

*The dream is chaotic and terrifying. You struggle against it, against the shock and disbelief, the engulfing flames, the screams, your heart bursting with panic. And then as if your mind can no longer deal with its own creation, you find yourself in another dream: your wife Kathy in the passenger seat, your two children in back, Cecilia buckled in, little Alex in his child safety seat, all eager to arrive and though you're driving you can't quite make out where you're going. Your wife says something and when you look, it's not Kathy but Mollie Sikorski, your old high school girlfriend with the smile that used to drive you mad with lust and she smiles and you feel the delicious agony in your groin and you wonder once again about choices made and paths not taken and then something wakes you up and you're in the bedroom of your old house in Chicago and you smile at the vividness of this new dream, your hand moving idly over the nubby white chenille bedspread, your fingers plucking at the tiny piles of cotton thread arrayed in neat rows like crops in a field. You smell bacon. You haven't had any in years, ever since Kathy read you that article and then the voice so familiar yet so buried by the passing years: your mom, calling you down. You smile again at the completeness of this dream of your youth: the sights, textures, smells and sounds all there. You reach up to scratch your chin and your fingers encounter a shocking smoothness. You run your hand over your cheek, the unfamiliarity of unstubbed skin. Getting out of bed you discover your slender hairless legs. Stunned, you jerk your gaze around the room. It's your old childhood bedroom. The hand-me-down desk, the old maple dresser, the Star Wars posters. Han Solo. Chewwy. Princess Leia. The Millennium Falcon. You stagger to the dresser and gawp into the mirror in wonder and terror at your impossibly young face. Surely you're still dreaming. But when has any dream been so vivid?*

"Ricky, aren't you coming down?"

You hear the irritation mingled with worry in your mom's voice. A sound you haven't heard in many years, yet now so fresh and immediate you're filled with wonder. What a memory you must have to reproduce such detail so accurately. You wonder when you will wake up. For surely you will wake up from this astonishing recreation of your past.

You have to pee. When you reach for the door handle, it's higher than you expect. It takes you a moment to understand why: you're shorter.

You stand before the toilet, amused at how close the bowl is. You reach for your prick and, less amused, find it's rather small. You pull out the waistband of your pajamas and stare at your hairlessness. No longer able to constrain it, your urine streams noisily into the bowl. You flush and rinse your hands, eyes avoiding their bewildered reflection above the sink. In hallway photographs, you see your dad in bellbottoms, your mom in a miniskirt, your older brother Bobby in a stroller, less than a year old. A shot of Bobby holding the infant Ricky in his lap. Another of Bobby, you and your baby sister Roseann. And Bobby's graduation picture. So he's in high school now, and you must have started middle school. Roseann would be in Second Grade.

Sounds from downstairs: your mom, cooking. The bacon is for your lunch. BLTs, your favorite. So today is a school day. What time is it? What day? And for heaven's sake, what year?

In your room, you spot a calendar. February, 1978. Your twelfth birthday was last month. You stare at the junk on your dresser: a Hot-Wheels race car, a Swiss Army knife, your old Star Wars wrist watch.

It's almost seven thirty. What time does school start? You don't remember. You don't remember a whole lot from when you were twelve. How could you? That was over twenty years ago. You're amazed your dream is so vivid.

The bedroom door opens. It's your mom, impossibly young. "Aren't you dressed yet? Get a move on! If you miss that bus, don't count on me to drive you."

"I'll be right down," you say, the timbre of your prepubescent voice yet another shock.

"Don't forget to brush your teeth."

The habit of obedience is quickly recalled. As you stand at the sink, Pepsodent foaming in your mouth, your impeccably reconstructed image staring into your eyes from the paste-flecked mirror, you begin to face the possibility that this is not a dream. That somehow you have reverted to your twelve-year-old self. Only this time around, you have memories of your future, your adult life. Could it be? Do you pinch yourself? Could a pinch be any more vivid than the tickle/hurt of the bristles of toothbrush against gums? All the evidence of your senses tell you this is no dream, but a bizarre new reality. Your stomach leans against the cold porcelain of the sink. There is a heft, a solidity to everything around you, everything you see, hear, feel, smell and taste that brooks no doubt. You're wide awake. Through some weird time-warp or inexplicable twist of physics, you've arrived at an earlier stage of your life; all the paradoxes, the impossibilities of science-fiction swept away by this new reality. Is there really no waking up? No going back? Is this to be your life from now on? *Do you want it to be?*

You pause to reflect. You picture your wife Kathy, your two sweet children. Your heart aches for them. But as much as you love them, and as much as you treasured your home, your life, your career, you know there were other choices you could have made along the way; opportunities missed. So you hope this time-loop, or whatever it is, is permanent: a one-way journey. An honest-to-God second chance. A surge of excitement runs through you. The hairs on your arms rise up as if electrically charged.

You rinse the toothbrush. You sip icy water from the tap, rinsing the minty paste from your mouth. You wipe your grinning lips. Living your life over again. But this time correcting the mistakes! Avoiding the blowup between you and your best friend Adam that spoiled your twelfth summer. Avoiding the schoolyard fight that chipped your front tooth. Preventing the car accident that broke Bobby's leg and cheated him out of his sports scholarship to Michigan. Can you do that? Sure you can! Because you remember the exact circumstances of that accident, including the date it happened. But then you worry. Your knowledge of the future will change it, perhaps radically. Preventing Bobby's accident will change the course of his entire life, and yours as well. What about other changes you make along the way? At some point, your new life will begin to diverge from the one you've already lived. But can it affect the larger world? Or just your own life, and the lives of those close to you?

And then it hits you. You can become rich. You can buy stocks in fledgling companies like Microsoft and Yahoo, Intel and Cisco. And sell before the meltdown. You stare in growing excitement at your fresh-faced reflection in the bathroom mirror. You've got to write it down. All your memories. Before they fade into the day-to-day concerns of childhood. This is the opportunity, literally, of a lifetime. One that must not be wasted. Your first impulse is to boot up your PC and start a file. And then you remember: this is 1978. There aren't any personal computers yet. Bill Gates is just another college-age nerd. Steve Jobs and his buddy Woz are just a pair of phone phreaks. You're stuck with paper and pen. A spiral notebook, a stack of notebooks, that must be written out with care and preserved through the many years ahead of you. Suddenly your face splits in a grin, exposing oversized teeth you know you'll grow to accommodate. *This is way cool!*