

## Darkness Yields to the Light

*Venice, FL, Saturday, October 24, 2009*

Trey Jensen was sitting on a bar stool in Chap's Sports Bar on the mainland in Venice. Chap's was the bar and restaurant where Trey and his buddies most often hung out. They liked coming here because the "regulars" and the bar maids were friendly, knew every regular by name and were just plain interesting to interact with.

This afternoon was a little different however. Trey had been there for about two hours and none of his buddies had popped in. That wasn't what was different. Trey and his two best friends were all retired and generally avoided the weekend crowds that populated Chap's for the six big screen TVs that showed the various football games – College games on Saturdays and Pro games on Sundays. No, what was different about this afternoon, beyond the fact that Trey was even there, was the fact that he was getting a bit inebriated. He couldn't remember the last time he had had so many beers. He was indeed in a funk that seemed to deepen with each emptied bottle of Miller Lite. His mind was in the process of remembering how his morning had begun...

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The day had started out like just about every Saturday since the preceding December, when he had decided to close down his one-man Information Technology consulting practice. But then things turned kind of ugly. After a light breakfast of Cheerios with skim milk and blueberries, a glass of Minute Maid OJ to wash down the morning regimen of prescriptions and supplements, he sat down at his laptop to check his Office Outlook email. The mailbox was quite full, because he had not looked at it all of Friday.

After deleting a lot of junk mail, he opened an email from his ex-wife, Penny. It was rare that Penny would send him an email, given they had divorced five years ago, and although the parting was amicable, they had very little contact since then except for occasional get-togethers with their three children and the five grandchildren. He was surprised to learn she was getting remarried, but while he felt both a bit sad for her and happy for her, it was the last sentence that floored him – her announcement that she was being operated on for a malignant tumor in her left breast. Ever since the divorce, Trey had felt a loss, or rather a sense of failure. He had always believed that like his parents, he would always be married "until death us do part". But now, this news was upsetting because he still felt love for Penny. "You just can't spend that many years with someone with whom you originally loved dearly and not feel some lingering pain...and now this?" he whispered to the empty room.

While attempting to recover from that announcement, another email had come from Sandra, the woman with whom he had had a most welcome, if short-lived relationship following his divorce. Trey had been trying very hard to revive that relationship over the past eighteen months, but Sandra apparently did not share his enthusiasm for rekindling their love affair. Her email was a reply to one he had sent on Thursday – it had only one single word – "No!" But he tried shaking that off with a less

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than heartfelt chuckle, “Well, at least this time I got a response. All the previous times there were no responses at all.” He was still looking for answers on why their relationship ended. They had started dating two years after his divorce from Penny and for Trey it was like a life saving happenstance. To find that he could love another woman again was an epiphany. In reality he and Sandra had a lot in common and being with her made him feel like he was a teenager again.

But that was not the whole of the day’s lousy surprises. Upon getting his postal mail from the mail box outside his double-wide trailer, he was absolutely floored by the notice from the IRS that he owed Uncle Sam for some back taxes on that business he closed down last December. Did things really happen in threes, he wondered in amazement? To say he was flabbergasted by this morning’s events would be the understatement of the year.

It was then that he felt a sudden need to get out of the house – to go somewhere where he could try to mentally and emotionally digest this news that was rankling him. So, Trey replaced his cutoff PJs with a pair of shorts, a tee-shirt, and a pair of ankle high white sweat socks and beat up Addidas sneakers. He picked up his cell phone and dialed his two buddies, Neither answered their phones, so he left a voice message to Blake Wilson and Royce Paulson saying he was heading down to Chap’s for a beer and if they wanted to, to come down and toss one down with him. “First round’s on me”, he offered. Not that he fully expected them to show up; they were both married to wonderful women and usually had plans for the weekends. “I guess love can be lovelier the second time around”, he thought and recalled the song by Sinatra.

