

THE REDEEMED: RISE OF THE BROKEN WARRIOR

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Malachi Cross had always believed that some men were born broken.

He just never expected to become one of them.

Detroit's winter wind cut through his coat as he stepped out of the abandoned warehouse, blood still drying on his knuckles. The night was quiet — too quiet — the kind of quiet that made the city feel like it was holding its breath. Streetlights flickered overhead, casting long shadows across the cracked pavement.

He hated the quiet.

Quiet meant thinking.

Thinking meant remembering.

And remembering meant drowning.

Malachi shoved his hands into his pockets and walked fast, boots crunching over ice. He didn't want to look back at the warehouse. He didn't want to think about the man inside — the man he'd left unconscious, maybe worse. He didn't want to think about how easily violence came to him now, how natural it felt, how numb he'd become.

He used to be different.

Before the gangs.

Before the debts.

Before the night everything fell apart.

But that version of him was long dead.

He lit a cigarette with shaking hands, inhaling deeply as if smoke could fill the hollow places inside him. It didn't. It never did. Nothing did.

He walked past a boarded-up church — the same one he used to attend as a kid. The cross above the door was cracked, leaning, barely hanging on. Malachi scoffed.

“Just like me,” he muttered.

He kept walking.

But something felt wrong.

A pressure in the air.

A heaviness.

A presence.

He stopped under a flickering streetlight, scanning the alleyways. His instincts — the ones that kept him alive in street wars and back-alley deals — screamed at him.

Someone was watching.

“Come out,” he growled. “I’m not in the mood.”

Silence.

Then — a whisper.

Not from the alley.

Not from behind him.

Not from anywhere outside.

It came from inside his chest.

Malachi.

He froze.

The cigarette fell from his fingers.

He hadn't heard that voice in years.

Not since he was a boy.

Not since he still believed in things like hope, forgiveness,
and second chances.

“No,” he whispered. “Not now. Not tonight.”

But the voice came again — gentle, steady, cutting through
the darkness like a blade of light.

Malachi... come home.

His breath caught.

He stumbled backward, gripping the brick wall behind him. His heart pounded like it was trying to break free from his ribs.

“Leave me alone,” he hissed. “You don’t want me. You don’t know what I’ve done.”

But the voice didn’t accuse him.
It didn’t condemn him.
It didn’t list his sins or replay his failures.

It simply said:

I know. And I still want you.

Malachi shook his head violently. “Stop. Just stop.”

He squeezed his eyes shut — but the darkness behind his eyelids wasn’t empty.

He saw flashes.

A gun.

A scream.

A body falling.

Blood on his hands.

His brother’s face — lifeless, pale, gone.

“No!” he shouted, slamming his fist into the wall.

“Don’t show me that!”

But the memory wouldn’t fade.

He had killed his own brother.
Not with his hands — but with his choices.
His brother had tried to pull him out of the gang life.
Malachi had pushed him away.
And the streets had taken him.

Malachi fell to his knees on the frozen sidewalk, chest heaving, breath fogging in the cold air.

“I can’t be saved,” he whispered. “I don’t deserve it.”

The voice answered:

You’re right. You don’t deserve it. But I’m not here because you deserve Me. I’m here because I love you.

A warmth spread through the alley — soft, golden, impossible.

Malachi lifted his head.

A figure stood at the end of the street.

Not glowing.

Not winged.

Not dramatic.

Just... present.

A man in simple clothes.

A face both ordinary and extraordinary.

Eyes that held galaxies.

Eyes that saw everything — and still held love.

Malachi’s breath caught.

“Jesus...?”

The figure didn't speak.
He didn't need to.

Malachi felt it — the truth, the presence, the overwhelming mercy that wrapped around him like a blanket in the cold.

He wanted to run.
He wanted to hide.
He wanted to disappear.

But he couldn't move.

Jesus stepped closer.

Malachi's heart pounded harder with every step.

When Jesus finally stood before him, He knelt — lowering Himself to Malachi's level, meeting him eye to eye.

Malachi trembled.

“I'm not worth saving,” he whispered.

Jesus reached out and touched his shoulder.

And in that moment —
the weight of years of guilt,
the chains of shame,
the darkness that clung to his soul —
all of it cracked.

Not shattered.
Not gone.
But cracked.

A single tear slid down Malachi's cheek.

Jesus spoke softly:

This is not your end. This is your beginning.

Malachi collapsed forward, sobbing into His chest — the first tears he'd cried in a decade.

Jesus held him.

Not as a judge.
Not as a distant deity.
But as a Father holding a broken son.

And in that frozen Detroit alley,
under a flickering streetlight,
a fallen man took his first breath
as someone who might one day rise.

CHAPTER II — THE NIGHT THE LIGHT FOUND ME

Snow drifted through the Detroit streets like ash from a dying fire. Malachi walked slowly, still shaken from what he'd seen — or thought he'd seen. His breath fogged in the cold air as he replayed the moment over and over.

Jesus.

Standing in front of him.

Speaking to him.

Touching him.

It felt impossible.

It felt unreal.

It felt... like hope.

But hope was dangerous.

Hope got people killed.

He shoved his hands deeper into his pockets and kept walking, trying to convince himself he'd imagined it. Trauma could do that. Guilt could do that. A decade of violence could do that.

But the warmth in his chest — the warmth that hadn't left since that moment — refused to fade.

He turned down an alley, heading toward the only place he still called home: a rundown apartment above a liquor store. The neon sign buzzed loudly, flickering red and blue across the snow-covered sidewalk.

He climbed the metal stairs, each step groaning under his weight. When he reached his door, he paused. Something felt off again. The air was too still. Too quiet.

He unlocked the door and stepped inside.

The apartment was dark.

Silent.

Cold.

He flicked the light switch. Nothing.

“Great,” he muttered. “Power’s out again.”

He walked toward the kitchen, stepping over piles of unopened mail and empty bottles. He reached for a flashlight in the drawer — and froze.

A shadow moved across the far wall.

Malachi’s instincts kicked in instantly. He grabbed the nearest object — a broken chair leg — and held it like a weapon.

“Who’s there?” he growled.

Silence.

Then — a whisper.

Not the gentle voice from earlier.

Not warmth.

Not mercy.

This voice was cold.

Sharp.

Hungry.

Malachi...

His blood ran cold.

He backed up slowly, eyes scanning the room. The shadow moved again — but this time, it wasn't on the wall.

It was standing in the corner.

Tall.

Twisted.

Wrong.

Its shape flickered like smoke trying to hold itself together. Two burning eyes glowed from the darkness, watching him with predatory delight.

Malachi's grip tightened on the chair leg.

“What are you?” he whispered.

