

One

I was masturbating to the sound of my wife's voice and a few of her words when I leapt for the first time. I had just turned 44 and my wife was giving me a taste of my birthday gift over the phone, since I was away on business in an afflicted place and thus unable to be home to receive it in vivo. To tell you the truth, any other place would have been an afflicted one for my wife and I. Hawaii had finally become our permanent home. We cherished it like most people adore their god and or love their children, having ourselves neither by choice. There were too many gods and enough children in the world for us to opt for a different kind of belongingness. Yet ours was not even a bit nationalistic. We simply fell in love with the Hawaiian Islands and its people. Their "hang loose" gesture coupled with their contagious Polynesian hospitality appealed to us when we discovered that it was practiced for real, especially after having been charmed by their music. Mellow, cheerful, and rarely melancholic, it soothed us, not that all the rest was not enough to appease us, be it the green-blue ocean, the welcoming sun, the pineapple-sweet wind, the colorful sandy beaches, the caressing foliage, Hawaiian history, and each island in its special and unique way. Honolulu was home and Hawaii was our homeland—our Mainland—even if we were both born in an afflicted place.

I must have leapt because all of a sudden it was no longer 2007, but rather 2005, and no one seemed surprised by the fact except for yours truly; not even my wife for whom 2007 was still two years in the future. On my forty-fourth birthday, I had turned 42. I was getting younger. I contemplated the idea of having gone mad, but being able to predict a considerable number of events up to 2007 negated that thought incessantly. I was sane—as sane as one can be—and especially given my curious situation. Yet why was I reliving the past, my past? The following question, however, suddenly engulfed me entirely: Could I change it to my advantage? I never considered buying any shares in the stock market, and rarely played the lottery; I was a spender, not a gambler. I was therefore unable to amass any riches during the couple of years that had presented themselves like a twisted cliché. I immediately thought of Ken Grimwood's novel, *Replay*, which I had enjoyed so much, reread at least once when I thought my life was going nowhere, and kept during all the years since 1986 when I had first read it. It was readily available in my bookcase between Philip K. Dick's *The VALIS Trilogy* and Christopher Priest's *The Perfect Lover*. It recounted the story of a man who replayed parts of his life several times before living it, apparently, to its natural conclusion. I was saddened to learn that Ken Grimwood had died in 2003 at the unripe age of 59, but smiled at the thought that he was perhaps replaying his own life. *Replay's* main character relived a long period of his life—twenty-five years' worth—whereas I was reliving a mere fraction of mine. What could I hope to accomplish during two measly years? It took many years—a good 20 years' worth of my life—to get to the point of feeling content about it. It is as if my life took a turn for the better after reading Grimwood's *Replay*. Many people must have felt that way. Two meager years to improve my content life! I dreaded the idea of reliving parts of it even if I could manage to change most of it. Who wants to relive the death of a father and see him diminished day after day as his brain gives way to Alzheimer's? Who

wants to go through school again and face the same dull questions and multiple-answer scenarios? Who wants to experience the fucking prom more than once? Who wants to be a pimply self-centered teenager? Certain events are better lived once, once too many in some cases.

When I was sure that I was reliving my past two years, I decided not to change much if anything about them. We had moved to Hawaii from an afflicted place two years earlier. Hence, reliving half of my new life in these blessed islands seemed like a dream come true. Four years in Paradise would suddenly become six. Too bad that my wife was not part of the deal! We were together in Paradise, but I was getting the bigger pineapple. She thought I was joking when I finally told her about my two-year leap to the past, but got quite worried when I was able to predict a decent number of events. In reality, not many noteworthy events occurred between 2005 and 2007 for me to forecast, especially in our personal life, but enough to appear truthful.

“How is it possible? Why are you reliving these years?”

“The possibility is no longer disputable given that I’m living proof of its actuality and likelihood. The why, however, is more difficult to figure out. Yet, the classical reply, why not, quickly arises.”

“Are you the only one it’s happening to?”

“Why would I be the only one? It’s highly probable that others are experiencing it as well. Ken Grimwood’s novel, *Replay*, is now reality, not fiction. I had told you about it when I reread it just after we had met. Do you remember?”