Grabbing his wallet, eye glass case and car keys, he left the trailer, jumped into his 2004 Hundai Sonata and sped off toward Chap’s, still shaking his head at the morning’s news. “Retired life is not supposed to be this screwed up!” he growled. His stomach started to rebel with acid build up, so he reached into the center console, extracted the container of Tums and popped a couple into his mouth while negotiating a turn onto the road leading to Chap’s.

Upon arriving at Chap’s, he had ambled over to the bar and sat on one of several empty stools near the far side. It was close to the old, nearly antique juke box that had been remanufactured to hold CDs instead of the old forty-fives, and away from the majority of TV screens that had the attention of other patrons watching college football games. After a couple of beers, which he quickly disposed of in less than ten minutes, Melanie, the bar maid working the bar today had come over to where Trey was seated. She tilted her head and looked at him with a look of concern in her eyes. “Are you OK, Trey? It looks like you’ve got the world on your shoulders”, she queried.

“Oh, just had some news today that has me a bit up the proverbial tree, Melanie. I just need to work some things out in my mind...nothing all that serious”, Trey had replied, attempting to make it sound like no big thing.

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“Well, if you need a sounding board, I’m here for you”, she had responded. Noticing the empty beer bottle, she continued, “Ready for another?”

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An hour later, his mind came back to the present, and there was Melanie once again asking if he wanted another beer. Only this time she asked, “Are you sure?” She was not used to seeing Trey put away the number of beers he had thus far this day and was beginning to get somewhat concerned. Melanie was an attractive woman in her early thirties; five foot, seven, long blond hair tied back in a pony tail; lively green eyes and a shapely body. She wore little makeup, just some pale blue eye shadow and some eyelash mascara. She was dressed in low cut jeans and a Chap’s tee shirt that was a bit tight and emphasized her well formed breasts.

Turning his attention to the empty bottle, Trey, smiled, nodded his head and said, “Yep, why not, but first I have to hit the head and make some room”, as he slid off the stool and went off toward the restroom. On his way he began to think about some other things that had been lurking in the back of his mind – other things that served to darken the funk that had already invaded his conscious. While he was gone Melanie replaced the empty with a fresh, cold Miller Lite.

It was late afternoon and just about all of the afternoon football games had ended, leaving Chap’s with only a few customers. The lunch crowd and football watchers had left. Later the dinner crowd would start moseying in. On his way back from draining his bladder, Trey stopped at the juke box. He scanned the selections and picked one by Neil Diamond. Upon dropping in a quarter, the song “Love on the Rocks” began playing as Trey slid back on his bar stool. He listened somberly to the song, the lyrics and orchestration slowly deepening his mood of sadness...

*“Love on the rocks  
Ain’t no surprise  
Just Pour me a drink  
And I’ll tell you some lies  
Got nothing to lose  
So you just sing the blues all the time*

*Gave you my heart  
Gave you my soul  
You left me alone here  
With nothing to hold  
Yesterday's gone  
Now all I want is a smile*

*First, they say they want you  
They haven't really need you  
Suddenly you find you're out there  
Walking in the storm*

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*And When they know they have you  
Then they really have you  
Nothing you can do or say  
You've got to leave, just get away  
We all know the song*

*You need what you need  
You can say what you want  
Not much you can do  
When the feeling is gone  
Maybe blue skies above  
But it's cool when your love's on the rocks*

*First, they say they want you  
They haven't really need you  
Suddenly you find you're out there  
Walking in the storm  
And When they know they have you  
Then they really have you  
Nothing you can do or say  
You've got to leave, just get away  
We all know the song*

*Love on the rocks  
Ain't no big surprise  
Just Pour me a drink  
And I'll tell you more lies  
Yesterday's gone  
And now all I want is a smile"*

By the time the song ended, Melanie looked over at Trey and she could almost feel the sadness oozing from him. The fresh bottle of beer was already half gone. She made a decision, picked up her cell phone and called Blake. Many of the regulars provided their phone numbers to Chap's for the football pools and for emergencies, so it was not unusual for Blake's number to be available at the bar. When Blake answered, Melanie turned her back to Trey and walked to the opposite side of the bar. "Blake, it's Melanie at Chap's; can you come down here? Trey is here and he's had a good number of beers...he's acting like he has some kind of problem. I don't think he should attempt to drive home." After a pause, she said, "Thanks, Blake, you are a good friend...see you in few minutes."

