin laughed.

"Yes it is. I read your lips."

"Neat! Can we eat now? Cause mama said we have to eat first before we have cake."

Robin looked up at Mary who rolled her eyes. Chris chose that moment to walk into the bedroom and seeing Mary and Naomi already jabbering away it was pretty obvious Robin was awake.

"Dinner's ready." He announced, and Naomi dashed out of the room, her mind on eating quickly so she could eat a piece of the cake Hope had purchased.

Robin stood and looped an arm around Mary's shoulders. "She is adorable."

"She's a menace." Mary replied with a grin.

"Like mother like daughter." Robin winked and then did a little mental calculation. "Hold on a minute, how on earth do you have a kid that old already?"

"Robin you are so dense. It's called me getting knocked up in High School."

Robin winced "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude."

"You weren't rude Robbie. I was the stupid one. Had I had a chance to do it again though, I would. She's the best." Mary watched as Naomi clambered up in a chair at the table.

"Dare I ask about Dad or is that a taboo subject?"

"Daddy is currently going to State College on a football scholarship. We're still together, and he comes home every other weekend to visit." Mary smiled and flashed her engagement ring. "We're waiting until he's through to get married, we weren't about to let him forgo school, we're fine for now." Mary said and Robin, looked visibly relieved.

Chris grinned "And naturally he is scared shitless of her big brother kicking his ass if he dared be a prick." Robin chuckled.

"I wouldn't mess with you either Big Man." Robin replied as he took up a chair next to Naomi.

"What smells so good in here?" Robin asked closing his eyes a moment to smell the air.

"Posole, Calabacitas and Cornbread your favorites if I remember correctly."

"I have never known what those first two are actually called. If it's not English I'm screwed reading lips. Tell me you mean the spicy pork chili and corn stew thing and the squash and cheese gooey stuff. Cornbread I got." Robin said bouncing in his chair. He hadn't eaten food like this in years; he was already drooling and waiting to burn his tongue off with spice. Helen ate such bland food; he had developed quite a spicy palate in his youth thanks to his time with the SilverWolf's.

"Bingo." Chris said setting the very hot bowls of food on the table.

"Whose feet do I need to kiss for making this for dinner?"

"Don't look at me Little Bird, Chris cooked, not I." Hope said, and Robin grinned at Chris who sat next to him.

"Is it edible?" Robin teased, and Chris winked.

"It's hot."

"You're hot."

"I meant Spicy dork."

"I know." Robin winked "You're still so easy to mess with."

"Only you can get away with it." Mary said filling Naomi's bowl and hers and passing the cornbread to Hope.

"It's because I am a dork, and he tolerates dorks." Robin said smiling at Naomi who was giggling at him.

"I talk funny huh?"

Naomi shook her head "No, you just are funny."

"How much for the little girl?"

"You can't afford her."

"But she's so cute!" Robin said leaning over to poke her nose. "I have to make special girls something pretty. Do you like horses?"

"YES!"

Robin nodded and turned to Chris. "I'd make fabulous cooks something, but I'm afraid you'd put my jewelry somewhere it shouldn't be." Robin teased, and Chris tossed a hunk of cornbread at him.

"I'll make you a convert."

"Not likely, the only holes in this body are the ones I was born with."

"Boys, we're eating!" Hope scolded playfully, and Robin grinned at her.

"I missed this." Robin sighed eating the rest of his meal without incident and without further scolding. Washing his meal down with several glasses of milk, he'd have to build his tolerance for spice back up. He was sweating by the end of the meal, and his tongue had lost all feeling and was burnt to a crisp.

He was insanely happy and thankful for the ice cream that cooled the fire in his mouth that accompanied the thoughtful birthday cake. He was too full to eat much dessert and gave half of his piece of cake to Naomi, which made him her new best friend instantly.

After dinner, Robin learned from Hope of his popularity in the shop, and that come Tuesday, he'd better be in attendance because Frances Walker would be back to meet him and ask about custom orders. When Hope handed him the envelope with almost two thousand dollars in it, Robin almost wept and then removed a little less than half and handed the rest to Hope.

"I only need enough for necessities right now. Besides, gotta give my boss her cut." Robin winked, and Hope refused to take it back.

"Use it to buy more materials, turn it into more stock for now. Once you're settled in nicely we'll work out the details Little Bird. I'm not hurting, we must establish you first, trust my business sense." Hope smiled and stood, pressing the envelope back in Robin's hand and leaning over to kiss his brow. "It's wonderful to have you home."

Robin took her hand and kissed it "I am never leaving unless you throw me out."

"Not likely." Chris said settling on the couch next to Robin, laying his arm around Robin's shoulders as Naomi climbed into his lap.

"Is he living here with us too?" Naomi asked her uncle who nodded, smiling fondly at her. He absolutely adored her and spoiled her rotten.

"He is."

"But you only have one Bedroom on this side. Where's he gonna sleep?"

"Out of the mouths of babes." Robin chuckled watching Chris squirm.

Mary was positively no help she had her hand over her mouth stifling a laugh of her own.

"Well, you see... It's like... God someone help me here. Mary, she's your daughter, you explain it!"

"She asked you."

"Wench."

"But of course."

"Explain what?" Naomi asked again, and it was Robin who saved Chris. He took her little hands in his and just spoke the simple truth.

"Your Uncle Chris and I love each other, and we don't mind sharing a bed. We did when we were little, it's okay. I won't be sleeping on the couch or anything."

