The cute house was decorated with green ribbons and peppermint candy canes on the window.

Mattie had purchased the ribbon to decorate her classroom for Christmas and she was going to give the students a peppermint candy cane for a gift.

Betsy placed the food on a red tablecloth on side of the front porch.

She placed the plates, utensils and cups on another red tablecloth across the steps.

She stepped back and looked at the cute house, it was very festive.

She was proud of herself.

William was a great help.

She could not imagine what the first lady’s life would be life without William.

Wes and William made several fires around the yard and the bath shed to knock away some of the cold.

As long as the people sat around the perimeter of the fires they could bear the cold.

Most people brought a quilt or knitted covering.

Wes made sure the fireplaces were full of coal.

He knew would be going in and out to keep warm.

He made sure the windows were closed.

And they kept the little girl’s door closed.

Mike, Shelia and Thomas arrived first.

They were followed by Cate, Frank, Glenda and Mattie.

The children’s father arrived with Harold.

Natalie looked nice and William was standing next to her on the porch.

Betsy was standing on the ground.

Wes was standing on the front porch so he could see everybody.

Betsy looked great, she had one of the dresses Wes bought her.

She let down her beautiful dark house and had her thick hair wrapped around her neck and laying on her shoulder.

Wes saw Betsy’s hair.

He said, “Betsy. I did not notice your hair was down.”

William said, “I noticed.”

Wes turned around and said, “Harold.”

Betsy and Natalie laughed.

Wes was not joking. He gave a fake laughed.

William whispered to Natalie, “Who is Harold?”

Natalie said, “The one who tried to steal Betsy. You will see him later.”

William thought and said, “That name sounds familiar. Oh, the man with the turkeys.”

Natalie said, “Right.”

Betsy saw how dirty and motley Mike, Shelia and Thomas were.

She was so stunned.

They looked as though they had not bathed in months and she thought this is a most holy night and they did not care to show God a thank you and joy.

They jumped off the wagon and ran to the food.

Wes was shocked even for them.

William and Natalie stood and looked.

Betsy was so disappointed.

Wes said, “I have to go and get the rest of them.”

He passed Betsy and said, “See I told you.”

He went to the wagon and left.

Mike, Thomas and Shelia acted like savages.

Natalie and William saw Betsy was heart broken.

They had destroyed her tables.

A half hour later, the second crew came.

Wes pulled the wagon into the yard and Frank, Cate, Glenda and Mattie got out the wagon.

Wes helped Mattie out the wagon.

The others saw Mike, Shelia and Thomas nasty and dirty and acting like savages.

Frank joined them.

Glenda and Cate looked at the others.

Frank passed by Glenda and bumped into her with both hands full of food.

He stuffed his coat pockets with food.

Glenda looked and saw the beautiful scenery she so missed over the past month.

Glenda was not washed and had the same dress on for the past several weeks.

She was wrapped in a knitted covering and a shawl.

Her hair was not comb and ruffled.

Cate was stunned.

She just stood.

Wes helped Mattie out of the wagon.

Mattie just stood and saw the savages.

She said to herself, “God just delivered me and heal me. They have no respect in them and therefore, none for anybody else.

Mattie looked at a hurt Betsy.

Mattie walked over to Betsy and hugged her.

Wes was watching them.

He had the plates in his hand and Glenda came by with both hands full of food and dumped her food in a plate Wes had in his hand and got the plate.

Wes could not believe Glenda. He knew the rest were idiots, but he thought she had some type of home training.

Frank yelled to Glenda, “Hey Glenda bring me of those cakes.”

Glenda turned to go back to the food.

Mike said, “I’m going to get my own.”

Mike stood up and brushed passed Wes to get to the food.

Cate was still stuck in her position.

Wes carried the plates and utensils to the porch and placed them on the tablecloths with the few that were there.

Mattie and Betsy looked at the savages devour the table settings and the food.

Luckily The main food was not set out.

William was watching Cate.

William leaned down to Natalie’s ear and said, “Natalie, who is that lady?”

Natalie looked and said, “Cate. She was a prostitute and a vagabond and decided to give up that life and stay here. I bought her that dress. Isn’t it nice?”

William said, “Yes it’s nice but why is she not moving?”

