

MORE THAN 125,000 IN PRINT

# DOMINION

a novel

RANDY  
ALCORN

# Dominion

By Randy Alcorn

“Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:24

“He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

DANIEL 7:14

## Chapter 1

---

The young man sat holding the .357 Smith and Wesson revolver, polishing its stainless steel with his mama's scarf until he could see in it his distorted reflection. He turned up the four-inch barrel and spun the cylinder, emptying all six shells on his bed. Staring blankly, he carefully reinserted one round.

He took out a bag of crack cocaine already packaged for the next day's delivery. He picked up one of the crusty rocks, smelled it, touched it with his tongue, debated whether to smoke it. Maybe it could make him forget what he could never tell his homeboys.

“They played me. Fools got it all wrong. Ain't their hood. Ain't their set. Can't tell my little homie, that's sure. What'm I gonna do now?”

He pointed the gun toward the pictures on the wall, setting his sights on people in the newspaper clippings, on one in particular. He slowly rotated his wrist, brushing the muzzle against the bridge of his nose, then pulling it back three inches. He peered deep into the seductive barrel, holding it so the light shone just far enough into the darkness to make him wonder what lay beyond. His trembling index finger fondled the trigger.

---

The barrel-chested man moved through the Gresham Fred Meyer supermarket aisle with surprising agility. He negotiated the aisles purposefully, pushing his shopping cart in and around the late Friday afternoon amblers, who seemed to have all the time in the world and nothing to accomplish.

His black tailored Givenchy suit and Cole Hahn dress shoes suggested he might be a CEO or corporate attorney. In fact, he was a columnist for the *Oregon Tribune*, where most of his colleagues dressed informally. But Clarence Abernathy calculated his dress for image.

Geneva had called him on his car phone and asked him to pick up a few things on the way home. He headed to the produce section to get the Granny Smith apples. “Granny Smiths are the green ones,” she’d reminded him. As if he didn’t know.

He headed toward the checkstand, bobbing and weaving just far enough down an aisle to snag a large box of Cheerios, when a loud angry voice invaded his private world.

“Shuddup! You hear me? I said shuddup! Keep your hands off!” The words spewed as if from a geyser.

A wiry man in his forties, about Clarence’s age, stood fifty feet away at the far end of the aisle. He wore a tattered red-and-white Budweiser T-shirt. Clarence watched the man grab hold of the ear of a boy who couldn’t be more than six years old. The boy’s legs momentarily left the ground, his eyes dancing wildly.

The bloodcurdling scream pierced the store like a fire alarm. As the boy’s tears flowed, the man pulled harder on his ear, then slapped his head.

“Shuddup, I said!” He cocked back his hand again, like a tennis racquet poised to serve. The arm came down powerfully but stopped just inches above the child’s clinched eyes, stopped as if hitting a concrete wall.

The man in the Budweiser shirt looked at the big hand clutching his arm like a vice grip. The intruder had strewn five cereal boxes behind him in the moments it took to run the fifty feet.

“What the heck do you...?” The wiry man whirled to stare down the meddler, but he stared not into eyes but at an Adam’s apple. The intruder was tall and thick, built like a redwood stump. He was the kind of man you’d grab hold of in a windstorm and run from in a dark alley.

“You’re hurting the boy,” he said, in a calm measured voice, deep and resonant.

The wiry man glanced to the side, suddenly aware of the gaping supermarket audience.

“Who do you think you are, you...” he sputtered, as if unsure what to say next.

“Doesn’t matter who I am. Just matters you stop hurting the boy.” He smiled broadly at the little man. But he didn’t release his arm. “This your son?”

“Yeah.”

“Then treat him like a daddy ought to treat his boy.”

“It’s none of your business.”

“It’s everybody’s business. Now, tell me you won’t hurt the boy again.”

“I don’t have to tell you nothin’, you—”

“That’s not the right answer,” Clarence whispered, clamping his fingers harder, twisting the wedge on the vice grip. The man’s arm throbbed, his eyes watered.

“Try again.” The smile appeared nonchalant and unthreatening. The grip suggested otherwise.

“Okay,” the man gasped.

“Okay, what?”

“I won’t hurt the boy.”

