

GLOVES OFF

Two friends are driven apart by a manipulative fight promoter,  
leading one to seek redemption and the other to spiral into  
corruption.

Writer Number- 25-DE04-W19

FADE IN:

EXT. UNDER AN ABANDONED CITY BRIDGE - NIGHT

A brawl. Raw, unfiltered violence.

MALIK (early 20s), well built, athletic, a fighter in every sense; takes a punch straight to the jaw. Blood trickles down his lip.

His opponent, GRAVE DIGGER (30s), a tattooed giant with a reputation; celebrates prematurely, raising his fists, sensing an easy win.

The CROWD erupts, hollering, shoving, fists full of cash as bets are placed. A rowdy bunch of gamblers and thrill seekers.

Malik's lips curls into a smirk, turning slightly so Grave Digger can't see it. He's toying with him.

LEON (V.O.)  
Some cats fight cause they got  
something to prove.

FREEZE FRAME - MALIK'S BLOODY FACE

LEON (V.O.)  
Then there's Malik. Ain't about  
pride for him; it's survival.

END FREEZE FRAME - BACK TO THE FIGHT

Grave Digger charges. Malik weaves, slipping punches like it's a dance.

A FIGURE in the crowd watches. VINCE (50s), sharp suit, cold eyes. He stands apart, calculating; watching with focus.

LEON (V.O.)  
And then you got snakes like Vince.  
Don't throw punches, just stack the  
deck. A fight promoter.

FREEZE FRAME - VINCE, HANDS IN POCKETS

LEON (V.O.)  
Big time Vince. Man bets on bodies  
like they cattle.

END FREEZE FRAME - BACK TO THE FIGHT

Malik stands, spitting blood onto the ground. Vince catches his eye and makes a quick throat slashing gesture.

Malik's smirk vanishes. He turns back to Grave Digger, fists tight with renewed purpose.

Malik explodes with a flurry of punches, uppercut, jab, right hook. A blur of movement.

Grave Digger's head snap back, his body THUDDING onto the concrete.

The crowd hushes. A moment of stunned silence.

Malik strides over to the CASH HOLDER, snatching his winnings without hesitation.

VINCE (O.S.)  
You forgetting something?

Malik freezes. Vince steps up, calmly.

VINCE (CONT'D)  
That ain't yours.

MALIK  
Nah, I'm the one with the bloody lip.

VINCE  
(leaning in)  
Don't forget who made you.

Malik tightens his grip on the money. Vince grabs his wrist, just enough to remind him.

Suddenly, POLICE SIRENS WAIL. The crowd scatters like roaches under a light, money flying through the air.

Malik ducks behind an abandoned building, panting. A close call.

INT. GYM - DAY

The gym hums with energy. Heavy bags THUD under relentless punches. Speed bags RATTLE with rapid rhythm. Boxers train to the blaring beat of HIP HOP MUSIC.

In one corner of the boxing ring, JASON (early 20s) stands confidently, headgear snug, every piece of gear color coordinated.

SHAWN (60s), Jason's father and trainer, medium build, wearing a worn baseball cap, methodically tapes his son's hands while praying softly over him.

SHAWN

Father, guide Jason's hands and his feet as he steps into that ring.

Jason closes his eyes briefly, absorbing the words.

JASON

Amen.

FREEZE FRAME - JASON AND SHAWN - SACRED MOMENT

LEON (V.O.)

That's Jason, and his pops, Shawn. They some real deal, God lovin' folks. Just so happens, Jason's got hands too.

END FREEZE FRAME

Shawn finishes taping Jason's hands before he puts on the gloves.

SHAWN

Help him hide your word in his heart---

Suddenly, JOSE (20s), lean, scrappy, bounces on his toes, grinning.

JOSE

-- Alright, alright. Enough with the prayers. God ain't gonna help you with this beat down.

Jose moves in, a smirk on his face.

LEON (V.O.)

That's Jose. The kinda fighter who talks like he already won.

The bell CLANGS.

JASON

Alright, let's see what all that talk gets you.

They circle. Jason slips a punch, counters with a precise one two combo; Jose stumbles back.

The gym erupts with cheers and claps.

At the gym entrance, MALIK slips in. Hooded, bruised. A rough night written all over him. A gym bag slung over his shoulder.

Jason, still in the ring, dodges a few of Jose's aggressive swings. Shawn coaches from ringside.

