

# Razzibot

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Rich Larson

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Marisol got the Razzibot for her fourteenth birthday, the same compact white model that followed Holly Rexroat-Carrow around during her Vogue shoots in Rio and on the Moon, the same that drifted after Anathema Knolls down the red carpet and all the way back to her Budapest penthouse. When it floated up out of the biowrap packaging, whirring and winking its beautiful electric blue eye, Marisol felt like she was floating, too, felt like her heart was a balloon that might pop from too much happiness.

“Mama, I love it, I love you, I *love* it . . .” She turned to the floor-to-ceiling German smart mirror, where her mother smiled down at her serenely like a redeemed Mona Lisa. “Thank you!”

“You’re welcome, *cielo*,” she said. “It’s loaded with your snap and filter preferences. You just have to stand still and let it imprint now, *cielo*.”

Marisol stood as still as she could with excitement jangling up and down her body. The Razzibot—her Razzibot—rose to head height, over the small mountain of clothes and bags and shreds of shriveling biowrap, all the presents that her father had dutifully watched her open before he slouched back to his virtual conference in Seoul.

There was a little electronic warble as the Razzibot made a full orbit around her head, then the blue light flared even brighter. “Marisol Midnight D’Souza,” it chirped. It drifted to the left, to get her good side, and Marisol felt her eyes brimming with tears of joy.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you,” she said.

“Yes, yes, you’re welcome,” her mother said. Her voice turned sweet and slippery. “Now, *cielo*, tell me, please, what your papa’s been up to while I’m away?”

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Once her mother had pushed her puffy lips together for a goodbye kiss and dissolved off the wall, Marisol ran to her room to change clothes and curl her eyelashes a little. Her Razzibot followed, circling the faux-stucco ceiling, familiarizing itself, she imagined, with light sources and angles. It dipped in closer to watch as she wriggled into a new pair of carbon black tights with shifting rips.

She did her lashes, then it was back to the main room, where she arranged her other presents more artfully on the floor and draped a few favorites over the spindly mobile furniture. When it all looked perfect, she looked at her Razzibot.

“Stream to . . .” she said, and considered only streaming to Paloma and Aline and Xandra at first, because they were her best friends and also because maybe there would be a few glitches the first time she used it. But the whole point of a Razzibot was sharing with *everyone*. That

was how Anathema Knolls used hers.

“Stream to all,” she said, the three little words sending little packets of electricity down her spine. Her Razzibot’s blue eye winked once in response, and a little holo underneath showed she was live.

Marisol stepped lightly through the minefield of presents, giving a piece of biowrap a playful kick so it fluttered up in the air, approaching the smart mirror. Her Razzibot moved backward in perfect synch with her. She stopped in front of her reflection, put her hands on her hips but actually her waist in a way that made it look tiny. She pushed her pink lips together.

“Guess who got a Razzi?” she sang.

On cue, her Razzibot circled behind her and joined her in the mirror, drifting over her shoulder, both of them framed so perfectly. Marisol looked down at the phone wrapped around her tanned wrist. Seventeen people on her Stream. Nineteen. A jittering jump all the way to thirty-one.

“And a few other things, too,” she said. “Here, let’s look. Maybe you can help me decide what to try on first, okay?”

She realized her Razzibot’s little holo now displayed the Stream numbers, swelling and swelling. She smiled with all of her gleaming white teeth.

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In her first week with a Razzibot, her Stream following quintupled. It was silly, Marisol thought, that people were still shuffling around with gocams or iClops. And the people still snapping with their phones, that was archaic.

The Razzibot knew her bone structure better than a surgeon and shopped her in realtime, making her skin a little smoother, hair a little glossier, ass a little rounder. Its crude AI was always shepherding her toward a wall with interesting graffiti, or a storefront with colors that matched her outfit. When she took it with her and Aline to Miramar beach, it found them the most beautiful outcrop of rock to pose on and then circled above them like a seagull while they splashed in the surf.

She wore an Herve swimsuit and pulled nearly a hundred new followers that day. While the setting sun smelted the sky orange and red, shot through with plumes of purple, she sat in the sand and scrolled up and down them all. Her Razzibot streamed the sunset with a chopped-screwed summer song from last year that everyone was nostalgic for now.

