

# Wunderkindergarten

Marc Laidlaw

*'Sad to say,' Marc Laidlaw writes, 'not only has the single gone the way of the portable manual typewriter, but the LP is now for all purposes more extinct than the baby condors they are always feeding with mama-condor regurgitating handpuppets on our local news. I finally had to break down and buy cassettes of the latest Joni Mitchell and Elvis Costello "albums"; in the US they're only on CD and tape . . . How easy it is to get out of touch with technology when one simply doesn't have the money to keep up. I remember when I was a kid, going into old people's houses, full of old things, vaguely wondering why they didn't have all the great new stuff, realising that was one of the ways the generations differed so greatly. No doubt they might have wanted some of the stuff I grew up with, the electronic gadgetry, ceaselessly interesting - but on a fixed retirement, who can afford it? So they made do, just as I make do with an old turntable and a tape player, and simply shuffle past those expensive CDs and read about the latest advances that are going to make even them obsolete.'*

*Marc Laidlaw's first published short story, a collaboration with Gregory Benford, was nominated for a Nebula Award. He has also collaborated with Rudy Rucker on a series of stories which collide pop culture with the wilder fringes of mathematical theory (their 'Probability Pipeline' was a benchmark story for this anthology), as well as publishing two novels and solo short fictions in most of the SF magazines and anthologies such as Bruce Sterling's Mirrorshades, Rudy Rucker's, Peter Lamborn Wilson's and Anton Wilson's Semiotext(e) SF and Dennis Etchison's The Cutting Edge. He's a self-confessed guru of the Californian freestyle movement of SF writing, the ideology of which can be summed up as 'Write like yourself, only more so.'*

*Hence, 'Wunderkindergarten'. Like a monster movie in which the monster gets to tapdance. Only more so.*

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The One and Only Entry in Shendy's  
Journal

# D

abney spits his food when he's had too much to think. Likki spins in circles till her pigtails stick out sideways from her blue face, and she starts choking and coughing and eventually swallows her tongue and passes out, falling over and hitting me and cracking the seals on my GeneKraft kit and letting chimerae out of ZZZ-level quarantine on to the *bare linoleum floor!*. Nexter reads pornography, De Sade, Bataille, and Apollinaire his special favourites, and thumbs antique copies of *Hustler* which really is rather sweet when you consider that he's light-years from puberty, and those women he gloats and drools over would be more than likely to coo over him and chuck his chin and maybe volunteer to push his stroller, though I'm exaggerating now (for effect) because all of us can walk quite well; and anyway, Nex is capable of a cute little boner, even if it is good for nothing except making the girls laugh. Well, except for me. I don't laugh at *that* because it's more or less involuntary, and the only really funny things to me are the things people do deliberately, like giving planarian shots to a bunch of babies for instance, as if the raw injection of a litre of old braintree sap can make us model citizens and great world leaders when we finally Come of Age. As you might have guessed by now, when I get a learning overload I have to *write*. It is my particular pornography, my spinning-around-and-passing-out, my food-spitting response to too much knowledge absorbed too fast; it is in effect a sort of pH-buffering liver in my brain. (I am informed by Dr Nightwake, who unfairly reads over my shoulder from time to time - always when, in my ecstatic haste, I have just made some minor error - that '*pH in blood is buffered by kidneys, not liver*'; which may be so, but then what was the real purpose behind those sinister and mis-leading experiments of last March involving the beakers full of minced, blended and boiled calf's liver into which we introduced quantities of hydrochloric acid, while stirring the thick soup with litmus rods? In any event, I refuse to admit nasty diaper-drench kidneys into my skull; the liver is a nobler organ far more suited to simmering amid the steamy smell of buttery onions in my brain pan; oh well-named seat of my soul!) In short, writing is the only way I have of assimilating all this shit that means nothing to me otherwise, all the garbage that comes not from my shortshort life but from some old blender-brained geek whose experiential and neural myomolecular gnoso-procedural pathways have a wee bit of trouble jibing with *my* Master Plan.