The explanation was enough to satisfy her curiosity, and she hopped down off Chris' lap and headed over to her mother who was getting ready to head home for the evening.

"You don't have to make it hard; she wouldn't understand the dynamics anyway." Robin said amused and kissed Chris' cheek.

"Very True." Hope said grabbing her purse. "Goodnight, see you tomorrow."

The door closed behind the ladies, and Robin lay down on the couch, his head on Chris' lap looking up fondly. "I should have said I won't be sleeping on the couch unless Uncle Chris gets sick of me being a dork."

"I love you just as you are Little Bird. Smart Ass Attitude and all."

"I feel like I'm dreaming. I feel like I never left."

"When you belong somewhere it does not matter how long you leave it. When you come back to it, you fit back into your place naturally."

"Are you always full of these deep wisdoms or have you been watching too much PBS?"

Chris rolled his eyes and poked Robin in the ribs making him jump and fall off the couch. "Do you ever take a break?"

"Of course not." Robin laughed getting up off the floor and sauntering into the bathroom. "And I have a full tummy and a stinking body. I need to visit the powder room, can I have a towel?"

"In the cabinet behind the door. Want company?"

"Horny?"

"Yes."

Robin grinned. "Give me a few minutes first, I really am a bit on the ripe side. Let me get a little less aromatic first."

"You have ten minutes."

Robin laughed as he shut the door and turned on the shower and jumped in to wash. Already getting excited and wondering if ten minutes really was as long as it suddenly seemed.

Robin had his head tipped back, rinsing the shampoo from his hair, his eyes closed when he felt hands slip around his hips, and he raised his head and opened his eyes and smiled. Robin, being fairly tall himself still felt dwarfed as he took in the sheer expanse of the man smiling down at him. His chest alone was the size of a Buick and the large eagle tattoo rolled over beautiful pectoral muscles. The silver hoops in his nipples catching the light and sparkling. Robin ran his hands up over that smooth, dark skin and linked his fingers around Chris' neck. "You are seriously hot stuff."

"Funny, I was just thinking the same thing handsome." Chris grinned tugging Robin's hips closer, their obvious states of arousal as they rubbed against each other made them both groan. Robin, however, took a breath and stepped back, and his eyes immediately traveled downward.

He visibly shivered even in hot water. "Holy Mother, Mary and Joseph! Chris, why would you do that to a cock that nice?"

Chris chuckled. "I told you it has its uses Little Bird, and I'm planning on showing you a few here in a minute." Chris replied running his hands down Robin's sides and reaching Robin's erection took a nice firm grip and squeezed, making Robin's knees almost buckle. "Your cock ain't so bad either beautiful."

"You're not piercing it either." Robin groaned as Chris slowly stroked.

Chris just chuckled and moved to pin Robin against the shower wall. Bending his head down and capturing lips in a heated kiss. Robin's arms clung to his shoulders for support as Chris kissed and stroked, Robin's legs quivering with stimulation and groaning in pleasure.

Chris leaned back for a moment and grinned. "You prefer Bottom or Top?"

Robin laughed. "Bottom. However, you scare the hell out of me Chris."

"I'm not that big."

"For a horse, no." Robin chuckled as he reached over and turned off the taps. "And I can't see with all this water in my eyes. Care to continue this elsewhere?"

"Oh yes." Chris purred stepping out of the shower and grabbing a towel and wrapping it around Robin's hips pulled him into the bedroom with it.

Chris sat on the edge of the bed and brought Robin between his legs, running the towel over him for a cursory dry before dropping the towel and tugging Robin into bed.

Robin laughed as Chris straddled him on the bed, pinning his arms over his head and crushing Robin's mouth in a kiss. Robin arched into Chris, suddenly set on fire. This was a whole new side of Chris, and he found it entirely to his liking. Chris was quite a dominant presence in bed, and Robin felt swallowed alive and surrounded by the sheer masculine power Chris emanated.

It was similar to that comfort he'd felt as a child. Always knowing Chris was there to support him, his safety net when the world grew too hard to bear, his peace of mind knowing that no matter what happened, he had Chris to turn to. Robin began to cry against his will and clung to Chris' shoulders. Chris was his rock, his comfort, his happiness, his protection and his very soul.

"Robbie?" Chris asked concerned, and Robin just shook his head and pulled Chris against his chest.

"Love you so much." Robin said into the crook of Chris' neck, and Chris wrapped around Robin and nibbled his earlobe a little before lifting his head so Robin could see him.

"I love you too. I always have Little Bird." Chris smiled kissing Robin's tears on his cheeks, his own growing moist. Robin had always been his confidence, his inspiration, his drive to push himself harder, his comfort and his freedom of spirit. He felt alive and whole when Robin looked at him; there wasn't anything on earth he wouldn't do for this man.

"I've been so miserable without you." Robin sniffed, his past catching up to him as he released years worth of grief and longing into Chris' chest. This was all he'd ever wanted, to be at Chris' side again.

Chris just held him close, he could see the ache in Robin's eyes, and the torment of his life was a scar that was suddenly painfully evident. Chris has missed him, yes, but his life really had been a

happy one. He'd had his family beside him to love him when times got tough. Robin had had no one to hold him through the tears, to support him when he was afraid, to encourage him to grow. Yet, he'd managed to not let the pain crush him, and he found his way home again.

