The year was 2158 A.D., and Lou and Emerald Schwartz were whispering on the balcony outside Lou’s family’s apartment on the seventy-sixth floor of Building 257 in Alden Village, a New York housing development that covered what had once been known as Southern Connecticut. When Lou and Emerald had married, Em’s parents had tearfully described the marriage as being between May and December, but now, with Lou one hundred and twelve and twelve and Em ninety-three, Em’s parents had to admit that the match had worked out well. But Em and Lou weren’t without their troubles, and they were out in the nippy air of the balcony because of them.

“Sometimes I get so mad, I feel like just up and diluting his anti-geraldone,” said Em.

“That’d be against Nature, Em,” said Lou, “it’d be murder. Besides, if he caught us tinkering with his anti-geraldone, not only would he disinherit us, he’d bust my neck. Just because he’s one hundred and seventy-two doesn’t mean Gramps isn’t strong as a bull.”

“Against Nature,” said Em. “Who knows what Nature’s like anymore? Ohhhh - I don’t guess I could ever bring myself to dilute his anti-geraldone or anything like that, but, gosh, Lou, a body can’t help thinking Gramps is never going to leave if somebody doesn’t help him along a little. Golly - we’re so crowded a person can hardly turn around, and Verna’s dying for a baby, and Melissa’s gone thirty years without one.” She stamped her feet. “I get so sick of seeing his wrinkled old face, watching him take the only private room and the best chair and the best food, and getting to pick out what to watch on TV, and running everybody’s life by changing his will all the time.”

“Well, after all,” said Lou bleakly, “Gramps is head of the family. And he can’t help being wrinkled like he is. He was seventy before anti-geraldone was invented. He’s going to leave, Em. Just give him time. It’s his business. I know he’s tough to live with, but be patient. It wouldn’t do to do anything that’d rile him. After all, we’ve got it better’n anybody else, there on the daybed.”

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Tasks:

In these first two pages of the short story people’s living conditions in 2158 are illustrated.

1. Summarize them referring to housing, environment, and population growth.

2. Contrast Vonnegut’s vision of the future with Lowry’s. Focus especially on the role played by the Old.

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