Clarence loosened his grip, removing his hand without the slightest twitch of uneasiness. He put the same big hand down on the little boy’s head, covering it like a wool cap.

“Take care of yourself, son.” The boy nodded, eyes big. Clarence turned to the father. “Have a nice day,” he said, as if they’d just had a discussion about whether the economy size Cheerios was really the better deal.

As he walked back to his shopping cart, Clarence smiled reassuringly to the onlookers, some of whom nodded their approval, some of whom weren’t so sure.

Clarence reached unconsciously to the two-inch scar just beneath his right ear. It was a thirty-two-year-old scar, compliments of some teenage boys in Mississippi who’d pummeled ten-year-old Clarence and his six-year-old sister with a dozen beer bottles, most of them broken before being thrown. One of the jagged missiles cut the gaping wound that became the scar he now fingered.

He headed for the checkstand, still smiling pleasantly, the outward calm masking a raging storm within. Everyone gave him a wide berth.

---

The next morning was the second day of September, a sunny Oregon Saturday, the air fresh and exhilarating, suggesting an early fall. It was the kind of day people who live elsewhere think Oregon never has, just as Oregonians want them to think.

Clarence Abernathy rose early, grateful for the weekend. After reading a few chapters of *Biblical Keys to Health and Prosperity*, he put in two hours work on the yard, mowing and trimming and edging, getting it all just right. He always managed to have the best looking lawn on the block.

“Give Daddy a hug,” he said to eight-year-old Keisha, proudly wearing her tights. She wrapped herself around him unreservedly. “Have a nice ballet lesson, okay?”

Clarence playfully punched eleven-year-old Jonah in the stomach. “And you have a good soccer practice. Use those Abernathy genes and fake ’em out of their socks!”

“Okay, Dad. Later.”

Clarence grabbed a worn children’s book from the shelf and put his tools in the car. Geneva came out by the car and hugged him. “Love you, baby,” she said.

“You too. Have fun being the kids’ taxi.”

“What time you comin’ home tonight?”

“Well, Jake and I won’t be done tearing out Dani’s carpet till late in the afternoon. Then playin’ with the kids and dinner and hangin’ awhile. Maybe ten or so?”

“Just make sure you’re home by eleven, okay? I know how you and Dani get to talkin’.” Geneva smiled. “I’ll be waiting for you, but you know I can’t stay up much past eleven.”

“All right.” Clarence said. “Maybe this time I’ll bring you home some Granny Smiths.”

“That’s okay. The Golden Delicious are good eating. We didn’t need a pie anyway.”

Clarence took off in his bright red metallic 1997 Bonneville SSE, settling back in the plush champagne leather. He drove through the tidy suburbs toward the city, listening to oldies and dreaming about moving farther out to the country, which they planned to do in just another three weeks.

He pulled into a visitor’s space outside the apartment of his friend and fellow *Tribune* columnist, Jake Woods, who walked out the door as soon as Clarence came to a stop.

“Jake! How’s my man?”

“Hey, Clabern.” Jake called Clarence by his computer ID at the *Tribune*, a short form of Clarence Abernathy. “Beautiful Saturday morning, huh?”

The men talked shop as they drove toward Dani’s, everything from the *Trib*’s changing editorial policy to the latest exploits of the multiculturalism committee to ideas for upcoming columns.

“Looking forward to finally meeting your sister,” Jake said. “Tell me more about her.”

“Dani’s four years younger than I am. Thirty-eight now.”

“Not married, right?”

“Not any more. Husband left her five years ago. He took to drinking and doing drugs, freebasin’, did some selling. Dani didn’t tell me for the longest time. Finally she came to me when Roy was snortin’ coke in front of the kids.”

“So what’d you do?”

“I came over and flushed the crud down the toilet.”

“The cocaine?”

“Yeah.” Clarence didn’t mention Roy’s head had spent some time in the toilet too. “Next day he took off. Never heard a word from him since. Finally she admitted he’d hit her. We’re close, really close, but she didn’t tell me while it was going on. Said, ‘If you go to the joint for killin’ somebody, Antsy, make it for somebody more than Roy.’”

“Antsy?”

“Just a nickname.”

Jake raised his eyebrows.