Natalie said, “I don’t know.”

Mattie reached out her hand and said to William, “Hey I am Mattie. I don’t want to walk over the food.”

William said, “I am William. The first lady aide. I came here with her to see about Dr. Obersteen.”

Betsy was so disappointed.

They heard another wagon pulled in the yard it was the children’s father and Harold.

They got out the wagon with ordinary clothes on.

They looked at the other rowdy group who were eating like savages and devouring the food.

The children’s father and Harold were disturbed.

William was watching them.

The children’s father and Harold looked at the food.

They saw Wes putting out the plates.

The children’s father elbowed Harold and said, “Let’s eat.”

Harold followed him to the food.

They did not see any plates and walked over to the other side of the front porch

and got some plates.

Wes took the plates out of their hands and said, “One plate per person.”

The children’s father sad, “Richard said he won’t be coming and to send him his share of goodies.”

Wes said, “His share.”

The children’s father looked at Wes and said, “Didn’t you say the governor and the first lady sent these goodies for us? And Richard said he wanted his share.”

Wes said, “You go and divide that food.”

He turned and counted the people who were present and saw Cate.

Wes said, “Cate?”

Cate did not respond.

Cate turned around and walked out the yard.

Wes said, “Leave Cate portion and Betsy and I will take it to her. Divide what remains between the nine of you and you take Richard his share.”

The children’s father did not like what Wes said.

Harold looked because he knew they were being rude and he began to think he is going to see the governor in the spring and he did not want to be kicked out.

He went to the food and began to fill his plate.

Mike ran over to get a plate.

Wes hit his hand and told him to move.

Dr. Obersteen, Emma and Joshua were riding on Dr. Obersteen’s horse when Cate passed walking in a hurry.

Emma said, “Cate.”

Cate did not respond but kept walking.

Dr. Obersteen looked back at Cate and said, “I don’t like that faraway look she had in her eyes.”

Emma looked at Dr. Obersteen.

Joshua looked nice.

He had the shirt Betsy bought him to wear to her wedding.

Dr. Obersteen gave him a dab of cologne and Joshua said he smelled great.

Joshua wanted to see his friend.

They arrived and Dr. Obersteen helped Emma and Joshua down from the horse.

Emma wore her new dress she wore to Betsy’s wedding.

Dr. Obersteen leaned to Emma and said, “You and Joshua look festive. I will take care of you Emma.”

Emma looked at Dr. Obersteen and he kissed her.

Joshua stopped and said, “Whoa.”

Emma was kissing Dr. Obersteen but looked to see why Joshua said, “Whoa.”

Emma stopped kissing Dr. Obersteen and dropped her arms from around his neck.

Dr. Obersteen tried to put Emma’s arms around his neck.

He looked at her startled face and turned and saw the rowdy group, the children’s father and Harold acting like savages.

Frank had eaten and stuffed his pockets he laid out on the picnic table and Glenda pushed his legs over and said, “Give me some room.”

She laid next to Frank.

He farted and they all laughed.

The children’s father turned from the table and continued to eat.

He saw how Dr. Obersteen, Emma and Joshua were staring at them.

Dr. Obersteen held Emma’s hand and he touched Joshua’s head to move forward.

Emma looked at the cute house and smiled.

She said, “Betsy you did a great job.”

Mattie said, “I told her it is beautiful. Everything. I cannot say anything bad, after God has delivered me and healed me. I feel new.”

Betsy still could not talk.

She wanted everyone to have a beautiful Christmas Eve.

The strange man looked at Betsy and said, “Remember God gave you have a husband and a baby.”

Betsy began to cry.

Mattie threw her shawl over Betsy.

Wes said, “Betsy are you sick?”

Emma saw the man standing next to Natalie.

Emma said, “Hello there. I am Emma, Dr. Obersteen and Joshua.”

Joshua walked up the steps and went into the house and closed the door.

Emma said, “Joshua.”

Joshua said, “I know him. Natalie are you dating too?”

Wes said, “Josh.”

Joshua said, “ua.”

William said, “I am William, the first lady’s aide. She sent me to deliver these goodies to the residents of the new settlement and send she and the governor’s glad tidings to all of you.”

The children’s father ate and listened.