The creature stepped forward, its form rippling like a nightmare made of ink.

You heard Him tonight, it hissed. And now you think you can leave us?

Malachi's heart pounded. “Us?”

The creature smiled — a jagged, impossible smile.

You killed him.

Malachi's knees buckled. He fell to the floor, shaking.

“No... no, I didn't—”

Your choices killed him, the creature hissed. Your pride. Your anger. Your sin. You belong to me.

Malachi covered his ears, trying to block out the voice, the memories, the guilt crushing him like a weight.

“Stop! Please stop!”

The creature reached out a hand made of shadow and wrapped it around his throat. Malachi gasped, clawing at the darkness as it tightened.

You will die in your guilt, it whispered. And you will die mine.

Malachi's vision blurred. His lungs burned. His heartbeat slowed.

He tried to speak — but no sound came out.

He tried to fight — but his strength was gone.

He tried to pray — but he didn't know how.

The creature leaned closer, its breath cold as death.

Say goodbye, Malachi.

The world dimmed.

His body went limp.

Darkness swallowed him whole.

And then —
a spark.

A flicker.

A warmth.

A whisper.

Call My name.

Malachi's eyes snapped open.

The creature recoiled, hissing like it had been burned.

Malachi gasped for air, clutching his throat. “Jesus—”

Light exploded through the room.

Not from the ceiling.

Not from a lamp.

Not from outside.

From Malachi.

A burst of golden fire erupted from his chest, blasting the creature across the room. It slammed into the wall with a shriek that rattled the windows.

Malachi stumbled to his feet, staring at his hands — glowing with a faint, pulsing light.

“What... what is happening to me?”

The creature writhed on the floor, smoke rising from its body.

You're His, it snarled. But you won't be for long.

It dissolved into black mist and vanished.

Malachi stood alone in the silence, chest heaving, hands trembling, light slowly fading from his skin.

He sank to his knees.

“Jesus... what did You do to me?”

A gentle voice filled the room.

I saved you.

Malachi closed his eyes as tears streamed down his face.

“But why me?”

The answer came softly.

Because I love you. And because you are called.

Malachi swallowed hard.

“Called... to what?”

The voice grew stronger — not louder, but deeper, resonating through his bones.

To rise.

Malachi looked at his hands again — hands that had once taken life, now glowing with the power to protect it.

He didn't understand it.

He didn't feel worthy of it.

He didn't even know what it meant.

But for the first time in years...

He felt alive.

CHAPTER III — THE MAN I USED TO BE

Malachi didn't sleep that night.

He sat on the edge of his mattress — a thin, stained thing thrown on the floor — staring at his hands. They looked normal now. No glow. No warmth. No supernatural fire pulsing beneath the skin.

But he could still feel it.

A hum.

A vibration.

A presence.

Like something holy had taken root inside him.

He didn't know what to do with that.

He didn't know how to carry it.

He didn't know how to be someone new when the old him still clung to his bones.

The sun rose slowly, painting the sky in pale orange. Malachi stood and walked to the cracked bathroom mirror. He stared at his reflection — the same scarred face, the same tired eyes, the same man who had done unforgivable things.

But something was different.

His eyes...

they weren't empty anymore.

He splashed water on his face and grabbed his coat. He needed air. He needed space. He needed answers.

He stepped outside into the cold morning. The city was waking up — cars honking, buses rumbling, people rushing to jobs they hated. Life moved on, indifferent to the war raging inside him.

Malachi shoved his hands in his pockets and walked.

He didn't know where he was going until he got there.

The church.

The same boarded-up church he'd passed the night before. The same one he used to attend with his mother before she died. The same one where he'd prayed as a child, asking God to protect his brother.

He stood in front of it, heart pounding.

The front door was locked, but the side entrance hung crooked on its hinges. He pushed it open and stepped inside.

Dust floated through beams of sunlight. Broken pews lay scattered across the floor. The altar was cracked. The cross was missing.

It felt like a graveyard.

Malachi walked slowly down the aisle, memories hitting him like waves.

His mother's voice singing hymns.

His brother laughing during Sunday school.

His own small hands folded in prayer.

He swallowed hard.

“I don’t know why You came to me,” he whispered. “I don’t know why You saved me.”

His voice echoed through the empty sanctuary.

“I’m not a good man. I’m not even a decent one. I’ve hurt people. I’ve ruined lives. I’ve done things I can’t take back.”

Silence.

He sank onto a broken pew, elbows on his knees, head in his hands.

“I don’t know how to be anything else.”

A soft breeze moved through the church — impossible, since the windows were boarded shut. Malachi lifted his head.

The breeze carried a whisper.

You don’t have to be who you were.

Malachi’s breath caught.

“Jesus...?”

The whisper came again — gentle, steady, full of truth.

Your past is not your prison. It is your testimony.

Malachi clenched his fists.

“But I killed my brother.”

The air grew still.

Your choices hurt him, the voice said softly. But you did not kill him. Darkness did. And I am here to break its hold on you.

Malachi shook his head. “I don’t deserve forgiveness.”

Forgiveness is not earned, the voice replied. It is given.

Malachi felt something inside him crack — a wall he’d built years ago, a fortress of guilt and shame. Tears filled his eyes.

“I don’t know how to change.”

The voice answered:

You don’t change yourself. You let Me change you.

Malachi wiped his face with the back of his hand.

“Then... what do You want from me?”

The answer came like thunder wrapped in mercy.

Your heart.

Malachi’s chest tightened.

“And what will You give me in return?”

Purpose.

Malachi stood slowly, feeling the weight of the moment settle over him like a mantle.

Purpose.

He hadn't had that in years.

He hadn't believed he deserved it.

He hadn't believed he could ever rise above the man he used to be.

But Jesus wasn't asking him to rise alone.

Malachi walked toward the altar — cracked, dusty, forgotten — and knelt.

“Okay,” he whispered. “If You want my heart... it's Yours.”

Warmth flooded the room.

Not heat.

Not fire.

Presence.

A golden glow filled the sanctuary, illuminating the broken pews, the shattered windows, the ruined altar. Malachi felt it wrap around him like a cloak.

And then —
a sound.

Footsteps.

Not divine.

Not gentle.

Human.

Malachi turned.

A man stood in the doorway — tall, muscular, wearing a leather jacket and a smirk that didn't reach his eyes.

“Didn't think I'd find you here,” the man said.

Malachi's blood ran cold.

“Dante.”

Dante Vega — his former crew leader. The man who ran half the criminal operations in their neighborhood. The man Malachi used to call brother. The man who had dragged him deeper into darkness than anyone else.

Dante stepped forward, boots echoing on the wooden floor.