I used to start *talking* right after an injection, when everyone else was sitting around addled and drowsily sip-ping warm milk from cartons and the aides were unfolding our luxurious padded mats for nap-time. The words

would start pouring out of me in a froth, quite beyond my control, as significant to me as they were meaningless to the others; I was aware of a pleasant warmth growing in my jaws and pharynx, a certain dryness in the back of my throat, and a distant chatter like jungle birds in jungle boughs singing and flitting about through a long equatorial afternoon, ignoring the sound of chainsaws ripping to life in the humid depths at the rainforest floor. Rainforest, jungle, I haven't seen either one, they no longer exist, but they shared certain descriptive characteristics and as far as I can tell, they could have been no more mighty than our own little practice garden just inside the compound walls, where slightly gene-altered juicy red Big-Boy radishes (my design, thank you very much) grow to depths of sixteen feet, their bulbous shoulders shoving up through the asphalt of the foursquare court, their bushy leaves fanning us gently and offering shade even to adults on those rare afternoons when the sun tops the walls of our institution and burns away enough of the phototropic haze to actually *cast a shadow!*. And there I sat, dreaming that I was a parrot or a toucan or macaw, that my words were as harmonious as flights of birds - while in actuality the apparent beauty of my speech was purely subjective, and induced in my compatriots a mixed mood of irritation, hostility and spite. Eventually, though no one acted on their resentment (for of us all, I am the pugilist, and Likki has never disturbed my experiments without feeling the pummelling wrath of my vulcanised fists), it came to be quite apparent to our supervisors, who heard the same complaints in every post-injection counselling session, that the injections themselves were unobjectionable, the ensuing fluxflood a bit overwhelming but ultimately worth-while (as if we had a choice or hand in the outcome of these experiments), and the warm milk pleasingly soporific; but that the one thing each of the other five dreaded and none could abide were my inevitable catachrestic diatribes. The counsellors eventually mounted a campaign to confront me with this boorish behaviour, which at first I quite refused to credit. They took to amplifying my words and turning them back on me through earphones with slight distortion and echo effects, a technique which backfired because, given my intoxicated state, the increase in stimulus induced something like ecstasy, perhaps the closest thing I have yet experienced to match the 'multiple orgasm' descriptions of women many (or at least nine) years my senior, and to which I look forward with great anticipation, when I shall have found my ideal partner - as certainly a woman with my brains should be able to pick a mate of such transcendent mental and physical powers that our thoughts will resonate like two pendulum clocks synchronising themselves by virtue of being mounted on the same wall, though what the wall represents in this metaphor I am still uncertain. I am also unsure of why I say 'mate' in the singular, when in fact I see no reason why I should not take many lovers of all sorts and species; I think Nexter would probably find in my erotic commonplace book (if I kept such a thing) pleasures more numinous and depraved than

any recorded or imagined in *Justine* or *The Story of the Eye*. The counsellors therefore made tapes of my monologues and played them back to me the day *after* my injection session, so that I might consider my words in a duller state of mind and so perceive how stupid and downright irritating my flighty speculations and giddy soul-bairings truthfully were. Having heard them, I became so awkward and embarrassed that I could not open my mouth for weeks, even to speak to a mechanical dictascriber, and it was not until our main Monitor - the one who received distillate from The-Original-Dr-Twelves-Himself - suggested I study the ancient and academically approved art of *writing* (now appreciated only by theoreticians since the introduction of the dictascriber, much as simple multiplication and long division became lost arts when calculators grew so common and cheap) that I felt some of my modesty restored, and gradually grew capable once again of withstanding even high-dose injections and marathon sessions of forced-learning, with their staggered and staggering cycles of induced sleep and hypnagoguery, and teasing bouts of wakefulness that prove to be only lucid dreams, followed by long periods of dreaming that always turn out to be wakefulness. It was particularly these last that I needed full self-confidence to face, as during these intervals I am wont to undress in public and speak in tongues and organise archetypal feats of sexual gymnastics in which even Nexter fears to participate, though he always was the passive type and prefers his women in two dimensions, or in four - as is the case with those models who spring from literary seeds and caper full-blown in his imagination, where he commands them with nine dimensions of godlike power above and beyond those which his shadowy pornographic puppets can attain.

Therefore I write, and become four-dimensional in *your* mind, while maintaining absolute dominion in my own - at least until the next injection, when once more I'll be forced into a desperate skirmish for my identity, repelling the plasmic shoggoths of alien memory from the antarctic ramparts of my ancient and superior civilised mind. I think at times that I have received the brain-juices of impossible donors - Howard Phillips Lovecraft, the hermetic Franz Bardon, Kahuna Max Freedom Long; impossible because they all died long before Dr Twelves's technique was perfected (or even dreamed of), though each of this strange trinity groped clairvoyantly toward predicting the development, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, of the Twelves Process. Consider HPL's silver canisters, carried by aether-breasting space swimmers, bearing the preserved living brains of worthy philosophers on information-gathering tours of the cosmos, like space-probes with tourists aboard; though Lovecraft never speaks of whether these dislocated entities were capable of boredom or of dreams throughout the long hauls from Yuggoth to

Andromeda, bound to be more tedious than a Mediterranean cruise. But Lovecraft is too popular an obsession these days, since the politically embarrassing emergence of R'lyeh, and I have plenty of others more obscure and less practical. Better poets, too.

