



WHAT DO  
YOU ALLOW  
TO DEFINE  
YOU?

FROM THE CREATORS OF WAR ROOM

# OVERCOMER

A NOVELIZATION BY  
CHRIS FABRY

BASED ON THE MOTION PICTURE BY  
ALEX KENDRICK & STEPHEN KENDRICK

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*Soon shall close thy earthly mission;  
Swift shall pass thy pilgrim days;  
Hope shall change to glad fruition,  
Faith to sight, and prayer to praise!*

“JESUS, I MY CROSS HAVE TAKEN,” HENRY F. LYTE

# PROLOGUE



JUNE 1999

Barbara Scott paused at her front door and listened, hoping she would hear noise inside. The TV blaring. Her granddaughter crying. She longed for anything but silence. She had awakened that morning with a feeling this would be the day something good would happen, the answer to her prayers would come. When she got home from work and opened her door, all her fears would ease. She felt a pang of hope, a stirring she couldn't describe that was equal parts pain and expectation. Pain for the loss in her life. Expectation that today things would finally turn around. They had to get better, didn't they? Things couldn't get worse.

Barbara caught a reflection of herself in the window. At forty-five, it seemed Barbara had stood in front of a lot of doors. Some were locked. Others were wide-open and beckoned her inside. She knew she shouldn't walk through some doors, and others she didn't feel confident enough to enter. Life was a series of doors and regrets.

A warm summer wind whistled through the trees, but she felt an unexpected chill as she grabbed the wobbly doorknob. Some chills came and passed. This one went to the marrow. Was she coming down with something?

Her daughter, Janet, always talked about coming down with something. There was a word for that—*hypo*-something or other—but the word that came to Barbara's mind was *drama*. There was so much drama to that girl. Enough to last a lifetime. When would the drama end? When would Barbara be able to move ahead without all the worry and struggle Janet brought with her poor choices?

*Please, God. Let her be here. That's all I'm asking. Let her be sitting on the couch. Let me hear that baby's cry. I just want them back. Is that too much to ask? I'll take the drama. Just bring them back. Let me hear from her today, Lord.*

She pushed open the door and it swung, hinges creaking. She ought to spray them with some WD-40. Those hinges had borne the weight of that door like the weight she carried, her choices and the choices of others. She carried life like a cross. Her back was tired and her knees ached and her ankles were swollen from a full day's work. She was in the prime of her life, but she felt like every part

of her had been wrung out like a dishrag, and her hopes and dreams had splattered on the tile, nobody but her to mop the mess. Why did she always have to clean up the mess?

That was a peculiar loneliness, when life lay on the floor and you were the only one to clean it. She didn't have the energy. It had left with her husband. Just flown like a bird carried off by a strong wind.

When the door banged against the hollow closet, Barbara took a step inside and scanned the living room. Perhaps Janet's suitcase would be there. Her jacket on the back of the couch. Janet holding the baby and walking up the hall from the back bedroom. She saw none of that. She heard no baby's cry. The room was no different from when she'd stepped out: cold, empty, and silent.

She put down her purse and keys and closed the door, then checked Janet's room. The bed was just as Barbara had left it that morning, made but empty. Her granddaughter's crib sat in the corner, also empty. The sight of it sent an ache deep into her soul. Where had Janet and Hannah gone?

Of course, Barbara knew. Not the exact location, but she knew who they were with. Barbara had driven to the man's old apartment on the other side of town, but his car wasn't there and there was no answer at the door. She'd called his work but they said he had quit. Nobody knew where he was.

Another closed door. Another dead end.



After Hannah's birth, there'd been a honeymoon period when Janet seemed buoyed by this new life. There was something about a baby in the house, even those wailing cries at 3 a.m., that told Barbara things would be okay, that though the world seemed like it had spun out of control, there was always a chance for life. She'd heard that a baby's cry was God's way of telling the world that He still had a plan. Now, standing in that empty room, she wondered if God's planning was off. Maybe He'd forgotten her prayers or hadn't heard them to begin with. And then the terrifying thought came. Maybe God wasn't there at all.