“You disappeared last night,” he said. “Didn't answer your phone. Didn't show up for the job. That's not like you.”

Malachi stood slowly.

“I'm done with that life.”

Dante laughed — a cold, humorless sound.

“No one's done until I say they're done.”

Malachi felt the warmth in his chest pulse — the same warmth that had saved him from the shadow creature.

“I'm not yours anymore,” he said quietly.

Dante's eyes narrowed.

“What happened to you?”

Malachi didn't answer.

Dante stepped closer, face twisting with anger.

“You think you can walk away? After everything we've done? After everything you owe me?”

Malachi clenched his fists.

“I don't owe you anything.”

Dante pulled a gun from his jacket and aimed it at Malachi's chest.

“You owe me your life.”

Malachi didn't move.

He didn't flinch.

He didn't fear.

The warmth inside him surged — stronger, brighter, alive.

Dante's finger tightened on the trigger.

Malachi whispered one word:

“Jesus.”

Light exploded from his body.

The gun flew from Dante’s hand, skidding across the floor. Dante stumbled backward, shielding his eyes.

“What—what are you?!”

Malachi stepped forward, light fading but strength remaining.

“Redeemed.”

Dante stared at him, fear replacing anger.

“This isn’t over,” he spat. “You’re dead, Malachi. You hear me? Dead.”

He ran out of the church, disappearing into the daylight.

Malachi stood alone again, chest rising and falling, hands trembling with the aftershock of power.

He looked up at the broken cross above the altar.

“Jesus... what are You turning me into?”

The answer came like a promise.

My warrior.

Malachi closed his eyes.

And for the first time in his life...

He believed it.

CHAPTER IV — BAPTIZED IN FIRE

The next morning, Malachi woke with a start — heart pounding, breath sharp, sweat clinging to his skin. He sat up quickly, scanning the room for shadows, for movement, for anything that didn't belong.

Nothing.

Just the dim light of dawn creeping through the blinds.

But the memory of last night — the creature, the light, Dante's gun — clung to him like smoke.

He stood slowly, stretching muscles that felt strangely stronger than they had any right to be. His body felt... different. Not invincible. Not superhuman. But fortified. Reinforced. Like something inside him had been rebuilt overnight.

He walked to the bathroom and splashed cold water on his face. When he looked up, he froze.

His eyes.

They weren't glowing — not like last night — but there was something new in them. A sharpness. A clarity. A fire.

He leaned closer to the mirror.

“What are You doing to me?” he whispered.

A soft warmth stirred in his chest — not a voice, not a vision, but a presence.

Strength, it seemed to say. Purpose.

Malachi exhaled slowly.

He didn't understand it.
He didn't feel ready for it.
But he couldn't deny it.

Something had changed.

He grabbed his coat and stepped outside. The cold air hit him like a slap, but he welcomed it. It grounded him. Reminded him he was still human — even if something divine had taken root inside him.

He walked with no destination in mind, letting his feet guide him. The city was waking up — buses groaning, shopkeepers unlocking doors, people rushing to jobs they hated. Life moved on, unaware of the war raging beneath its surface.

Malachi turned down a side street — and stopped.

A woman stood on the sidewalk, crying. Her hands shook as she clutched a small purse to her chest. A man towered over her, shouting, jabbing a finger in her face.

“You think you can just walk away?” the man snarled. “You owe me!”

“I—I don't have it,” the woman stammered. “Please, I just need more time—”

The man grabbed her arm, squeezing hard.

Malachi felt something ignite inside him.

Heat.

Pressure.

Righteous anger.

He stepped forward before he even realized he was moving.

“Let her go.”

The man turned, eyes narrowing. “Mind your business.”

Malachi kept walking.

“I said,” he repeated, voice low, “let her go.”

The man scoffed. “Or what? You gonna play hero?”

Malachi didn’t answer.

The man shoved the woman aside and squared up, fists raised. “Come on then.”

Malachi didn’t want to fight.

He didn’t want to hurt anyone.

He didn’t want to be the man he used to be.

But the warmth in his chest surged — not rage, not violence, but something else.

Authority.

The man swung.

Malachi moved without thinking.

His hand shot up, catching the punch mid-air. The man’s eyes widened in shock as Malachi squeezed — not hard, not enough to break anything, but enough to make a point.

“Walk away,” Malachi said quietly.

The man yanked his hand back, stumbling. “You’re crazy!”

He ran.

Malachi exhaled slowly, letting the fire inside him settle.

The woman stared at him, eyes wide. “Thank you... thank you so much.”

Malachi nodded. “Are you okay?”

She wiped her tears. “I—I think so.”

He wanted to say more. He wanted to comfort her. But he didn’t know how. He wasn’t used to being the one who helped. He wasn’t used to being anything but a weapon.

He turned to leave.

“Wait,” the woman called. “What’s your name?”

Malachi hesitated.

“Just... Malachi.”

She smiled weakly. “Thank you, Malachi.”

He nodded and walked away.

But as he turned the corner, he felt it again — that presence, that warmth, that whisper of purpose.

This is only the beginning.

Malachi stopped walking.

“Beginning of what?” he muttered.

The answer came not as a voice, but as a vision.

The world around him blurred. The street dissolved. The sky darkened. And suddenly he stood in a vast, empty space — a void filled with swirling shadows.

Shapes moved in the darkness.

Twisted.

Hungry.

Watching.

Malachi’s breath caught.

“What is this?”

A figure stepped forward — tall, radiant, armored in light. Wings of fire unfurled behind him, stretching across the void.

An angel.

Malachi stumbled backward. “What—who—”

The angel spoke, voice like thunder wrapped in silk.

“Malachi Cross.”

Malachi swallowed hard. “Y-yeah?”

“You have been chosen.”

Malachi shook his head. “Chosen for what? I’m nobody. I’m a mess. I’m—”

“Redeemed,” the angel said firmly. “And because you are redeemed, you are dangerous to the darkness.”

Malachi stared at him, heart pounding.

“I don’t understand.”

The angel stepped closer.

“You were saved for a purpose. Not just to live — but to fight.”

Malachi’s stomach twisted. “Fight what?”

The angel gestured to the swirling shadows.

“The enemy.”

Malachi looked around, fear rising in his throat.

“I can’t fight that. I’m not a warrior. I’m not holy. I’m not —”

The angel cut him off.

“You are not chosen because you are strong. You are chosen because you are willing.”

Malachi shook his head. “I’m not willing. I’m terrified.”

The angel smiled — a fierce, knowing smile.

“Courage is not the absence of fear. It is choosing to stand anyway.”

Malachi looked down at his hands — the same hands that had once taken life, now glowing faintly with divine fire.