At the end of the week, her mother came back from Seville, and both her parents slid around the house like pieces in a digital quicklock, never occupying the same square of space. Marisol’s mother took her shopping in the downtown, and to the Leitaria da Baxa for *natas* afterward. She cooed and laughed as Marisol showed off the Razzibot’s more acrobatic camera angles on the walk home. Marisol’s father took to kissing her on the top of the head how he used to when she was younger, but sometimes when he did it his eyes were pewter cold and pointed toward her mother.

Marisol kept herself busy with the Stream. She had to make the most of her Razzibot while it was still summer; they weren’t permitted in schools. Xandra’s older sister invited her to a party one weekend, because the Razzi was as good as having a professional photographer. Marisol drank two glasses of cheap red wine mixed with Coke and danced with her hips and tried to laugh carelessly like her mother did. Someone’s cousin was visiting from London, and later on the rooftop, because her Razzibot was already zoomed and waiting, she let him kiss her. His tongue in her mouth mostly felt wet and cramped, but she saw a dozen new followers ticking onto her Stream to watch. The Razzibot always knew what people wanted to see.

She hung around with the boy for a few days, walking hand-in-hand over the Dom Luis bridge, watching autobarges cut through the blue muscle of the river, but he was always looking at her Razzi and smoothing his hair like it was all some sort of audition, and a few days later he left. At least he started following her Stream, and so did his friends in London.

Marisol had followers everywhere, now; at night she liked to scroll through their names and faces and GPS tags until it was all a beautiful blur. Mostly she liked looking at her total follow count. Over three thousand, now, which was nothing compared to Holly Rexroat-Carrow, who

was diving in New Orleans, or Anathema Knolls, who was having a total rederm but saving her old skin with its tattoos to tack up on her penthouse wall.

But the number still made her feel happy, and when she finally blacked her phone it was nice to still have the muted blue light of her Razzibot in its armoire-side charging station. It reminded her of when she was little and her father would sit on the end of the bed to watch for bogey-men until she fell asleep.

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One evening she let herself into the house and found the low glass coffee table ambling a little circle on the rug, borne down with several empty wine bottles and a vapor pipe and a half-swept spill of dull white powder. The sight put a familiar fear in her gut, but then from upstairs she heard her parents giggling to each other, shush-shushing, which was better than the alternative.

She realized her Razzibot was drifting over the table, peering down at the contents, its streaming indicator switched on. Marisol's face turned hot and red. She hadn't told it to start streaming. Had she? The Razzibot started to move toward the wrought-iron staircase, toward her mother's drunken laugh.

"Stop," Marisol hissed. Too quietly, maybe, because her Razzibot ignored it. "Stop."

Its holo blinked out, and it sank in the air like a scolded pet. Marisol realized her heart was pounding against her ribs like percussion, so hard she could hear it. How many people had been looking down at the filthy table and listening to her parents' muffled voices? How many people had heard her panicked *stop*?

"*Cielo*, are you all right?" her mother called. "Ignore the mess. There's *bifanas* we picked up in the kitchen, *cielo*, you should eat, you . . ."

Marisol went to her room without answering. Her hands trembled at her sides. Her Razzibot floated behind her, but too close, now, and for the first time the tiny whine of its rotor set her teeth on edge. When she closed her door, she stuck it into its charging station and threw her Versace jacket overtop to cover its eye.

She knew Razzibots had crude AI, that their algorithm was always seeking ways to draw followers, that they liked growing the Stream audience almost as much as their owners did. They always knew what people wanted to see. But some things Marisol did not want to share, not even for a hundred new followers.

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For a few days afterward, things seemed to be better. Her mother went to a spa and had her nails done sharp and shiny, arterial red. Her father played scratchy *fado* music and strummed at invisible guitar wires. But then it turned bad again, worse than ever, and so Marisol did her best to not be in the house. She was still afraid her Razzibot might stream something without her knowing, so afraid she considered leaving it turned off.

But then her follow count would stall, and slowly shrink, and soon there would be nobody admiring her perfectly sculpted eyebrows or envying her beautiful Porto summer. So she kept it on. She went to more parties with Xandra's sister, and kissed another boy who was better at it. She went to a concert, where her Razzibot skimmed all the way over the crowd and somehow made it look as though she was in the dead center of it, as if everyone else was revolving around her.