When Blake arrived he caught Melanie's eye and she surreptitiously nodded her head toward where Trey was sitting. Blake pulled up the stool next to Trey, clapped him on the back and said, "What are you up to Trey?" He didn't let on that Melanie had called him.

Trey seemed to act surprised, as if he was coming out of being deep in thought, but Blake could see that Trey was well under the influence by the way he smiled and took a little longer to focus his eyes on his buddy's arrival. "Oh, hey! Blake! I didn't think you

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were going to make it today”, Trey blurted out. Then, signaling Melanie, “Melanie, sweetheart, give old Blake a beer and put it on my tab.”

Blake nodded his OK to Melanie, and after she served up a bottle of Bud, he turned to Trey and said in a quiet, jocular voice, curious as to what was bothering his friend, “Looks like you’ve been thirsty today, old pal. That’s not your usual way...I’m guessing that you’re either celebrating something or trying to drown away something...from where I’m sitting it appears to be the latter. Am I right or did you hit the lottery?”

“Ha”, Trey let out a short chuckle, “oh, I uh...it’s just that uh...it’s just that it has started out to be a goddamned lousy friggin’ day! It’s like I got several bad news things today and I just want to crawl up in a ball and make the world go away...ya know?”

Blake put his beer down after taking a drink, looked over at his friend with empathetic, questioning eyes and asked, “What has happened, so terrible, that it’s got you so fucked up today? Tell me; that’s what friends are for.”

Trey nodded, half turned on the bar stool toward Blake and told him about the three bad news events he had gotten earlier in the day. “But, you know the one that hurts the most is the reply from Sandra – I mean...damn but I really had my hopes high when we were together. I felt like I was riding in the clouds with the eagles. I had convinced myself that love the second time around was going to be so much better; and then it didn’t last.” Snapping his fingers, Trey continued “Bang, just like that it was over. She said she didn’t think we should see each other anymore.”

Just then Blake’s cell phone rang. “Hello”, he spoke into phone as he flipped it open. “Oh, hi, Betty honey, what’s up?” Blake then went on to hold a conversation with what Trey knew was Blake’s daughter. When the phone call ended, Blake looked back at Trey and reported, “My daughter – she called to ask me for advice on buying some new furniture for their family room.”

By now the alcohol was taking its toll on Trey and he could feel his eyes getting heavy. What he couldn’t detect was that his voice was getting a bit slurry and his head was excessively bobbing as he nodded and said, “I kind of got the essence of that from overhearing your end of the conversation.” Then after a pause he said, “You know Blakey, ole friend, I sometimes feel jealous of you.”

Blake looked a bit surprised and responded with a lighthearted chuckle, “Why do you say that?”

“Because you’re always getting calls from your kids!” Trey exclaimed. “Me? I’m lucky if one of my three kids call back after I’ve left a couple of voice messages.”

“Oh don’t give me that bullshit”, Blake said loud enough so that he was sure that Trey could hear, but the rest of the patrons would not be unduly startled. “You’ve told me

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a number of times how you were proud of those kids, because you and Penny had raised them to be independent and self-reliant and that's how they've become. Then there's you – you've always been so independent, like the rock of Gibraltar or something. I'm not sure I have the right words, but it's like you always seem to be so strong minded and self-reliant – maybe your kids think of you as a person who fends for himself and isn't all that needy that they have to always check up on you.”

Trey was beginning to sway somewhat on the bar stool and forced himself to focus on his friend. He replied, “Thash right! You got me there. Yet I love them, and I want them to have happy married lives and not wind up like me – that they will have that loving companion all the way up until the end. But truth be told, ever since the divorsh I sometimes feel so alone, so when I don't hear from them I feel like maybe I hadn't been susch a great father. Oh, I don't know; maybe it's just me feeling lonely without a woman to be with.”