“What if I fail?”

The angel’s expression softened.

“You will fail. You will fall. You will struggle. But you will rise — because He will lift you.”

Malachi closed his eyes.

“Why me?”

The angel answered with a truth that pierced him to the core.

“Because the broken make the best warriors.”

Malachi opened his eyes — and the vision vanished.

He stood alone on the sidewalk again, breath fogging in the cold air.

But he wasn’t the same.

Something had shifted.
Something had awakened.
Something had ignited.

He wasn’t just forgiven.

He was called.

And whether he felt ready or not...

The war had already begun.

CHAPTER V — THE FIRST BATTLE

The city felt different now.

Not because anything had changed on the surface — the same cracked sidewalks, the same flickering streetlights, the same cold wind slicing through Detroit’s bones — but because Malachi had changed.

He walked with a strange awareness, like he could feel the air shift around him, like he could sense things moving in the shadows that no one else noticed. Every sound felt sharper. Every breath felt heavier. Every heartbeat felt like a drum calling him into something he didn’t yet understand.

He didn’t know where he was going.
He just knew he couldn’t go back.

Not to Dante.
Not to the gang.
Not to the man he used to be.

He walked for hours, letting the city guide him. Eventually, he found himself near the river — the water dark and restless under the gray morning sky. He leaned against the railing, staring at the churning waves.

He felt small.
He felt unworthy.
He felt terrified.

“Jesus,” he whispered, “I don’t know how to do this.”

A warmth stirred in his chest — gentle, steady, familiar.

You don’t have to know. You just have to trust.

Malachi closed his eyes.

“I’m trying.”

The warmth deepened.

Then you're already doing it.

He exhaled slowly, letting the tension drain from his shoulders.

But the peace didn't last.

A scream shattered the air.

Malachi's eyes snapped open. He turned toward the sound — a raw, desperate cry echoing from a nearby alley.

Without thinking, he ran.

His boots pounded against the pavement as he sprinted toward the alleyway. When he turned the corner, he froze.

A young man — maybe seventeen — was pinned against the wall by something Malachi couldn't fully see. A shadow. A distortion. A shape that flickered like smoke and flame.

The boy clawed at the air, gasping, eyes wide with terror.

“Help me!” he choked out.

Malachi didn't hesitate.

“Hey!” he shouted. “Let him go!”

The creature turned.

Its face was a shifting mass of darkness, eyes burning like coals. It hissed — a sound that scraped against Malachi's bones.

You again.

Malachi's heart pounded. "You know me?"

The creature stepped forward, dragging the boy with it like a puppet.

We all know you, Redeemed.

Malachi swallowed hard. "Let him go."

The creature laughed — a low, guttural sound.

Make me.

Malachi clenched his fists. He didn't know how to fight something like this. He didn't know what he was capable of. He didn't know if he could win.

But he knew one thing:

He wasn't alone.

He took a step forward.

"Jesus," he whispered, "help me."

The warmth in his chest ignited — not a spark this time, but a flame.

The creature recoiled.

No... not again...

Malachi stepped closer, fire building inside him.

“Let. Him. Go.”

The creature snarled and threw the boy aside. The kid hit the ground hard, coughing, scrambling away.

The creature lunged at Malachi.

Malachi didn't move.

He didn't flinch.

He didn't fear.

The creature's claws slashed toward his throat — but before they could touch him, a burst of golden light erupted from Malachi's chest, blasting the creature backward.

It hit the wall with a shriek that shook the alley.

Malachi stared at his hands — glowing again, brighter than before.

“What is this?” he whispered.

The creature writhed, smoke rising from its body.

You are not supposed to exist, it hissed. You were ours.

Malachi stepped forward, fire swirling around his fists.

“Not anymore.”

He swung.

His fist connected with the creature's chest — and instead of passing through like before, it struck solid darkness. The creature screamed as light exploded from the impact, tearing through its form.

Malachi swung again. And again. Each punch sent waves of holy fire rippling through the creature's body.

The creature shrieked, voice cracking.

You can't kill me!

Malachi's eyes burned with righteous fury.

"I'm not trying to kill you."

He grabbed the creature by the throat — his hand glowing like molten gold.

"I'm casting you out."

The creature's eyes widened in terror.

"No—NO—"

Malachi shouted with everything in him:

"IN THE NAME OF JESUS!"

Light erupted from his hand, engulfing the creature in a blinding explosion. The darkness screamed — a sound that echoed like a dying storm — and then it shattered into a thousand fragments of smoke that dissolved into the air.

Silence fell.

Malachi stood alone in the alley, chest heaving, hands trembling, light slowly fading from his skin.

The boy stared at him, eyes wide with awe and fear.

“What... what are you?” he whispered.

Malachi swallowed hard.

“I don’t know,” he said honestly. “But I know who saved me.”

The boy nodded shakily. “Thank you.”

Malachi helped him to his feet. “Get home. Stay safe.”

The boy ran.

Malachi leaned against the wall, breathing hard.

His body ached.

His mind raced.

His soul trembled.

He had just fought a demon.

And won.

He looked up at the sky.

“Jesus... what are You turning me into?”

The answer came like a whisper carried on the wind.

My weapon.

Malachi closed his eyes.

He wasn't ready.
He wasn't worthy.
He wasn't strong enough.

But he wasn't alone.

And the war had only just begun.

CHAPTER VI — THE ARMOR I DIDN'T EARN

Malachi didn't go home after the battle in the alley.

He couldn't.

His body still hummed with leftover power, like lightning trapped beneath his skin. His mind raced with questions he didn't know how to ask. His soul trembled with the weight of what he'd just done.

He had fought a demon.

And won.

Not with fists.

Not with weapons.

But with something holy burning inside him.

He walked aimlessly through the city, trying to calm the storm inside him. The sky had darkened, clouds rolling in like a warning. Thunder rumbled in the distance.

Detroit felt different now — not just broken, but alive with unseen movement. Malachi could feel it. Shadows shifting. Darkness watching. Light stirring.

He wasn't just a man anymore.

He was a battleground.

He turned down a quiet street lined with abandoned houses. The wind howled through broken windows, carrying whispers he couldn't quite make out. He stopped walking.

Something was coming.

He felt it before he heard it — a pressure in the air, a tightening in his chest, a pull in his spirit.

Then a voice.

Malachi.

He spun around.

A figure stood in the middle of the street — tall, radiant, armored in light. The same angel from the vision. But this time, he wasn't a vision.

He was here.

Malachi stumbled backward. "You're real."

The angel nodded. "I am Gabriel."

Malachi's breath caught. "As in... the Gabriel?"

Gabriel's expression softened. "There is only one."

