

YOUNG ADULT: WHAT AM I RATED? BY MEREDITH HARDT
SUBMISSION FROM ILLINOIS

Summary: Social media darlings run the country and appearances are everything. Dying for fame, or desperate to escape the superficial society, teen suicide becomes an epidemic. Raelyn watches as everyone she loves abandons her society for a Rebel colony. Everything isn't as it seems; secrets lie beneath the society's beautiful veneer.

Raelyn swiped a lazy finger across the screen of her personal communication device. An expectant ding wiped the glaze from her eyes and a grin spread across her face.

She had another hit on her Rate Me account. Squealing, she tapped the screen- her finger jumping like a spring- and a 3D holographic image appeared in front of her. "What am I rated?"

Her fuchsia-tressed virtual assistant announced the good news: "You are rated thirteenth. You have 403 new rates. Would you like to view them?"

Raelyn held her breath and crossed her fingers, excitement and nervousness battling as she readied herself for the critiques to come.

Raelyn looks amazing in those stellar new turquoise contacts.

Raelyn has obviously been working hard with her lipo tech. If she keeps thinning her thighs and lifting her butt, she could beat out Twila for #1!!

Has Raelyn even looked at her 360 holo? If she did, she'd never wear that black FabTech jumpsuit.

"Seriously? What a bitch." Raelyn waved away the holo, cursing the raters under her breath. With a deep inhale, she shook her hair out, as though shaking away the criticism. She bounced off the bed and checked her reflection in the mirror. Her eyes flicked over her face and she smiled; the smile fell away when her gaze reached her thighs.

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Sighing, she pressed a button on the PCD and donned a suggestive smile and froze in place as it took a full 360-degree picture of her. A quick tap and the picture appeared on her Rate Me account. A glance at the 360 confirmed what the raters had said. She did need to work on her butt. They hadn't even mentioned her arms, but her gaze zeroed in on the untuned flab of her triceps. Her heart fell; she'd never be number one looking like this.

"Raelyn, breakfast," Emmaline's voice beckoned from the kitchen. Raelyn rolled her eyes and cracked her neck. She wanted nothing more in life than to make it to number one, to be the top-rated teen female, and Emmaline knew it. No matter how often Raelyn tried, she couldn't get her mom on board the Rate Me bandwagon. If she couldn't join in her excitement, Raelyn wished Emmaline would, at least, keep her opinions to herself.

"I don't say anything about your awful sweatsuits and stupid braid, even though it is super embarrassing," she grumbled under her breath. Despite Raelyn's efforts, she couldn't convince Emmaline to care even a little about trends. It was unfortunate because she had a great body- for a mom- and could be in the top one hundred if she just tried. Even worse, she wasn't even on Rate Me. It had crossed Raelyn's mind that they weren't actually related, maybe she had been switched at birth.

She left her room, passing her parents' bedroom on the way to the kitchen. Her father sat at the weight bench; hard at work, as usual, lifting weights in front of the full wall mirror. Rated thirty-sixth in his division, he was the father every girl wished she had. It was obvious that most of her DNA came from him; like the desire for public admiration was ingrained in their double helices, neither could resist the siren song of popularity. He waved to her reflection and she grinned. Their eyes met for a second before hers darted back to her PCD and the high of another rate from a stranger.

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A ping from her best friend pulled her attention from the rates. "Rae, I saw you're up to thirteen. I made it to 998 this morning. I know you've gotta be so hyped and you know I could use it, so let's celebrate with a trip to the lipotech- your treat."

Raelyn laughed. Of course, Hayli would suggest she pay; Raelyn was the one with a government sponsorship. So long as she stayed in the top 100, they'd continue to give her enough digipoints to get all the lipo she, and Hayli, could ever want. Raelyn pinged Hayli back and agreed to meet at her apartment before heading to the lipotech.

"Sorry, Mom," Raelyn yelled toward the kitchen as she slipped out the door, "I have to meet Hayli. I'll see you tonight."

Raelyn pressed the button and absentmindedly watched the screen next to the elevator doors as she waited for them to part. It pictured a perfectly flat and toned stomach with the words "Don't waste another minute, get the body you've always dreamed of today. Lipotechs are now open 24 hours a day for your convenience." The car arrived, and she stepped on, taking the elevator down to Hayli's floor.

Hayli was pacing outside her apartment when Raelyn arrived. She stopped and looked at her PCD with a frown.

"You ready?" Raelyn asked.

Without bothering to respond, she glanced up and declared, "Rae, you have to help me. Look at my 360 and pick the worst of my problem areas. Some of the raters say I should do my hips first, but others think my triceps need the most work. Tell me the truth, what do you think?"

Raelyn circled her, her mouth pursed as she tapped a finger to her lips. "They're both right, but you'll have to pick one first. So, I guess I'd say your hips. If you choose your triceps,

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then you shouldn't wear the FabTech mini dress. It'll only highlight the extra fat around your hips."

Hayli's face fell and tears formed in the corners of her eyes. Raelyn winced, she hated to hurt her friend's feelings, but feelings were disposable, and rates weren't. Besides, she'd asked for the truth. All Raelyn had done was give it.

Hayli's shoulders drooped and she turned her attention back to her PCD, this time checking the daily Obitz. Line after line of the names of 'cidars scrolled past. "This is so sad. I can't believe so many teens our age killed themselves last night. And, that's only the successful ones, who knows how many more 'cidars are in the hospital."

"It is sad, but it's not our problem." Raelyn examined her magenta nail polish, wrinkling her nose when she spotted a chip. "I don't know why anyone would do that. They literally have everything they could want. All the time in the world with nothing else to do but make themselves into who they want to be, and they want to throw it all away?" She shook her head. "Frankly, it's wasteful, and a slap in the face to the government that's given us so much."

"Maybe that's just it. Maybe they want to be more than popular." Hayli's eyes clouded. "Maybe they want to live for more than a stranger's rates. Every day, I thin here and I push up there. I follow the trends, upload my holo, but there's always something else they find for me to change. It's like the scarf trick in a magician's act, you pull out one scarf and find an unending series of scarves in its place."

Hayli tucked her chin and stared down at the floor, avoiding eye contact with Raelyn. "I'm starting to think I'll never be good enough for the raters or myself. Even the best, the top ten, get told they need more work. The government jumps in and gives plastic surgery sponsorships. Even the perfect aren't good enough."

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Raelyn rolled her eyes. "You can sulk if you want, but I'm not gonna let those depressing low-rated 'cidars spoil my day." She turned and headed back for the elevator. "Come on, Hayli, let's go melt some fat."

Hayli wiped her eyes and followed her friend down to the first floor and into the lipo tech suite. It was only nine in the morning, but there was already a line out the door. In anticipation of a wait, the girls joined the line and, like the teens around them, tapped open their PCDs.

Raelyn clicked open Rate Me and spent a few minutes sizing up the competition. She peeked at Hayli behind her, and the girl in front of her, to be sure no one was watching, before down-rating the top ten to lift her numbers.

"Look at her." Raelyn tilted her PCD toward Hayli. "Twila's still number one. And, not that I'd want to, but even if I did, I couldn't think of anything to down-rate her about." A scowl darkened Raelyn's face.

Twila Edwards had held the top spot since the day she turned sixteen almost eighteen months prior. Perfectly-arched eyebrows floated over sparkling crystal blue eyes giving the appearance of an untold joke. Her luminous raven hair and porcelain skin made her look like a doll come to life. All that combined with the flawless body beneath, and it was no wonder she was number one. Raelyn fumed; to defeat Twila and take the top spot for herself, she'd need to change just about everything about herself, and she was prepared to do it.