Blake pointed his bottle of beer at Trey and offered, “Yeah, but there was that woman you dated a few months ago, the one with the cute face and big tits.”

“Ha!” Trey chuckled, “that was just for the sex”, and they both laughed.

Blake was now shaking his head and said, “So what's this all about? What is eating you? I'm still not seeing it. All the years I've known you, you've handled worse things and not gotten into heavy drinking like today.”

Trey thought about the question a minute and said, “Eating me? What do you mean? Oh, yeah, I get it now. I am not shertain, Blakey. But I think maybe, ah, I'm feeling lonely. I mean look at you and Royce? You both went through a divorsh and look at you now! You guys are both remarried and happy as pigs in shit. You have Abby and Roysh has Kathy. Hell's Bells, why can't I have that? Thash another reason why I envy you guys! You have a woman who you love and who wants to be with you – who wants to be a part of your life. God, if I only had that! I thought I did have it with Sandra, but it wasn't to be”, he ended sullenly.

Blake looked at his friend of fifty years, shook his head and smiled empathetically, “You know my friend it's time to get you home.”

Trey laughed and said, “I know I might appear to be a teeny little smashed, but how about one for the road? I promish I won't barf or fall off the stool.”

“Not a good idea”, Blake laughed. “I've known you for about fifty years, ever since we were fifteen and played on the same baseball team in Babe Ruth League. I've only seen you this shit-faced twice before in all those years. So, I'm going to see that you get home and sleep it off. Give me your car keys”, he gently ordered.

“Nah!” Trey responded. “Hey, I'm okay. I can make it home. I'm a little tired and had a few too many, but I can drive”, Trey tried straightening up in his seat and giving

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the appearance that he was he was more sober than he was, by deliberately pronouncing his words.

“And Santa Claus has two tits and a vagina. Bullshit! Give me your keys!” Blake repeated the command.

“Whoa! But if you drive my car, how are you going to get back here to get your car?” questioned Trey, displaying a brief moment of lucidity, after a few seconds of determined thought.

“No sweat! I’ll call Abby to pick me up at your place and she’ll drive me back here for my wheels. But first we got to get you home so you can wake up tomorrow and suffer through a hangover”, Blake announced with a sympathetic smile.

“Oh, come on, Blake. Really, I’m okay, I can drive. You can’t make me give my keys”, challenged Trey.

“In your most sober condition, you might give me a decent fight, my friend, but tonight you wouldn’t stand a chance. I can kick your ass with one hand tied behind me”, Blake declared. “So, come on, be smart and don’t give me any more crap – hand me your keys.”

Trey slid clumsily off the stool and stood unsteadily, rocking slowly side to side, tightened fists at his side with a frown on his face. He looked at Blake with a bit of fire in his eyes, as if he was ready to make a challenge. Blake tensed somewhat and was wondering if he would have to take Trey up on his well intentioned threat. After a few seconds that seemed a lot longer due to the tension, Trey smiled, hiccupped, and said, “What the fuck! You’re a good friend Blakey”, and then reached into his right pants pocket, extracted his keys and slapped them on the bar.

Blake smiled with relief that Trey still had some sense of mind, which meant that Trey wasn’t totally out of it. Blake motioned for Melanie to come over and asked her for the tab. Trey clumsily pulled out his wallet, almost dropping it, and fished out two twenties and put them on the bar. Melanie came back with the tab; Blake picked it up and saw it was \$34.50. “Is that enough for the tab”, asked Trey as he rocked back and forth unsteadily. “I have more if it’s not enough”, he mumbled.

“It’s just enough including a good tip”, Blake said as he nodded to Melanie. “Alright Trey let’s get you home. You can walk okay?”

“Of coursh”, Trey answered as he waved goodnight to Melanie and began weaving his way toward the door.

Blake said goodnight to Melanie and she whispered, “Good luck. And Thanks.”

