

"expecting good things to happen is dangerous"

"i don't like anyone or me"

"there are so many hot people i'm so upset"

"if you're doing well don't tell me"

"is this death, a breakdown or am i just tired: a memoir"

"disappoint me so I know it's real"

"insecurity is forever"

"horoscope: he's lying"

so sad today...

WHY IS MELISSA BRODER SO SAD TODAY?

Panic attacks, sexual fetishes, and adventures in non-monogamy: inside the world of Twitter's favorite depressive.



BY WHITNEY JOINER MAR 14, 2016

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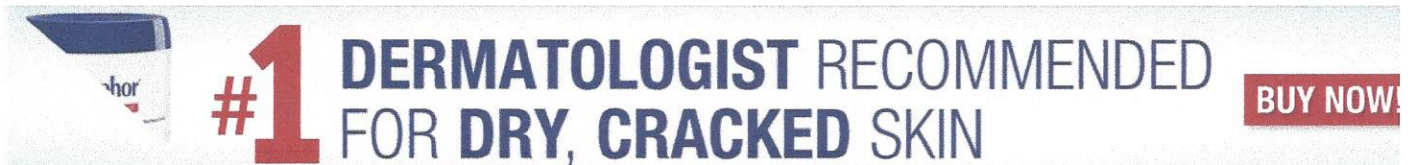
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somehow evolved into a proclamation of approval, as easily applicable to a perfect stranger's Instagram account as to a difficult-to-s snag lip kit. All week long we'll be examining what it means to be all-consumed in the digital age. So if you like what we're doing, #LBLBLBLB, okay?

"Oh, I just thought of a tweet!" It's New Year's Day, and Melissa Broder—Twitter's reigning queen of angst, insecurity, sexual obsession, and existential terror via her alter ego @sosadtoday—has just had a stroke of under-140-characters genius. But it'll have to wait: We're at Natura Spa in Los Angeles' Koreatown, where for the third year in a row Broder has soaked off the prior year's psychic remnants, and her iPhone is stashed in a locker, safe inside her Alexander Wang bag. Broder is tan, slim, and fit—she runs four times a week—but her hair is her most striking attribute. Thick and dark blond, it's a keratin-treated curtain that falls far past her shoulders. Her diamond navel piercing is endearingly anachronistic for 2016, but somehow fits a grown woman who describes herself as "still a teen."

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Just after midnight she'll send the tweet to her nearly 300,000 followers, including pop royalty Katy Perry, gender-fluid spirit fairy Miley Cyrus, actress Emma Roberts, brooding singer-songwriter Sky Ferreira, Frances Bean Cobain, Vampire Weekend's Ezra Koenig, and some of Broder's favorite indie musicians, like songwriter and producer Dev Hynes. Her message, "no one knows what they're doing and if they do they're a psychopath," will receive 607 retweets and be favorited more than 1,500 times. Other tweets during our time together: "i've been tired a lot lately so ly i'm dying," and, the most popular of the two-day period, "feelings 015." (One of her top offerings ever, thanks to a Katy Perry share: "everything I did was for you but I think you were asleep.")



SHARE TWEET MAIL



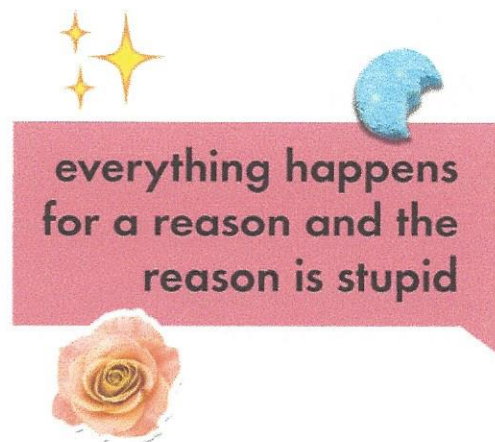
because we're always evolving, or there's no core self. Even to ourselves we're performing."

