

Back to Ground Zero

Angelo Thomas Crapanzano



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By Angelo Thomas Crapanzano



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my faithful and loving wife, Rose, who has stood by me through two major surgeries. I also wish to dedicate this book to all the cheerful, pleasant, and caring nurses on the fifth floor of Akron General Medical Center, who took good and competent care of me while I was recovering from my surgeries.

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Unexpected Turn of Events

The sun was still pretty high in the sky. It was May tenth, and the weather was great for this early in the spring. The temperature hovered around seventy-five degrees all day.

The sun was coming in the back window of the auto and reflecting off the dashboard. Antonio was glad he was traveling east. He turned left off Market Street into the Summit Mall parking lot and turned right onto Smith Road. He usually did this to bypass the traffic light at Market and Ghent roads.

Slowly the realization of where he was going began to sink in. He started to feel the excitement. He looked over to his wife. She had a large grin on her face. Annie was usually a happy person by nature and affectionate. She was laid back and had a very pleasant personality. Her eyes were always showing her happiness and smiled sometimes when her lips did not. This time Antonio could notice a definite difference. She was happier than he had ever seen her before.

"Are you as excited as I am?" Antonio asked his wife.

"You know I am," answered Annie. "And you are too. I can tell by your smile. You're going to break your cheeks."

"Can you believe what the kids are doing?" said Antonio, knowing the answer before Annie spoke.

"I know," is all Annie could say. They had four children, two boys and two girls. They had gotten together and planned a fiftieth wedding anniversary party at Todaro's Party Center for

them. It was supposed to be a surprise, but they could never keep a secret from their father.

Antonio looked at his wife. He was admiring how beautiful she still was. To him she was as beautiful now as she was when they got married. She still had baby smooth skin.

"What?" asked Annie. "Keep your eyes on the road--will you please."

"I'm thinking you are as beautiful now as when we first met," answered Antonio.

"When was that?" asked Annie. "Was that in Sicily or here in the states?" They both started to laugh. It was sort of an inside joke. Antonio's thoughts wandered to the time his father sent him, his mother, and his sister to Sicily to live. The plan was for him to sell the house in the US and join them later. However, World War II broke out, and his father sent them a telegram telling them to return to the United States as soon as possible. Antonio, his mother, and his sister found themselves as Americans trying to get out of a country in time of war. Antonio remembered the other American, Giuseppe Sabano, who was also trying to get out of the country. They shared the car to Palermo where they would take the ferry to Naples and board the ship to the USA. Giuseppe had one request.

"Would you mind taking a slight detour?" he had asked. "It is only two streets out of your way. I would like to say good-bye to my family. I won't even get out of the car. I will say my good-byes through the window." When they got there, he kept his word. They said their good-byes through the window. Antonio, however, was distracted by the beautiful young seven-year-old standing by the car. She had such beautiful eyes he thought at the time. He was surprised when someone picked her up and shoved her through the window. She kissed Giuseppe and said good-bye. She was crying. Being so close to her, he got butterflies in his stomach. He felt very sad when they left.

Giuseppe, with Antonio's mother's permission, took Antonio

sightseeing every place the ship docked. Antonio learned to respect and love him. He was a great guy to Antonio.

Antonio's thoughts then shifted to the day that he went to New Jersey with his mother to visit relatives. He had graduated from college and wanted a vacation. When they were there, Antonio asked about Giuseppe, They found out where he lived and went to visit. Giuseppe recognized Antonio. He hugged him affectionately. When they went inside, Giuseppe turned to Antonio and said,

"Antonio, remember when we were in Sicily, they put a little girl and also a little boy through the window to kiss me good-bye? I want you to meet the little girl. She is my daughter. The little boy is my son. Anna Maria, come here," he yelled. Through the doorway came his nineteen-year-old daughter, the beautiful little girl he had seen in Italy. Antonio remembered how he got butterflies again and could hardly say hello. She was lovelier than he had remembered. Antonio reflected with much joy how six months later on May tenth they were married.

"Hello, Antonio, where are you?" asked Annie. "You seem to be miles away."

"I was thinking of the question you asked," Antonio answered trying to think fast. "You asked if I thought you are as beautiful as you were in Sicily or in the USA."

"Well, what did you figure out?" she asked, starting to laugh again.

"Well, I think I felt you were very pretty when I saw you in Sicily. You didn't get beautiful until we got married. In fact, you just recently got gorgeous," answered Antonio with tongue in cheek.

