

Shortcut

They had abandoned her with no guilt whatsoever. They left her on the side of the gravesite – which she helped uncover, thank you! - to dangle her feet six feet above the empty box that once held Dice. Not to mention that both Marcus and Dice had wings now. Wings! The guys she had grown up with, the Amun brothers, both sported wings on their backs. How did that happen? When did things go all berserk?

She left the cemetery wondering where everyone went. Marcus, Dice and that huge gold man were there one minute and gone the next. Marcus did, however, tell her that he'd be back for her. He knew where she lived. It didn't bother her to spend time in the cemetery. In fact, she rather enjoyed it. But, she wasn't going to wait around forever for him.

The trip to Egypt didn't go at all how she had planned. She thought that she would have memories to share with Marcus for the rest of her life. Good memories. She couldn't have known the memories that she would bring back were those of Marcus transforming into a human bat. They were all doing fine up to the point where they went into that damned pyramid. Then all hell broke loose. Everything changed. Marcus got weird and she was no longer enjoying the trip. Just like she wasn't enjoying sitting on the edge of a recently uncharneled grave. She glanced at the Pleurant standing at the foot of the grave. Of course, he was weeping. At least someone was doing their job.

She stood up at the side of the massive hole in the ground and dismissed the five statues. The four saints moved slowly back to the mausoleum they guard and the Pleurant went to weep at the grave she had disturbed him from. It was a bit of a walk back home. The cemetery was dark except where the moon was illuminating the path way. Leaves were flitting to and fro across the concrete path where the wind had asked them to dance. She noticed two cats chasing cemetery rats near a gravestone to the far right. The cats were adorable, yet deadly, while chasing their prey. How could something so evil be so darned cute? She looked up to the moon shining brightly above her. *It sure would be nice to have wings right now*, she thought to the twinkling stars in the night sky.

She hadn't heard from Justin since she got back. Come to think of it, she hadn't seen Micah, either. Whether she liked it or not; she always saw Micah. If there was one thing she could count on, it was that all of her irritations were constantly in the forefront and visible. Micah was one of those irritations. She was going to head to their house to see what they were up to. Even though Micah could be a pain in the ass, it would be nice to have some company right now. Even if it was bad company. But, she decided it was too late in the evening to go bothering people at their home. So she walked the rest of the way home.

She was still on her period. It was an uncomfortable walk as she battled slight cramps. She had slid into black jeans before the walk out to the cemetery. *Way to plan ahead*, she thought. She was going to wear her white jeans but then thought better of it since she knew she would be around

dirt in the cemetery. It would seem that's all she plays in lately. Dirt or sand. *What a fun existence I have*, she thought as she turned the corner onto her street.

She pulled her cell phone out of her back pocket to text...who? Who was she going to text? Everyone that she would normally text has now disappeared. Marcus was her main text buddy but he flew the coop. Literally. He flew away. Dice hasn't answered a text of hers in almost two years. She would text Justin or Micah, but she remembered that it was a little bit too late to be bothering anyone. She looked at the white screen of her cell phone with the little icon to the bottom left awaiting her texted words when she realized there really was no one to text. She turned her phone off and returned her phone into her back pocket. "Well...I tried," she said out loud. She continued along the sidewalk until she was in front of her house. She looked up to the sky not only to look at the stars, but to wonder where her best friends were. She wondered if she was going to have to gather new best friends now that her old best friends had other duties. They obviously have no time for her anymore. They seemed to have other priorities nowadays.

She had never smoked a cigarette in her life, but if someone were to offer her one this very moment...she'd smoke it. Hell, she'd even smoke a joint right now if it was offered to her. It figures that Micah was nowhere around when she really could use him.

Her parents were inside the house having a very loud conversation. She wasn't sure (nor did she care) if it was an argument or just a really loud talk between the two of them. She sat on the front porch to wait the storm out.

She sighed. Not a sigh of relief that all has gone well. It was more a sigh of confusion. She had no way of knowing which way to go next. Not that she was a completely organized person as a whole. She just liked to know if something good was about to happen, or if something bad was about to happen. She wanted to be – at the very least – prepared for whatever would come next.