Clarence sighed. “When I was a kid, Mama would call us in from playin’ ball. Of course, we never came after the first call. About the third time she’d yell, ‘Clar-ants.’ Dani was only three or four when she started thinking that was my name. She just turned it into Antsy.”

“Thanks for sharing that with me, Antsy.”

“Only Dani calls me that. And don’t go telling anybody. I’d never hear the end of it.”

“Your secret’s safe with me, Antsy.”

Clarence turned north off the Banfield Freeway toward Dani’s house. After a few miles he saw a car with four flats, tires slit, windows broken, and insides stripped. He saw small businesses that had invested months of profit in steel bars so their merchandise would be there in the morning. They passed Sojourner Truth Middle School, with its heavy wrought iron fence surrounding the schoolyard. They had a metal detector there now to screen out weapons. He saw two teenage boys wearing T-shirts, both of which he’d seen in the suburbs. One said, “No Fear”; the other, “Life is short. And then you die.”

“More gangbangers all the time,” he said to Jake, looking at a young Crip strutting like a peacock and flashing his handsign, daring a Blood set to take on him and his homeboys. He watched obvious drug deals happening on two street corners. “Where are the cops when you need them?”

Clarence looked at the kids with baseball caps worn backwards, some tipped to one side, some to another, some with colorful bandannas. He knew it all had meaning, but he was a suburb dweller and tried not to think much about that sort of thing.

He saw boys dressed in gray oversized Dickey’s and khaki beige work pants, sagging low. He noticed several black stretch belts with chrome or silver gang initials forming the belt buckle. White tennis shoes with black laces and black tennis shoes with white laces. Gold chains and black woven crosses around the neck.

Clarence looked at Jake out of the corner of his eye. His friend seemed to be studying the surroundings as a man would study the far side of the moon.

Clarence inhaled the smell of North Portland, the musty scent of aged buildings freshly baked in the last few weeks of summer sun. It wasn't the clean urban showpiece of Portland's renovated downtown, a stretch and tuck job done on the face of an aging movie star. This lacked even the appearance of a facelift. It had its highlights, its nice storefronts and well-preserved homes, but as a whole it seemed to Clarence a forsaken boneyard.

He glanced down the side streets at broken-down houses and lawns the size of pocket handkerchiefs. There on his right stood the rotting carcass of Zolar's shopping center, one of the last old-time mid-sized stores. Abandoned for at least fifteen years, the building still advertised bargains on faded colorless signs in the window.

"Thirty-nine cents a pound?" Jake asked. "Wonder what that was."

The numbers on the sun-bleached yellow tagboard were barely visible, the name of the product having long ago disappeared. Petroglyphs on glass, the remains of a civilization that once prospered, but now lay in ruins.

Clarence turned right on Jackson Street. About every fourth house was well kept, with flower gardens looking to Clarence like oases in the desert. But most of the houses on this street had sagging roofs, peeling paint, and weed-choked lawns. Some of the driveways were littered with junk—rusted sheet metal, rotting plywood, abandoned appliances. Clarence pulled up to number 920. He scanned his sister's house, noticing the dull gray duct tape on her bedroom window facing the street.

Something else I need to fix.

Felicia and Celeste, Dani's twin five-year-olds, ran out in synchronized fashion, yelling "Uncle Antsy, Uncle Antsy." Both forty inches tall and forty pounds soaking wet, they jumped into his extended arms and he curled them like dumbbells, holding one in each arm effortlessly. He lifted them up high like a shoulder press, while they clutched his arms, giggling hilariously. He proudly displayed the girls for Jake, who smiled broadly, nodding his approval.

Clarence waved to Dani, who was working on the left side of the house, tending her little rose garden, a stark contrast to her neighbor's, ramshackle and grown over with weeds. Though they'd reached their peak two months ago, under Dani's watchful eye the last of summer's roses still barely held on.

"Hey, little sister!" Eyes on Dani, Clarence passed the girls to Jake like two sacks of potatoes. Surprised, Jake grinned, and they touched his face with immediate familiarity. Any friend of Uncle Antsy's was a friend of theirs. Clarence made a beeline for Dani.

"Hey, big brother!" Dani's girlish smile spread like a wave across her round moist face. Her skin was smooth except for one blemish on the right side of her throat, a discolored scar left by another jagged beer bottle that same Mississippi night.

