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Try as we might, not everything we do changes our lives for the better. It's been three weeks since I moved to Saratoga, Wyoming and getting acclimatized. My boxes are unpacked, clothes and dishes placed where they belong, books sit orderly in their rows, paintings are hung, and pieces of art grace the shelves. I'm doing my best to mitigate the previous owners' footprint who, it seems, were beholden to sharp, angular lines, bright lights, and polished chrome.

The weather here is colder than in the rural Wheatland of my past—it snowed last night, and nighttime temps are in the low twenties. My house is fifty years old, with drafty windows that need updating. The glass company tells me, any orders take 16 weeks to fill.

The house is without a garage. A local contractor assures me, a one-car garage can be built in the backyard, with access to the road that adjoins it. I have the financial resources, for the house I bought here is smaller than the one I built eight years ago and sold this past summer, which means I should be able to manage the upgrades.

A local friend invited me twice to a dinner party, introducing me to the town's movers and shakers. The conversations revolve around local politics, but we also sang a few songs. All of us seem clear on the concept that Saratoga is a good place to spend our sunset years.

Meanwhile a friend in Cheyenne at ninety-five, never married with no family in Wyoming, has taken a turn for the worse. In August he moved from his apartment to Pointe Frontier and, for a time, continued his independent life style. Then began the trips to the hospital, the most recent or which ended in his transfer to Life Care Center.

When I visited him last week, I extended my Cheyenne stay by overnighting with friends to be with him for a few hours the following day. That day I picked up his mail at his PO box and went to his Pointe apartment for his cell phone, hearing aid, and changes of clothes. None of it garnered much of a reaction. He is despondent and wishes to die, for his days of functioning on his own appear to be over.

"I thought this is a place where people come to die," he said. "Yet I'm still alive. I don't want to be."

Throughout my visits he reiterated that he wanted to die, which is understandable, given the limitations on the quality of his current existence, which center on transferring (with assistance) from bed to wheelchair and back. While I was there a physical therapist urged him to try a bit of exercise. He would have none of it, but I persuaded him to give it a go. The therapist readied his

walker and helped the transfer from wheelchair to walker. She asked me to follow with the wheelchair in case he got tired. We managed a loop around the wing and returned to his room, which he shares with another patient.

“I want to die,” he reiterated to the therapist.

“We humans don’t have that option. We must let nature take its course,” she said.

That sounded reasonable, but my friend saw right through it.

“Nature,” he muttered bitterly after the woman left. “They keep you living no matter what.”

He is not the only elderly patient I know of who doesn’t want to be kept alive. To have no opportunity for their own input leaves them with a sense of powerlessness that begets resentment.

“When it’s time for the diapers, it’s time for the black pill,” is a line from a John Grisham novel, uttered by a protagonist in the prime of life. As if it were that simple! Only Oregon offers choices to terminal patients, and by the time you find yourself “in diapers” it’s too late to move to Oregon.

Not everyone agrees that the elderly should have the option to end their lives. When last I visited my nephew in Switzerland, a neighbor in his small town, who was dying of cancer, opted for the Swiss equivalent of the black pill. It mightily upset my nephew to find a hearse pull up next door. “I talked with him jus5 last week,” he said, “and now he’s gone. No warning, no good-byes, nothing. He shouldn’t have done that.”

I had begun to enjoy my Saratoga surroundings when my friend’s illness rendered me glum. There’s little I can do to cheer him, not to mention, as an oldster myself, I can’t help wonder what my life will be like, should I reach his age. Most of us grapple with such questions at some point, yes, even writers like John Grisham.