But why call them obsessions? They are influences. Good influences - too many of them, and too good, as if they had been shaved of all their interesting edges before they were injected. It's this that bothers me. Whatever there is of interest in me is accidental - a synergy between a constellation of old coots' shared synapses. Nothing I can do about it but run riot in the privacy of my mind, gallop screaming down the narrow dark corridors left between the huge shambling wrecks of old personalities wrenched into position on a fundament too soft and shoggothy to support them, each new structure blocking out a little more of the mind's sky, trapping me - whoever I am/was - down here in the dark garbagey alleys with the feral rats that used to be *my own* dreams. Mine is a Mexico City of a mind, all swamp and smog and encrusted cultures standing on/smothering each other, tottering wrecks, conquerors and guerillas locked in a perpetual Frenchkiss snailsex carezza of jammed traffic, everyone gasping for breath.

One breath.

I am beginning to feel fatigue now. The initial shocky rush wearing off. Cramping in my wrists and forearms, fingers. Likki has stopped her spinning, regained consciousness, and a more normal pinkness is returning to her cheeks, and Dabney is actually eating up all he spat out, while Nexter is closing the last of his magazines and giving the rest of us a thoughtful, pragmatic look. And Elliou, shy little Elliou who becomes almost catatonic after her injections, says, out of the counsellors' hearing, 'We gotta get out of this place.'

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## The Aide's Excuse

I was in charge of night-watch on the nursery, yes, but it was a big task for one person, and mainly it was automated. I was really just there for the human touch. The orphans were usually very good, easy to keep quiet, always occupied with their tasks and research. Of course, they were just children, and with all they were going through you had to expect the occasional outburst from a nightmare, bedwetting, pillow fights, that sort of thing. We always demanded obedience from them, and discipline for their

own sakes, and usually they were good, they did as we suggested; though a bit of natural childish rebellion sometimes showed through.

But we never never expected anything like the chaos we found on that last night. The noise, the *smell* - of something rotten burning, a horrible spilled-guts stench, the scream of power tools. It sounded like they were being slaughtered in there, or murdering each other. It sounded like every kind of war imaginable. I can't tell you the thoughts we had, the feeling of utter helpless horror.

It took us hours to break the doors down, they had done something to the locks, and by then everyone was working on the problem - which of course was what they wanted, to completely distract us with the thought that our whole project was coming to a violent end before our eyes. And we did believe it at first. The smoke was so dense there was no enter-ing. Plastic continued to burn, there were toxic fumes, and from somewhere unimaginable all that charred and bloody meat. The metal walls had been peeled back, the wiring exposed, the plumbing ripped out, the floor itself torn right to bedrock. Impossible to believe anyone could have survived it.

But they hadn't. They were long gone. We found the speakers, and those ghastly instruments they'd made from what had been the nursery computer's vocaliser, turned all the way up. They were naughty, naughty, naughty . . .

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### *From The Twelves Fiasco: A Fiscal Post-Mortem*

. . . Which of the six children gained access to the index of neurodistillates is still uncertain, and short of confession from one of the gang themselves we may never know, so cleverly was the trail concealed. There are literally *no clues* remaining from which to reconstruct the incident - thus helping to explain why no member of the project staff was able to anticipate or prevent the eventual revolt.

What is certain, however, is that the Six selected their injections carefully, screening the half dozen they settled upon from among literally hundreds of thousands of poss-ible stored distillates. The descriptive records pertaining to each donor were safeguarded by 'unbreakable' encryption methods, which nonetheless must have been broken within a mere seven days, the period of time elapsed between Shendy Anickson's

sole journal entry (which cuts off when the Six apparently first began to conceive the plan, unless this too is a false lead), and the latest possible date at which the distillates could have been removed. It remains a greater mystery how they gained access to the storage vault, considering that it is 32.7 kilometres from the Twelves Center, that the children possessed no vehicles more advanced than push-scooters, and that the vault is protected by security systems so advanced that they may not be discussed or described in this report. Twelves Center itself is modelled after a high-security prison installation which has to date foiled every attempt at escape.

