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HONOR BEGINS AT HOME

COURAGEOUS

a novelization by

RANDY ALCORN

based on the screenplay by

ALEX KENDRICK & STEPHEN KENDRICK

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Courageous: A Novel

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Randy dedicates this book to:

*My precious wife, Nanci,
my wonderful daughters, Karina and Angela,
my excellent sons-in-law, Dan Franklin and Dan Stump,
and my beloved grandsons, Jake, Matt, Tyler, and Jack.
For each of you, my family, no man could be more grateful
to God than I am.*



Alex and Stephen dedicate this book to:

*Our wives, Christina and Jill—your love and support have
added momentum to our pursuit of God’s calling on our lives.
You are an incredible treasure! May God continue blessing,
teaching, and drawing us closer together and closer to Him.
We love and need you desperately.
Sherwood Baptist Church—may the love you have for Christ
and each other continue to shine brighter with each passing year.
Keep praying, serving, giving, and growing. It has already been
worth it, but your greatest reward is still to come! May the
world know that Jesus Christ is your Lord! To Him be the glory!*

CHAPTER ONE

A ROYAL-RED Ford F-150 SuperCrew rolled through the streets of Albany, Georgia. The pickup's driver brimmed with optimism, so much that he couldn't possibly foresee the battles about to hit his hometown.

Life here is going to be good, thirty-seven-year-old Nathan Hayes told himself. After eight years in Atlanta, Nathan had come home to Albany, three hours south, with his wife and three children. New job. New house. New start. Even a new truck.

Sleeves rolled up and windows rolled down, Nathan enjoyed the south Georgia sunshine. He pulled into a service station in west Albany, a remodeled version of the very one he'd stopped at twenty years earlier after getting his driver's license. He'd been nervous. Wasn't his part of town—mostly white folks, and in those days he didn't know many. But gas had been cheap and the drive beautiful.

Nathan allowed himself a long, lazy stretch. He inserted his credit card and pumped gas, humming contentedly. Albany was the birthplace of Ray Charles, "Georgia on My Mind," and some of the best home cookin' in the galaxy. One-third white,

two-thirds black, a quarter of the population below the poverty level, Albany had survived several Flint River floods and a history of racial tension. But with all its beauties and flaws, Albany was home.

Nathan topped off his tank, got into his pickup, and turned the key before he remembered the carnage. A half-dozen big, clumsy june bugs had given their all to make an impression on his windshield.

He got out and plunged a squeegee into a wash bucket only to find it bone-dry.

As he searched for another bucket, Nathan noticed the mix of people at the station: an overly cautious senior citizen creeping his Buick onto Newton Road, a middle-aged woman texting in the driver's seat, a guy in a do-rag leaning against a spotless silver Denali.

Nathan left his truck running and door open; he turned away only seconds—or so it seemed. When the door slammed, he swung around as his truck pulled away from the pump!

Adrenaline surged. He ran toward the driver's side while his pickup squealed toward the street.

“Hey! Stop! No!” Nathan's skills from Dougherty High football kicked in. He lunged, thrust his right arm through the open window, and grabbed the steering wheel, running next to the moving pickup.

“Stop the car!” Nathan yelled. “Stop the car!”

The carjacker, TJ, was twenty-eight years old and tougher than boot leather—the undisputed leader of the Gangster Nation, one of Albany's biggest gangs.

“What's wrong wichu, man?” TJ could bench-press 410 and outweighed this dude by sixty pounds. He had no intention of giving back this ride.

He accelerated onto the main road, but Nathan wouldn't let

go. TJ repeatedly smacked Nathan's face with a vicious right jab, then pounded his fingers to break their grip. "You gonna die, man; you gonna die."

Nathan's toes screamed at him, his Mizuno running shoes no match for the asphalt. Occasionally his right foot found the narrow running board for a little relief, only to lose it again when his head took another blow. While one hand gripped the wheel, Nathan clawed at the thief. The pickup veered right and left. Leaning back to avoid the punches, Nathan saw the oncoming traffic.