She stayed anonymous for nearly three years, long enough for BuzzFeed to publish "13 Reasons Why Lana Del Rey and the So Sad Today Twitter Are the Same Person," comparing Broder to the melancholic siren (sample reasons: "They're *so* lonely, all the time"; "They are both fucking crazy"; "And God, do they love a crazy boy"). Finally, in May 2015, the day [RollingStone.com](#) published a piece about the sale of *So Sad Today*, Broder came out via a photo taken at her doctor's office: an intake form, in which she'd circled *Yes* to the question "Do you suffer from anxiety or depression?" Her name is clearly visible.

For someone who writes about her incessant need for validation, I say, I can't imagine keeping an alter ego—especially one rising so quickly in Internet fame—a secret for that long. Now we're sitting on a concrete wall at the skate park in Venice Beach, post psychic readings, surrounded by the smell of weed and twentysomething boys slapping their boards on concrete.

It's right before sunset and unseasonably cold. We're both huddled under down jackets. She was proud of all the attention she was getting, she says, but at the same time, "I was embarrassed by how much I tweeted"—up to 40 times a day back then—which kept her from divulging her identity. (Now it's anywhere from 5 to 20 times a day, "if I'm on a binge.")

After the sun goes down, we try to light the 2016 "intention-setting" candles we bought at Mystic Journey: green, yellow, red, and black candles to
t success, healing, money, love. Our iPhones play snippets of
od Mac and ill-fated Beach Boy Dennis Wilson's *Pacific Ocean Blue* to
set the mood. The whipping wind won't allow them to stay lit, but we refuse



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should i obsess about my hair or the fact that we exist and it's terrifying



a dark—or perhaps *darker* would be more apt—period. Her husband, journalist and short-story writer Nicholas Poluhoff, had begun suffering from fevers, weakness, brain fog. Multiple doctor's appointments, tests, and a variety of Western and holistic treatments didn't bring improvement or

a firm diagnosis, but it was clear that the illness, which Broder now simply calls a "neuroimmune disease," was progressive. (When I'm in L.A., Broder reports that he's doing relatively well: He can walk four blocks before becoming exhausted.) At the same time, Broder had a falling-out with the publisher of an online poetry journal she was coediting. Coupled with not enough sleep and an erratic diet, the panic attacks ramped up.

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"I was going to work every day and writing these crazy narratives, like 'I'm not going to keep my job. I'm not fit for society. I'm going to be institutionalized,' " she says. That's when she launched @sosadtoday, from her office at Penguin. The worst anxiety eventually subsided, but material kept rolling in: romantic difficulties with men outside her marriage; "the fucking drudgery and disappointments of daily life."

The more favorites she received, the funnier and more crafted her tweets became. "Once it started getting followers, that helped with the anxiety and depression, because you're getting all this dopamine," she says. At Natura,

d about the difference between the writer and her avatar: Alter ego? Romance art? @sosadtoday is Broder...and it's not, she said as we lay



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side by side, my feet near her head, in a dry sauna. "Anything that's crafted is



safe spaces were," she says. "I was terrified day and night."

But it was food—"the religion of my house"—that had the biggest imprint on her mental struggles: "I always say my toxic relationship with food is my longest relationship." From a young age, she self-soothed with sugar, but she was never a fat kid, she says, never teased—"just kid chub." But her mother's parents had been obese, and, Broder says, "I think the shame and sadness she felt regarding her parents...she didn't want her child to have that experience, but it became an obsession." Her mother weighed her in at the end of every summer and threatened to ask her teachers what she was eating. (For her part, Linda Broder admits being "a lot more conscious about what [her] kids ate" because of her own parents, but "I don't think it was every single day that we discussed this. I think maybe a child exaggerates in their mind.")