Jake watched as Clarence lifted Dani off her feet, him laughing, her giggling. He envied Clarence for having this kind of relationship with his sister.

"Jesus is my best friend," Felicia announced to Jake, as if this was the most important thing he could know about her. It seemed to Jake only yesterday his own daughter Carly, now nineteen, was just this size.

When Clarence introduced Dani to Jake, she reached out her hand. “I’ve heard all about you,” she said with a toothy grin.

“Not as much as I’ve heard about you.”

They went in and sat at the kitchen table. Clarence wondered if she’d ever get a new one. He’d offered to buy her one many times, but she’d always refused. She poured them both a berry-red glass of Kool-Aid. The ice clanked against the glasses as they talked.

“Where’s Ty?” Clarence asked.

“Who knows? I’m havin’ trouble with that boy, Antsy. I know he loves me, but he’s fourteen and he just won’t listen to his mama. The boy needs a daddy.”

Clarence nodded.

“I’ve put an ad in the *Trib* lookin’ for one,” Dani glanced at Jake with a deadpan expression. “Course, maybe I shouldn’t have included my picture.” A low squeal of a laugh came out of Dani, rising to a crescendo. Jake smiled. He liked her already.

“You look great, Sis,” Clarence said, despite the rapid aging of her face, the gray hairs and extra pounds.

Tyrone, wearing a blue durag, swaggered in the front door. His teenage sensors detected the presence of adults, and he made a quick turn toward his room.

“Ty, get over here—it’s your Uncle Antsy,” Dani called. “And his friend Jake Woods. From the newspaper.”

Ty came out mumbling something under his breath, maintaining steady eye contact with the floor. An eighteen-year-old independence rose out of this fourteen-year-old boy, who disappeared immediately after his command performance. Clarence noticed the distinctive blue of his bandanna.

“What’s he doin’ wearin’ Crip colors?”

“That’s what I been tellin’ you, Antsy. I just don’t know. He says those colors aren’t a gang thing any more. Some people say it’s so and others say it ain’t. Truth is, I’m losin’ him to the hood. He’s startin’ to run with bangers. I think he’s a wannabe. He’s losin’ his straight A’s. Studies are slippin’. Boy needs a daddy, or at least a man he can look up to. Don’t know what to do, how to stop it.”

“We’ve been over this a hundred times, Sis. Move! Just get out of here. I’ll set you up with a down payment. I’ll find you a place out by us.”

“Out in the burbs? They’re not for me.”

“You need to live someplace safe, that’s all I’m saying. Doesn’t matter where, as long as you can keep the kids away from the bad influences.”

“Oh, no bad influences in the suburbs? Come on, Antsy. I’ve never lived in the burbs, and I don’t think I could. Folks there don’t know each other—you’ve said that yourself.”

“And in the city you’re likely to get knifed for pocket change by somebody you’re on a first-name basis with, is that what you want? If that’s what it means to know folk, I’d rather not know anybody.”

“It’s not like that, Antsy. Folks here look out for each other. We’ve got lots of problems, that’s true, but it brings us together. Me, I just got to find a way not to lose my son.”

“You want Ty to stay out of trouble, off drugs, out of the gangs? You’re gonna have to get him out of here. Change his environment. That’s the way it is.”

“Things are gettin’ better. Councilman Norcoast has a new plan.” Dani ignored her brother’s rolling eyes. “It’s a *good* plan. I’ve been at the sounding board meetings. We can turn this thing around if we work together. Why don’t you move in on my street, Antsy? There’s some houses for sale.”

“I’m surprised they aren’t all for sale. Who’d want to live here?” Clarence saw instantly he’d hurt her. “Sorry, Sis. I didn’t mean it that way.”

“I really appreciate you comin’ over every week and spendin’ time with the kids,” Dani said. “But if your family was nearer and Ty knew he could talk to you, watch you, maybe then... We need all the role models we can get, big brother. The community needs people like you.”

“Stop thinking of the community and start thinking about yourself and your children. Don’t you see, Sis? The city belongs to drunks and druggies and users and pimps and gangbangers. They’ve taken over. That’s why your big shot Councilman Norcoast doesn’t live in a hood like this. Why would he? And why would I move somewhere just to triple bolt my door every night and hope some lowlife with a sawed-off shotgun or an Uzi doesn’t blow open my door and rob me blind? What’s the point?”