“Vaguely.”

“Don’t you remember the story about the man who replays parts of his life several times before living it normally towards its natural end with no more replays?”

“It sounds familiar.”

“It was an amazing story that stayed in my mind for a long time. You never got around to reading it. I guess you’ll have to make time now. It’s one of the books that I kept when we moved.”

“Do you think you’ll relive more parts of your life?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps it’s a one-time-only thing, or the beginning of a series of leaps. I guess only time will tell.”

“It scares me to think that this might happen again. It’s not like *Groundhog Day* where the Bill Murray character relives the same day repeatedly until the love of a woman sets him free. In your case, we’re talking about years. How are you going to deal with it?”

“I don’t know.”

“What if your leap brings you to a point in your life when you still haven’t met me? What will you do then?”

“I will meet you again, and this time around, I will try to avoid your father.”

“Come on; he was only protecting me; his only young daughter.”

“From me? I was harmless.”

“But he didn’t know that.”

“Come on; he simply didn’t want another man to have you. And I don’t blame him. I would have acted the same way. I will simply try to avoid him.”

“I guess you’re right.”

“You know I’m right, but you’re right about the how would I deal with a long leap. It might seem at first that I had gotten a chance to make better choices, but after a while, a different choice might not necessarily mean a better one. Things could go awfully wrong.”

“Wouldn’t it be prudent and wiser then to make exactly the same choices?”

“I suppose so, but given a second chance and perhaps additional ones, most individuals would probably opt for doing things differently.”

“Would you do so too?”

“I don’t know.” I lied of course. I knew that I would also choose to do things differently if I kept leaping and reliving parts of my life. I would at least avoid the bad decisions that I had made earlier in my life. I was jumping the gun. This was my first and only leap, a short jump, and I was not sure that I was going to leap again or that I was hoping for a longer one.

For many months, Lulu rarely mentioned it, and I did not bring it up. What for? Yet, April 14, 2007 was quickly approaching, and I could feel my wife’s apprehension coupled with mine. I stayed home this time, avoiding any afflicted place, leaping again just when my wife was singing “Happy birthday dear Louis.” If my different lives run in parallel, I must have ejaculated in the first one and heard the end of the song in the second, and who knows what I will be doing in subsequent ones. Going down on my wife would probably be my first choice. Yet, if my life remains the same, I can practically choose to do whatever I want just before I leap again.

Two

It was April 14, 2003; I had leapt four years. My wife and I were preparing for our move to Hawaii and planning to celebrate my fortieth birthday at home. It is often said that many people have their midlife crisis at 40; I had mine at 30 and so turning 40 was nothing special, the first time, that is. I decided not to tell her about the leaps this time around and suggested that we change our stopover to an afflicted place called Los Angeles. I explained that Ken Grimwood, one of my favorite writers, was gravely ill and that I wanted to visit him before he died.

“Do you know him?”

“No, but I’ve read one of his novels many years ago and have never forgotten it. I even kept it for all these years.”

“How are you going to contact him?”

“I’m not sure, but I read somewhere that he lives in Santa Barbara, so I thought we could stay there a few days and look him up.”

“Don’t you think it’s going to change our plans with the move and all?”

“I guess so, but I have to do it; I have to see him before he dies. There is something important I want to tell him about his book.”

“What are you planning to say to him?”

“You wouldn’t understand; it has to do with his book.”

“Which one?”

“Replay.”

“I haven’t read it.”

She listened attentively as I told her about it, her attractive face becoming even more striking. I told her that I had to tell Ken Grimwood how much his novel had meant to me throughout the years, how much it still means to me (especially now).

I wanted to tell him that his life mattered so much more than he could ever have hoped it would. I wanted to tell him about my leaps, and promise to look him up again, since I was seeing him just a few days before his death. But I was not sure about the last part. How do you tell someone special, anyone for that matter, that he or she is going to die? We are all going to die, but how do you tell someone you like that he is going to die on a specific day, on June 6, on the fifty-ninth anniversary of D-day and just a few months following his fifty-ninth birthday? How do you look him in the eye and say it? It is as if you were pulling the trigger. I would probably skip that part and concentrate on the leaps. Two years! Four years! What is next? Do I add two years? Is it going to follow a binary progression? Is it going to keep a more complicated sequence? Is it going to be random?