SHAWN

Keep your hands up! Move your feet!

Jason moves smooth, calculated, landing a pair of sharp jabs. Jose drops to the canvas.

Jason glances toward Malik, distracted for a moment by his friend's bruised face.

Jason leans on the ropes, calling out.

JASON

Yo, rough night? Your girl do that to your lip?

He laughs, bouncing on his feet.

Malik walks up to the edge of the ring.

MALIK

You need to keep your eyes on your own fight, choir boy.

BAM!

Jose slams a gut punch into Jason, knocking the air out of him. Jason drops to a knee, gasping.

Both corners rush into the ring, cutting off a brewing brawl.

As Jason regains his breath, Malik confirms that he's ok.

They dap each other up with their signature hand shake.

Again the gym doors swing open. VINCE strides in, arms wide, voice booming.

VINCE

I got Vegas, baby!

FREEZE FRAME - VINCE STANDS, ARMS WIDE.

LEON (V.O.)

Some folks walk in a room and think they own it. Vince don't think, he knows.

END FREEZE FRAME

A hush. Those training, pause mid punch. All eyes on Vince.

LEON (60s), slender, old school, wearing coveralls, broom in hand.

LEON (V.O.)  
That's me. Just a janitor.

Leon doesn't react as Vince scans the room. Vince glances at him, walks toward him, then passes by like he doesn't exist.

Vince reaches Jason's corner, pulls out a crisp envelope, and hands it to Shawn.

VINCE  
Told you I could pull it off.

Shawn opens the envelope, his eyes widening.

SHAWN  
Well, I'll be a wise apple.

He passes the paper to Jason, who reads it and instantly frowns. He exits the ring jumping down, next to Vince.

JASON  
This says... tomorrow? We gotta be  
in Vegas tomorrow for the W.I.B.E.  
Amateur Boxing Showcase?

Malik, still ringside, perks up. Without hesitation, he snatches the paper from Jason's hands.

MALIK  
This is the opportunity I've been  
waiting for!

Vince swiftly snatches the paper back from Malik.

VINCE  
Whoa, whoa, whoa! Don't get your  
panties in a bunch.

Vince throws an arm around Jason, speaking loud enough for Malik to hear.

VINCE (CONT'D)  
They're looking for a new face of  
the sport. Someone marketable.  
Someone that sponsors can get  
behind.

Vince claps Jason on the shoulder, grinning, before his eyes shift to Malik. Malik's face hardened.

He pulls Malik aside for a private conversation.

In the background, Leon pretends to sweep, eavesdropping.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Let's just say you don't exactly  
fit their mold.

Malik flinches as laughter erupts around him, the sound a sharp humiliation.

Vince walks off, Jason following behind.

Malik's fists clenches in anger.

Leon watches as he sweeps, taking it all in.

INT. GYM LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Malik storms in, tossing his gym bag aside. He paces, frustration boiling over.

He stops, staring at his gym bag. An idea sparks.

Malik drops onto the bench, yanks open the zipper, rummaging through.

His hand finds cold steel, a gun.

He grips it, his mind at war with itself.

LEON (O.S.)

What you gone do with that?

Malik's head snaps up. Leon stands in the doorway.

MALIK

Look, dude, mind your business.

Leon steps inside, calm, unfazed.

LEON

Been there. Done that.

Leon moves to his locker, rummages through his belongings. He pulls out a newspaper, unfolds it, and hands it to Malik.

The headline: Number one contender found guilty - Sentenced for armed robbery.

A faded photo of a younger Leon stares back at him.

Malik studies it, then looks up. Their eyes lock.

Leon leans against the lockers, arms crossed.

LEON (CONT'D)

Fifteen years upstate. Armed robbery.

(beat)

So like I said... been there.

He watches Malik for a moment, then sets a worn Bible on the bench beside him.

Malik glares at it.

MALIK

What's this for?

LEON

You're gonna need that when dealing with that devil.

Malik snatches the Bible, stares at it for a beat, then hurls it against the wall.

MALIK

Look, I'm the last one to talk to God about anything. I'm a sinner's sinner, old man.

Leon doesn't flinch. He bends down, picks up the Bible, dusts it off.

LEON

You think your situation is unique? Malik stands.

MALIK

Nah, it's not. But let me guess, you were innocent?

Silence.