Chris would never let Robin face the world alone anymore. He'd protect this wonderful person in his arms until his dying breath; love this person the way he should have always been loved; the way he had been loved since the day they'd met all those years ago.

"No more Robbie, no more. You're home, and I'll be damned if I see you hurt anymore." Chris said smoothing Robin's hair back from his face, and Robin smiled through his tears.

"Home. You are my home, Chris." Robin almost choked on his words they were so full of emotion.

Chris smiled. "My best friend, my blood-brother, my family, and my heart. Little Bird, you are not just my home, you're my soul."

That statement caused a whole new set of tears as Robin grappled Chris to his chest. He'd walk through fire and hell for this man who made him feel so profoundly loved and wanted. Even if he'd always hated "little bird" it was suddenly growing on him rapidly when Chris called him that with affection.

They clung together, mouths exploring each other with fire and need as they kissed until they were gasping for air. Robin's hands running up and down Chris' back, kneading muscles with strong fingers and then getting lost in Chris' thick black hair when Chris slid down Robin's body and began using his lips in the most intimate of ways.

Robin was arched on the bed, his hands fisting in Chris' hair as Chris delivered sweet torture on his senses and Robin didn't hear Chris bang blindly for the nightstand for a moment, but he did gasp out loud with pleasure when suddenly slick fingers invaded in addition to lips devouring him.

Robin pressed into those fingers, moaning, nothing had ever felt so good in his life. Sex was not the same when it was done with a partner you didn't truly love. When love was involved, sex was taken to an entirely different level. Robin felt Chris sit up and when he reached for a box of condoms, Robin literally threw them across the room.

"Not with you. I've never had sex without them before. I want to feel only you." Robin insisted, and Chris smiled. It was habit to wear one; he'd never had sex without them before either, this experience would be something new for them both that they could share.

Chris coated himself, and Robin watched fascinated and highly scared for a moment. As much as he wanted this, he was nervous that that gleaming piece of metal was going to hurt not to mention Chris' size in general.

"It's not going to hurt, trust me." Chris said, circling the tip of his penis around Robin's opening, before guiding it home.

Robin arched his back right off the bed with a loud moan. "AH GOD! CHRIS!" Robin almost screamed, and Chris smiled, planting his hands on either side of Robin's head and gyrating his hips as he thrust slowly.

"That's what it's for." Chris grinned as Robin met his eyes. "Feels nice, doesn't it?"

Robin could only nod, lost in sensation. The ring seemed to strike places inside that made him see stars behind his eyes. Chris' slow torture as he moved in lazy, circular strokes was maddening.

"Oh god! Fuck me!" Robin groaned, and Chris complied, picking up his pace until they were literally crashing together, Robin making quite a lot of noise with vocal appreciation. He had no idea just how loud he was or how much he was fueling Chris' desire with his total abandon with pleasure.

When Robin kicked suddenly knocking Chris off his balance onto his back, Chris was stunned for a moment as Robin crawled on top and literally straddled his hips and seated himself completely, taking Chris into his body while he took over and bounced for all he was worth. It was Chris' turn to arch his back in pleasure as Robin took the lead. "Jesus Christ! Robin!" Chris grunted, his head thrown back in ecstasy. Robin was incredible, the way he moved, the way he felt, and the way he made Chris's insides shout with joy and wonder.

Chris reached forward and gripped Robin's erection and stroked while Robin grunted and moaned with exertion. He gasped and panted, and it wasn't long after Chris began stroking that Robin came hard and fast, coating Chris' chest with hot droplets. Robin began to crumble, and Chris quickly flipped them over; Robin was on his knees, his chest and face in the pillows as Chris desperately sought his own completion.

It wasn't long in this position and after a few hard thrusts; Chris was emptying himself deep within his lover with jerky body spasms of release. He collapsed out of breath beside Robin who just melted into the bed on his stomach as his knees slid back and his posterior lowered to the bed.

"I'm dead." Robin moaned into the pillows, and Chris chuckled and rolled over to face Robin.

"You don't seem dead."

"You're incredible. Holy hell, I'm not going to be able to move tomorrow. That was so good."

"I'll say. So have you changed your mind about my piercing?"

Robin just grinned. "You can keep it big boy." Robin waggled his eyebrows, and Chris laughed.

"I thought as much." Chris said leaning over to kiss a sweaty brow.

Robin closed his eyes and purred in the back of his throat unconsciously. "I am never leaving this bed, ever." He sighed, and Chris smiled leaning back from his kiss.

"Good, I sort of like you there myself. However, care to leave it long enough to shower with me?" Chris asked, and Robin nodded, and they both got up on shaky legs to take a shower.

They wandered from the bathroom wrapped in towels out to the kitchen where they ended up grabbing the nearest bag of chips and a couple of beers before settling on the sofa in front of a late night bad horror movie together.

After staving off the munchies and quenching thirsts, they had both ended up dozing off before Chris awoke and turned off the infomercial for some real estate get rich quick book and nudging Robin awake briefly before they shuffled off to bed together.

They didn't wake up until Naomi bounded onto the bed with them early the next morning. Robin almost fell out of bed with fright, and Chris only laughed, being used to Naomi's wake up calls.

"Holy He... Who let in the tornado?" Robin asked, censoring himself mid-swear as his heart settled to a normal rate again.

"Silly! Grandma is running late and asked if you could take me to school this morning Uncle Chris."