TJ saw too, and he angled into it, hoping the cars would peel this fool off.

First a silver Toyota whizzed by, then a white Chevy; each veered off to avoid the swerving truck. Nathan Hayes dangled like a Hollywood stuntman.

"Let go, fool!"

Finally Nathan got a good toehold on the running board and used every remaining ounce of strength to yank the steering wheel. The truck lost control and careened off the road. Nathan rolled onto gravel and rough grass.

TJ smashed into a tree, and the air bag exploded into his face, leaving it red with blood. The gangbanger stumbled out of the truck, dazed and bleeding, trying to find his legs. TJ wanted some get-back on this dude who'd dared to challenge him, but he could barely negotiate a few steps without faltering.

The silver Denali from the gas station screeched to a halt just a few feet from TJ. "Hurry up, man," the driver yelled. "It ain't worth it, dawg. Get in. Let's go!"

TJ staggered into the Denali, which sped away.

Stunned, Nathan pulled himself toward his vehicle. His face was red and scratched, his blue tattersall shirt stained. His jeans were ripped, his right shoe torn open, sock bloody.

An auburn-haired woman dressed for the gym in black yoga pants jumped out of the passenger side of a white Acadia. She ran to Nathan. “Are you okay?”

Nathan ignored her, relentlessly crawling to his truck.

The driver of the SUV, a blonde, was giving their location to the 911 operator.

“Sir,” the auburn-haired woman said, “you need to stay still.”

Nathan continued his crawl, disoriented but determined.

“Don’t worry about the car!”

Still moving, Nathan said, “I’m not worried about the car.”

He used the tire to pull himself up enough to open the back door of the pickup. An ear-piercing cry erupted from a car seat. The little boy let loose his pent-up shock at the sight of his daddy on his knees, sweaty and bleeding. Nathan reached in to comfort him.

As sirens approached, the auburn-haired woman watched Nathan with his little boy in the tiny denim overalls. This stranger wasn’t blindly obsessed with a possession. He wasn’t crazy.

He was a hero—a father who’d risked his life to rescue his child.

CHAPTER TWO

CORPORAL ADAM MITCHELL approached the heroic father who sat on the back bumper of an ambulance while a paramedic tended his bloodied foot. Shane Fuller, Adam's younger partner, matched him step for step. Two other deputies interviewed the women who'd stopped to help. The man held his baby close to his chest and ran a hand over the soft black hair.

Adam addressed the paramedic. "How about moving the child over there? Someone keep an eye on him while we ask this man some questions."

"No thank you," the father said. "I took my eye off him once; next thing I know I almost lost him."

Adam paused, running a hand quickly through his dark-brown thinning hair, then asked, "Can you describe the guy who stole your truck?"

"Black—dark like me. Huge biceps and a powerful punch." He touched his jaw gingerly. "Can't tell you much about his face, but I could describe his fist perfectly: hard as granite. Big gold ring. Late twenties, wearin' a big hunk of gold jewelry around his neck."

“Notice any other markings? Tattoos?”

“No, it happened so fast. I think he had on a black do-rag. But I had my eyes on the steering wheel. And the oncoming traffic!”

Shane squinted and rubbed at the bags under his eyes. “What about the driver of the getaway car?”

“Didn’t see him. I was just thinking about my son.”

“You’re lucky you didn’t get thrown on the road. I can’t believe you got away with that crazy stunt.”

“I was fortunate. Not crazy, though. What else could I do?”

“Why not let the police go after him? That’s our job!”

“And what would that thug have done with my son? Tossed him in the bushes when he cried? I wasn’t lettin’ go of that wheel. Jackson is *my* job.”

“You know you could have lost your life?”

“Yes, sir,” he said, cradling the child in his arms. “But I couldn’t risk losing my son.”

Deep in thought, Adam stopped jotting notes.

The injured man said, “I was looking forward to meeting you guys under better circumstances on Monday.”

“Monday?” Shane asked.

“Yeah. I start working with you next week.”