“The point is giving back to your people, helping the neighborhood, brother.”

Clarence hated this conversation, as much as he’d hated it the dozens of times they’d had it before. He shook his head and kissed Dani on the cheek, as if to say “We’re never going to agree, but I love you.” He looked at Jake. “Time to go to work. If you think you’re man enough to keep up with me, I mean.”

Clarence and Jake started tearing out the badly worn living-room carpet. They followed with odds and ends chores, Jake fixing a leaky faucet while Clarence measured Dani’s bedroom window for a replacement.

At four o’clock Jake peered out the living-room window, watching the street. There she was. Janet, looking tentative and studying the street numbers, crawled up in Jake’s lapis blue Mustang.

“See ya, Dani. Nice to meet you,” Jake said.

Dani gave Jake an unexpected hug. “Bye, Jake. Thanks *so* much for your help.”

“Come on out and meet Janet,” he said to her. The women chatted a few minutes, then Jake got in the driver’s seat. As he pulled off, he rolled down the window and called out, “Later, Antsy.”

Clarence glared. “Later, Jakey.”

On their way back up the porch steps Dani said, “You can’t give up on the city, big brother. You can get me out of here, but who’s gonna get out the Hills up on Jack Street? And the Devenys over on Brumbelow? And Mr. Wesley and his children on Moffat? And old Hattie Burns right across Jackson? We need men like you, Clarence.”

“Geneva tells me you’ve been talking about getting us in here. Well, you may be able to push her buttons, little sis, but not mine. My dream’s the same as always. A house in the country, even farther out than where we’re moving in three weeks—but hey, it’s a start. Beautiful fields and trees and flowers and horses and peace and safety for my children, that’s what I want. And I want it for you too, Sis. That’s not such a bad dream, is it?”

“You and your dreams, Antsy,” Dani sighed. “At least you could come to our church and teach a class or work with the youth. At least you could do that.”

“It’s a long way to drive for church.”

“How ’bout I cut you a deal, big brother? Instead of Saturdays, you come out Sundays to church, spend the afternoon with my kids. That way we’d see Geneva and Keisha and Jonah. The girls would love to hang with ’em. And you’d have your Saturdays all to yourself and your family out there in your suburbs.”

Clarence acted as if he didn’t hear, turning to watch the commotion at the front door. Celeste and Felicia had arrived again, in tow from Hattie Burns. The old woman scowled at Clarence.

“Now, Clarence, these little girls say you been readin’ them some stories. And they don’t want to finish the video they been watchin’ at Grandma Hattie’s. They prefer your readin’. Now if that don’t beat all!”

She gave him a big grandmotherly hug. Hattie always reminded him of Mama, soft and warm and cuddly, but with more authority than smart boys ever wanted to challenge.

“You goin’ to read about Aslan?” Felicia asked wide eyed.

“And Lucy and Susan?” Celeste asked.

“And Peter and Edmund,” Clarence said. “Don’t forget the boys! Yeah, I brought the book along. When we finish it, there’s still six more books to go! How does that sound?”

Both beamed ear to ear as he picked up *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He’d started reading stories to them two years ago. Back then Ty sat and listened too.

Clarence walked toward the big bedroom the twins shared with their mama. Meanwhile the girls ran to the living room to pick up the old brocade chair that had been Clarence and Dani’s mother’s prize possession. One girl lifted it on each side. Like throne bearers, they carried in the chair for Uncle Antsy.

Felicia’s and Celeste’s own beds were tucked in the corner of their mother’s room. Three years ago when Clarence’s daddy still had the strength, the two of them had built a paneled divider for the girls to give them that closed-in cozy feeling kids like. Dani said she shared the room with the girls so they wouldn’t be scared at night. Clarence knew she needed the company too.

Felicia proudly showed off her new lunch bucket with a big-eyed giraffe. “Isn’t it *fine*, Uncle Antsy?”

“Finer than frog’s hair, Felicia.” He picked her and Celeste up and swung them together effortlessly around his head.

“Have I told you how much you girls look like your mama when she was little?”