Months earlier, Janet had returned home penitent, deeply sorry for her mistakes and the trouble she had brought her mother. Barbara was glad Janet hadn't decided to end the child's life in the womb. She'd preached to her daughter that life was sacred and no child was a mistake. So they had walked through the last months of her pregnancy together, drawing a little closer each day, fixing up the back bedroom with a crib Barbara had found at a garage sale. She'd mended the broken slat on the rocking chair her own mother had used when Barbara was a baby. Oh, the worn arms on that chair and the memories it brought when she put her hand there.

Then, two months ago, Janet and Hannah left while Barbara was at work. No note. No phone call. Nothing. Just disappeared into thin air. And every day she came home hoping to hear the sound of that child.

Barbara wandered to the kitchen and noticed the red light blinking. The answering machine. Her heart fluttered as she hit the button and heard the computerized voice. “You have one message.” Why couldn’t the machine just play it instead of telling her how many there were and what time it came in? She just wanted to hear it.

That inner pang hit again. If she heard Janet’s voice and knew she was okay and that little Hannah was all right, that would be enough. That would be the answer to her prayers. It would be like hope walking through the door. It would let her know that she hadn’t asked too much of God.

“Mrs. Scott, this is Cindy Burgess at Franklin General.”

*The hospital. Why was the hospital calling?*

“We have an emergency here and need you to come down right away, ma’am. When you get this message, please call. My number is . . .”

*Emergency?*

The doorbell rang and she couldn’t process the sound. She lifted her arm as if she could get the person to go away with just a wave. She looked for something to write on as the woman on the message repeated her number.

The doorbell again. Then a loud knock.

“Just a minute!” Barbara shouted, grabbing an unpaid bill from the kitchen table. She turned it over and wrote the number on the back.

“Please call me as soon as possible, Mrs. Scott,” the woman on the machine said. “Better yet, just get here as soon as you can.”

A banging on the door now. Someone shouted, “Open up!”

“Hold on a minute!” Barbara yelled, trying to scribble the last four numbers. Trying to think who might have been taken to the hospital and why they would be calling her about it. Trying to hope it wasn’t who she thought.

The front door swung open and banged hard against the closet and Barbara looked into the face of the devil himself. The one everybody called T-bone. Why they called him that, she didn’t know and didn’t care.

T-bone held a blanket in front of him. It was the one Barbara had made for Hannah. Pink and soft and fluffy. He stepped inside.

“Don’t you come in here,” Barbara said. “I told you to never come to this house.”

Her words didn’t connect with him. His eyes were hollow and bloodshot. His cheeks sunken. He usually dressed nicely and had so much confidence—cockiness. But now he wore sweatpants and a stained T-shirt. He had a scruffy beard and wrinkled clothes that looked like they hadn’t been laundered in a month.

“I didn’t know what to do,” T-bone said, stammering. “I just wanted to . . .” His voice trailed off.

What in the world was he talking about?

“Where’s Janet and the baby? I haven’t seen them in two months. Have they been with you?”

He nodded. “Yes.” All the charm was gone. All the swagger he’d used to lure Janet had leaked out of him.

He looked like simmering death. He stooped and put the blanket on the floor in front of him.

The blanket moved and a little fist shot through the folds. Barbara gasped, then bent down and looked inside and heard her granddaughter give a raspy cry.

“Oh, come here, baby, it’s all right,” Barbara said, cradling the child to her chest. As soon as she held Hannah, she began swaying, moving back and forth to quiet and comfort the child.

“I called 911,” he said weakly, absently.

“You did what?” Barbara said. “Why did you call 911?”

He didn’t answer, his eyes darting as if he didn’t know where he was. Then he turned and stumbled toward the door and she saw the untied shoelaces flapping.

“Where’s my daughter?” Barbara yelled. “Is she at the hospital?”