Malachi swallowed hard. "Why are you here?"

Gabriel stepped closer, the ground glowing faintly beneath his feet.

"To prepare you."

Malachi shook his head. “Prepare me for what? I’m not a warrior. I’m not holy. I’m barely holding myself together.”

Gabriel’s eyes burned with fierce compassion.

“You were chosen not because you are strong, but because you are willing. And because you know what darkness feels like.”

Malachi looked away. “I know what it feels like to cause darkness.”

Gabriel placed a hand on his shoulder — a touch that felt like fire and comfort all at once.

“And now you will learn what it feels like to destroy it.”

Malachi’s heart pounded. “I don’t know how.”

Gabriel stepped back and raised his hand.

Light exploded around them.

Malachi shielded his eyes — but the light didn’t burn. It wrapped around him like a cloak, warm and powerful.

When he opened his eyes, he gasped.

He was wearing armor.

Not metal.
Not steel.
Not anything human.

It was made of light — shifting, glowing, alive. A breastplate that pulsed with golden fire. Bracers that shimmered like molten gold. Boots that felt like they were rooted in both earth and heaven. A belt that radiated truth. A cloak that moved like wind and flame.

Malachi stared at himself, stunned.

“What... what is this?”

Gabriel’s voice echoed with authority.

“The Armor of God.”

Malachi shook his head. “I don’t deserve this.”

Gabriel’s expression hardened.

“No one deserves it. That is why it is given.”

Malachi touched the breastplate — warm, solid, alive.

“It feels... like it’s part of me.”

“It is,” Gabriel said. “Because it is forged from your redemption.”

Malachi looked up sharply. “My redemption?”

Gabriel nodded.

“Every piece of this armor is tied to what Jesus restored in you.”

He pointed to the breastplate.

“Your heart — once hardened by guilt — now beats with righteousness.”

He pointed to the belt.

“Your truth — once twisted by lies — now stands firm.”

He pointed to the boots.

“Your steps — once leading to destruction — now carry peace.”

He pointed to the bracers.

“Your hands — once used for violence — now wield justice.”

He pointed to the cloak.

“Your past — once a burden — now covers you in grace.”

Malachi swallowed hard, overwhelmed.

“And the fire?” he whispered.

Gabriel’s eyes glowed brighter.

“That is the Spirit of God within you.”

Malachi felt his knees weaken. “I’m not ready for this.”

Gabriel stepped closer.

“No warrior ever is. But you are not alone.”

Malachi looked up. “Then what do I do?”

Gabriel turned toward the darkened sky.

“You rise.”

Thunder cracked overhead.

The wind howled.

The shadows around them shifted — gathering, swirling, forming shapes that made Malachi’s blood run cold.

Dozens of them.

Maybe hundreds.

Demons.

Gabriel drew a sword made of pure light.

Malachi's armor flared.

The angel's voice thundered:

“Your training begins now.”

The first demon lunged.

Malachi didn't think.

He didn't plan.

He didn't hesitate.

He moved.

His fist collided with the creature's chest — and holy fire erupted from the impact, blasting it backward in a burst of smoke and ash.

Another demon leapt at him. Malachi spun, the cloak of grace whipping behind him like a trail of flame. He struck again — light exploding from his bracers.

A third demon lunged from above. Malachi raised his arm instinctively — and a shield of light materialized, blocking the attack with a thunderous crack.

He stared at the shield, stunned.

“I didn’t know I could do that.”

Gabriel fought beside him, wings blazing.

“You don’t need to know,” the angel said. “You need to trust.”

Malachi roared and charged into the swarm.

He moved like a man reborn — every strike guided, every step empowered, every breath filled with divine fire. Demons fell around him like shadows torn apart by dawn.

But the battle wasn’t easy.

Every punch drained him.

Every block shook him.

Every burst of light burned through his strength.

He stumbled, panting, sweat dripping down his face.

“I... I can’t... keep going...”

Gabriel's voice thundered across the battlefield.

“You fight with His strength, not yours!”

Malachi closed his eyes.

“Jesus... help me.”

The fire inside him ignited — brighter than ever before.

He opened his eyes.

And the demons trembled.

Malachi surged forward, light blazing from his armor, his fists, his very soul. He struck with righteous fury, each blow a declaration of freedom, each step a rejection of the man he used to be.

One by one, the demons fell.

Until none remained.

Silence settled over the street.

Malachi collapsed to his knees, exhausted, trembling, armor flickering like dying embers.

Gabriel approached, sword dissolving into light.

“You fought well.”

Malachi looked up, breath ragged.

“I barely survived.”

Gabriel nodded.

“And yet... you survived.”

Malachi swallowed hard.

“Is this what my life is now? Fighting demons?”

Gabriel’s expression softened.

“No. This is what your calling is. Your life... is to walk with Him.”

Malachi looked down at his hands — still glowing faintly.

“I don’t know if I can do this.”

Gabriel placed a hand on his shoulder.

“You can. Because He is with you.”

The armor dissolved into light, sinking back into Malachi’s chest.

He felt empty without it.
But he also felt... ready.

Gabriel stepped back.

“Rest, Malachi Cross. The next battle comes soon.”

And with a flash of light, the angel vanished.

Malachi stood alone in the street, breathing hard, heart
pounding, soul burning.

He wasn't just redeemed.

He was armed.

And the war was far from over.

CHAPTER VII — THE CITY OF SHADOWS

Detroit looked the same.

But Malachi didn't.

He walked through the streets with a new awareness — a sense that the world was layered, that reality had seams, that darkness wasn't just metaphorical but alive, moving, hunting.

He could feel it now.

Every alley.

Every abandoned building.

Every flickering streetlight.

The city wasn't just broken — it was infested.

He shoved his hands into his pockets and kept walking, trying to blend in, trying to look normal. But nothing about him felt normal anymore. His body still ached from the battle with Gabriel. His spirit still hummed with leftover fire. His mind still reeled from the truth:

He was a weapon.

A redeemed weapon.

He turned down Jefferson Avenue, passing boarded-up shops and graffiti-covered walls. A group of teenagers huddled around a trash can fire. A homeless man slept under a blanket of newspapers. A woman pushed a stroller with one hand and wiped tears with the other.

Malachi felt the weight of it all.

The pain.

The fear.

The hopelessness.

He used to be part of the problem.

Now he was supposed to be part of the solution.

He wasn't sure which felt heavier.

He stopped at a crosswalk, waiting for the light to change. A bus rumbled past, splashing slush onto the sidewalk. Malachi barely noticed.

Something was wrong.

He felt it — a pressure in the air, a shift in the atmosphere, a coldness that crawled across his skin.