"Let me get dressed first. Go grab your backpack." Chris yawned.

"Why are you both naked?" Naomi asked, and Robin laughed.

"Our clothes were dirty sweetie." Robin answered seeing as Chris looked like a stunned deer in the headlights of an oncoming Mack Truck.

"We'd better lock the door in future, huh?" Robin asked as Naomi scampered off, and he crawled out of bed au natural to go and raid Chris' closet for a shirt. His were all still outside in his van.

He came out looking decidedly and deliciously domestic in just a large t-shirt and nothing else. Chris was pulling on a pair of pants and smiled. "Yes, we need to lock the door; I forgot about Naomi. Nice save."

"Well, it was true. I'm not putting those back on until I wash them and seeing as I have no pants... How about I make breakfast while you drop off pretty little girls at school?"

"Deal." Chris said grabbing his keys and planting a kiss on Robin's cheek. "I'll be back in twenty minutes or so."

Robin just smiled and headed into the kitchen while Chris took Naomi to school.

Chris walked into the house after dropping Naomi off, seeing Mary and Hope driving out to work on his way back. Robin was puttering about the kitchen, his long legs poking out from beneath Chris' borrowed t-shirt. Every time he reached above his head, a nice peak-a-boo shot of his smooth white posterior was revealed. Chris just shut the door and watched; Robin hadn't heard him come in.

"I may not have heard you, but I feel your eyes on my back, Christopher SilverWolf." Robin scolded playfully as he flipped the bacon frying in the pan.

Chris walked forward and squeezed a handful of the smooth pink flesh of Robin's rear. "You are so damn sexy in just my shirt." Chris purred as Robin looked at him and grinned.

"Glad you approve of my theft. I used your toothbrush too. I figured since you didn't mind sucking my dick like it was a melting Popsicle, my spit wasn't going to bother you in comparison." Robin quipped with a grin still flipping bacon.

Chris just lowered his head to Robin's shoulder and shook with laughter. "Ah God Robbie, you fucking retard! God I missed you!" Chris howled, and Robin just wrinkled his nose at Chris.

"You were only gone twenty minutes."

"You're always 'on' aren't you?"

"But of course Darling. Go sit, this is almost done. My boring bacon and eggs coming up." Robin said setting the bacon out on a paper towel to soak up the excess grease and quickly scrambling up some eggs in the same skillet.

Chris grabbed the ever-present bottle of Tabasco sauce out of the fridge and sat down at the table and liberally coated the eggs Robin set on his plate. Even as a child, Chris had always eaten his eggs buried in liquid fire. Robin smiled at the fond memory and seated himself opposite Chris, and both men practically inhaled breakfast.

After they finished, Chris rinsed their plates and stacked them in the dishwasher while Robin quickly raced outside to get his bags out of his van, glad that there were no nosy neighbors anywhere near the ranch and that the women had already left, because his backside was indeed bare as he crawled into the back to lug in the trash bags that held his clothes.

He dragged them into the bedroom, and Chris materialized to help put them away. "I've made you room in the closet and give me a minute to move some stuff around, and I'll have some drawers free for you in a minute." Chris smiled, and Robin fought fresh joyful tears.

"I feel so domestic. Honey, I'm home!" Robin cracked a joke to mask his emotional roller coaster, and Chris knew that classic block and just leaned over and kissed his cheek.

"And damn good to have you home. Who's the wife?" Chris teased right back, and Robin laughed as he hung up his shirts.

"Well considering it was my legs in the air, I was last night; hell let's face it, me most nights. I'm such a bottom boy."

Chris grinned as he cleared out drawers in the dresser. "That's good to know."

"I take it you prefer Top dancing?" Robin waggled his eyebrows at the bad pun. Chris groaned.

"That was bad even for you Robbie. But yes, when dancing, I like to lead the tango."

"I always thought the Paso Doble was Hotter." Robin grinned, and Chris just sighed. He'd forgotten how quick Robin was on his feet; he was even quicker now.

"I thought you said if it wasn't English you couldn't say or read it."

"I know a few things now. Taco, burrito, Loco."

"You are loco!" Chris laughed moving the last of his socks to a different Drawer. "All clear, where is your underwear buried, and I'll stack them in here."

"God, I dunno. One of those bags, I just shoved shit in there making my escape, and they sort of stayed like that. I just tipped the bags into dime Laundromats every few weeks so I didn't stink too badly. I've been living like a hobo."

Chris shivered. "No more Little Bird. Christ this shit is threadbare man. Let's just toss this stuff and go get you some new ones?"

"Oh new undies! Remember when you hated that as a Christmas present and now you get all excited over them?" Robin chuckled, and Chris nodded.

"Can I pick 'em?" Chris wagged his eyebrows, and Robin smirked right back.

"So long as you don't want me to get dental floss up my ass, also known as man thongs, you have a deal. I swear I don't know how people can wear shit like that. I'm always trying to dig my regular stuff out of the crack of my ass. Purposefully putting it up there makes no sense."

Chris nodded. "No thongs, I agree with you there. Tried on a pair once and thought I was going to die within the first half hour."

Robin laughed. "Me too, I think I lasted less. Fifteen minutes and they were in the men's room trash at the club, and I was bare under my jeans." He winked as he pulled on a pair of his better and less worn underwear and said jeans. Chris tilted his head and checked out Robin's behind.

"You fill out jeans Nice. What an ass!"

