

## Piece by Piece

I made it safely to the bottom of the tower, and then let myself down backwards off the edge of the piling. I hung for a second before letting go to land on the ground a few feet below.

As soon as I turned away from the concrete face, Brin was there. She grabbed me, and hugged me tight. There was a note of distress in her voice.

“Are you ok?”

“Umm, yes. It’s not a life event I hope to experience again, though.”

She squeezed me tighter and then let go, stepping back. I asked her the million-dollar question.

“Is it the same?”

“It looks like it to me. It does the same thing.” She held out the recovered cube, once again palm out. As I was reaching into my pocket to pull out the original one, Bear spoke up.

“It isn’t glass, for sure. It landed on a rock, and bounced. No damage. Not even a scratch.”

“Wow. I was wondering about that when I knocked it off and saw it fall.”

I retrieved the other one from my jeans pocket. I put it into Brin’s outstretched hand, next to the other one.

As soon as the two were in close proximity, they clicked together of their own accord, two adjacent faces mating like magnets. I didn’t see anything happen, but Brin reacted, jerking slightly.

“Woah!”

Bear and I responded in sync.

“What?!”

She stared down at the blocks with wide eyes, and then looked up and outward, focusing on our surroundings before answering. It only took a second or two.

“I was right. They *do* talk to each other! I *can* see farther!”

She looked back at us, but this time she didn’t raise the blocks. It would appear she didn’t need to, as I could see her eyes shift from me to Bear, and back again. Her smile was wide, and beautiful to behold. There was a profound joy contained in it. I urged her to describe it.

“What’s different?”

She continued to look around, and didn’t comment right away. Bear and I waited. It was pretty clear she was trying to make sense of it before she answered. She looked back down at the joined cubes in her hand.

“It was two separate lights until you put the other one in my hand. Then it was one light, right when they clicked together. It wasn’t...wasn’t any brighter to look at for me, but now I can see farther away than before. Like, past both of you, where you’re standing. And there’s more color now.” She looked directly at me. “Your eyes are blue. I couldn’t be sure of that with just the one.”

There was something in her voice as she said it. There was a lot going on in her, I could tell, but it was deep. There weren’t a lot of visible ripples on the surface. It made me want to expand the miracle as fast and as wide as I could, though.

“We should go look for the last one. I have to go back to the grove, though. I need to figure out the direction if....”

Brin interrupted me.

"No need. It's over there." She turned and pointed into the woods beyond the open space the towers were stepped through. "I couldn't see it before you gave me the second one, but now I can."

Once again I felt flat-footed mentally, trying to hang new information onto a constantly shifting understanding. Bear was quicker.

"So the more we get, the easier the others are to see for you?"

Brin did that side-to-side thing with her head before answering.

"This time, anyway. Is it a rule if it's only happened once so far?"

Bear seemed to reappraise Brin before addressing her question.

"Fair point."

She didn't hesitate, just turned away and started towards the distant trees. She walked with confidence, as if it didn't occur to her that we wouldn't follow.

It didn't. I grabbed the wheel-barrow, and Bear and I waded through the tall grass in pursuit.

She disappeared into the tree-line without stopping before we'd even caught up with her. My first impulse was to call out to her, asking her to wait. I didn't though. I'm pretty sure she wouldn't have even if I had. Everything about her body language was shouting about her release from limitation. I dragged the wheel-barrow through the first few trees and stopped. I hesitated only long enough to snag my bow and a few arrows off of the top of it. Bear didn't wait for me, so he was a few yards ahead.

We made our way through the trees in that order. We didn't catch up to her until she'd stopped and was stooped over, retrieving something from the mix of ground cover and dead pine needles. She held it up in triumph for us to see, and then brought the third cube down, mating it with the others in her other hand.

Once again, I didn't see anything happen, but it only took a few turns of her head to look around before she let out a scream of delight. It might have been the most gorgeous sound I'd ever heard. She matched eyes with me, and she smiled at me with more wattage than I'd ever received from another human being. Then she rushed at me. I had just enough time to drop my bow and arrows before she leaped up, wrapping her arms around my neck and her legs around my hips. I caught her in return as she started to speak, managing to stay upright as I held her tighter. Her mouth was next to my ear as she described it.

"It's gone, Jake. The dark is gone. I can see the sky through the trees, I can see everything! I can see again! All of it!"

I couldn't help it. I could feel tears start to slide down my own cheeks as she drew her head back so she could look into my eyes. There were tears on her face as well.

"You did this for me."

I started to shake my head, but she stopped me with a frown and her next words.

"You did! You *got* me here, and gave me the chance to have this. Whatever *this* is, I don't care. How can I care about that? I love you."

Then she kissed me, and I could feel all of the emotions coursing through her in it. My body responded for sure, and most of my mind was also lost to it. I don't think that either of us even factored in that Bear was standing right there.

I'm going to be utterly honest here, Reader. I don't really want to. I'd rather just tell you that this was the best thing that had ever happened to me in my life so far. And it was, really. But the one

immutable thing that I've learned about life (and is etched on my soul at this point) is that it is a mixed bag, always. There is *never* a hundred percent win.

So while I wanted wholly lose myself in this intense intersection with Brin, there was a tiny part of me that could only see the three cubes, and what they represented. This wasn't a healing. It wasn't a repair or restoration of something lost, not really.

It was like...a treatment. Like dialysis or insulin, it was an outside remedy for an inside malady. I could feel the realization taint my tears of joy, and the streaks they left down my cheeks grew just that little bit colder.

The kiss ended, and she slid down me as we released each other in a controlled separation. I watched her face carefully, wondering if she could feel any of my reserve. It didn't look like it, which made sense. She was high on the result still, and internal analysis didn't seem likely to happen anytime soon. I was relieved. I knew that I'd never articulate any of this to her. Better to live in the now, because it was what we had, and it was good.

As soon as her feet were back on the ground, she was moving again though. Her gaze left mine and focused outwards. Her words to us were almost like an after-thought.

"Let's get out of these trees. I want to see the sun."

And away she marched again towards the tree-line, and the road.

I stopped only long enough to retrieve my dropped items, but when I stood up again I could see that Bear hadn't immediately followed her this time. He was looking at me. It wasn't clear what he was thinking, so I asked.

"What? And spare me that 'Romeo' shit."

His face was impassive, but his question was more cold water in mine.

"You know what you need to do, right?"

It's amazing what perceptive people can distill down to the least amount necessary to communicate something complex in a compact interrogative. I did get what he was asking. I met his eyes.

"Yes. Keep it secret. Keep it safe."

He gave a slight smile, and nodded.

"Ok."

Then we both hurried after her.