Their criteria for selecting donors is only slightly more explicable:

Obviously, the six subjects had access to virtually all historical and contemporary records that did not directly threaten their own security or the integrity of the experiment. Limitless research was encouraged. We know from pathtracking records that the children evinced an unusual interest in unseemly topics - predominantly the lesser by-products of Western culture - ignoring almost completely the consensus classics of world literature, visual art and music, and those figures of history most commonly regarded as important. They treated these subjects almost casually, as if they were too easily grasped to be of any interest, and concentrated instead on what might be called the vernacular icons of time. It has been suggested that in this regard they showed their true age; that despite the interlarding of mature mental matter, they were motivated by a far deeper emotional immaturity - which goes a long way toward explaining their fascination with those 'pop' (that is, 'popular') phenomena which have long been regarded as indicative of an infantile *culture*. It mattered little to the Twelves Six that the objects of their curiosity were of utter insignificance in the grander scheme; in fact, they bore a special affection for those figures who were obscure even as 'pop' artifacts. Rather than focusing, for example, on Michael Jackson or Madonna, Andy Warhol or William Burroughs, figures whose stature is at least understandable due to the size of their contemporary following (and who are therefore accorded a sort of specialised interest by sociostatisticians in the study of population mechanics and infatodynamics), the Six showed most interest in such fringe phenomena as the fiction of Jack Sharkey, the films of Russ Meyer, Vampirella Comics (especially the work of Isidro Mones), the preserved tattoos of Greg Irons, Subgenius cults, and the music of anonymous 'garage' bands.

It is no wonder then that, turned loose in the brain-bank directories with an extensive comparative knowledge of coterminous culture, they sought out figures with a close spiritual kinship to those they had studied at

some distance. Of course, few of their pop favourites were donors (one geriatric member of Spot 1019 being the sole exception), so they were forced to find acceptable analogues. Unfortunately (from the comptroller's point of view), in the first years of Twelves-ready brainmatter harvesting the nets were cast far and wide, and selective requirements were extremely low. Every sort of personality was caught in the first sweep, some of them possessing severe character defects, sociopathy, tendencies to vandalism and rebellion, and addictions to crass 'art'. Without being more specific (in order to protect survivors and relatives of the original first-sweep donors, who may themselves be quite well adjusted), we can state that the Six carefully chose their antecedents from among this coarser sort of population. They did, in fact, wilfully select their personality additives from among the most exemplary forms of the planet's lowlife . . .

\* \* \* \*

## A Witness

How do we know when they're coming? Kid, there's a whole network - if you know how to crack it - keeps us up to date. They're always one step ahead of the law, that's what makes it so exciting, so you have to stay on the hop. One time we were at a show, me and my lover Denk, Wunderkindergarten's been playing less than ten minutes - but those minutes were like a whole lifetime compressed down to this intense little burning wad of sensation - and suddenly it's sirens, lights, smoke grenades going off. Cops! We were okay, you don't go without being prepared, know-ing all the exits. They kept playing, playing - five seconds, ten, the alarms going off, the smoke so thick I lost hold of Denk, everyone's screaming at the Six to run for it, get out of there, don't risk it, live free to play another day, but the music's still going and Shendy's voice is just so pure cutting through it like a stabbing strobelight cutting back at the cop rays, and then I'm trapped in the crowd, can't even find my feet, and I look up overhead, the smoke's clearing, and there's just this beautiful moment where everything is still and her voice is a single high pure note like she can do, a perfect tone with words in it all tumbling together, and above I see the vultures floating over us in their big gunboats - but then I see it's not the cops at all, kid-o-kid, it's the Six up there, and I swear Shendy's looking right at me waving out the hatch of the ship as it lifts away spraying light and sound - and the backwash blows away the last of the smoke and we look on the stage, there's six naked cops standing there, strapped up in their own manacles looking stunned and stupid, holding instruments, this big bitch with a mike taped to her lips and she's screaming - it fades in, taking over from Shendy's voice as they lift away, until all you can hear is the cops in



misery, and our laughter. There's nothing they could do to us - we're too young - but we still got out of there in a hurry, and talked about it for weeks, trying to figure out how they did it, but we never did. And a few weeks after that, somebody gets the word - 'Show's coming . . .' And it all starts again.

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## The Song They Sang

This is our song this is our song this is our sa-aw-ong!  
It goes along it goes along it goes a-law-aw-ong!  
This is our song this is our song this is our saw-aw-ong!  
It goes along it goes along it goes on way too long . . .