LEON

Nope. Guilty.

Leon steps closer towards Malik. LEON

But it saved my life. It's where I met God. Learned who He is.



MALIK  
(Mocking/Sarcastic)  
Yeah... save me? Please.

Leon tilts his head.

LEON  
God saved me. Looks like He wants  
you too.

Malik scoffs, shaking his head.

MALIK  
Man, I ain't you.

Leon smirks.

LEON  
You right.  
(beat)  
Question is... how far you gotta fall  
before you figure that out?

A tense silence.

Leon heads for the door, then pauses. He points at Malik's  
bruise. Malik flinches slightly.

LEON (CONT'D)  
Oh... and I can make sure that  
doesn't happen again. Teach you to  
keep your guard up.

He exits.

Malik tucks the gun back in his bag, his gaze drawn back to  
the newspaper headline. His face is a mix of emotions.

INT. GYM - TWO WEEKS LATER

BEGIN MONTAGE:

QUICK CUTS:

— Malik swings at the heavy bag, off-balance, sloppy. Leon  
shakes his head.

— Frustration simmers as Malik and Leon square up.

— Speed bag- Malik's rhythm is off. He exhales sharply,  
trying again.

- Leon steps in, adjusts Malik's stance, and corrects his form.

LEON

Gotta keep your guard up, here

- Malik nods, resets, his jab SNAPS like a whip.

- Malik moves, dodging imaginary punches. His footwork sharpens.

- Leon smirks, finally approving.

- Leon places a hand on Malik's shoulder, Bible in hand. Malik hesitates... but listens.

- Later, Malik flips through the Bible alone, skeptical, but intrigued.

- Locker room-Malik sits on the bench. He clasps his hands together... prays for the first time.

- Sparring session With Jose-Malik lands a crisp combo. Jose stumbles.

- Gym onlookers nod-Malik's earned respect.

ON THE GYM TV:

REPORTER (ON TV)

"Rising star Jason Thomas dominates another opponent in the Vegas circuit!"

- Malik glances at the screen. Jason, draped in luxury, flashing a cocky grin.

- Malik's face hardens; not jealousy, but clarity.

- Leon pats Malik's back after a grueling session.

- Malik, drenched in sweat, grins, but this time, he's at peace.

END MONTAGE:

INT. GYM - DAY - WEEKS LATER

Malik's fists hammer the heavy bag.

The gym door creaks open.

Jason stumbles in, slight slur in his voice.

JASON  
Yoooo, Malik... what's good, my  
boy?

Malik pauses.

Jason approaches, dap ready. They perform their signature handshake, but something's off.

Malik notices Jason's wrist Blinging.

MALIK  
You coolin down the whole gym with  
that timepiece J.

Jason glances at his watch.

JASON  
Gift from Vince.

They sit on the bench. A heavy silence.

JASON (CONT'D)  
Long way from the lil' dude you  
used to save from bullies, huh?

Malik exhales, shakes his head.

MALIK  
(Get's animated)  
Shoulda been both of us in Vegas.  
We both deserved a shot.

Jason keeps checking his watch, uneasy.

JASON  
Vince'll take care of it.

MALIK  
Dirty Vince? You dreamin'.

Suddenly, the gym door bursts open.

Shawn rushes in, jittery, and antsy.

SHAWN  
Son, we got a flight to catch. Why  
ain't you answering your phone?

Shawn barely acknowledges Malik. Jason forces a weak chuckle.

Shawn starts ushering Jason toward the door.

SHAWN (CONT'D)  
Come on we got to get out of here.

MALIK  
Yo, J!

Jason pauses. Malik's expression softens.

MALIK (CONT'D)  
Remember what you used to tell me?

Jason looks down.

MALIK (CONT'D)  
Guard your heart.

The doors burst open again.

Vince strides in, flanked by two glamorous women.

VINCE  
Let's go, let's go! Time is money,  
baby.

Jason hesitates for just a second.

Then, he turns and follows Vince and Shawn out.

Malik watches in silence.

Leon steps beside him.

LEON  
It ain't how you start the race...  
it's how you finish.  
(beat)  
Some things, you just gotta let  
play out. But you gotta keep your  
guard up.

Malik exhales, eyes heavy with thought. He slowly removes his gloves, letting them drop, next to the old Bible.

Malik picks up the Bible.

FADE TO BLACK.