Adam glanced at the notes he’d written earlier. “*Nathan Hayes*. I wondered how I recognized your name.” He extended his hand. “Adam Mitchell. Pleased to meet you, Deputy Hayes.”

“Shane Fuller.”

“Good to meet you both,” Nathan said.

“Why Albany?” Shane asked.

“Wanted to give my family a slower pace. Grew up here. Went to Dougherty High. Life in Atlanta wasn’t a good fit for us.”

Adam checked out Nathan’s truck. “I own an F-150 myself. I know a good body shop. I’ll write it down.”

“Thanks.”

The paramedic interrupted. “Done with that foot for now. They’ll take care of you at the hospital. Need to get you inside. We can strap your kid’s car seat in.”

“I want Jackson where I can see him.”

Adam looked at Nathan. “I’d say welcome back to Albany, but I hate to after such a rotten day.”

“Well, my son’s okay. So I still say it’s a good day.” He smiled at Jackson and continued rocking him gently.

From his squad car, Adam watched as the paramedics shut the ambulance door and drove away with the brave father and his child.

He pulled onto the road. “Would you have grabbed the wheel? And held on while you were getting beaten to a pulp?”

Shane Fuller turned and thought a moment. “Well, I can think of a few ways he could have died doing that. Crazy as it was, I guess he saved his kid’s life.”

“So would you have held on to the wheel?”

“Honestly? I don’t know. Would you?”

Adam thought about it but didn’t respond.

It troubled him that he wasn’t sure of his answer.



Carrying several files from the sheriff’s office, Adam entered his back door and gazed through to the living room’s most prominent wall hanging, a sixteen-by-twenty framed photo with the autograph of one of the greatest Atlanta Falcons of all time: Steve Bartkowski. He nodded to Steve, his boyhood idol.

Adam walked through the hall to the kitchen, where his wife was finishing the dishes.

“Adam, it’s 8:15! Where have you been?”

Victoria had *the tone*, so Adam gave her *the look*.

“Working on reports. Trying not to miss any more deadlines. Sorry about dinner.” Just walked in the door and already he was engaged in self-defense. He barely registered Victoria’s thick dark curls falling onto her new blue sweater. Sometimes, even after eighteen years of marriage, Adam was struck by how pretty she was. But tonight his wall went up, romantic thoughts evaporating.

“You missed Emily’s piano recital.”

Adam grimaced. “I totally forgot about that.”

“We talked about it last week, yesterday, and again this morning. And you’d have known if you’d been home for dinner.”

“It was a crazy day. Lots of important stuff going on.”

“What’s more important than your children?”

Adam donned his best nobody-understands-a-cop face.

Victoria bit her cheek, then softened her tone. “Emily asked if she could stay up till you got home.” She paused, searching for words. “Dylan is out running. When he gets back, he’s going to ask you about that 5K race again.”

“And I’m gonna say no again.”

“I tried to tell him that. But he’s determined to change your mind.”

The back door opened. Adam sighed. “And here we go.”

Dylan Mitchell, a skinny, dark-haired fifteen-year-old wearing a sweaty black sleeveless T-shirt with red shorts, walked through the door, breathing hard.

Adam studied the junk mail in his hand.

“Dad, can I talk to you?”

“As long as it’s not about a 5K race.”

“Why not? A bunch of other guys are running in it with their dads.”

Adam finally glanced up at Dylan. *When did he get so tall?*

“You’re on the track team! You don’t need something else to run in.”

“They hardly ever let me run because I’m a freshman. I can’t sign up for this race unless you run with me.”

“Look, Dylan, it doesn’t bother me that you like to run. But there’ll be other races.”

Dylan scowled, then turned and walked stiffly to his room.

Victoria wiped her hands on a dish towel and approached Adam. “Can I suggest you spend a little more time with him?”

“All he wants to do is play video games or run five miles.”

“Then run with him. This race is just a 5K! What’s that, three miles?”

“Three point one.”

“Oh, sorry. That ‘point one’ would kill you?” She smiled quickly, attempting to defuse after detonation.