"Boy do you have a line," she returned. "I thought after all this time that you would have run out of lines."

"Do they still work?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered reaching out for his hand. "So when you saw me in Sicily you thought I was pretty," she added after a few moments of silence.

"Yes, I got butterflies when you were pushed through the window and I was very close to you," Antonio answered.

"But you were only twelve. Can you remember all that?" asked Annie. "I don't remember much of that day. I just remember that I missed my dad."

"I remember it all very clearly." They smiled at each other. They remembered that they had had this same conversation many times throughout the years.

"You know, there aren't too many people that have been married as long as we have who are still as much in love as we are. We're very lucky," said Antonio. Annie squeezed his hand and smiled sweetly at him.

Antonio turned right on Riverview Road, then left on Akron Peninsula Road, and proceeded to the traffic light. The light was red, but turned green as Antonio approached the intersection. It was Annie who saw the car first. She was looking out the side window.

"Look at that car," she screamed. "It isn't slowing down for the light." The car was coming down Portage Trail Road. Antonio saw the car, but he had nowhere to go. The car in front of him blocked him from speeding up. The cars coming the other way blocked him from pulling to the left. Antonio flipped the wheel to the right as hard as he could to try to avoid the accident. It was too late. Antonio didn't even feel the impact.

When Antonio first opened his eyes, he was not aware of where he was. His head hurt terribly and he felt nauseous. He did, however, recognize his daughter Sara. She was his oldest daughter. She had been named after Antonio's mother Sarafina.

"What are you doing here?" asked Antonio. That was the only question that came to mind.

"I'm here worrying about you," she said. Antonio did not hear her. He had gone back into unconsciousness. Sara got tears in her eyes. She loved her dad very much. He had always been there for her. Sara was a widow at thirty years old. She had been married a little more than a year when she gave birth to

Cal, the most beautiful little boy Antonio had ever seen. When Cal was a month old, they talked about going to New Jersey to visit Grandma Sabano. They never got the chance. George, Sara's husband, was killed in an auto accident on the way to work a week later. Sara moved in with her parents. Antonio and Annie raised and loved Cal as one of their own children.

Antonio came to again for a few minutes. He was still a little drowsy and confused. Sara noticed that his eyes had opened. She grabbed his hand.

"Sara honey, what has happened? What am I doing here? Am I in a hospital?"

"Dad, you have been in an auto accident," she answered tears coming into her eyes. "Don't you remember?"

"All I remember is we were going to our fiftieth wedding anniversary party. The next thing I know is I woke up here." Suddenly Sara saw fear appear on his face.

"Where is your mom?" he asked with a shaky and worried voice. "Is she all right?"

"She's down the hall," Sara responded quickly to alleviate his worry. "She is being taken care of, Dad, don't worry. Right now we've got to get you better. We have been very worried over you. You have been unconscious for over a week."

"How is your mom really doing?" he asked still showing his worry.

"Joey is with her. She was hurt just as you were. Later tonight, Lee will come to watch over mom to let Joey come here. He has talked with the doctors and will explain about mom's injuries."

Joseph is Antonio's oldest son. He is an optometrist. He is single. Lee is Antonio's youngest daughter. She decided to follow in her older brother's footsteps. She applied at the Chicago School of Optometry where she was accepted. Lee is married to Jack Albright. They have two children--a girl named Sally, who is ten, and a boy named Jimmy, who is five.

Antonio was starting to feel very tired. He squeezed Sara's

hand. She put her other hand on top of his.

"I don't like being away from your mom," Antonio whispered as he drifted back to unconsciousness. Sara, worrying, called for the nurse.

"He is fine," said the nurse. "He is sleeping soundly. It is a good sign." Sara gave a sigh of relief. She was the worrywart of the family.

Lee and Ben came into the hospital that evening. They came every night to sit with their parents. Ben turned into the first room where his dad and his sister Sara were.

"How is dad doing?" Ben asked.

"He is doing much better," answered Sara. "He is sleeping right now. He was awake for a little while and we talked."

"Thank God," said Ben feeling a little relieved. Ben is Antonio's youngest son. He is an optician. He works with his brother Joey. Joey writes the prescriptions and Ben makes the glasses. Ben married Julia Sliser. They had one son they named Daniel.

"How is mom doing?" asked Ben. "I'm more worried about her. She seems to have been injured worse than dad."

