

“New” (Excerpt)
by John Harden

When I was 69 years old, I was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. It had metastasized to my lung and liver, and was inoperable. The radiation didn't help. On December 1st, 2012, one day before my 70th birthday, I died.

That was a long time ago.

They put us in a pretty nice place. An authentic replica of an early-21st-century house. It's sort of upscale-faux-farmhouse style, a la Martha Stewart. Not that anyone outside of Candace and me remember Martha.

Noelle did a lot of the research for the house herself. She made some funny mistakes. There's an IBM Selectric typewriter in the study I won't get much use out of. And the vinyl bean-bag chairs in the living room don't really go. They're pretty comfortable, though.

I have to say I felt vaguely insulted the first time I saw the place. I thought they were coddling us. But then Noelle took us into the city for the first time. It wore us out. It's still hard. I don't understand most of what I'm seeing, and conversations are tricky. It's still English, mostly, but I just don't know what the hell people are talking about. We're always relieved to get home.

Noelle's a historian. She's also like our case worker. She makes sure we have everything we need, and helps us understand how things work now. Out of all the futures we might have woken up in, I'd say we did okay. No more war. Trees everywhere. And a kind of immortality, if you want it.

Despite her weird clothes and haircut, I would consider Noelle attractive. She laughs really hard at my jokes, like I'm a celebrity. Candace hasn't commented on it yet. I'm a little surprised.

We're basically like exhibits in a museum. There are tours of the house three days a week. People come around to ask us about cars and canned food and serial killers. I got tired of answering the questions pretty fast. Candace is better at it, and that suits me fine.

“Who died first?”

“I did. Hugh was... 12 years later. 12 years, right honey?” (Right.)

“So, Candace, it was your decision to be cryonically preserved?”

“God no! Freezing us? That was all Hugh's idea. I thought it was a waste of money! The kids thought so too, believe me. But when I got sick, Hugh was just

so sad. So sad. So, I said okay.”

“And is the future anything like what you imagined?”

“I never thought much about it. I didn’t expect it to work.”