He turned slowly.

A man stood across the street.

Tall.

Still.

Watching.

Not a demon.
Not a shadow.
Not a creature.

A man.

But Malachi felt darkness radiating from him like heat.

The man smiled — a slow, deliberate smile that didn't reach his eyes.

Malachi's heart pounded.

“Who are you?” he whispered.

The man didn't answer.

He stepped off the curb and began walking toward Malachi, hands in his pockets, expression calm, almost amused.

Malachi took a step back.

The man kept coming.

Cars honked as he crossed the street without looking, but he didn't flinch. He didn't break eye contact. He didn't blink.

Malachi felt the fire inside him stir — not fully igniting, but warning him.

This wasn't human.

Not fully.

Not anymore.

The man stopped a few feet away.

“Malachi Cross,” he said, voice smooth as oil. “I’ve been looking forward to meeting you.”

Malachi clenched his fists. “Who are you?”

The man tilted his head.

“Names are... complicated. But you may call me Varron.”

Malachi swallowed hard. “What do you want?”

Varron smiled wider.

“To welcome you.”

Malachi frowned. “Welcome me to what?”

Varron stepped closer, lowering his voice.

“To the war.”

Malachi's breath caught.

"I already know about the war."

Varron chuckled softly. "No. You know about battles. Skirmishes. Little encounters with little creatures."

He leaned in.

"You haven't seen the war."

Malachi felt a chill crawl down his spine.

"What are you?"

Varron's eyes darkened — literally. The whites turned black, the pupils glowing faintly red.

"I am what happens when a man gives himself fully to the darkness."

Malachi stepped back. "You're possessed."

Varron shook his head.

"No. Possession is crude. Primitive. I am... partnered."

Malachi's stomach twisted.

"You let a demon inside you?"

Varron smiled.

“I invited him.”

Malachi felt the fire inside him flare.

“Why are you here?”

Varron’s expression shifted — amusement fading, replaced by something colder.

“To give you a message.”

Malachi braced himself.

Varron leaned in, voice dropping to a whisper.

“You should have died the night your brother did.”

Malachi’s chest tightened.

Varron continued.

“You were marked for us. Claimed. Promised. And then He” — Varron spat the word like poison — “interfered.”

Malachi’s fists shook.

“Leave my brother out of this.”

Varron’s smile returned.

“Your brother is the reason you were chosen. His death opened the door. His blood paved the way.”

Malachi’s vision blurred with rage.

“Shut up.”

Varron stepped even closer, their faces inches apart.

“You think you’re a warrior now? You think a little light makes you dangerous? You have no idea what’s coming.”

Malachi felt the fire inside him ignite — but Varron raised a hand.

“Not here,” he said calmly. “Not yet. You’re not ready.”

Malachi growled. “Try me.”

Varron’s eyes flashed.

“Oh, I will. But not today.”

He stepped back.

“Today, I’m just here to tell you something important.”

Malachi glared. “What?”

Varron’s smile vanished.

“We’re coming.”

Malachi’s heart pounded.

“For who?”

Varron’s answer was a whisper that chilled him to the bone.

“For everyone you love.”

Malachi froze.

“I don’t... I don’t have anyone.”

Varron chuckled.

“You will.”

He turned and began walking away.

Malachi took a step forward. “Get back here!”

Varron didn’t stop.

“You can’t stop what’s coming, Malachi Cross. You can only choose which side you’ll stand on when the city burns.”

Malachi’s fire surged.

“Jesus!” he shouted.

Light exploded from his chest — but Varron vanished into the shadows before it reached him.

Malachi stood alone in the street, chest heaving, hands trembling, fire fading.

He looked up at the sky.

“Jesus... what do I do?”

The answer came softly.

Stand.

Malachi closed his eyes.

He wasn’t ready.

He wasn’t strong enough.

He wasn’t brave enough.

But he wasn’t alone.

And Detroit was becoming a battlefield.

CHAPTER VIII — THE ENEMY THAT KNEW MY NAME

Night fell over Detroit like a curtain of smoke.

Malachi walked through the city with his hood up, hands in his pockets, trying to look like any other man heading home after a long day. But inside, he was anything but ordinary.

His spirit felt stretched — pulled between the weight of his past and the fire of his calling. Every step felt like it echoed in two worlds at once. Every breath carried the tension of a man caught between who he was and who he was becoming.

He turned down a narrow street lined with shuttered shops. The neon signs buzzed overhead, casting sickly colors across the pavement. A cold wind swept through the alley, carrying whispers he couldn't quite make out.

He stopped walking.

Something was wrong.

He felt it — a pressure in the air, a tightening in his chest, a coldness that crawled across his skin.

He wasn't alone.

Malachi turned slowly.

A figure stepped out of the shadows.

Not Varron.

Someone else.

A woman — tall, elegant, dressed in a long black coat that moved like liquid darkness. Her hair was silver, her eyes a deep, unnatural violet. She walked with the grace of a predator, each step deliberate, controlled.

Malachi's fire stirred.

“Who are you?” he asked.

The woman smiled — a slow, chilling smile.

“My name is Selith.”

Malachi swallowed hard. “Another demon?”

Selith tilted her head.

“Not quite. I am... older.”

Malachi's stomach twisted. “Older than what?”

“Older than the darkness you fought. Older than the shadows you fear. Older than the lies you believed.”

She stepped closer.

“I am one of the first.”

Malachi’s heart pounded.

“Why are you here?”

Selith’s smile widened.

“To study you.”

Malachi frowned. “Study me?”

Selith circled him slowly, her eyes scanning him like a scientist examining a specimen.

“You are an anomaly,” she said softly. “A man who should have died. A soul we claimed long ago. A weapon forged from brokenness.”

She leaned in.

“You fascinate us.”

Malachi clenched his fists. “I’m not here to entertain you.”

Selith chuckled.

“Oh, Malachi... you misunderstand. You are not entertainment.”

Her voice dropped to a whisper.

“You are a threat.”

Malachi felt the fire inside him flare.

“Good.”

Selith’s expression hardened.

“Do not be arrogant. You are powerful, yes. But you are new. Untrained. Unrefined. You shine brightly — but even the brightest flame can be snuffed out.”

Malachi stepped forward.

“Try me.”

Selith raised a hand.

The air around Malachi tightened — like invisible chains wrapping around his chest. He gasped, dropping to one knee as pressure crushed his ribs.

Selith watched him calmly.

“You see? You are not ready.”

Malachi struggled to breathe.

“Jesus...” he whispered.

The fire inside him ignited.

The invisible chains shattered.

Selith’s eyes widened.

Malachi rose to his feet, fire swirling around his fists.

Selith stepped back.