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After getting Trey into the passenger seat of Trey's car and buckled up, Blake called Abby and told her what the situation was. She agreed to meet them at Trey's home and bring a couple of Advils on Blake's suggestion that it might lessen Trey's hangover the next morning (he couldn't be sure that Trey had any).

As they headed out of Chap's parking lot, Blake looked over at his friend and said, "Trey, we've been friends for a long time and I can honestly say I've seen you go through worse things than what you told me got you into such a state tonight. It seems to me that there is more that's bothering you – something that's much more serious than what you let on. As your friend I am asking you to tell me, because I want to help. And even if I can't help directly, talking it out with me might just make it easier. You know what I mean?"

After a couple of moments, Trey began in a subdued voice that grew with the intensity of sorrow as he went on, "I don't really know...I mean I am not sure I can put my finger on it. It's just like this big dark cloud is pushing down on me like, you know, like when a thunderstorm suddenly arrives and you can smell the ozone in the air and the heaviness is all around you, and you feel instinctively that you need to get away from there and seek shelter."

Blake's brow furrowed as he tried to fathom what Trey was saying, while at the same time negotiating the turn onto the main road. All he could think of was to say, "Go on, I'm listening."

Trey was obviously trying to think his way through the velvet fog induced by too many beers. Then he continued, "I guess...I think that today was just like a tipping point for me. For some weeks now I have been feeling a sadness, a loneliness – no it's more like feeling that I am alone – more like missing someone to hold and make love to and someone to love me."

"You still miss Sandra; is that it or part of it?" Blake queried trying to encourage Trey to dig a little deeper.

Trey nodded slightly and replied, "It's not just that I miss her. It's that I lost her. Just like I lost Penny; and before Penny there was Tracy. All three woman I loved are gone out of my life and I feel this deep sense of loss; this acute sense of failure."

Not knowing how to respond, Blake struggled for something to offer up to his friend. "I kind of understand, Trey, I mean I felt some of that when my first marriage ended."

Uncomfortable about divulging too much vulnerability to Blake and not wanting his friend to think him weak and unmanly, Trey attempted to hide behind a bit of bravado. "Ah, well, I guess I'm just feeling sorry for myself – you know, seeing you and Royce happily married, at least from where I stand. I'm just like I said feeling sorry for



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myself. It will pass. Tomorrow morning will be a new day and hopefully I won't have too big a hangover."

A few minutes went by in silence as neither of the men could think of anything to say, then the entrance to the trailer park appeared. Blake turned in and drove up to Trey's home. Abby was already there waiting for them. Together they escorted Trey in, had him take the two Advils that Abby brought and made sure Trey was settled. Blake hid Trey's keys in a kitchen cabinet while Trey wasn't looking, just to be sure Trey wouldn't get it in his head to go out again. Blake and Abby gave Trey a hug and left. Blake tried filling Abby in on the ride back to Chap's to pick up his car. Since it was still dinner time, they decided to have a late dinner there before going home.

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Trey barely remembered brushing his teeth. He went to bed but couldn't fall asleep - his mind turned over the news events of the morning and bits and pieces of his conversations with Blake. Then his mind cycled several times over the times he had spent with Sandra - the times they had laughed together, the things they did together, but mostly the nights of making love. It was the love making scenes continually flashing in his mind's eye that got to him - how much he missed holding her in his arms, touching her, running his hands and lips over every inch of her supple body, giggling together like a couple of teenagers. Then there were the mornings awakening in bed together and softly touching one another and warmly kissing; the arousal of his erection making him feel like a full blooded male again, innately knowing that he had fallen deeply in love with her - then returning to bed after their morning trip to the bathroom and making love one more time to celebrate the birth of a brand new day. Those memories brought back the sadness with a vengeance. He got up and put a Johnny Mathis CD in the CD player. He got back into bed as the first song began playing...

