

### Part Three

#### Look What Love Has Done

Brin pulled away from Jake after a time. Not because she wanted to, but because she wasn't quite ready to go where they'd go if she didn't. I mean, she wasn't, right?

She could see he didn't want her to either. It was written everywhere on him, a certain place more obvious than others.

But he smiled his smile at her and turned away slightly into the curtain of darkness beyond him, the limit of her sight with the two cubes she had. She imagined it was to both hide his desire, as well as pocket the latest cube she'd passed to him before their make-out session.

That was him. She could feel his love for her radiating off of him every waking moment, but it was always punctuated by his will to keep her safe, and do what was necessary.

It had made her mad at first. Then it had become a burden.

But that had dwindled to nothing, and now it had become a fire in her that was getting bigger the more time she spent with him.

She hated that her love for him hadn't come to her without the slow u-turn. It would have been so much better if it had seized her fully formed already, like his for her.

Was she ready, though? For them to...?

No. Life wasn't like that, and she wasn't like that, and this fucked up version of the current world wasn't like that....

She teetered, because all that didn't seem to stack up high enough right now. Maybe she should just tackle him, and do what they both wanted to do.

He turned back, and offered out his hand.

"Let's get back."

It was a close thing, but in the end, she grasped it and they made their way back to the road.

Bear was nowhere to be seen, but that was nothing new. Whenever they went on their prospecting trips, he'd always watch them go from their departure point, but would then relocate to a hidden place with their belongings. He was always line of sight to their return point, and would join them as they took up their journey again. This time was no different. He pulled the wheel-barrow out from behind a huge oak tree not far from the road's shoulder and joined them without comment.

It wasn't long before she realized that Jake was back in "leader" mode. His focus was no longer exclusively on her. She wasn't really clear on *why* this was irritating, just that it was. How could he go from where they'd been less than ten minutes ago to some other state so quick? She was still suffused with the feel of his hands on her. How could *he* not be?

He spoke.

"We should do the experiment before we go any farther."

Bear didn't offer anything, just diverted to the roadside and parked the wheel-barrow. He shrugged off his pack and knelt to dig through it for something, coming up with a collapsible shovel a few moments later.

This just increased her frustration. Why was Bear so passive? Why did he defer to Jake like that? What was the point of burying them, anyway?

She could feel other protestations start to grow in her, but something else inside stepped in the way. It was something that she'd said herself, not all that long ago.

*You are mine, and I'm yours.*

It didn't put the fire of irritation within her out, but it doused it enough to keep her silent as Jake and Bear went about the task of burying varying numbers of cubes deeper and deeper into the dirt. She let them know as they went from white lights, to dim, to gone.

They celebrated her final ruling. She didn't, though. She couldn't. Even as they exhumed their treasure and resumed their journey, she knew what was coming.

He would ask her to leave it all in the ground. He would tell her it was temporary, and he would believe it. Maybe it even would be.

It would come down to whether she trusted him enough to willingly go back into the black.

She remembered waking up in the hospital. Her parents had been there, but she'd only had their voices to confirm it, as well as the smell of her mother's perfume. The dark had taken her prisoner, and her visual memories ended at the sight of her father's horrified expression as he stared beyond her right shoulder.

Then, the dark had ruled. She could still see in her head, but everything beyond the accident was her making it up based on old mind movies and her four remaining senses. That was, until the incremental miracle of those first few little clear blocks.

It had been one of the hardest things she'd ever had to do when she'd handed back the first one to Jake to help him locate the second atop the tower. She'd gone back into that black world, with nothing to see but the two white sparks on their eventual intercept course.

Could she be blind again, even for a short time, if he asked her to?

She didn't know, so she did the best she could to put it down until it came time to choose for real.

It didn't take long. She thought later that if he'd waited a little bit longer, maybe the outcome would've been different. Maybe she could've said yes.

They were walking together ahead of Bear, who was taking his turn pulling the cart when Jake turned to her.

"Brin, I think...."

She was as surprised by the vehemence in her reply as he was.

"Yes! I know what you think!"

He blinked at her, a little lost before trying regain the thread.

"I just...."

She felt her fear expand, and because she had no desire to flee from him, fight was the only thing left, and she knew she was good at it.

"You want me to give it all up, right? Just for a little while. Just until you figure out whatever it is that will make you feel better about the way forward. Am I wrong?"

They'd both stopped, and stood facing each other on opposite sides of the segmented yellow line that went from what was behind to what was ahead. Bear had also stopped, looking uncomfortable.

Jake didn't shrink back, once his initial surprise dissipated. She could see he was trying to broadcast calm at her as well as make his point. It was both endearing and infuriating, yet the latter was a clear winner.

"If he's there, and *if* he's willing to help, he still knows about your injury. Won't he see it, if you are still carrying them?"

"He doesn't know me well enough, Jake. At all, really. Don't try to take this away from me."

He looked hurt, but didn't stop until later on, when he'd realized he'd lost before he had even started.

And so it went. Point and counter-point, as her fear of the dark spoke for her against his diminishing will to confront it. She would never be able to recall the specifics of the argument later, except her last statement, which was just a repeat.

"He doesn't know me. *He* won't be able to tell."