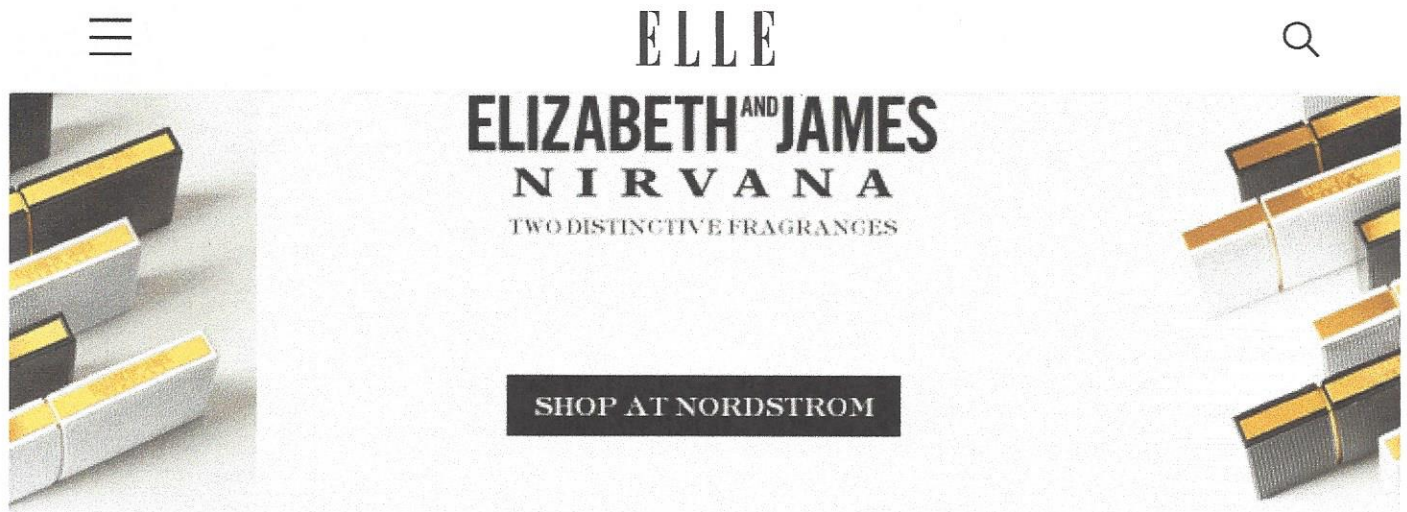
By her senior year, Broder was diagnosed with anorexia, which she says she gradually brought under control with the help of a nutritionist and therapist. In college, she traded one set of compulsive behaviors for another. A sober but terrible student during high school—except in English—Broder transformed into a model, but high, student in college: A cocktail of cigarettes, Adderall, Ritalin, and benzos helped with schoolwork; for nights and weekends, there was vodka, psychedelics, and weed.

After college, Broder moved to San Francisco, working as a grill cook, canvassing for the Sierra Club—"which I loved, because you could do it stoned," she says—and blacking out every night. At 25, she relocated to New York to get an office job—she'd wanted to work in editorial, in publishing, but ended up in publicity—and got clean. (She won't talk about her recovery but says she has a "sober support network" that she relies upon.) "I love drugs, but for me they don't work. It sucks when it stops, because it's this thing that kind of saved you from anxiety and depression." Right, because it's saving you from feeling, I say. "Who wants to feel?" she agrees. "Feeling is



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SHARETWEETE-MAIL In October 2012, Broder had been at Penguin for seven years and had



Robinson compares her work to Anne Sexton's and Sylvia Plath's, who happen to be Broder's collegiate heroes. "She told me once that her poems are like the deep cuts of her Twitter. In her poems, there's not a word or a line out of place. That's what differentiates her from a lot of confessional writing; she's more restrained."

Broder is currently working on a novel, which she'll describe only as being about "a woman and her inner conflicts." Now she writes on the freeway, with the help of Siri. *So Sad Today* was dictated onto her iPhone; her daily goal is three paragraphs, to be edited once the manuscript is complete. "I think that's why I was able to be honest, like I was just talking to my therapist," she says of writing the book. "When I'm dictating, I'm not thinking, Someone's going to be reading this."