“Interesting,” she murmured. “Very interesting.”

Malachi took a step forward.

“You don’t get to touch me.”

Selith smiled again — but this time, it wasn’t mocking.

It was... intrigued.

“You are stronger than we expected.”

Malachi’s fire burned brighter.

“And I’m just getting started.”

Selith’s expression shifted — the amusement fading, replaced by something colder.

“Do not mistake curiosity for fear,” she said. “I am not here to fight you.”

“Then why are you here?”

Selith’s eyes darkened.

“To warn you.”

Malachi froze.

“Warn me about what?”

Selith’s voice dropped to a whisper that chilled him to the bone.

“Varron is not your greatest enemy.”

Malachi’s breath caught.

“Then who is?”

Selith stepped closer, her violet eyes glowing.

“The one who killed your brother.”

Malachi’s heart stopped.

“What did you say?”

Selith smiled — slow, cruel, deliberate.

“Oh, Malachi... did you really think your brother’s death was an accident? A random act of violence? A tragic mistake?”

Malachi’s fists shook.

“Don’t lie to me.”

Selith leaned in, her voice soft as poison.

“I do not lie. Not about this.”

Malachi’s vision blurred with rage.

“Who killed him?”

Selith whispered the answer like a secret meant to break him.

“Your brother was murdered by one of us.”

Malachi staggered backward.

“No... no, that’s not true...”

Selith’s smile widened.

“He died because of you, yes. But not in the way you think.”

Malachi’s chest tightened.

“Tell me who did it.”

Selith stepped back into the shadows.

“You will meet him soon.”

Malachi roared, fire erupting from his chest.

“Tell me!”

But Selith was already fading, her form dissolving into smoke.

Her final words echoed through the alley.

“He knows your name, Malachi Cross. And he is coming.”

Silence fell.

Malachi stood alone, fire flickering around him, breath shaking, heart breaking.

His brother hadn't died because of a mistake.

He had been murdered.

By a demon.

And now that demon was hunting him.

Malachi looked up at the sky, tears burning in his eyes.

“Jesus... help me.”

The answer came like a whisper carried on the wind.

I will.

Malachi closed his eyes.

He wasn't just fighting for redemption anymore.

He was fighting for justice.

And the war had just become personal.

CHAPTER IX — THE BREAKING OF THE CHAINS

The night felt heavier than usual.

Not just dark — oppressive.

Not just cold — suffocating.

Not just quiet — expectant.

Malachi walked fast, fists clenched, jaw tight, heart pounding with a rage he hadn't felt in years. Selith's words echoed in his mind like a curse he couldn't shake.

Your brother was murdered by one of us.

He replayed it over and over, each repetition cutting deeper than the last. He had spent years believing his brother's death was his fault — the result of his choices, his anger, his pride. But now...

Now the truth was worse.

His brother hadn't died because of him.

His brother had died because of them.

A demon had killed him.

And that demon was coming for Malachi next.

He turned down a deserted street, breathing hard, trying to steady himself. The city lights flickered overhead, casting long shadows across the pavement.

He stopped walking.

He couldn't breathe.

He leaned against a brick wall, gripping it so hard his knuckles turned white.

“Jesus...” he whispered, voice cracking. “Why didn’t You tell me?”

Silence.

Malachi slammed his fist into the wall, brick cracking under the impact.

“WHY DIDN’T YOU TELL ME?!”

His voice echoed through the empty street.

He slid down the wall, collapsing onto the cold pavement. His chest heaved. His vision blurred. His hands shook.

He felt like he was drowning again — pulled under by guilt, rage, grief, confusion.

He buried his face in his hands.

“I can’t do this,” he whispered. “I can’t carry this. I can’t fight this. I can’t—”

A gentle warmth touched his shoulder.

Malachi froze.

He looked up.

Jesus stood beside him.

Not glowing.

Not radiant.

Not overwhelming.

Just... present.

Malachi's breath caught.

“Why?” he whispered. “Why didn't You tell me the truth?”

Jesus knelt beside him, eyes full of compassion.

Because you weren't ready to hear it.

Malachi shook his head. “I should've known. I should've
—”

Jesus placed a hand over Malachi's heart.

You would have blamed yourself even more.

Malachi's voice broke. “I already blame myself.”

Jesus' expression softened.

I know. That is why I am breaking the chains that bind you.

Malachi swallowed hard. "What chains?"

Jesus looked into him — not at him, into him.

The chains of guilt. The chains of shame. The chains of lies the enemy wrapped around your soul the night your brother died.

Malachi's eyes filled with tears.

"I thought... I thought it was my fault."

Jesus shook His head gently.

You made mistakes. But you did not kill him. Darkness did.

Malachi clenched his fists. "Then why didn't You stop it?"

Jesus' voice was soft, steady, unshaken.

I did.

Malachi froze.

“What... what do You mean?”

Jesus’ eyes glowed with a sorrow older than time.

Your brother cried out to Me in his final breath. And I took him home.

Malachi’s breath hitched.

“He... he called out to You?”

Jesus nodded.

And I answered.

Malachi covered his mouth, tears streaming down his face.

Jesus continued.

Your brother is not lost. He is not suffering. He is not gone. He is with Me.

Malachi sobbed — not the quiet, controlled tears of a hardened man, but the raw, broken sobs of a child who had carried too much for too long.

Jesus pulled him close.

Malachi clung to Him, shaking.

“I miss him,” he whispered.

I know.

“I want him back.”

I know.

“It hurts so much.”

I know.

Jesus held him until the sobs quieted, until the shaking stopped, until the storm inside him began to calm.

Then Jesus spoke again.

Malachi... look at Me.

Malachi lifted his head.

Jesus placed a hand over his heart.

Your brother’s death was not the end of your story. It was the beginning of your calling.

Malachi frowned. “What calling?”

Jesus’ voice deepened — not louder, but heavier, filled with purpose.

To break the chains of others the way I am breaking yours.

Malachi swallowed hard.

“And the demon who killed him?”

Jesus’ expression hardened — fierce, righteous, unyielding.

He is coming.

Malachi’s fire stirred.

“And when he does?”

Jesus met his gaze.

You will not face him alone.

Malachi stood slowly, wiping his face.

“Then show me how to fight.”

Jesus smiled — not with softness, but with pride.

You already know how.

Malachi felt the fire inside him ignite — stronger, brighter, purer than ever before.

The chains of guilt cracked.

The chains of shame shattered.

The chains of lies fell away.

He wasn't fighting for redemption anymore.

He was fighting from it.

He looked up at the sky.

“I'm ready.”

Jesus nodded.

Then rise, Malachi Cross. The enemy fears the man you are becoming.