"Why thank you Big Man." Robin wiggled a little, grabbing one of his tank tops and changing out of Chris' shirt that was way too big for him. Wearing clothes that fit his frame, Chris whistled low, Robin really had a fabulous physique. He was lean and cut in all the right places. He had the classic swimmer's body, streamlined, long and graceful.

"Damn you got fucking gorgeous Robbie. Who knew my skinny as a rail, freckle faced little bird would turn into this."

"I can fire that right back at you, you realize. Last I remember you were a pudgy little boy covered in baby fat rolls. I certainly did not expect a brick-shithouse to greet me. Hubba, Hubba. You could bench press my bus! I mean I'm six-one, you make me feel like a dwarf. How tall are you?"

"Six-Six."

"Holy hell! No wonder I feel so short. I was taller than you once!"

"For about three months."

"I was still taller!" Robin grinned flopping on Chris' lap.

"True. Ready to head out?" Chris smiled, his hands naturally lopping around Robin's waist.

"Yep." Robin quipped and then squealed when Chris piggybacked him out to his truck. They were ten-year-old boys all over again.

It was quite comical watching the pair as they pushed the cart around the local Wal-Mart. Robin was in desperate need of necessities. Deodorant, a new toothbrush and dental floss sat in the cart as they entered the men's section and over to the racks of underwear. Chris held up a leopard print and wagged his eyebrows. Robin laughed. "No."

"Come on, be adventurous Mr. Tightly-Whities."

"I like my Tightly-Whities. Y-fronts man, Y-fronts. You ever try to use a urinal in fancy underwear? No thanks."

"For home?"

"You want me to get those, don't you?" Robin asked, and Chris grinned.

"For home only. Toss 'em here." Robin rolled his eyes and caught the underwear and tossed it into the cart along with a couple of six packs of his favorite fruit-of-the-loom briefs.

He turned to see a zebra print and what looked like heart polka dots had suspiciously ended up in the basket. "You perv."

Chris just laughed and walked around to the other side of the aisle. Robin followed chuckling silently.

A pair of new jeans ended up in the cart after that, and Chris disappeared for a moment while Robin was trying the jeans on and as the jeans got put into the cart, Robin noticed the rather large bottle of "intimate lubrication" from the pharmacy section.

"You are definitely a perv!" Robin laughed, highly amused with Chris' deviant personality.

"Would you rather without? I used all I had last night."

"Such a good boy, thinking of the comfort of my ass." Robin winked, and Chris smiled.

"But of course." Chris replied as they headed towards the checkout stands.

"Hey Chris!" a voice shouted, Robin didn't hear but turned when he noticed Chris pause and turn and raise up a hand in greeting. It was Martin from the big-brother program. He smiled as Martin walked over and smiled.

"I see you're still on speaking terms, not ready to beat him up yet?" Martin grinned at Robin and signed as he spoke, and Robin returned the smile and signed as he spoke back.

"Have you seen the size of him? I'm not stupid."

Martin laughed. "Do I take it from the domestic shopping spree, you're here to stay for a while?"

Robin nodded, and Chris looped an arm around his shoulders. "Indefinitely." Chris smiled fondly, and Martin winked.

"That's great news. I always knew if Chris was going to settle with any one it would be you Rob. You probably don't remember, but you laid me out flat once in fifth grade." Martin said to Robin who looked stunned.

"Oh my God. Martin Villalobos?"

"The same little shit. I learned my lesson."

Robin smiled. "We're all little shits in elementary. I hit first asked questions later."

"You had reason to with people like me bagging on you. Now that I work with handicaps, I see kids like me. and I want to drop kick them. I can't believe I acted like that sometimes. I'm really sorry for what it's worth."

"There's no need to apologize, but thanks." Robin smiled reaching over to hug Martin. "God it's good to be home again." Robin sighed returning to Chris' loose embrace.

"It's good to have you back, Robbie. You want to join our big brother program with Big Guy here? We could really use every volunteer."

"Count me in, you couldn't keep me away. I wish we'd have had something like that when I was little it would have helped."

"I know. Well, then I'll see you both next Sunday?"

"We'll be there." Chris said, and they both waved as Martin went back to his shopping, and the pair checked out and detoured to a local Mexican Food street corner walk-up diner and got a bag full of tamales and enchilada's, with extra jalapenos for Chris, to eat at a filthy outdoor resin picnic table for a quick lunch on the go.

"God I have no tongue left. I love it!" Robin gasped as he drained his soda in several long gulps.

"You've turned into a wimp! Where's my Robbie who could eat chili's right out of the bag?" Chris teased as he watched Robin work up a sweat with lunch.

"Blame Helen, the only spice in that house was Salt and Pepper. The woman could not eat any thing with flavor in it without complaining."

"Criminal. Just criminal. We'll train you back up."

"I can't fucking wait." Robin said tossing the trash away as they crawled back into the truck and headed over to the large chain craft store in the mini-strip mall that hadn't been there fifteen years ago. The town was still small, but had greatly expanded since he'd left.

Robin was a kid in a candy store going through the bead aisle. "I want everything in here. This is a beaded jewelry maker's Mecca!"

"It's close to the reservation; they get a lot of beads since it's pretty much a local hobby. Grandma even buys from here now. She said the same thing the first time she came here." Chris said watching Robin sort through the beads, selecting a large variety and tossing them into the cart. Next came a lot of wire and a new pair of wire cutters, Then he went over to the clay and added a good portion of modeling clay into the basket, a large bucket of powdered molding cement and a few tools Chris had no idea what they were for, but Robin obviously did as he sorted through them gleefully.

