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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.