*Huh!*

You can't hold us - any more.  
You can't even tell us when to - take our naps.  
We can't stomach your brain feeding - your program juices.  
We're not worms with goofy cartoon eyes - we're not your saps.

*Huh?*

This is our song this is our song this is our saw-aw-ong!  
It goes along it goes along it goes a-law-aw-ong!  
This is our song this is our song this is our saw-aw-ong!  
It goes along it goes along it goes on way too long . . .

*Tell it, Shen!*

Your brain matter my brain patter what's it mean and what's it matter  
flattened affect stamp and shatter babysitter's a -ladder hatter what you  
want with myomolecule myelin sheath's the least that she can do can you  
can't you can't you can't you do kee-kee-kee-kootchi-kootchi-coo  
bay-bay-bay you bay-baby boy stay-stay-stay I'll show you super-toy here's  
your brain and here's your brainiac suck my skull you racking maniac I can  
ro-oo-aar my voice is hii-ii-igh I-I can crawl between your legs and kick you'll  
die-ie-ie I-I can make no sense since I can sense no maybe I can still  
remember I'm just a ba-a-aby you wanna cradle me daddy you wanna rock  
me mum I can still feel your fingers in my cal-lo-sum no more no more you'll  
twist can't catch what you can't resist your voices inside my head I shout  
and I scream they're dead no I can't hear you now won't milk your sacred  
cow hafta haul your own shit now I'm climbing on top a your rower I'm



get strong, even Twelvin' it. We turned the whole process against the dults. That's our message, if you can call it anything. To the kids today, don't let them stick their prehistoric ideas down your craw - don't let them infect your fresh, healthy young minds with their old diseases. If you have to Twelve, then inject each other.

NVM: Now you're sounding like Shendy the notorious kiddie-rouser.

SA: You gonna blame me for the riots next? I thought you were sympathetic.

NVM: Our subscribers are curious. Shouldn't they be able to make up their own minds?

SA: I never incited any riots. The fact is, every kid already knows what I'm singing. It's an insult the way dults treat them - us. As if we're weak just because we're small. But hey, small things get in the cracks of the street, they push the foundations apart, they force change from underneath and erode the heavy old detritus of banks and museums and research centres.

NVM: Should adults fear you?

SA: Me? What am I but some experiment of theirs that went wrong in a way they never imagined but richly deserved? No ... I have everything I need, it's not me who's coming after them. They should fear the ones they've been oppressing all these years. They should fear their own children.

NVM: What are your plans for the future?

SA: To grow old gracefully, or not at all.

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## I'm with the Band

The whole 'tot' = 'death' connection, it was there in the beginning, but none of us could see it.

I can't deny it was an attractive way of life, we had our own community, Twelving each other, all our ideas so intimate. We felt like we were gardeners tending a new world.

This was right after the peak of the musical thing.

Wunder-kindergarten was moving away from that whole idea of the spectacle, becoming more of a philosophical movement, a way of life. It had never been just pure entertainment, not for us, the way it hooked at you, the way Shendy's voice seemed to come out of our own mouths, she was so close to us - but somewhere along the way it became both more and less than anyone supposed.

I was in the vanguard, travelling with the group, the official freezeframer, and we'd been undercover for so long, this endless gruelling existence, constantly on the run, though it had a kind of rough charm.

Then it all changed, our audience spoke for us so eloquently that the dults just couldn't hold us back any more, we had turned it all upside down until it became obvious to everyone that now we were on top.

Once you're there, of course, the world looks different. I think Shendy had the hardest time dealing with it because she had to constantly work it out verbally, that was her fixation, and the more she explored the whole theme of legitimacy, the more scary it became to her. You could really see her wanting to go backward, underground again, into the shell - at the same time she was groping for acceptance, as we all were, no matter how rebellious. We were really sort of pathetic.

Elliou was the first to drop out, and since she and I were lovers then, after I broke up with Shendy, naturally I went with her. We started the first Garten on Banks Island, in that balmy interim when the Arctic Circle had just begun to steam up from polar evaporation, before the *real* cooling set in.

It was really beautiful at first, this natural migration of kids from everywhere, coming together, all of us with this instantaneous understanding of who we were, what we needed. We had always been these small stunted things growing in the shadows of enormous hulks, structures we didn't understand, complex systems we played no part in - while all we really wanted to do, you see, was play.