“You know I’ve never liked to run. Shoot hoops? Okay. Throw a football? Anytime. But he doesn’t like what I like. I’m forty years old. There’s gotta be a better way to spend time with him than torturing myself.”

“Well, you have got to do something.”

“He can help me build that shed in the backyard. I’m taking time off next week.”

“He’s gonna see that as your project. Besides, he’ll be at school most of the time. With track practice, he doesn’t get home until just before dinner, which you wouldn’t know since you’re seldom home by then. Adam, you really need to connect with your son.”

“You’re lecturing me again, Victoria.”

She walked to the sink and threw in the hand towel. Adam wondered whether she was conscious of the symbolism.

“Hi, Daddy!” Nine-year-old Emily entered the kitchen and leaned against the counter, smiling at her father. With dark

curly hair like her mom's, she was adorable in her princess pajamas.

"Hey, sweetheart. Sorry I missed your recital today."

"That's okay." She peered up with wide, dark, elf eyes. "I messed up three times."

"You did?"

"Yeah. But Hannah messed up four times, so I felt better."

Adam grinned and tweaked her nose. "You little stinker!"

Emily giggled.

Adam rounded the kitchen island and embraced his little girl. That's how it was, Adam realized—this hierarchy of relationships in the Mitchell home. Dylan was hard work with little payoff. Next came Victoria. He still loved her, but these days things were sweet one minute and sour the next. The sour parts often involved Dylan.

Adam wanted to *leave* the world's toughest job at the end of the day. He did *not* want to come home to it. But Emily was a delight. So easy.

"Emily's been invited to Hannah's birthday party."

"She has, huh?" He gave Emily a squeeze.

"Hannah's mom says she can take her home after school. But I told Emily she had to ask you first."

Emily spun like a gyroscope. Adam loved the delight she took in the smallest of things.

"Oh, please, Daddy! Please let me go! I promise I'll do my chores and my homework and . . . everything! Please!" Her smile was big, her dimples in just the right places, and her excitement lightened the whole room.

Adam asked Victoria, "Has she committed any crimes or misdemeanors lately?"

"No, she's been very good. She even cleaned her room without being asked."

“Yeah, but not by throwing everything in your closet, right, Emily?”

The little elf smiled sheepishly.

“Oh, all right. But you owe me a really big hug.”

Emily squealed and stretched her arms. “Yes! Thank you, Daddy!”

As Emily threw her arms around Adam’s neck, Dylan ducked into the kitchen to grab an apple. He stared at his father embracing Emily. His sister took center stage, as always. Dylan felt his teeth clamp together. *He always gives her whatever she wants. He won’t even enter a race with me.*

Dylan knew he was invisible to his father, but he saw his mom looking at him. She usually noticed him. His father never did. Except to shut him down.

Dylan turned his back on his father and retreated to his bedroom.

He didn’t slam the door. If he had, the house would have shaken.

CHAPTER THREE

MONDAY MORNING, Adam entered the kitchen at 7:10 and reached for the nearly full pot of French roast. *The problem with morning is that it comes before my first cup of coffee.*

Sundays were supposed to be restful, Adam knew, but yesterday had been tense. When Dylan didn't want to attend church, Adam had to insist, and Dylan pouted through Sunday dinner. Adam came down hard. So Victoria objected, and Adam told her that Dylan needed to grow up and stop sulking when life didn't go his way. Victoria was convinced Dylan and Emily heard their loud exchange. A frigid wind blew through the Mitchell household all that night.

Now Victoria sat at the kitchen table sipping her own morning coffee. Her weak smile told him she was still unhappy but probably wouldn't come after him with a steak knife.

He ate a quick piece of toast and a bowl of Wheaties, then went through the living room and paid his habitual homage to Steve Bartkowski. Steve was ageless. He demanded nothing of Adam and reminded him of his childhood fantasies. Back then, Adam dreamed of becoming a football player or an astronaut. As he pulled out of the driveway, he thought of the boys who'd

dreamed of becoming cops and were now businessmen. Maybe when they saw him, they imagined Adam was living the dream.