*"I have wished before,  
I will wish no more.*

*Love, look away!  
Love, look away from me.  
Fly, when you pass my door,  
Fly and get lost at sea.*

*Call it a day.  
Love, let us say we're through.  
No good are you for me,  
No good am I for you.*

*Wanting you so,  
I try too much.  
After you go,  
I cry too much.*

*Love, look away.*

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*Lonely though I may be,  
Leave me and set me free,  
Look away, look away, look away... from... me.*

*Look away, look away, look away... from... me.”*

Trey became aware that tears were welling up in his eyes and beginning to roll out toward his cheeks; his heart seemed to be burning in his chest and his pulse was racing such that he could feel the throbbing in the carotid arteries of his neck! He cried out, “Oh, Sandra, why? Why did it end? Why could I not hold on to you? Why did you have to move away and leave me?” Then with a deep emotional pang, “Was it my fault? Did I screw it up somehow?”

He tried taking a couple of deep breaths, hoping he could calm the racing pulse and the burning tightness and fluttering in his chest. The fear that he might be on the verge of a heart attack invaded his thoughts. He grabbed one of the pillows and clumsily shoved it under his feet, thinking that he had best elevate the feet as well as his head. Minutes ticked away as he lay there and repeated slowly inhaling deeply and exhaling, praying silently, “Dear God, let this just be an anxiety attack, not a heart attack”.

Gradually, after what seemed a long time, but in reality was only about five minutes, the fluttering diminished in his heart and his pulse rate slowed to where he no longer felt the blood surging in his neck. “Should I get up?” He asked cautiously, but he hesitated and waited a few more minutes. Finally he realized that it was useless trying to get to sleep, so he slowly edged his body over and sat up on the side of the bed. When he was sure that the attack, whatever it had been, was not coming back, he got up and went into the small living room, after getting a glass of water from the kitchen.

He sat down in the arm chair. Trey shook his head as if that might help him grasp what was torturing him and what he could dredge up from his sub-conscious that would help him overcome the darkness that seemed to have permeated his being this day.

He didn't know why, but suddenly he remembered that it was just about a year ago that he had accepted an invitation to return to Dawes College for a fraternity reunion. He remembered that it had been a bitter/sweet weekend. On the one hand, it was great to see, mingle with and share old times again. These were the men with whom he had once forged a strong brotherhood – the Greek fraternity life in the early sixties was a special time in his life. It was his first experience at being away from home and in many ways it was a time for him to mature (although he still felt that he had a ways to go).

As an only child who had been loved unconditionally by his mom and dad, he had to overcome that attachment and his innate shyness, while learning to adjust to college studies and the campus life. Had he been spoiled as an only child? He didn't recall ever feeling spoiled – only loved. Maybe, it occurred to him, that the unconditional love he had from his parents, especially his mom, pre-conditioned him to expect that from all three loves in his life. Could that have been a source of friction and discontent in his marriage to Penny and a hindrance in his relationships with Tracy and Sandra?

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Trey couldn't be certain. "Perhaps I was too self-involved, too self-centered and couldn't give them what they needed from me", he reflected. "But I made the choice to love them. And with Sandra, while she was the object of my affections, she either chose not to love me, or could not because the personal history with her earlier marriage and painful divorce led her to not allow herself to love someone again. It was as if she were emotionally unavailable to make that strong a commitment."

He was searching to understand – he needed to understand! He longed for the knowledge and clarity that would enable him to move ahead and not repeat the mistakes of the past. But he was struggling within himself. At times like this the soul longs to be free and the sub-conscious mind surfaces, bubbles to the top and overpowers the conscious mind. For Trey it came when he felt overburdened with stress or loneliness, and on this occasion with the added influence of too much alcohol.

Whatever, this mood, this dark, blue feeling, had taken hold of him – he could not escape it. He was unable to fend it off and do anything other than let it overwhelm him. He was constrained to let it boil up to the surface, engulf his emotions and flood through his thoughts like a raging wall of water – a tsunami of emotion. It carried him in its grasp until it eventually ran out of territory and dissipated.

