



## 100 Strokes of the Brush Before Bed

*Melissa P.*

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It opens innocently enough: the diary starts off with a tone of self-absorbed adolescent wistfulness. The fourteen-year-old Melissa starts taking notes about her feelings during a very hot summer. Her bedroom is plastered with Klimt posters and photos of Marlene Dietrich. She is a loner, fond of classical music. She examines her body in the mirror, pleasurably yet without desire.

Her friend Alessandra introduces her to Daniele, an eighteen-year-old who intrigues her. She is embarrassed when he asks her if she is a virgin and she says yes. He invites her to his home to go swimming, and after cornering her in a secluded room and kissing her passionately, he asks, "Do you feel like doing it?" She declines coyly, but soon he is pushing her face below his waist. When she takes his penis in her mouth, he comes immediately. "Is this the way it's done?" she asks him. He isn't very nice to her, but the act fills her with a "strange contentment."

The diary then jumps to her fifteenth birthday, and then Daniele's nineteenth. She is smitten with him, can't keep her mind on her Latin lessons, tells him she wants to make love, but he responds that she doesn't "even know how to suck him off." She depicts her parents as not very caring of her, and feels unloved. She starts masturbating habitually and finally offers herself to Daniele, who tells her that he'll have sex with her only if their relationship remains purely sexual. She hopes that it will turn into love. When she arrives to have sex with him, he mistreats her; when he finally penetrates her and she claims not to feel any pain, he accuses her of lying to him about being a virgin. They begin to meet regularly to have sex on the beach, but she is unsatisfied, detached, deeply hurt by his abusive treatment. She feels guilty and sad when she confronts Daniele with his abuse of her, and he is humiliated: he bursts into tears. She stops seeing him, but the relief is mixed with the desire for self-punishment

One day at a school assembly, she flirts with one of the guest speakers, an intellectual law student named Roberto. Though he has a girlfriend, he is intrigued by Melissa, who is tiny, standing at five feet, and invites her to an abandoned country house. He is brutal, tells her he wants her to scream, showers her with obscenities, and she complies, but is finally detached from the act, distanced by his commands and his foul language. Still, she is very much in control when they meet, she strokes his macho ego and is amused by his transformation from the well-mannered guy to the passionate lover. She begins to discover things about men and the faces they put on to meet the world

On her sixteenth birthday, Roberto arranges a "celebration" for her: he takes her to an abandoned house and blindfolds her, whereupon she is stripped by him and four other men who take turns caressing her. She is intermittently excited and at one point, during a pause in the action, thinks about leaving, but doesn't. She is then made to kneel down and give head to all five of them, in succession, until they ejaculate. After the oral sex, they take turns mounting her. "I felt invaded, dirtied," she writes upon her return home. "Then I brushed my hair a hundred times, as princesses do, my mother always says." The next entry begins with broad irony: her mother asks, "Did you have fun last night?" She suspects her daughter of smoking pot, but Melissa just feels "empty." The question of self-love is raised again, and she distinguishes between the girl who did not love herself last night and the girl who does this morning.

The next several entries switch between three different narrative threads, sexual relationships that begin on the internet. Melissa meets a lesbian called Letizia, who intrigues her. They exchange photos and talk on the

phone. “I’m thinking (or perhaps I’m deluding myself) that by surfing the net I might find someone inclined to love me.” She also finds Fabrizio, a thirty-five-old married man who repulses her--she won’t kiss him--but whom she fucks. She is not doing well in school, so she finds a private tutor, a mathematics “professor” in his late twenties called Valerio, who attracts her. Their relationship starts very professionally, with actual lessons, but he also arranges phone calls in which he tells her his fantasies and she masturbates. He calls her “Lo” at the end of a call, an allusion that is later made explicit with a brief extract from Nabokov.

Melissa has her first encounter with Letizia, and then a sexy date with Valerio, who instructs her on what clothes to wear and takes her to a secluded spot. The encounter is outdoors at night, graphically described, beginning with their passionate kissing, continuing with them going down on one another, and then fucking in the car where she straddles him and reaches a shuddering orgasm. Fabrizio meanwhile has bought an apartment where he wants to rendezvous and watch porn films. But ultimately he has something else in mind: they make an appointment, and she arrives first, only to find a group of boxes that each contain an assortment of sex-oriented clothing, ranging from lingerie to leather gear. She chooses the leather, and he shows up for a sadomasochistic encounter. She shows herself to be an accomplished dominatrix, sees the power to inflict pleasurable pain as self-defining, and vents her distaste for him as she whips him and fucks him with a dildo.

She realizes that of all her lovers, Valerio is the one most capable of recognizing her passion. She writes him a letter essentially explaining to him who she is, what she’s looking for, asks if he’s up to the task of seeing her as the passionate person she is. She doesn’t hear back, and realizes that she is no more than a somewhat pedophilic fantasy to him.

Then one night she’s at a bar with her friends and someone catches her eye—he can’t stop staring at her, she can’t stop staring at him. They have a tentative conversation and then he shows up at her house to serenade her. She is amazed and touched and they go out on a date that lasts all night, though nothing physical happens. He alone has recognized her passionate self. But suddenly she doesn’t know if she can handle true intimacy, she doesn’t feel worthy. Valerio contacts her and she decides that a meeting with him will show what she really is, what she wants. When she arrives, Valerio introduces her to Flavio, and they arrange an evening at which a number of couples are invited. The idea seems to be an orgy, starring Melissa, but as soon as Valerio begins working on her, she decides to leave. On the way home in the car, she asks him about her letter. He doesn’t respond till he drops her off: “Addio, Lolita,” he says.

She sees Claudio again, and he admits that he’s fallen in love with her. She challenges this love, asking him when he wants to make love to her, and his response is just what she has wanted for the entire book: “when two people are joined together,” he responds, “it is the height of spirituality.” The last few entries--they end in August 2002--show her vacillating between accepting and fearing his love. They finally spend the night together, and make love instead of simply fucking, and the diary ends on a very hopeful note—she is loved, she has learned to love others, and more importantly herself.

This is a titillating and graphic account of one young girl’s extreme sexual journey, but it is also a fascinating and often sad portrait of female adolescent identity. The diary is impelled by Melissa’s arresting and powerful voice, transforming what could otherwise be mere pornography into a literary experience that is sweet, bold, and totally fresh.

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