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## **Ageism Works Both Ways**

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# AGEISM WORKS

## BOTH WAYS JESSICA REINER

*This piece is a commentary written from the perspective of Celeste, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Allison White, the cook. Though a minor character in the novel, Celeste offers a unique perspective as a young and modern teenager. She is the true representation of the generational gap that exists between the GI generation and Gen X at the time of Bluebeard's publication. The development of modern technology and being raised during peace time shaped this new generation, while those who suffered through the Great Depression and World War II had entirely different perspectives. By writing from Celeste's perspective, the following piece offers a more nuanced perspective on Celeste and Rabo's relationship.*

I'm fifteen years old. I'm from Long Island. I live with my mom in a mansion with sprawling grounds. And my mom's boss is an old artist and, for lack of a better word, a loser.

The old man I live with is Rabo Karabekian: a famed abstract expressionist artist and art collector, which is why the house is filled with paintings that look like someone randomly dragged a paintbrush across it in different colors. I barely notice the artwork on the walls anymore, even when he asks me about all his old and dead painter friends. He thinks I'm stupid, which maybe I am, but I don't think it's because I haven't heard of Mark Rothko or Booth Tarkington. He doesn't understand why I'm not interested in art and history. I believe that there are important things going on right now and I already study history in school. There are new stories on the news every day and it's so hard to keep up. Not knowing about dead artists and novelists doesn't make me foolish.

Before this year, life with Rabo was pretty boring. Though he's an artist himself, I have never seen any of his work. I was informed that all of his paintings disintegrated and fell off their canvases. All he does is sit around all day, dwelling on his past failures and his days in the war. When he speaks with me or my friends, it's only to point out that my interests are frivolous.

So, when Rabo encountered Circe Berman on the beach and she came to live with us, life got a lot more exciting. Not only was there finally someone around to keep Rabo company, but she is also one of my favorite authors! Circe has been called Satan's sister by evangelical Christians on account of her feminist writing. I have read each and every one of her books.

Circe has made a lot of changes around here and there's actually some life in this house. She's convinced Rabo to work on an autobiography and now he spends much of the day writing while she explores every nook and cranny of the house. I'm not exactly sure what she's looking for, but I've overheard many conversations between the two of them about the things that she's found. Sometimes they talk about the potato barn, Circe's writing, or Rabo's teenage love interest, and the letters he and the love interest shared. Once I overheard them talking about me and I obviously listened to the conversation. Rabo made a disapproving comment about taking birth control at my age, which is absolutely none of his business. He sure is quick to judge other people's choices.

The biggest argument I ever witnessed between the two of them was after Rabo's trip to New York City, during which Circe took the opportunity to redecorate the outdated foyer. I patiently waited for him to return with the tension building by the hour, knowing there would be an outburst as soon as he arrived home. I certainly wasn't disappointed. On the day that he came home, as soon as he walked in the door, the yelling began, and I made my way to the foyer where I was joined by my mom. He was in a state of shock and kept repeating, "This is not my house!" "Who did this?" He asked. I still wonder why he asked that? As if there was any possibility that someone other than Circe was behind the foyer's transformation. She even replaced his expensive expressionist art with paintings of little girls on swings which he had told her to keep "caged in Baltimore."

Mom and I like the new paintings better since we can actually see something in them. We walked around and came up with stories of their lives and what the little girls might be talking about. They show people doing real-life activities. They may not be worth much, but I find much more value in this art than the ones on the walls worth millions of dollars; the expressionist paintings look like a painting I saw done by an elephant at the Bronx Zoo. Truthfully, I liked the colors the elephant chose better.

Upon seeing the foyer, Rabo threw such an animated fit that the patch that covered the eye he lost in the war fell off. Before that day, he had always been so careful to keep it covered. Mom says he uses it as an excuse to hide from the world. I honestly don't know what the big deal is since it doesn't really look like much. As Rabo went to pick up the patch, his best friend Paul Slazinger walked in. Paul had been spending the last few days in the foyer helping Circe redecorate and Rabo asked him how he could have allowed this to happen?

“How could you have let me make such a fool of myself for so long, Rabo? I was giving *the* Polly Madison tips on the ins and outs of the writing game?” He replied.

Paul was the only one in the house who didn't know that Circe used a pen name. To get back at Rabo, he assisted Circe in redecorating the foyer. By the end of the argument, Rabo told both Paul and Circe to get the hell out of his house and to never come back again. In my experience with Rabo he pushes people away. He has two sons and never once did they call or visit. When mom and I leave—she gave her notice after hearing that Circe was leaving—he'll be completely alone. He is so wrapped up in his own misery that he barely treats my mother like a person, and she has had enough. We were planning to leave before the incident with the foyer but stayed because we found Circe interesting.

I will admit, there have been some benefits to living with Rabo. I get unrestricted access to the entire grounds including the tennis courts and fitness center, the pool, and private beach access. I share an entire floor of the house with just my mom and my friends are allowed to come over and use the pool and beach with me whenever I want. The only place on the entire property that I am not allowed to go is the potato barn I mentioned. Rabo locked something up in there years ago after his second wife passed away and no one knows what is in there. He says it will be opened after his death. At least that's what his will says. The potato barn used to be his art studio and my guess is that he keeps old paints and used brushes in there. Of course, I'm not really sure why he would need six locks to safeguard those items. Since Mom and I are leaving we probably won't find out what's in the potato barn, but Circe believes he is saving the best for last.

Mom got pregnant and the stock market crashed so we decided to stay. The newest development is Rabo has opened the potato barn and house to visitors. He calls it our own personal museum. He has even been explaining the painting and the people in it to visitors and not a single art critic has come. And he's completely okay with that. He's almost a new person. He doesn't need anyone to tell him his painting is good because he knows it is. If you would have told me 6 months ago that Rabo Karabekian had made that painting out in the barn, I would have said you were crazy; a man that dead on the inside could not have painted a piece with actual depth and emotion. I also would have said that Rabo has no hope left inside him and that the war was his downfall. But I guess I was wrong.