What came next was Marcus landing on the porch next to her from above. He didn't jump down from the roof of the portico, it was a landing. Like a snowflake falling from the sky. *He's a flake, alright*, she thought as she asked, "Where in the hell did you guys go?"

"I intended to follow Dice and the other guy, but I lost them by the time I got over Lake Grail. It's like they just disappeared. So, I came back to look for you at the cemetery and you were gone." explained Marcus.

Shortcut still couldn't get over Marcus being able to fly. She stared at his wide, expansive and very black set of wings. Was he always going to have wings like this? "What if my Mom and Dad come out here and see you with those flappers?" she said as she nodded toward his visible set of wings.

"Oh, yeah," he replied as he looked at his wings almost forgetting that he even had them, "I suppose we should go somewhere a little more private."

"Can you take passengers, or would I just weigh you down?" she asked Marcus.

"I'm not even sure. They seem pretty strong, though." he answered, "Try jumping on my back. You know, piggy-back style. We'll see if I can lift up from the ground with you on my back." he said.

She did just that. He stood facing away from her and spread his arms and his wings anticipating her jumping on his back. She jumped on like she did when they were children. She clasped her arms around his shoulders just below the neck and wrapped her legs around his mid-section. He then grabbed onto her legs and lifted off into the open sky. His wings were strong. Shortcut hardly weighed anything to begin with. She was hardly noticeable while she was riding on his back.

"If you drop me so help me, God...I'll beat you to a pulp when I get out of my coma." she yelled in his ear. She had to sort of yell to battle the forceful wind in her face as Marcus flew up above the houses in her neighborhood.

"Keep yelling so that everyone around will know we're up here," Marcus yelled back.

With Shortcut now on his back, he was getting visions of statues and inanimate objects coming to life around his best friend. She had gained this talent to breathe an essence into inorganic, non-man-made items during an accident that had caused her death for a few moments. When she had been brought back to life, she began sharing her gift of resurrection with anything and everything in her vicinity. He also received visions of her sex life – or lack thereof. And he was getting visions of the object of her desire. It wasn't Marcus. It was, however, someone that he was well acquainted with. His brother, Dice.

"Where are we going?" she asked him very loudly in his left ear.

"Not far. To a place you're comfortable in," he answered as he circled around the cemetery below.

Shortcut liked that Marcus knew her so well. This time. At other times it aggravated her that he knew her so well. In fact, she tried so hard to do the opposite of what she would normally do because she didn't want Marcus to be able to figure her out so easily. It was a game she liked to play.

He landed on top of a mortuary with a flat roof and then carefully knelt so she could climb off of his back easily. "Well, that's great. But, how am I supposed to get down from here? You're the one with wings. Not me." she said with her hands on her hips.

"Oh, come on. You like being manly. You can jump from here. But, why do you need to be on the ground? Is there something down there that you need to get to?" his question wasn't totally out of the ordinary. Why did she need to get to the ground level? They just needed private time. It didn't have to be on the ground. She supposed if she was going to continue to be Marcus's best friend, she was going to have to alter her way of thinking a bit to fine tune into his new, yet weird, way of thinking of things. She conceded to his explanation and sat right down on top of the mortuary. Her jeans weren't thick enough to stop the cold from penetrating right through to her ass.

“Okay, I’ll ask it again. How are you going to hide those wings of yours from the general public? They’re pretty large.” she said as she stared at his new appendages.

“I actually don’t have any reason to stick around anymore,” he said as he bowed his head either in shame or sorrow or both. He wasn’t really sure.

“Sure you do,” she was trying to accentuate the positive.

“No. I don’t. Not with Dice gone from here. I’m not sure he’ll be coming back.”

“You still have your Grandparents. You still have school. You have me!” she wasn’t sure if he was buying what she was selling; hope.

“I suppose two out of three ain’t bad.” he said as he looked directly at her. She wasn’t sure she could get used to the lavender eyes after all of these years of seeing brown ones. Admittedly, they creeped her out. And it was tough to creep out Shortcut.

“I’m not sure what you mean. Are you going to quit school? I’m sure we could find some way to hide your wings for a couple of ho...”

He cut her off in mid-sentence.

“My grandparents are dead.” he said matter-of-factly.