Yeah, right.

A cop's job wasn't easy. So why did being a husband and father seem far tougher?

The usual buzz of conversation filled the muster room at the sheriff's office, punctuated by laughter as the deputies shared favorite stories they'd rehashed many times while they waited for their shift meeting to begin. The room was a white cinder-block box crammed with fourteen fake wood folding tables in two rows, a narrow aisle between, and a podium in front. No one could mistake it for an executive boardroom.

Still, the stark walls and camaraderie were a familiar solace, and when Adam entered the muster room, he felt more at home than he'd felt with his family yesterday.

Adam and Shane sat next to each other on uncomfortable black stacking chairs, as they had for the last thirteen years, Styrofoam coffee cups, notepads, and pens in front of them. Ahead and to their left sat twenty-three-year-old David Thomson, fresh faced, looking like a grad student playing cop. Ten other deputies, eight men and two women, sat around them, two per table.

Adam turned to Shane. "Hey, I'm grillin' steaks on Saturday. What are you gonna do about it?"

"I'm gonna come over and eat one. Maybe two."

"That's what I'm talkin' about." He leaned forward. "David, you've got no life. Why don't you come too?"

"I've got a life."

"Yeah? What are you doin' this weekend?"

"Uh . . . I'm, uh . . . Well, it depends on whether—"

"Right. See you Saturday." Adam and Shane laughed. David smiled sheepishly.

Sergeant Murphy—a stocky, savvy veteran—began roll call. “Okay, let’s get started. First, Deputy David Thomson has survived his rookie year.”

Applause broke out. Adam raised a hand for a high five. David grinned in embarrassment and raised his hand to acknowledge the praise.

“You know what that means,” Shane said. “Now you can start using real bullets!”

Everyone laughed. Meanwhile a uniformed officer walked in the door, recognized only by Adam and Shane.

“Now I want to introduce you to Deputy Thomson’s new partner, Nathan Hayes. He’s joining our shift. He has eight years’ experience with the Fulton County Sheriff’s Department in Atlanta. But he grew up here in Albany. Let’s welcome him.”

The cops clapped for Hayes. He waved as he sat in the empty chair by David, then extended his hand to him.

“Unfortunately Deputy Hayes already had a run-in with a couple of our gang members. I’m sure you’ve heard the story. I don’t know department policy in Atlanta, Hayes, but in Albany we recommend staying *inside* vehicles on the highway.”

“I’ll try to remember that.”

“We have two new warrants today: Clyde and Jamar Holloman. Two frequent fliers who opened up a drug operation on the 600 block of Sheffield. I’d like both warrant teams to handle this one. Everyone else stick to your normal beats. Now the sheriff has something he wants to tell us this morning. Sheriff?”

A tall, sandy-haired man in uniform entered the room. From his haircut down, he looked like a Marine because he was one. His steely blue eyes seemed tired. Sheriff Brandon Gentry rarely made appearances in the muster room, so the deputies knew this must be important.

“An e-mail came across my desk I’d like to share with you. A recent study was done on the increase in violent gang activity. It says almost every case has something in common. Runaways, dropouts, kids on drugs, teens in prison.”

Sheriff Gentry paused and checked the printout. “The attribute they share is most of them came from a fatherless home. That makes kids growing up without dads our worst problem and the source of a thousand other problems. The study shows when a father is absent, kids are five times more likely to commit suicide, ten times more likely to abuse drugs, fourteen times more likely to commit rape, and twenty times more likely to go to prison.”

He eyed the deputies before he continued. “The study ends by saying, ‘As fathers check out in increasing numbers, these percentages continue to rise, with escalating gang violence and crime.’”

The sheriff lowered the paper. “So maybe you’re thinking, why tell us this, since by the time we face it on the streets, it’s usually too late? The answer is what we’ve told you a hundred times—the divorce rate for cops is high. I know your shift work is hard. But the bottom line is this: when you clock out, go home and love your families. All right, you’re dismissed. Get out of here.”