They both giggled—he told them that every time he saw them. He slowly brought them down from near the ceiling, depositing them gently on the bed. Uncle Antsy was the biggest, strongest man on earth. With him around, they never had to be afraid.

The girls took their place on Mama’s bed. Clarence read to them for nearly an hour, then the family ate pork chops, potatoes, and collard greens, Uncle Antsy’s favorite meal. Following the sweet potato pie and coffee, Clarence and Dani put the girls to bed. Brother and sister stayed up late talking about old times, growing up in Mississippi, the years in the Chicago projects, and the move to Oregon. Time got away from them. Geneva called at 11:20 to make sure Clarence was okay. He finally moved toward the door at 11:45, kissing his little sister good night.

“Antsy...promise me you’ll pray about movin’ in here, or at least comin’ in for church. So you can keep in touch. I think it would do you a world of good too.”

“You’ve got the tenacity of a pit bull, Sis, I’ll give you that.” Clarence suddenly shook himself loose, arms dangling, puttin’ on a strut and lookin’ like he owned the world.

“Yeah, you right, Mama, do me a *world* a good. I could smoke me some hubba, sip me a forty, do a few speedballs. I get draped, put on lokes and a durag, dress down, and put in some work, huh? Yo, whatchu think, little sis?”

He pulled his pants down low enough she could see the top two inches of his underwear. She slapped her hand over her mouth.

“I be one bad hoodsta, hey? I mean, why play tennis out in the burbs when you can fly yo’ colors in the hood, grab a rosco, and go get dusted with the homies?”

“Very funny.” Dani tried not to laugh, but she did. “Come on, Antsy. There’s more to life here than gangs and drugs, and you know it. I want you to promise me you’ll think about it.” She looked at him with those big pleading brown eyes.

“Okay,” he said, putting his hands up in surrender, almost touching the ceiling. “I promise.”

“Great. I love you, big brother.” She kissed him on the cheek and gave him a bear hug. He’d always enjoyed her hugs, even when they were children.

Clarence got in the Bonneville and drove down Jackson, the street now gleaming with a late summer sprinkle that cooled the night air to a pleasant chill. About every third streetlight didn’t work. Some had burned out, others were shot out, target practice for gangbangers. The street gleamed, black oil drawn out by the light rain.

As he drove by houses, Clarence imagined residents going through the ritual of checking and rechecking the locks on their doors. Like tortoises withdrawing into their shells, many inner-city families withdrew into their houses shortly after dark to find refuge. He watched teenagers still on the streets, some on foot, some on dime-speed bikes, some driving, including a few he was certain weren't old enough. As he turned on to Martin Luther King, he saw graffiti tags everywhere, reminding him of wolves marking their territory.

He thought about Tyrone. He had to help Dani, to keep Ty from running with those young hoodlums. Yeah. He'd make sure of it.

Clarence drove past a police car with two uniformed officers in the front seat. His whole body stiffened, and he exchanged wary glances with them.

"Boom! Boom! Boom!" He winced, hearing behind him the muffled noise of successive backfires that seemed to go on and on. Or was it gunshots?

The cops pulled a U-turn and headed toward the sound. Clarence considered turning around himself. But why? If he turned around every time he thought he heard a gunshot in this part of town, he'd never get home. He drove a mile farther, heard a siren and watched another police car and then an ambulance fly by.

I don't care what you say, little sis. I'm going to get you out of here before it's too late.

Clarence turned to his favorite Christian radio station. He listened to the preacher say, "God wants his children healthy and happy. Claim his promises for you, and he'll send his angels to protect you. He'll make you prosper, and he won't let harm come your way."

Thirty minutes later Clarence turned into his driveway east of Gresham. Suddenly he hit the brakes, startled. A bluish figure paced frantically under the front porch light.

Geneva? It was after midnight.

He saw his wife's contorted face and shoved the Bonneville into park before it stopped. He jumped out of the lurching car and bounded up the porch steps.

"What's wrong? What's happened? Are the kids all right?"

"Oh, baby." Geneva sobbed. She hugged him tight, clung to him. She was trying to tell him something, but Clarence couldn't understand her.

"Calm down, Geneva! Tell me what's going on."

"I got a call. From Hattie Burns. It's Dani."

"What? What happened?"

"She's been shot. Dani's been shot!"