Hannah wailed.

T-bone stopped on the first step and looked back with a fear she had never seen before. “I tried. I really tried. I didn’t know what to do.”

“What happened?” Barbara said, grabbing her purse and following him outside, holding the baby tightly.

He stumbled on the steps and fell, hitting his elbow on the concrete. He gave a muted yelp of pain. She didn’t help him up.

“Where’s Hannah’s car seat?”

“I don’t know.”

“You drove her here without it?” Barbara snapped.

He managed to stand and took a few steps toward his car, walking like the ground was tilted at some impossible angle.

“If you’ve hurt my daughter, you’re going to answer for it. Do you understand me?”

He tried three times to open his door, looking at her, mouthing something she couldn’t hear. What did he say? She couldn’t read lips but swore he was saying, “I’m sorry.”

“When did this baby last eat?” Barbara yelled. “Where’s her formula? And where are her bottles? You answer me, T-bone!”

He opened the door and fell behind the wheel of his nice car with leather seats. He started it and backed up, but he’d forgotten to close his door. When he gunned the engine, it slammed and his tires squealed. He raced out of the parking lot.

Heart beating wildly now, Barbara had to get to the hospital. Janet was in trouble. She could feel it in the voice of the woman on the phone. She could see it in T-bone’s eyes. But what about Hannah? She couldn’t drive without a car seat.

*Lord, I need Your help like I’ve never needed it. Protect my girl. Keep her safe. And protect Hannah as we drive.*

She wrapped the blanket tighter around Hannah and got in her car, holding the child in one arm as she drove to the hospital, praying like she had never prayed before. She didn’t know what else to do.

*Part 1*

# THE COACH

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# CHAPTER 1



FEBRUARY 2014

ICSSA CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

Coach John Harrison told his Cougars the game would be a dogfight, and he was right. It was a seesaw, scratch-and-claw battle and both teams played well, making few mistakes and hustling for every loose ball. When the buzzer sounded to end the first half, the Cougars led the Knights by three points. In the locker room, John gathered himself and drew on his playing days. He knew exactly how those boys felt—the adrenaline, the aching muscles, and the drive to win. He wanted it just as bad—maybe more.

“We’re going to keep driving to the basket,” he said.



“We’re going to attack their defense and force them to foul. This is our night. We are going to win this game.”

John had decades of playing and coaching experience. He was forty-five but felt twenty-five, and a game like this brought out all the competitive juices. His dark hair had thinned a bit, but other than that and the few extra pounds he carried, he felt in his prime. He was made for games like this, for the challenge of going against a good team with a good coach.

However, in the second half, his confidence waned when the Knights pulled ahead. He regained some hope when his son Ethan hit a three-pointer with eight minutes remaining.

“This is it,” John said in the time-out. “We’re up by two. We don’t take the foot off the gas pedal. Strong passes. Drive to the basket and get a good shot or pick up the foul.”

John knew coaching was reminding. In the middle of the battle, players needed to hear a coach’s words. Tell them, tell them again, and keep beating the drum. As he spoke, he sensed the momentum swinging their way. The crowd was with them, buoying them, and why wouldn’t they be? They were playing in their own gymnasium. The league had made that decision a year ago because of its size and location. The Cougars were taking advantage of their home court.

John grabbed Ethan as the time-out ended. “How you feeling?”

“I’d feel better if we had a bigger lead,” Ethan said.

John smiled. On the next play, the Knights broke toward

the basket and a Cougar player sacrificed himself and took the charge. The referee blew the whistle and called a blocking foul on the Cougars. John folded his arms, gave the ref a look, and called the next play.

Momentum is a cruel friend, and it turned on John and his team. With two minutes to go, they were down by eight points. In the huddle on the sideline, John desperately tried to make his team believe again.

“Look at me,” John said intensely. “All eyes right here. This is exactly where we were last game with them, chasing them from behind. Remember what happened? They’re scared we’re gonna do it again.”