"Why are you so dark?" he demanded of himself. "Why are you dwelling on the darkness, on the negatives and not the positives? You've allowed yourself to deny the gifts you've been given. Lord knows you've seen guys who were naturals in sports – guys who could whip anyone they competed against, but guys who lost it all through drugs, alcohol, or some other wasteful distractions. And here you sit, pissing your life away, having a pity party and diverting your energy into negative behavior rather than focusing on using your God given gifts to do something constructive! Why do you feel so alone and like a ship without a rudder?"

Trey pondered that for a moment then began to feel the tide of emotion begin to turn. He continued his self analysis, "You really have been blessed – yes, in so many ways. Over thirty years of marriage to Penny, whom you loved and with whom you had three wonderful, successful children and five adorable grandkids. And even though that marriage ended in divorce, there were many years of happiness before it came undone. And then you met and fell in love with Sandra, and for the short time it lasted allowed you to know that it was alright to love again; a love that was as intense as any love could be. You have been blessed in so many ways, yet you too easily overlook that and dwell on the darkness rather than the light."

At this point he knew that he needed to reach out and grab onto something that was stable and firmly rooted in his life. That anchor in a storm was his faith – what he had grown to hold out all hope in – that there was a divine providence, God, the creator. As the tsunami of negative emotion subsided and a peace began to form within his conscious, he reached out for that source of hope.

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He looked over on the table and turned on the lamp. On the table was the church bulletin from last Sunday's service. He opened it and began scanning through it. He stopped at the Hymn of the Day, "Day By Day" and read through the three verses, not quite remembering the tune. After reading all three verses, there were several portions of each that reached out to him – that seemed to speak to what was bothering him. He read them again...

*"Day by day, your mercies, Lord, attend me, bringing comfort to my anxious soul. Day by day, the blessings, Lord, you send me..."*

*I will seek your loving will to guide me o'er the paths I struggle day by day. I will fear no evil of the morrow, I will trust in your enduring grace. Savior, help me bear life's pain and sorrow..."*

*Oh, what a joy to know that you are near me when my burdens grow too great to bear; oh, what joy to know that you will hear me when I come, O lord, to you in Prayer"...*

Next he read aloud the Confession...

*"God of steadfastness and love, we confess that we love the works of darkness more than the light. We have sought to satisfy our deepest longings through material things of creation rather than through you, our Creator. We are quick to judge others, yet we fail to see our own failings. We ignore the cries of the poor and grow weary of working for justice. Restore us, O God; let your face shine on us, that we may be saved."*

He put the bulletin down and picked up his bible. He turned to the book of John and began reading one of his favorite passages, John 1: 1-18...

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."*

Trey began to pray fervently, "Almighty God, I believe you want us to love you as you first love us. You created us in your image and want us to love one another as brothers and sisters. I believe you will in your own time guide me to seek and find the woman with whom we are destined to share our lives together, no matter how few years may be awaiting us on this earth. I pray for all my family and friends, and humbly ask that you will watch over and protect them from harm."

Trey went on to pray specific prayers for all people and institutions within his awareness, ending with "I pray all this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ." Trey's darkness had finally yielded to the light.

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*Four Weeks Later...*

## Darkness Yields to the Light

On the next four Sundays, Trey went to church. Epiphany Church was the lone Roman Catholic Church in Venice and it had been months since he had attended mass.

On that first Sunday, the very next day after his day of darkness experience, after leaving church he drove to Costco in Ft. Myers to pick up a few things that he could only get there. He made his way around the myriad aisles piled high with all manner of products. Upon loading up his cart with the handful of items he was in search of, he wheeled the cart around the back corner of the aisle with the extra large boxes of cereal. Then Bang! He ran right smack into another cart. The other cart was stationary as the woman who was standing alongside of it was deciding on which of two brands of coffee she wanted to place in her cart. The act of running his cart into hers caused her cart to bump into her and she dropped a large container of Folgers coffee on the floor. Fortunately nothing broke.

Trey began apologizing profusely, “Good lord, I hope I didn’t hurt you! I feel so clumsy and embarrassed.”