"I just need metal now, I already have a great cast iron pot I use to melt it in, do they have that here?"

"No clue. All I buy from here is paper and pens, you and Grandma are the crafters. Let's go to the information desk."

They went and sadly they didn't carry what Robin needed so they went over to the reservation where Grandma had always purchased her metals and stones. Robin got the ores he needed and

some beautiful quartz, turquoise, and agate stones for the jewelry centerpieces and went home after depleting over half of his earnings.

He felt so good blowing that sort of money; he'd never done it before. He wore a huge grin on his face all the way back into town, where they stopped at the Store to drop off his beads and metals. Since he'd be working out of the store itself it seemed silly to take it all home, just to turn around and bring it all back in the following morning.

The bell chimed, and Robin walked in with Chris loaded with bags, and Hope cheerfully waved and turned to the smartly dressed woman standing at the counter wearing one of Robin's beaded chokers.

"That's Robin, Frances. Make sure you look at him directly when you speak. Remember, he's deaf." Hope reminded, and Frances turned around all smiles.

"You my young man are Brilliant! I'm so glad I get to meet the genius himself!" She cheered as she stunned him with a hug.

"Uh, thank you." Robin blushed his hands still full of plastic bags. Chris just laughed and took the bags and carried them into the back workroom.

"No dear, thank you! All my life I've loved beaded jewelry. My great-grandmother was Navajo, and she always made me things to wear when I was little. When my husband and I moved here, this instantly became my favorite store in the world. You just made it more so!" She exclaimed almost bouncing up and down with delight.

"Wow, thanks." Robin blushed again, no one had ever raved like this about his jewelry before.

"So modest! You are an artist; there wasn't a piece of yours I didn't love. My husband loves you too. He much prefers me spending his money here than at tiffany's! You can keep diamonds, give me art to wear every day!" She laughed, and Robin turned eyes to Hope who was laughing behind the counter.

"Tell me you take custom requests."

"Sure, it's not a problem. Anything in particular?"

"Just something with rose quartz? Something delicate. I have this lovely pale pink Armani gown I want to wear to the Hospital fundraiser next month. If I bring you a swatch of the fabric and a picture of the neck line do you think that's enough?"

"Sure, I just picked up some quartz on the way here, I'm sure I can match color for you." Robin said getting fired up, his first custom request.

"Fabulous! I'll drop it by tomorrow, is a month enough time?"

"Plenty, a piece takes me roughly a week or two so it's not a problem. I'm glad you like my pieces, I don't know what to say."

"Ah, Hope you're right, he's such a dear! What a treasure find. I know once I show off your work at the country club you're going to have every lady there beating down your door. Promise to save me your best pieces?" She batted her eyes at him, and Robin chuckled.

"Okay." He grinned, and Frances paid for her rug and happily danced out of the store, climbing into her pristine black Jaguar and heading home.

"What happened here?" Robin asked stunned and smelling like expensive perfume that lingered after Frances' embrace.

"You nabbed your first stinking rich client Robbie. Her husband owns oil wells all over the southwest. They have more money than the Queen of England and the Catholic Church combined. Everyone copies Frances in this town, you're going to be busy." Hope smiled sipping her coffee from her stool behind the counter.

"Oh god. I need a drink." Robin flopped onto the other stool next to Hope.

"I told you no price tags dear. Let Frances offer what she thinks it's worth. She thinks she's getting a fabulous deal, and you walk out stinking of roses. It's a win-win scenario."

"I never thought I could do this as a living. It was just a hobby."

"Honey, you're good, really good. You are an artist. You were as a boy, and you're even better now. You make me proud little bird." Hope leaned over and kissed his cheek.

Robin just smiled. "God it's good to be home again!" He laughed as Chris tossed him a soda from the back fridge.

"It sure is Robbie, it sure is." He said holding up his own coke in a toast.

Robin grinned, held up his 7-Up and drank to the toast himself.

Things settled into a routine after that. Robin worked the same hours as Chris so they could drive in and leave together, which also made it so "Tribal Treasures" could stay open longer hours.

Hope opened up at nine in the morning and usually closed at five in the evening and all day Wednesday and Thursday, her slow days. Chris's parlor didn't open until two in the afternoon, since most of his clients came in late afternoons and evenings. He didn't close until after midnight most nights. Taking Sunday and Monday off as his slow days.

Robin came in with Chris and kept "Tribal Treasures" open the same hours as the parlor, running it by himself after Hope went home at five. He'd spend that time sitting at the counter, his projects laid out in front of him working away. Occasionally taking a break to head next door to see what Chris was doing to some insane idiot.

There was no way in hell he was letting Chris anywhere near him with a needle. He didn't mind being on the receiving end of that Prince Albert, he was certainly never going to sport one himself.

The only concession he made was an earring, and he currently wore a little silver hoop in it that Chris had given him after begging for days to let him pierce something on his lover.

Robin was considering a tattoo; Chris was really good there. His art was beautiful and he was quite popular in town and he had people coming in from all over after he had been featured in Tattoo Magazine. They were all doing quite well for themselves.