“Let’s do it again, Coach,” Ty Jones said.

The team attacked the court with fire in their eyes. Ethan scored quickly, then stole the ball and put it in the basket. With less than a minute left, the score was 84–80. John yelled for full-court pressure and forced the Knights to call their final time-out.

“Come here, come here, come here!” John yelled, pulling his team together, the crowd going wild. The boys gathered around him, sweaty, lungs burning, fatigued. But he saw players hungry for his words. They knew they had a coach who believed in them.

“Okay, listen, they’re going to try to hold the ball and run out the clock. You gotta keep the pressure up. Get in their face! When we get the ball back, run a double flex and look for Ethan or Jeff for a three. Then crash the boards. Stay in full-court press till it’s over. Cougars on three.”

John counted them down and their hands went into the air with a shout of “Cougars!”

John saw it in their faces. He had given them confidence by saying, “*When* we get the ball back . . .” There was no question or doubt in his voice.

The Cougars were built around three players: Ty, Ethan, and Jeff. John joked that they’d played together since they were in diapers. Other teams feared the Ty/Ethan/Jeff juggernaut because they worked with one mind, one heart. An opposing coach called them the “velociraptors” for their ability to coordinate.

John glanced at his wife, Amy, who sat in the stands with their younger son, Will. She’d been to every game this season, cheering him on but cheering twice as loud for Ethan, their older son. She looked his way, and he smiled, knowing she had his back.

Ty intercepted an inbound pass and the ball went to Jeff Baker, who drained a three-pointer. With only seventeen seconds left, the Cougars were in business.

No time to celebrate. John waved and yelled for a full-court press. They needed one more steal and one basket to pull ahead.

Instead of trying to run out the clock, the Knights drove to the basket but missed a layup. Another Knight rebounded and dunked the ball. The Knights went ahead 86–83.

As long as there was time on the clock, there was a chance.

“Ethan!” he yelled.

The ball came to his son. Three seconds left. Ethan dribbled twice, lunging toward half-court.

“Shoot it! Shoot it! Shoot it!”

Ethan launched a high, arcing shot. As the ball descended, the buzzer sounded, but instead of swishing through the net, the ball caromed off the rim and bounced harmlessly away.

The Knights celebrated. Ethan put his hands behind his head and knelt, totally spent. A hush fell over the gym and John looked at the scoreboard. He wanted to sink to his knees like a few of his players. But he couldn't. Instead, he clapped and urged Ethan from the floor as the home crowd chanted, “We are proud of you! We are proud of you!”

John shook hands with the Knights' coach and congratulated him.

“You've got a great team, Harrison,” the man reciprocated. “We were lucky tonight.”

“Luck didn't have anything to do with it. You fought hard. Good job.”

As he walked from the court, he glanced at Amy and Will, locked in a hug, clearly crushed by the loss. They'd been sure this was the year. Instead, John was a runner-up yet again.

John found Ethan outside the locker room and he pulled his son in for a hug. He was almost as tall as John now. When they walked inside, they heard the chatter of defeated boys.

“We had ’em,” Jeff said. “The refs gave them that game.”

“I got hacked all night and the refs didn’t call nothin’,” Ty said.

John got their attention and took a deep breath, looking for words he hoped he could believe himself. What was supposed to be a celebration felt like a funeral. He had to help them see something they couldn’t.

“All right, everybody, look at me,” he began. “I wanted this one, too.”

He looked at Ethan, then the others. Joining his voice with that great cloud of past coaches, he said, “I am proud of you.”

The boys stared at him, believing. He saw it on their faces. And he knew the next words were not just for them, but also for his own heart.

“And here’s the good news. That team is the biggest hurdle we’ll face next year. They’re graduating four of their starters while all of you are coming back. We’ll also be that much stronger. Which means next season we take everything.”

His words washed over them. Though devastated by the loss, they nodded and accepted the challenge. He had given them hope in the midst of defeat. Too bad that hope for next season didn’t come alongside this year’s trophy.