We arrived to Los Angeles on May 23, which gave us two weeks to find Grimwood. Lovely and loving Lulu decided to help me, especially after reading the book. We came

up empty looking him up in several phone books, on the Internet, and via his publisher. It is difficult to reach someone that you do not know personally and who is protected to some degree by his fame. Consequently, we hired a private investigator that was only asked to get hold of Grimwood's phone number. With over a week to go, we had the number, which my wife swiftly validated by calling Grimwood up and asking him to meet us to discuss his book.

"Which book?" he asked.

"Replay."

"What else is there to discuss about Replay?"

"The possibilities are endless."

"They are," he chuckled.

He did not even ask who she was. Lulu Lavoix sufficed for an appointment on the following morning, May 30, at his home in Santa Barbara. She had that effect on people, whether up close and personal or remote and friendly. We agreed that Lulu would present herself as a freelance reporter for the New York Times, while I would pose as Jeff Ripley, her assistant in California. I did not sleep very well that night, troubled by what I was going to say to him and in front of Lulu to top it all. I therefore decided to just say it; I would not be roundabout about it. What is the worst that could happen?

Grimwood greeted us with a large smile and led us, after short introductions, to his sunny office where we were invited to sit on a large, comfortable, beige, leather sofa, which was nicely situated between two towering plants. He was still bearded, somewhat similarly to the photograph on the cover of his book. My heart ached thinking that he would or could be dead on the following week.

"You were right, Mr. Grimwood; I am replaying my life. This is my second replay," I blurted out unexpectedly. Lulu looked puzzled. "As proof," I quickly continued, "these are the California Super Lotto Plus winning numbers for tomorrow's ten-million-dollar jackpot: 5, 21, 23, 27, and 38; and 24 will be the mega number. I bought two tickets. One is for you. No one else will win it." Both of them remained silent as I handed him his winning ticket with tears beginning to well in my eyes.

"What are you talking about?" my wife uttered as I was regaining my seat rather heavily.

"I told you about it after my first leap, which only amounted to two years from 2007 to 2005. You were worried, especially when you finally believed me, so I decided to spare you the trouble this time around, that is, until now. This one is four years long; 2007 to 2003."

"So you're only beginning this one," Mr. Grimwood thought out loud.

"Yes. I had planned to see you if another leap was ever thrust upon me."

"So the lottery is for real?" my wife whispered.

“I looked up the numbers during my first leap so we could indulge in Hawaii and as proof for Mr. Grimwood. I could probably do a lot more if I ever leap again.”

“Please call me Ken.”

“Do you believe me, Ken?”

“If the ticket is a winner, I will have to.”

“You’ll have to wait till tomorrow then.”

“I will have to believe you given the odds of winning.”

“I thought as much.”

“Are you sure that you want me to have half of your winnings though? What is it, half of ten million dollars?”

“Yes, I do. Your book is like a guide, and the author should be entitled to a large percentage.”

“It would be a hoot if all this were true; if people were really replaying their lives; well you at least. Imagine that!”

“It is very true, but it seems to happen in reverse. In the meantime, please have your heart checked and take it easy for the next week or so!”

“Why is that?”

“I just want you to prevent some discomfort.”

“Is something going to happen to me?”

“Nothing terrible, but you could help circumvent part of the problem by looking into it.”

“So you want both to enrich me and save me?”

“Why not? And I hope to do it again. Please promise me that you’ll visit the best doctors come Monday; come Sunday if it’s possible!”

“I promise,” he said smiling.