The sheriff strode out, and the deputies rose.

“‘Go home and love your families?’” Sergeant Brad Bronson snorted, addressing Sergeant Murphy. “In the old days they just told us, ‘Round up the bad guys and do your job!’”

“Yeah, and most of us were getting divorces, including you and me. The sheriff’s just trying to look out for the men. You might wanna show more respect.”

“He’s all hat and no cattle,” Bronson said to Murphy, way too loudly. “He’s been livin’ too long in high cotton.”

Adam sized up Brad Bronson, a piece of work if there ever was one. Six and a half feet tall, over three hundred pounds nonstrategically distributed, he was saggy fleshed, a giant marshmallow in pants, but still managed to intimidate. The hair that once grew on his huge billiard ball head had been rerouted out his ears. His forehead was the gray of smudged newsprint, some veins permanently broken from his history of head-butting uncooperative perps. Thick-throated and chinless, Bronson smelled of cigar smoke. The sergeant believed “too stupid to live” was a valid jury verdict.

Shane whispered to Adam, “There’s a lot of gravity in this world, but Bronson uses more than his share.”

“Well, boys,” Bronson said with a growl, “I’ll keep the streets safe while you take the ladies to the ballet.”

“Where you headed today, Sarge?” Adam asked.

“The toughest part of town. ’Course, the toughest part of town is wherever I happen to be standin’.” Even now, Bronson gave Adam his hundred-yard stare, the one that would have made Clint Eastwood in his prime melt like a salted slug. He cleared his throat, sounding like he was mixing cement.

Bronson acted tough, but Adam sensed more beneath the surface. In the twelve years Adam had known him, Bronson had been through two wives and had four children between them. Bronson constantly caused headaches for his superiors. He’d earned the particular ire of the public information officer, who repeatedly lectured him on his public demeanor and disdain for the media.

As the deputies made small talk on their way out, several shook hands with Nathan.

“Hold on,” Shane told Adam, then went to talk with Riley Cooper.

Adam approached Cooper’s partner, Jeff Henderson, forty

feet away, standing by his patrol car. Now a fifty-six-year-old veteran, Jeff had made a career of breaking in rookies, as he'd done with Adam seventeen years earlier. Last year, after their youngest son's graduation, Jeff's wife, Emma, had filed for divorce and moved to California to live near the older children and grandchildren.

Jeff's jaw was still chiseled, but his cheeks were fleshier and his blue eyes that used to flash bright seemed dimmer now. Adam reached out his hand. Jeff shook it, his grip looser than before.

"How are you, Jeff?"

He shrugged. "Can't complain. Wouldn't do any good if I did." His once-booming voice now seemed as weak as his handshake. Though he smiled, it appeared pasted on.

"How's Jeff Jr.?"

"Still alive, I guess. He hasn't spoken to me for a year. He and his sister side with their mother. Brent's at college now, hasn't been back."

"I'm sorry, Jeff."

"That's life."

"How's the stomach?"

"Sometimes it's okay, other times . . . feels like it happened yesterday."

"It" happened fourteen years ago when Jeff and Adam confronted a shoplifter fleeing a store. Jeff tackled him on the sidewalk, and the guy buried a blade deep in Jeff's stomach. It pierced his small intestine. He'd had two surgeries and unending therapy, but things hadn't been right since.

Time was supposed to heal Jeff, but it didn't. It just made him older. Some cops stayed fresh; many became shopworn. Jeff put in his time now, doing his job with less passion. He had another young partner, Riley Cooper, who was eager, as Adam

had been. But Jeff didn't appear the energetic mentor anymore. He had so much to offer, yet he no longer seemed to offer it. Sadly, Adam thought, that wasn't just Riley's loss, but Jeff's.