Malachi clenched his fists, fire swirling around them.

The war wasn't over.

It was just beginning.

CHAPTER X — THE RISE OF THE REDEEMED

The wind howled across the rooftops of Detroit, carrying with it the scent of snow and smoke. The city lights flickered like dying stars, struggling to hold back the darkness pressing in from every direction.

Malachi stood on the rooftop of an abandoned high-rise, staring out over the city he once helped break — and was now called to protect.

His breath fogged in the cold air. His fists clenched at his sides. His heart pounded with a mixture of fear, fury, and something he hadn't felt in years:

Purpose.

Jesus' words echoed in his mind.

Your brother's death was not the end of your story. It was the beginning of your calling.

Malachi closed his eyes.

He could still feel the warmth of Jesus' hand on his heart.
He could still feel the chains breaking.
He could still feel the fire rising.

But tonight... the fire felt different.

He wasn't just burning with power.

He was burning with justice.

A voice cut through the wind.

“You came.”

Malachi opened his eyes.

Varron stood across the rooftop — tall, calm, hands in his pockets, eyes glowing faintly red. But he wasn't alone.

The shadows behind him twisted, forming a shape that made Malachi's blood run cold.

A figure stepped forward.

Taller than Varron.

Broader.

Darker.

Its form flickered like smoke and flame, its eyes burning with ancient hatred. Its presence pressed against Malachi's chest like a weight.

Malachi knew instantly.

This was the one.

The demon who murdered his brother.

The demon who had haunted his nightmares.

The demon who had whispered lies into his guilt.

The demon who had claimed his family.

The demon who had marked him.

Varron stepped aside, bowing his head slightly.

“Malachi Cross,” he said softly. “Meet Azrakar.”

The demon’s voice rumbled like thunder wrapped in poison.

You have caused me much trouble, Redeemed.

Malachi’s fists tightened.

“You killed my brother.”

Azrakar smiled — a jagged, impossible smile.

He was in my way.

Malachi’s fire surged.

“You murdered him.”

Azrakar stepped closer, shadows swirling around him.

I freed him from you.

Malachi's vision blurred with rage.

“You're lying.”

Azrakar's eyes glowed brighter.

He begged for his life. He cried out for help. And you were not there.

Malachi's chest tightened.

“Stop.”

Azrakar leaned in.

You failed him.

Malachi's fire flickered.

“You failed him,* the demon repeated, voice twisting like a blade. You failed him, Malachi Cross. You failed him the way you will fail everyone else.

Malachi dropped to one knee, breath shaking.

The guilt clawed at him.

The shame whispered.

The darkness pressed in.

Azrakar raised a hand.

You were mine. You were always mine. And tonight, I take you back.

Malachi felt the shadows closing around him — cold, suffocating, crushing.

He couldn't breathe.

He couldn't think.

He couldn't fight.

He whispered one word.

“Jesus...”

A spark ignited in his chest.

Azrakar snarled.

No.

The spark grew.

Malachi lifted his head.

“No,” he whispered. “You don't get to own me anymore.”

Azrakar roared, shadows swirling violently.

Malachi stood slowly, fire rising inside him like a sunrise breaking through storm clouds.

“You don’t get to define me.”

The fire spread through his arms.

“You don’t get to shame me.”

The fire reached his fists.

“You don’t get to chain me.”

The fire erupted from his chest.

“I. AM. REDEEMED.”

Light exploded across the rooftop.

Azrakar staggered backward, shrieking as the fire burned through the shadows around him.

Varron shielded his eyes, stumbling.

Malachi stepped forward, armor of light materializing around him — brighter, stronger, more complete than ever before.

The breastplate blazed like molten gold.
The bracers shimmered with holy fire.
The cloak of grace whipped behind him like a banner of
victory.
The shield formed in his left hand.
A sword of pure light formed in his right.

Gabriel's voice echoed in his memory.

Your training begins now.

Malachi raised the sword.

Azrakar roared and lunged.

Malachi met him head-on.

Their collision shook the rooftop, sending cracks
spiderwebbing across the concrete. Azrakar's claws
slashed through the air, but Malachi blocked with the
shield, sparks of light scattering like stars.

Malachi swung the sword — a clean, powerful arc —
and struck Azrakar's chest. The demon screamed as
holy fire tore through him.

Varron charged from the side, but Malachi spun,
slamming the shield into his face. Varron flew
backward, crashing into a ventilation unit.

Azrakar roared again, shadows swirling around him like a storm.

You cannot kill me!

Malachi stepped forward, fire blazing from his armor.

“I’m not here to kill you.”

He raised the sword.

“I’m here to end you.”

Azrakar lunged.

Malachi shouted:

“IN THE NAME OF JESUS!”

He drove the sword into Azrakar’s chest.

Light exploded — brighter than anything Malachi had ever seen. The rooftop shook. The air cracked. The shadows screamed.

Azrakar’s form shattered — breaking apart into fragments of darkness that dissolved into the wind.

Silence fell.

Malachi stood alone, sword fading, armor dissolving, breath shaking.

It was over.

The demon who murdered his brother was gone.

Varron crawled to his feet, blood dripping from his mouth.

“This isn’t over,” he hissed. “You’ve made enemies you cannot imagine.”

Malachi stepped toward him.

Varron flinched.

Malachi’s voice was calm.

“You don’t scare me.”

Varron’s eyes narrowed.

“You will.”

He vanished into the shadows.

Malachi stood alone on the rooftop, the city lights flickering below him.

He looked up at the sky.

“Jesus... thank You.”

Warmth filled his chest.

Well done, My warrior.

Malachi closed his eyes.

He wasn't the man he used to be.

He wasn't the weapon he once was.

He wasn't the monster he feared becoming.

He was redeemed.

And Detroit had a protector.

Malachi opened his eyes.

The night no longer felt heavy.

It felt full of purpose.

He stepped to the edge of the rooftop.

A new war was beginning.

And he was ready.

The Redeemed had risen.

Dedication

To the One who stepped into my darkness
long before I ever knew how to reach for His light—
Jesus, my Savior, my Strength, my Redeemer.
Every page in this book exists because You refused
to let brokenness have the final word.
You took what the enemy meant for destruction
and turned it into a testimony of fire.

To my brother in the story,
and to every brother, sister, friend, or loved one
whose absence still aches in the quiet places—
may this book remind you that Heaven holds
what hell tried to steal.

And to every soul who has ever believed
they were too far gone, too stained, too shattered
to be used by God—
this is for you.
May you discover the truth Malachi learned:
that grace does not choose the worthy,
it creates them.

This book is dedicated to the warriors rising
from the ruins of who they used to be.