"She was still in a coma when I saw her awhile ago. The air bags should have protected them both the same I would think."

"Yes, but the car hit on her side."

"Why don't we both sit and pray for Mom and Dad?" said Sara. They put their hands together and Ben said a prayer.

Lee walked directly to her mom's room. She was more aware than the others that her mom's injuries were worse than Dad's. She had talked with the doctor who had performed the surgery on her mom's chest. She was told that her mother was in critical condition. He told Lee that they had done everything that they could and now she was in God's hands. As Lee walked toward her mom's room, she saw Joey coming down the hall. She could tell from the look on his face that things were not good. As she approached him, he shook his head from side to side. Tears started to come down Lee's face.

"She's gone," is all Joey could say. Lee buried her face in his shoulder; they embraced and cried. When they recovered somewhat, Lee pulled her face from Joe's shoulder still in a tight embrace as if they needed each other to stay upright.

"How are we ever going to tell Dad?" Lee cried. "It will just kill him. He is not strong enough at this point to accept news like this."

"We will have to keep this from him until he gets stronger," said Joe. "Is Dad out of his coma yet?"

"I don't know. I headed straight to Mom's room."

"According to the doctors, Dad is in better shape than Mom was," added Joey.

"They still consider him as critical," reminded Lee.

"We can't go into Dad's room until we get better control of ourselves," stated Joey.

"I guess it would be all right if he isn't awake."

"Oh Lee, can you imagine what that room will be like when Sara finds out about Mom?"

"Your right, said Lee. "I forgot about her. Even without her, can we walk into that room without breaking down?"

"What are we going to do?" asked Joey feeling helpless.

"We are going to stay out here until Ben or Sara comes looking for us. At present I can think of nothing we can do except pray." They held hands and Joey prayed for guidance from God.

Two hours had passed since Ben had joined Sara.

"Why haven't we heard from Joey?" asked Sara.

"Maybe Joey and Lee got talking and forgot about us," stated Ben.

"I don't think they would have forgotten about Dad," stated Sara. "Let's go see what is going on." They were about to leave when Antonio came to again.

"You guys are not leaving me are you?" asked Antonio.

"Hi, Dad," said Ben, happy to see his dad awake. "How are you feeling?"

"I could lie to you as I do to everyone else and say that I'm doing fine," said Antonio.

"You must be better," returned Ben. "You still have your sense of humor."

"Why don't one of you go see how your mother is doing and come back and tell me?" requested Antonio.

"I'll go," volunteered Sara. "You and Ben need some time together." Sara headed for her mother's room. As she turned the corner, she noticed Joey and Lee sitting on a bench in the hallway.

"What are you guys doing out here in the hallway?" inquired Sara. Joey and Lee looked up at Sara, but no one spoke. Sara noticed that Joey's and Lee's eyes were very red.

"What has happened to Mom?" she asked, her eyes beginning to water up. She was hoping that they were just changing dressing or the bed sheets or something like that. When no one would answer her question, she started to cry.

"What has happened to Mom?" she repeated. No one answered.

"No, please God, no" is all that Sara could say. She then felt dizzy. Joey caught her before she could fall and sat her on the bench. Due to their concerns for Sara, both Joey and Lee reduced their crying to watering eyes. Joey rubbed Sara's hands while Lee wiped her hair back and patted her cheeks.

"Sara, try to control yourself," said Lee.

"You have to trust in God," added Joey. It took several minutes before Sara could speak.

"Daddy will just die," she said, still half unconscious.

"We can't tell Dad until he gets stronger," responded Joey. Just then Ben walked around the corner.

"Why hasn't anyone come to Dad's room?" he asked.

"Mom is gone," blurted out Joey. Ben stood in a state of shock. He had not expected that answer. Tears appeared in his eyes.

"What happened?"

"She was too badly injured," answered Joey. "As you know, her

ribs had punctured her lungs. The doctor told me they couldn't stop the internal bleeding."

"Who is going to tell Dad?" asked Ben.

"I think we will have to keep it from him until he gets stronger"

"That's going to be hard to do," stated Ben. "He sent Sara out to see how Mom was doing."

"We will have to lie to him."

"I don't like to lie to Dad," said Lee.

"Would you rather he died?" asked Joey.

"Of course not," responded Lee. "But you are not going to keep it from him. Are you going to keep Sara out of Dad's room?" No one noticed that Sara had left.