She planned a daytrip to Sintra, because 38 percent of her followers voted it, but Aline's grandfather was sick and Xandra was busy and Paloma had hated her for weeks now, so in the end she went with only her Razzi. They wandered through the red-and-yellow palace, underneath the great dome and the notched parapets. Marisol smiled until her teeth ached, relaying little facts about crenellations and love scandals her Razzibot sent to her phone, skipping through archways and spinning and laughing. Her shadow slowly stretched thin as a wasp on the ancient cobblestone.

It was late when the Luxcar dropped her at home, but her Stream was thrumming with fifty new followers, and everyone saying how beautiful Sintra was, how beautiful she was, how beautiful her gathered Rilla-Cruz skirt was. She let herself inside, and for a moment forgot all about

the Stream.

In the living room, the autocleaner was trying to digest chunks of shattered vase on the floor. Her father was sitting very still on the couch, his hand wrapped around a Superbock, the previous five bottles lined up in front of him on the table like a firing squad. Little red cuts were scabbing over on his cheek and Marisol could nearly make out the imprint of her mother's hand.

"Where's Mama?" she asked, and hated how it came out so weak and trembly.

Her father was silent for a long moment, swilling beer in his mouth. "She left," he finally said. His voice was thick and dark as tar. "What did you tell her?" He looked up at her, his mouth twisted with rage. "What did you tell her, you stupid little bitch?"

Marisol heard the whine of her Razzibot over her shoulder as she fled, but she was too flayed open to think about it. Her pulse was crashing in her ears. Her vision swam black at the edges as she stumbled into her room and shoved the door shut behind her.

It was only when her Razzi slipped through the closing crack that she realized it was streaming again.

"Stop!" she shrieked. "Stop!"

The Razzibot bobbed hesitantly in the air, algorithms warring. Its indicator flickered off. Back on. Behind it, Marisol saw her reflection in her smart glass window, saw the inky tears spilling down her face and her skin gone pale. Her eyes were wide and terrified and everyone could see. A panicky whine rose in the back of her throat; her breath came fast and faster.

"Stop streaming!" she choked.

The Razzibot drifted to the right, changing angles. Something came dislodged inside her. Her gaze raked around the room, landed on a heavy baroque lamp beside her bed. She seized it with both hands and smashed the Razzibot out of the air, then smashed it again on the floor, swinging over and over.

"You little bitch," she chanted. "You little bitch, you stupid little bitch!"

Glass and poly-plastic crunched; sparks showered the carpet, scorching small holes. Her back muscles seared but she didn't stop until the Razzibot was nothing but a dead lump of shattered shell and circuitry. Then Marisol dropped the lamp. She climbed into her bed and pulled the covers over her head, and tried to disappear.

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She woke up to the soft chime of her phone and reached for it on instinct, snapping it flat and peering at the soft glowing screen. An avalanche of messages. Her mother, trying to explain. Aline, asking if she was all right. Paloma, asking if she was all right but in a bitchier way. Some sort of offer from Luminos Cosmetics.

The night came back to her. Marisol peeled the covers back and saw the husk of her Razzibot on the floor. There was still a faint smell of burnt circuits in the air. She remembered her father knocking on the door, pleading with her, weeping. It made her feel like she might need to vomit.

Then she looked down at her phone again and saw her follow count.

Half a million.

Half a million, and growing in spurts as she watched, climbing by thousands instead of tens. Her fingers shook and she nearly dropped her phone. She flicked back to her messages and realized the offer from Luminos Cosmetics wasn't for a deal, it was for a sponsorship. And there were others, too, from a burgeoning clothing line in Barcelona, from a wearable start-up in Oslo.

By the time she was through them all, her follow count was nearing a million. So raw, they were all saying, so raw and so real. Marisol watched the number rise, and it filled her like morphine. She opened her door and walked tall to the kitchen, where her father was waiting with bags beneath his eyes, with fresh orange juice in a carafe and apologies in his mouth.

"I didn't tell her anything," Marisol said, cutting him off.

"I know," he said hoarsely, rubbing his gray temple.

"But I could have," Marisol continued. "And I might, still. I need a new Razzibot, please."

She poured a glass of orange juice, licked a splash off her thumb. Then she went back to her room and sat cross-legged by her old Razzi's wreckage, phone in her lap, silently watching her

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