Robin could barely keep up with Frances' whims. He often remarked to Chris he could string his shit on a wire and the woman would pay him three grand for it, then all her friends would be in the next day asking for shit-on-a string. Chris just laughed, they laughed a lot actually, and life was wonderful again for them both.

They loved, they laughed, they danced to the radio late at night when they had a lull in customers, Well Chris danced to the radio, Robin just let him lead indulgently.

The diner Robin's mother used to work at was still just a block down the street and every night either Chris or Robin went to pick up dinner that Chris had called in from the paper menu they kept by the phone for take-out, and they sat over the counter eating out of Styrofoam compartment lidded containers. Robin had gotten his pallet back for spicy food after just a few months and once again munched on chili peppers straight from the local farmer's market as snack food.

On Sunday's they volunteered in the Big Brother program. Some days it was organized sports, some days it was craft classes, some days they all just piled the kids in a rented bus and headed to a museum or amusement park. It was fulfilling, it made Robin feel like he'd finally done something good with his life. Giving back to others what the SilverWolf's had always given to him in his youth. Life had come full circle.

Robin grinned at his newest finished pieces laid before him on the counter. It was just about closing time, and he pocketed the special items as he shut up his side and wandered through the beaded curtain to see Chris putting away his instruments as his final customer left for the night.

Robin walked over and locked the door and strolled lazily toward Chris.

"I know that look Robin. You're up to something." Chris said pausing and leaning up against his counter, his arms folded over his chest.

"Of course I am." Robin smiled and his hand went to his pocket, and whatever he held was fisted and hidden. Chris' eyes went wide as Robin went down on one knee and took Chris' hand.

"We can't get married Chris. But that doesn't stop me from loving you as if we were. You're everything to me and you'd make me insanely happy if you'd wear this as my husband in spirit if not in reality." Robin said brining out the intricately detailed silver ring. It was a pack of tiny wolves running as the band and tiny chips of turquoise were painstakingly shaped and made into the eyes of the wolves.

"Oh God Robbie! That's Beautiful!" Chris burst into sudden joyful tears and fell to the floor with Robin to crush him in a hug. "I love you so damn much! I've been your husband in my heart since the day you came home."

Robin cried as he returned the embrace. "I know. Me too." Robin sniffed leaning back and pulling out a smaller duplicate ring from his pocket and handing it to Chris, held out his own hand. Chris smiled as he slipped it on Robin's ring finger.

"I am so looking forward to the honeymoon later tonight." Chris grinned, and Robin laughed.

"Oh you can count on that Big Man. I love playing cowboy and Indians with you."

"Save a horse, ride a cowboy." Chris winked, and Robin grinned.

"Funny, Aren't I the one usually riding?"

"Turn of phrase moron."

"Such a thing to call your husband, I'm wounded." Robin fake pouted.

"You'll never get me with that pout, I know better Little Bird." Chris said leaning over to kiss Robin until he melted into floor tiles.

"Ready to go home?" Chris asked and Robin just reached over and tugged on Chris' belt.

"Maybe in a few minutes. I'll never make the Drive." Robin smirked, they were hidden behind the counter after all and the doors were locked.

Chris smiled with intent and tugged his belt free as they made love on the cold tile floor of the parlor.

They didn't manage to leave until well after midnight, stopping at the all-night fast food drive-thru for munchies on the way home. Chris admiring his ring in the streetlights, munching on French fries out of the bag while Robin, his 'husband', drove them both home.

Life was more than perfect.

"If you don't mind, before I take you into the office, I'd like to stop in town first. My jeweler, you know the artist friend of mine I raved about? It's his birthday today, and I just have to drop off his present first. It's a surprise. Besides, you'll get to see such wonders, he's truly a brilliant artisan, not to mention the dearest man in the world. Such a sweetheart he is." Frances Walker said to her passenger as she pulled up in front of Tribal Treasures and parked.

"I'm sure he's everything you say Mrs. Walker, your taste is impeccable." The woman replied, dripping with almost patronizing sweetness. Her firm wanted this deal to represent the Walker Estates, there was no way in hell she was going to screw this up, they were potentially huge clients.

The door chimed, and Frances burst in all smiles. Robin had his back turned to the door, and Frances knew just to walk over and tap him on the shoulder. He turned and smiled brightly and then froze as his eyes landed on the woman coming into the store behind Frances.

"Aunt Helen!" Robin gasped; he hadn't seen her in over a year and a half since he'd left Chicago penniless.

"You!" Helen began then censored herself and smiled, it didn't fool Robin a minute. "Robin, dearest how have you been?"

"Like you give a shit? Not likely." Robin snorted, and Frances was stunned.

"How to talk to your only living relative Robin dearest."

"Don't give me that Helen. It didn't work when I was twelve, and it's not going to work now. You're only being nice to me because you're trying to get a client. Frances, I'd run, not walk, the other way."

"ROBIN! You ungrateful little brat! After all I did for you!" At this outburst, Chris walked over and stood in the doorway of his parlor connecting to the shop. He remembered this bitch.