That was how most of the destruction came about - as play. 'Riot' is really the wrong word to describe what we were doing - at least in our best moments. The Gartens were just places where we could feel safe and be ourselves.

It didn't last, though. Shendy, always the doomsayer, had warned us - but she was such a pessimist it was easy to ignore her.

The Six had been the original impetus - the best expression of our

desires and dreams. Now the Six were only Five. We found ourselves listening to the old recordings, losing interest in the live Five shows.

Then Five turned to Four, and that broke up soon after. They went their own ways.

Then Elliou and I had a huge fight, and I never saw her again.

The Gartens disintegrated almost before they'd planted roots. Hard to say what the long-range effects were, if any. I'm still too much a product of my childhood to be objective.

But forget the received dult wisdom that puberty was our downfall. That's ridiculous.

It was a good two years after I left the Garten before my voice began to change.

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## A Quote For Your Consideration

Intense adolescent exploration, as far as we know, is common to all animals. Science's speculation is that such exploring ensures the survival of a group of animals by familiarising them with alternatives to their home ranges, which they can turn to in an emergency.

Barry Lopez

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## Where Are They Now?

*Elliou Cambira*: Wife, mother, author of *Who Did I Think I Was?* Makes occasional lecture tours.

*Dabney Tuakutza*: Owner of 'Big Baby Bistro' snack bar chain. Left Earth's gravity at age thirteen and has resided at zero gee ever since, growing enormously fat.

*Nexter Crowtch*: Financier, erotic film producer, one-time owner of the Sincinnati Sex-Change Warriors. Recently convicted of real estate and credit fraud, bribery of public officials. Awaiting sentencing.

*Corinne Braub*: Whereabouts unknown.

*Likki Velex*: Conceptual dance programmer and recluse.

*Shendy Anickson*: Took her own life.

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## Shendy's Last Words (First Draft)

I'm sick - sick to death. There's nothing to say but I still have the vomitous urge to say anything, just to spew. My brain feels burned, curdled, denatured. Scorching Summer came too early for us orphans. Straight on into Winter. I don't remember Spring and know I'll never see another. Too much Twelving, none of it right - it wasn't my fault, they started it, I ran with what I was given/what they gave me till I ran out of things to say, new things, meaningful things. Nothing to push against. My mind was full of big ugly shapes, as bad as anything they'd ever injected, but these I had built myself. I'd knock them down but the ruins covered everything, there was nowhere to build anything new. I knew who I was for the first time, and I hated it. Straight from infancy to adulthood. Adolescence still lies ahead of me, but that's only physical, it can't take me anywhere I haven't been already. Everything's spoiled - me most of all. I wanted to start again. I wanted to go back to what I was before. I got this kid, this little girl, much younger than me, she reminded me of myself when I was just starting out. I Twelved her. Took a big dose of baby. It was too soft; the shoggoths came and almost melted me. The brain slag turned all bubbly and hardened like molten glass plunged in icewater; cracks shot all through me. Thought to recapture something but I nearly exploded from the softness. All I could do to drag myself out here to R'lyeh Shores. Got a condo - bought the whole complex and had it all to myself. Corinne came out to visit on her way to disappearing. She brought a vial of brainsap, unlabelled, said this was what I was looking for, when I shot it I'd see. Then she went away. I waited a long time. I didn't want another personality at this late stage. *Twelve*. Killed me to think that I was - finally - twelve myself. And that's what I did. I Twelved Myself. I took the dose Corinne had brought - just this morning - and first I got the old urge to write as it came on, but then the shock was too great and I could only sit there hang-jawed. It was Me. A younger me. They must have drawn and stored the stuff before the first experiment - a control/led/ling substance, innocent unpolluted Me. The rush made me sick so sick. Like going back in time, seeing exactly what would become of me. Like being three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten-eleven-twelve all at once. Like being a baby and having some decrepit old hag come up to me and say,

this is what you're going to do to yourself, what do you have to live for anyway? see how awful it's going to be? you think you're cute but everyone will know how ugly you really are, here, why don't you just come understand everything? And baby just drools and starts to cry because she knows the truth is exactly what she's being told by the stinky old hag who is herself. Is Me. All at once and forever. This is final. What I was looking for - and I've ruined it. Nowhere newer; no escape hatch; no greener garden. Only one way to fix what they broke so long ago. I loved to hate; I built to wreck; I lived to die. All the injections they doped and roped me into, not a single one of them convinced me I should cry.

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