"Where is Sara?" yelled Joey "She doesn't know what she is doing. We've got to stop her." Ben was closest so he ran to stop Sara, but it was too late. Sara had gone into Antonio's room and was crying loudly with her head buried in his chest. Antonio woke up from the commotion.

"Sara honey, what is wrong?" asked Antonio. He looked up and saw Ben and then Joey just behind him. He began to suspect that something was wrong with Annie. Then when he saw Lee come into the room with full tears in her eyes he knew.

"No, no," he yelled several times. "Not Annie, I can't live without her. Why didn't God take me? I can't support this pain. God take me too. I have no life without her."

"No Daddy, we love you, we need you. You have to live for us." explained Sara. The others just cried. Antonio cried profusely for awhile and then tried to get up.

"I want to see her. I need to see her one last time." He wanted to go to Annie's room. Lee pressed the nurse's call button, and the nurse came in with an orderly. Before Antonio could object, the orderly pushed him back in bed and the nurse stuck him with a needle. It only took a few minutes and Antonio was unconscious.

Antonio fell into a deep sleep. The doctors were afraid that he

had lost his will to live. Antonio came to several days later, but he found that he was completely alone. His children were nowhere to be seen. Antonio cried himself back into unconsciousness. It was about ten days later that Antonio came out of his deep sleep. Sara and Lee were there. Sara was holding his hand and was whispering to him.

"Dad, we need you. We can't lose both you and Mom. We love and need you." Sara kept repeating the same words. Suddenly she stopped. She thought she felt his hand tighten around hers.

"I know you love me, honey" said Antonio. "You must understand that my life ended with the accident. I have no life without your Mom. That accident was ground zero for my world. My world ended there. Everything I did was for your Mom."

"That is not exactly true, Dad." responded Lee. "Who put me and Joey through college and medical school? Who helped put in Ben's kitchen? Who helped Sara with the down payment on her house? Who has given us a wealth of advice when we needed it? You have four children to live for. You did a lot for Mom that is true, but you did a lot for us. Dad, you always taught us that we have to trust God even when we don't understand what He is doing. You now have to trust God. God has a plan for you; otherwise, he would have taken you with Mom."

"That's quite a speech, young lady. Did you rehearse it before you came here?" asked Antonio.

"Are you making fun of me, Dad?"

"No honey, I'm just amazed at the wisdom that my sweet daughter has gained."

"I got it all from you, Dad." said Lee. "Do you know that as soon as you are able to walk, they will send you home?"

"I'm not sure I want to go home."

"They will not keep you here any longer than they have to."

"You know, I thought you all had abandoned me" said Antonio.

"Why would you say that?" responded Sara.

"Well, I woke up one day and there was no one in sight. I was

up all morning until about noon. I didn't see anybody."

"That must have been during Mom's funeral," noted Lee.

"That's right, because someone has been here every day except for Mom's funeral," added Sara. "Dad, we would never abandon you." At that moment the nurse walked into the room.

"So, you are awake," she said. "Good, I will tell the doctor. I think you are going on a liquid diet today. Meanwhile we are going for a walk." She took off the leg pumps and arranged for him to pull the rack with the feeding bag with him. They all went for a walk.

It was two days later when Antonio was released from the hospital. He dreaded the idea of going into the house and Annie not being there. It would have been unbearable if Sara had not moved in temporarily. Cal was also a big help. Cal looked up to Antonio like a father rather than a grandfather. Antonio now became a couch potato. All he did all day was watch television. Sara tried to get him to go out to dinner, but he always said it was too soon. In late August Sara made a decision.

"Dad, in a few days Cal will be going back to school. At that time I am going to move back to my house. I have neglected it for over four months. I need to get back to my own life." Antonio agreed. He assured her he would be okay. Therefore, when school started, Sara moved out. Antonio was left alone with his thoughts.

It was in late September, over a year later, when Antonio finally decided he was tired of the reruns and didn't care for the new programs. He also was tired of his own cooking. If it weren't for the once a week that he was invited for supper by his children, he would have stopped eating altogether. Antonio decided that he would take a walk, go to the nearest hotel or restaurant, stop at the bar if he was early, have a soft drink or coffee while he waited, and then have dinner there. He decided he would do this at least once a week. It turned out that after going to several different places, he found he liked the Hilton Hotel on Market Street the best. He ended up going there regularly at least twice

a week. He got to know the bartender, the waiters, and waitresses very well.

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