Later the next day, when Broder drives me home from the spa, she pulls out her phone to dictate. She waits until we're at a good clip on the 405. There's a pause, then the familiar iPhone ding. She doesn't want me to quote too much; she worries her first attempt at fiction will fail. *Ding*. "Maybe I was still projecting," I hear while I look out at the lights of Los Angeles from the passenger window. "Maybe we are always only projecting. And when we grow or learn anything at all, it's just a new projection." *Ding*.



roder's earliest memories of acute anxiety are from eighth grade, when her Hebrew school's repeated attempts to remind the



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Broder's first love and original medium. She wrote her first collection in the third grade, at Baldwin School, an all-girls school in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where she grew up with her younger sister, Hayley, and their parents, Linda, a teacher who now owns a stationery store in town called Pen & Paper, and Bob, a retired tax lawyer. At Tufts University, Broder edited the literary magazine *Queen's Head and Artichoke*; after graduating in 2001 with a degree in English, she moved to New York and spent almost seven years attending night school at City College of New York to receive her MFA in poetry, doing most of her writing on her iPhone during her commute to her job as a publicist at Penguin Books. Her first collection, *When You Say One Thing but Mean Your Mother* (Ampersand Books) came out in 2010; *Meat Heart* (Publishing Genius Press) followed in 2012.

"Once *Meat Heart* came out, everyone sat up and said, 'Oh, what's this?' " says Adam Robinson, founder of Publishing Genius, which also put out *Scarecrones*.

"When I say everyone, I mean a population of about 500 people who care about small-press poetry." Broder is a consistent best-seller for his press, he says. "It's hard to get reviews for poetry in places like *Publishers Weekly*, and she always manages to." The *Rumpus*, *BOMB*, *Paper* magazine, and the *Chicago Tribune* have reviewed her poetry, which is both feral and contained: "I call it sex / because I don't know / how else to say / *terrified of dying*," begins *Scarecrones*'s "Satisfy the Desolate." From *Meat Heart*'s "Bye": "When I die I regret the dieting / and literary theory. I am just / oh my god one raspberry left. Strange / how we had different experiences."



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In the 30 minutes between our first hello on New Year's Eve day and the psychic readings we've booked at Mystic Journey Bookstore, a New Age emporium on Abbot Kinney Boulevard, a main thoroughfare in Venice Beach where Broder lives with her husband, we immediately dive into *The Real Shit*. ("I hate small talk," she'll say later. "Why don't we cut to the meat here? We're all going to die.") We talk about her ambivalence about monogamy and marriage, despite her obvious love for and dependence on her husband (after many years together, she says, "I just wanted the ring. I got swept up in a current of 'This is what you do'"); my love life; Broder's fear of aging. At 37, I'm older than she is, but she refuses to reveal her age, except to say she's in her midthirties. "I'm scared the teens are going to be like, 'Oh my God, she's so old,' " she says, referring to the adolescent segment of her fan base, the size of which is unknowable because age isn't a requirement to sign up for Twitter. That said, Broder has no shame about aligning with teen girls: She relates to their passion and intensity, the way they heighten everyday, quotidian dramas to the point of blocking out more real or mundane problems.

Nita, the psychic, looks at Broder's hands, asks her birth date, and tells her to relax. "I never relax," Broder says. "I can tell," Nita responds.

"It feels like here you were at the bottom of this mountain"—Nita draws a diagonal line on a piece of paper, with a stick figure moving from the bottom to the top—"and you've climbed up a pretty steep hill. Is this where you've been? Walking up a hill?"

"Yeah," says Broder. "Like, since birth."

f **🐦** **✉** **g** to be a big year for Broder, Nita says. Does she have a book coming out? A script?

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