She didn’t know what to say. She had known Patricia and Gerald Amun for almost two years now on a daily basis. She had gotten used to Marcus’s Grandmother’s smile. And the lady could cook! When Marcus’s grandmother offered Shortcut something to eat, Shortcut did not decline. She actually was silently wishing Mrs. Amun would offer some of her tasty food.

“Why are they dead? What happened to them?” she was in shock.

“When they told me about Dice being dead, and they weren’t sympathetic at all about it, I went crazy. I don’t even know why I went crazy. I couldn’t control my emotions at all. I just know I wanted them dead. I wanted them to pay for letting Dice die on me while we were in Egypt. I wanted...no...I needed to see them in as much pain as they were putting me through.” He was relaying this all without looking at her this time. He was, instead, looking out over the dark cemetery.

“Do I even want to know how they died? I mean...was it by jumping out of a window? Was it by falling down the stairs? Did you hold a pillow over their faces?” she couldn’t believe Marcus, one of the most tender guys she knew, was about to confess to a double homicide.

“Not even close. I wish it was like that. What I put them through will be cauterized in my memory forever.” he said with more remorse than he thought he had.

“Oh, man,” she whispered. She honestly didn’t know what to say. So she said what was immediately on her mind, “are you going to kill me, too?”

He swung around to look at her directly once more. He couldn't believe that question just came out of her. "Of course not. What a dumb question. Geez, Shortcut!"

He relayed the confrontation between his grandparents and him in his grandfather's study. He told her that his grandparents didn't even seem like they were sorry that Dice died. They told him like it was some news from another country. Like the price of gas had just risen in Bangladesh. Dice was their grandson. They should've been crying. His grandfather never cried while his grandmother didn't even cry until the end when she knew it was her time to leave this phase of life and enter the next. Her apparent death. He told Shortcut about how the rage took him over. How he barely even remembered the murders until he was on the windowsill about to leave the study. He looked back at his grandparents and it was at that moment that he realized that they were elements from a past life. A life he no longer had possession of. He didn't feel one bit sorry for them.

Shortcut knew this had to be upsetting to Marcus. She absolutely knew that he loved his Grandmother. He would talk about her all the time. What was she supposed to do with this new information?

"Okay. I was just asking. You know how I like to be prepared. If you ever do feel a murdering rampage coming about, you'll warn me?" she asked him. She was half kidding and half serious. She truly wanted to know that he would give her some sort of advanced warning before slaughtering her in the same manner he slaughtered his own family.

"I promise I will try to warn you," he said. He was half kidding, half serious as well. He didn't know if he even had any control over any kind of warning system. To be honest, when he got mad at his grandparents it wasn't even him causing the chaos. It was someone else. Or, something else.

"So, now what? Do we try to find Dice?" she asked. She was desperately attempting to change the subject.

"Yeah. I have to go find him. He's the only thing I have left in this world."

"Oh, gee, thanks," she snorted.

"You know what I mean." he said, immediately apologetic. "I have no reason to stay here. With my Grandparents gone, I don't even think I have a home to go to. I'm sort of homeless."

That was fact. He didn't even have a job to be able to secure his own apartment. While he was being the host to his own pity party, he heard the female voice once more whisper,

Come to me.

That was it! He would go find the voice that incessantly called to him. He knew he had to find Dice at any cost. But if he had disappeared, that was going to be sort of hard to do. And he couldn't stay at his Grandparent's house where Dice would be sure to find him since the police would be all

over the place in a matter of hours. He crouched down a bit to give some torque to his lift. Before Shortcut could say anything, Marcus was in the dark sky flying toward the voice that haunted him.

“Hey, shithead! Did you forget something?” she yelled from the top of the mortuary. She was not happy with the idea that he had brought her all the way out here to the cemetery only to leave her here on top of a building for the dead just so she would have to jump and then walk home with a possible sprained ankle.

“Oh, yeah. Sorry.” he said as he swung back around the mortuary to pick her up and take her home. But, first, he was proud of his new wings and what he could do with them. He wanted to show them off to her for a minute.

“Nice. Now pick me up and take me home. Stop fucking around. It’s cold out here.” she yelled at him. She wasn’t angry; she was just playing the game that the two of them played very well.