The woman looked to be in her early fifties, about 5’ 5” with short brown hair, dark brown eyes, and from what Trey could tell without getting more embarrassed by staring, a shapely, eye candy body. She smiled up at him and said, “Oh, no harm; the coffee didn’t break and accidents happen. It was just as much my fault for standing so close to the end of the aisle for too long. I just couldn’t decide if I wanted to try the Folgers this time – I normally drink the Maxwell brand.”

“Well I still feel like a klutz”, Trey smiled and apologized once again. Then, for some reason, he couldn’t fathom, he asked, “How about if I make it up to you, or at least try to – it is lunch time and I’ve been wanting to try their pizza here at the snack bar. If you are even a little hungry, let me treat you to a slice by way of compensation?”

After studying him for a few seconds, the woman said, “Oh, why not. I am a little hungry and like you I have wanted to try the pizza, but haven’t as yet – too much in a hurry to get out of here usually. By the way, my name is Wendy – Wendy Peterson”.

“Trey Jensen”, he responded as they both simultaneously reached out hands to shake. “Do you come here often?” He asked, and inwardly scolded himself that it sounded like the proverbial cliché of all pick up lines. So, he hurriedly followed up with, “I usually come every two weeks or so. Most of the goods here are in too large of packages for me – it would take me a year to use up most things”, he exaggerated.

“Well, I see there are a few things that you prefer”, Wendy said with a smile, nodding toward his cart. Then, “Like you I only come infrequently. You are so right – most of the goods are packaged for families...large families”.

Trey was practically staring at Wendy. He was mesmerized by the warmth of her smile and the ease with which she seemed to carry herself. Breaking away from that stare

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and feeling the heat of a blush forming on his neck and face, he suggested, “Well, if you still have some shopping to do, would it be OK if I tag along until you finished and we can go to the snack bar?”

“Oh, I only have to decide on the coffee and then I’m done”, Wendy replied. “I think I’ll be adventurous and try the Folgers”. In her mind she was thinking that the Folgers was not the only adventurous thing she was about to do.

So they wheeled their carts over to the snack bar, ordered two slices of pizza and unsweetened iced tea. Then they wheeled the carts over to the table and Trey went back to the serving window to pick up the food and drinks and pay. “Interesting”, he thought that they both ordered pepperoni pizzas. Returning with the food and drinks, the two of them fell into an easy conversation that started out with very general topics and developed into more personal subjects. Wendy related how she was once divorced and later widowed. Trey related his situation without getting too deeply into it. By the time they were finished with lunch and ready to wheel their carts to the checkout lanes, Trey had asked and Wendy had accepted a date. Mentally reviewing their calendar schedules they agreed to dinner and the movies the following Friday.

On that first date they got along so very well that they both eagerly decided to date again. Then that led to a third date and on that night Wendy cooked dinner for them at her house. Yes, it turned out that she also lived in Venice, but on the island in a recently renovated condo. She had just moved in two months ago, having relocated from Barrington, Illinois and decided to retire early. During dinner that night, Trey brought in a cake to celebrate Wendy’s sixtieth birthday, despite the fact that it had been over two months ago. Trey looked happily at Wendy across the table as she blew out the six candles (one for each decade) and thought to himself, “Lordy, she doesn’t look more than fifty-two.”

When she had finished blowing out the candles, Wendy laughed heartily, got out of her chair and went to Trey. She put her arms around him, gave him a big, open-mouthed kiss, and then whispered, “Why not stay the night.”

It was at that moment that Trey had the thought that this just might be the woman he had been searching for.

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### *Postscript...*

We are continually faced with choices throughout our lives – we can opt for good or evil. For the most part we all fall short of where and what we want to be, where and what God intended for us. We are confronted with a constant battle within our souls between good and evil – between light and darkness. Whether Fate or Divine Providence given a chance the light will always win out.

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Credits: “Love on the Rocks”; Words and Music by Neil Diamond and Gilbert Beaud;  
Stonebridge Music (SESAC)/Sweet Sixteen Music, Inc. (ASCAP)

“Love Look Away”, Words by Oscar Hammerstein and Music by Richard  
Rodgers; Williamson Music Co. (ASCAP)