Whether it was the ongoing pain or the trauma of the stabbing, the Jeff that Adam had known years ago and the one he knew now weren't the same guy. At first, Emma had been the model cop's wife, standing by her man, trying to help him. But he wouldn't let her. One day thirteen years ago, Adam went to pick up Jeff at his house. Before Adam got to the door, it opened. Jeff came out in a fury and slammed it behind him. Emma called out the window, "Stop blaming your family! We're not the ones who stuck that knife in you!"

Adam had never forgotten that awkward moment. Neither had Jeff, though he never let on.

Jeff peered at Adam as if through a fog. "Your family okay?"
"Yeah. You know, the usual stuff. But we're fine."

Jeff nodded. To Adam they seemed like two old men on the front porch in their rocking chairs saying, "Yessir" to each other with nothing to talk about. He thought of inviting Jeff fishing or to a ball game. But if they couldn't keep a conversation going for five minutes, why shoot for hours?

"Ready to go, Adam!" Shane called as Riley Cooper, sunglasses donned and full of strength and youthful enthusiasm, approached Jeff's car.

"Later, Jeff," Adam said.

"Later."

As Adam walked toward Shane and his car, he thought about the sheriff's encouragement to leave his work behind him when his shift was over. How many times had he been told that? A hundred? How many times had he actually done it? A half dozen?

Now Adam Mitchell had to serve arrest warrants on a couple

of those fatherless young men the sheriff talked about. And if he wasn't careful, they could make Adam's kids fatherless too.



Seventeen-year-old Derrick Freeman made his way from the train tracks toward Washington and Roosevelt. Tall and slender, he was dressed in a purple plaid shirt with a black Volcom tee underneath and long black denim shorts. He approached an abandoned warehouse, cell phone to his ear.

"I can't do that right now, Gramma! I'll be home later." His jaw clenched. "I don't know when. I'm gonna take care of that later. Bye. I said *bye!*"

He crammed the phone into his pocket and peered into a shadowy building.

Big Antoine, TJ's right-hand man, spoke out of a dark corner. "Hey, man, why you talkin' to yo gramma like that?"

Derrick squinted. He saw Antoine leaning against a concrete pillar, wearing a camo do-rag and closely trimmed goatee, dressed in an Army shirt. Torn-off sleeves emphasized bulging muscles. He slowly and deliberately skinned an apple.

"Tired of her naggin' me. I'm gonna do what I wanna do, man."

"Ain't she takin' care of you?"

"She workin' all the time. I take care of myself."

The way Antoine used the knife on the apple made Derrick's nerve endings crawl. He wondered if someone with that same kind of knife had put the two scars on Antoine's right cheek.

"So you ain't got nobody? Well, little wannabe, you better be sure you ready to do this. It ain't no game, man."

Derrick took a few steps closer, eyes still on the rotating knife scalping the apple. "Tell TJ I want in. I'm ready."

“You *think* you ready. TJ’s gonna check you out. Watch out, man. TJ’s a beast.”

Derrick hesitated, then blurted out, “Is it true the Waterhouse kid died when he was jumped in?”

Antoine stared. “Got a little rough. Stuff happens. That kid was weak. TJ don’t mess around. He’s gonna make you prove yo’self.”

Derrick sucked in air, stuck out his chest, and tried to deepen his voice. “Then I’ll just prove myself.”

“Good. Just remember . . . I warned ya.”



eternal perspective ministries

with author Randy Alcorn

Learn more about *Courageous*

As law enforcement officers, Adam Mitchell, Nathan Hayes, and their partners willingly stand up to the worst the world can offer. Yet at the end of the day, they face a challenge that none of them are truly prepared to tackle: fatherhood. Can a newfound urgency help these dads draw closer to God...and to their children?

Purchase this book



About Randy Alcorn

Randy is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries and the best-selling author of over 50 books (over nine million in print) including *Heaven*, *The Treasure Principle*, and the Gold Medallion winner *Safely Home*.



About Eternal Perspective Ministries

Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a nonprofit ministry dedicated to teaching principles of God's Word and assisting the church in ministering to the unreached, unfed, unborn, uneducated, and unsupported people around the world. You can order all of Randy's books and products through EPM's online store at www.epm.org.