We opted for the lump sum of close to two and half million dollars, which we wired to our little account in Hawaii. Upon our arrival on June 2, a splendid day like any other day in Honolulu, I called Ken to find out what he had heard from the doctors. My wife had called him before we had left that afflicted place to make sure that he had gone to see them. “The results are negative,” he said. “I’m in good health.” I called him again on June 5 and got a similar reply. “I’m fine, Louis, don’t worry! I got a clean bill of health.” He had laughed heartily upon realizing that Jeff Ripley was an assumed name. “I should have recognized the wordplay. Yet who could have done so with Lulu Lavoix preceding it?” When I called on June 7, I was told that he had passed away suddenly. I had failed to save him.

Many days had to go by before I was able to laugh again, save the occasional chuckle

when Larry David was simply too enthusiastic. Our evenings though, walking on Kalakaua Avenue next to the ocean, were soothing. We usually started in the late afternoon by visiting our isolated cousins in the zoo; apes and monkeys wondering aloud, unable to wander too far in Paradise, but close enough to the ocean to smell, taste, hear, and even see it, jumping high before the cage and or gravity stopped them from reaching for it with their humanoid hands. These prisoners of Paradise, receiving food, shelter, attention and care, seemed content, except when your eyes met theirs and it was doubly understood that freedom may be all that they longed for, all that anyone longs for, eventually. After seeing these relatives of ours, we had a light supper, overseeing the sun fade away into the ocean in a spectrum of colors, which were soon replaced by tall torches lighted across the beach to celebrate life in all its forms and shapes. People seemed happy in Paradise; they were pleased to become part of the superb landscape. What more could one ask for in this place called Hawaii? I was no longer content as I had been during the first four years before my first leap and even following it during the second two years. These four years, which had just begun, promised to be long and mostly uneventful. We did not have to work any longer, a blessing some say in disguise, but a boon that we appreciated immensely, essentially continuing to indulge ourselves, occasionally treating our favorite causes to financial contributions, whether it was the Honolulu Zoo Society, the Hawaiian Humane Society, or a number of organizations that labored to help preserve Hawaiian culture.

One major event, however, was on my mind when Christmas 2004 was approaching. The loss of so many lives to the tsunami had to be prevented. I therefore wrote an anonymous letter a few months earlier and a reminder letter a few weeks before that dreadful December day to a few major papers as well as the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center informing them that my calculations, mysterious as they and I may be, predict a major earthquake in the Indian Ocean near Indonesia on December 26, which if not duly made known, will kill over 250,000 people. "You have to advise all governments in the region, including Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and even East African countries, to warn the populations who live, work and play near the ocean that a deadly tsunami will arise on December 26 and to seek higher grounds. You will be held accountable if you do not prevent this catastrophe from taking its toll." Many people heeded the news and did not perish, but over 50,000 people lost their lives on that day. I was unable to save them all, but Lulu reminded me unremittingly that I had saved a great number.

Another major event presented itself the following year, requiring me to write by the end of July to the papers and the National Hurricane Center. "My calculations, mysterious as they and I may be, predict a deadly hurricane on August 29. You have to warn people in Louisiana, and the majority of people in Mississippi and Alabama, that levees and other structures will bow down before this storm. You will be held accountable for over 3,000 deaths if you do not prevent this disaster from taking its toll." Over 2,500 people were saved that day, another considerable number according to Lulu.

Another event, a major one especially for his family, although it greatly affected many people, including Lulu and me, was to occur the following year. The Crocodile Hunter was to be fatally pierced in the chest by a stingray while snorkeling at the Great

Barrier Reef in Australia. I warned Steve Irwin, a few weeks in advance, of the danger he was facing on September 4 while filming his documentary, but he did not heed my words. How could he? He was simply being true to himself.

Lulu became increasingly anxious as April 14, 2007 was approaching. Would I leap again and to what year? I was not particularly apprehensive at the thought of leaping again, hoping that this time around I would be able to do much more. To ensure that I would be able to accomplish all my main objectives, I memorized a mammoth amount of information spanning as far as 1963, the year of my birth. I spent the day going down on Lulu, that is until my tongue was numb and Lulu especially satisfied, unable to determine which came first, but realizing just before I leapt that they must have transpired at about the same time. Numbness is after all one opposite of satisfaction, but in concert they can only spell stupidity.