

# BLINDED

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The sun had long since left its perch by the time Maia was done sorting things out. She slid open the balcony door, heaving a sigh of relief.

The chilly wind seeped through her t-shirt and blew back her wavy black hair as she pushed the door further aside and stepped out, letting the air freshen out her stuffy apartment.

The full moon glowed softly in the night sky, its light dulled out by the gleaming cityscape. Maia was used to this by now. She didn't know when the constant honking of car horns and the screeches of trains went from a nuisance to her lullaby.

She leaned her arms on the railing and looked out. It was nearly midnight, but of course, the city never slept. People were calling for taxis, pouring into the metro or simply walking. The restaurants and malls were still bustling, and the movie theater a few blocks away drew in hordes of teens and adolescents.

Maia wondered what Mira and Davi were up to as she massaged her aching arms. Her sister and nephew had moved to a small town nearby, but she still couldn't see them as often as she'd have liked. She loved the way her little nephew's eyes lit up every time she visited. It didn't matter if she couldn't always bring him chocolates or toys. His reaction never changed. Maia smiled.

A dull thud and a cry from behind her roused Maia from her thoughts. She turned to find a figure clad in black sprawled facedown on the floor of the balcony. The dark-skinned boy was younger than her — in his early twenties.

"What do you have wings for?" she asked, folding her arms and leaning back against the railing.

The boy groaned, folded his enormous bat wings and sat up, rubbing the side of his head. Blood dripped from the cut on his lip.

"I was being chased when I made the portal. It was too low."

"That, I could tell," said Maia, sparing a glance at the remnants of the pulsing blue portal on the balcony ceiling. "Still doesn't explain how you couldn't fly and break your fall."

"Give me a break. Wings don't work sometimes."

"Whatever. They better not be broken, Mak."

"They're safe," assured Mak, standing up and sliding the protective case off his shoulders.

He set it down on Maia's desk once they were inside. Maia counted and inspected the jars for damage first before moving on to the vials. She set aside the two vials of blue liquid from the eight vials of yellow ones. Once she was sure they weren't damaged, she slid everything back into the case apart from two of the yellow vials.

"I thought you said you were keeping one of them," said Mak warily, dabbing at

the cut on his lip with a damp cloth.

"I lied," replied Maia, scooping up the remaining vials, not even bothering to look at him.

"If he finds out —"

"He won't."

"Besides, what are you gonna do with two of them? One is more than enough."

"Not when they're temporary," replied Maia, locking them away.

The bluntness in her tone made Mak want to fly away right then and there. But he decided on trying one more time.

"But you know it's dangerous. What about the side effects?"

jaw, Mak knew he'd crossed a line. Her eyes set ablaze with rage. And then it happened. Her irises turned white and her eyeballs turned into a luminescent blue, casting a glow over her dark olive skin.

He blanched. Not again.

"Do you think you're innocent?" she spat, advancing slowly on him. "You work for them. Do you honestly believe, nothing you do contributes to this?"

"I didn't deny it!" Mak said, his voice wavering as he inched back towards the balcony. "But it doesn't contribute that much, does it? Most of it doesn't even go to mortals!"

my sight," she rasped. "Before I throw you down."

Mak did not dispute. It wouldn't be the first time he was kicked out of a balcony by superhuman strength.

He folded his wings tightly and inched sideways, away from her, being careful not to touch her. By the time he was standing on the railing he could feel her white irises burning holes into the back of his head. But Mak was equal parts relieved and surprised when Maia didn't push him down to his death.

He was airborne in seconds, speeding away from the apartment as fast as his wings



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

"Worth it," Maia wound her hair up into a bun. She frowned at him. "Not that I expect you to understand."

Mak didn't. He was born with his bat wings. He didn't know what it was like to not have magic coursing through his veins, to live a life devoid of it.

"I don't understand," he admitted, raking a hand through his curly black hair. "But I know what it's doing to you. This needs to stop, Maia. You're turning into one of them."

The moment he saw Maia clench her

Maia's face twisted into a scowl. "You're even more of a fool than I thought," she scoffed as she kept advancing. "You're a smuggler. A thief. You'd have to be a special brand of idiot to believe your work doesn't have consequences."

"Y-you're right," stammered Mak, raising his hands in surrender. His wings were almost touching the railing. "I'm sorry."

Maia's eyes still glowed, piercing Mak with barely disguised contempt. "Get out of

would carry him. The chilly wind greeted him, enveloping his tired, sweaty form.

Mak had been flying for a while when his thoughts finally became coherent. He'd had enough, he decided. He had dealt with enough gangs, mysterious faceless bosses and ferocious glowing-eyed superordinates for one lifetime.

It was time to find a different profession.

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