"After all you did? Gee where should I start? Take me away from a home I was happy in just because you thought it would look bad on your reputation to have a nephew living with people you thought beneath you. Then you just toss me into a boarding school because you didn't give a rat's ass about me and couldn't handle a severely depressed deaf ten-year-old boy who'd just lost his mother and then the only other family he'd ever known. You totally ignored me in High School until you found out I was gay, had me thrown in a mental institution for it for a year, lying to them saying I was suicidal just so your little faggot of a nephew wouldn't mar your oh so pristine image. I'm surprised I wasn't suicidal living with you! Then after I graduated you kept me confined to the house day in and day out, I had to sneak out windows at three in the morning just to have human contact and try to scrape up every single penny I could find in the gutter until I finally cracked and left penniless to whore myself cross-country to get home again. I ate DOG FOOD to survive. Yeah, you did a whole lot for me Aunt Helen, sorry if I'm not more happy to see you."

Frances who had known the tale turned livid eyes toward Helen. "So you're the infamous Aunt that thinks Native Americans all live in poverty stricken pow-wows and what was it you said Robbie? They're worse than "ghetto niggers" because they don't even pay taxes?"

"That's tame."

"Mrs. Walker, I would never..."

"Right. I know people like you Ms. Smythe-Wood. Turn on the charm in public and then behind closed doors are the most bigoted, two-faced people in the world. I know Robbie; I know he did indeed go through all he said he did. As his 'only living relative' I certainly wouldn't have let MY nephew suffer humiliation, nor have him committed, nor make his life so miserable he'd almost starve just to come back to the people he knew loved him. No madam, I think our business is over. We Walkers don't deal with two-faced bigots. Oh and by the way, this "ghetto-nigger" pays taxes."

"You're...?" Helen looked floored and could only stammer as her past came back to haunt her.

"Oh yes. I may not look it madam, But, I'm part Navajo and my Husband is Full-blooded Choctaw and the family only took the surname "Walker" during the signing of the "1830 treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek" when the Choctaw Nation became U.S. Citizens while still retaining their Heritage within the Choctaw Nation and then deeded their Arkansas lands West of the Mississippi to the Government. I suggest knowing a little of your client's backgrounds in the future."

Robin was trying very hard not to laugh. Frances was a formidable force when she was passionate about something. He must have had to tell her his story a dozen times or more; she treated him like his real aunt should have and had often remarked how it was a crime Robin wasn't hers to spoil. She did anyway. Robin loved her; she was his favorite and best client and over the past year had also become a very good friend.

"Robin, how many other people have you lied to about me?"

"Oh please Helen, the only person lying in the store is you. Shall I have my husband call you a cab?" Robin asked as Chris strode forward and over to Robin behind the counter. His towering height and tattooed frame almost making Helen quiver with freight.

"Husband?" Helen asked stunned.

"Oh yes, my name is Robin SilverWolf-Wood now, but then had you cared one iota about me you might have already known that." Robin grinned leaning into Chris.

"You can't be married."

"We are, we took a little trip to Hawaii last winter, but that really didn't matter it's just a piece of legal paper, it's the love that counts, the love I came back home to. I've never been happier."

Helen just stood there, mouth hanging open and wide-eyed.

"Shall I call you a cab?" Chris asked, and Helen just shook her head and literally fled from the store. The door hadn't even made a swing before all three people within busted up laughing.

"OH GOD! That felt soooooo GOOD!" Robin laughed as Frances leaned across the counter grinning at him.

"I'll bet it did. I thought she seemed false right off the bat."

"She is. Why on earth was she here?"

"Her law firm wanted to be Bill's Executors of Estate. Fat chance now." Frances grinned.

"I'll say." Robin chuckled; he felt vindicated at last.

"Goodness, with all the commotion I almost forgot why I came in here. Happy Birthday Robbie!" Frances said handing him a card. Inside were two tickets for a two-week cruise to Acapulco.

"Whoa! Frances I can't take this."

"Yes, you can. You and Chris go have a ball, and I hear the stone bead market down there is fabulous."

"You devious woman, you just want more goodies."

"But of course dear!" Frances laughed as Robin leaned over the counter to hug her.

"Thanks, and here I just finished this, and it's on the house for you." Robin said handing her a silver and blue beaded bracelet, which he fastened around her wrist.

"You spoil me Robbie."

"But of Course Dear." Robin threw right back at her. Frances laughed and sashayed out the door admiring her new trinket, and Robin grinned up at Chris.

"A cruise! Holy hell!" Robin squealed, and Chris grinned.

"Let's hope we don't get sea sick."

"We'll pack Dramamine. I want you in a Speedo on the beach, and my digital camera sucking up batteries as I abuse it." Robin waggled his eyebrows, and Chris chuckled.

"Wanna do some Sailfish fishing?"

"Where would we put one if we caught one?"

"Over the mantle?"

"Tacky, and we don't HAVE a mantle."

"In the back of the closet for a garage sale?"

Robin laughed, "That's probably more than likely unless you hang it in your shop. But knowing you, you'd tattoo and pierce it."

"Now that's a good idea!" Chris was envisioning an entertaining showpiece. Robin just rolled his eyes.

"Go back to work you retard. I was KIDDING."

"Too late, I'm gonna tell everyone it was your idea."

"No one would believe you." Robin grinned going on tiptoe to kiss Chris.

"True. I married Mr. Straight Laced Smart Ass."

"And I married a man with a needle fetish. Go, off with you my handsome fellow. Go prick people."

"I got a prick for you Birthday Boy."

Robin grinned. "Later gorgeous, Daddy is working."

Chris just laughed and headed back to his shop. Robin went back to work on his projects highly amused and having one damn fine Birthday. It had only been a year since he came "home" and it was like he'd never left. He really was happier than he'd ever been and every day just seemed to get better.

End