He said to William, “You did not introduced yourself to me and Harold.”

William said, “Because you were too busy trying to get goodies that you ignored me and Natalie.”

The children’s father said, “I am Abraham Lee.”

Dr. Obersteen recognized Lee as the last name of Samuel. He did not say anything.

Abraham Lee elbowed Harold and said, “Introduced yourself to William.”

Harold waved at William and said, “I met him when he was here with the governor and the first lady.”

Harold played it off and turned back to Thomas and Mike and continued to talk.

Dr. Obersteen looked to see where was their food.

Everyone looked festive.

Betsy said, “No Wes I am not sick. I actually have joy in my heart.”

Wes walked over and wrapped his arm around her.

She looked Wes in his eyes and said, “God gave me a beautiful gift.”

Wes looked at her.

Betsy said, “You. And you gave me another beautiful gift. I have to thank God for this barren hand maid.”

Betsy covered her face and cried.

Wes was overcomed with peace and joy.

He was so worried about being poor and broke.

And having a wife and baby, he would go to the big city and work and build up money for Betsy and the baby. He knew Betsy could survive in the country. But when he looked at the people he knew he had to stay. He did not like none of them and he did not trust none of them not even the women.

He hugged Betsy.

Emma looked at William and Natalie and said, “Whoa you two make a striking couple.”

Mattie said, “I love her dress.”

Natalie was nervous and shaking.

William felt her buckling.

He said, “Natalie come inside and sit.”

He took Natalie inside the house and they sat on the sofa.

He said, “I got you a Christmas gift. You want it now or tomorrow.”

Natalie said, “Tomorrow.”

They sat in quietness.

William got up and put more coal in the fireplaces.

Dr. Obersteen wanted to know if this man was Samuel’s father who abandoned him and his sister.

Dr. Obersteen went to the food and got an orange and began to peel it and put the hull in the thrash bucket.

He offered Emma and the rest a piece of the orange and they rejected it.

Abraham watched Dr. Obersteen.

Dr. Obersteen walked over and said, “Shelia how are you doing?”

Shelia said “Huh” and looked off in space.

Matie turned and said, “Shelia!”

She walked over to talk with Shelia.

Mattie sat next to her and looked at her being nasty and unkept.

Emma went to re-organize the dishes.

Harold, Mike and Thomas continued to talk.

Abraham Lee was watching Emma move.

Dr. Obersteen noticed him.

He said, “I got to get Emma from here. But what about Mattie and Joshua.”

Dr. Obersteen walked over to Abraham and purposely stood in his view of Emma and said, “Abraham what city are you from?”

Abraham said, “The big city where I drive supply wagons.”

Dr. Obersteen said, “So you have settled here and will be running a supply transport business.”

Abraham was suspicious and looked at Emma and said, “Doc you don’t need to worry.”

Dr. Obersteen looked back at Emma to make sure they had an understanding.

Harold was listening.

Dr. Obersteen said, “Now that we have that understanding Abraham, how are enjoying this freezing weather?”

Abraham still did not like Dr. Obersteen and said, “I have been in worst. Snow and then rain.”

Wes was watching the encounter between Dr. Obersteen and Abraham.

Emma completed the dishes and walked to re-organize the food.

Wes called her and said, No. I believe they have divided the food out into their shares.”

Emma stared at Wes and walked over to Mattie and Shelia.

Abraham watched Wes and Emma.

Emma began talking to Shelia and Shelia was talking to her children.

Mattie said, “Shelia your children are not here.”

Shelia said, “Yes they are Mattie all five of them.

Mattie walked away to the brook.

Emma sat in Mattie’s spot by the stinking Mike and Thomas.

Emma said, “You remember Mattie’s name Shelia let’s see if you remember my name.”

Shelia looked at Emma and then said, “Caleb come from that fire.”

Thomas looked at Shelia and said, “Come from that fire boy and go and sit down somewhere.”

Dr. Ober

 Wes frowned up.

Dr. Obersteen said to Thomas, “Why did you do that? She needs help.”

Thomas looked back at Shelia and said, “I, you not even God can help her. She has made up her mind that is where she want to be with her children.”

Dr. Obersteen said, “You don’t live with her nor do you check on her.”

Shelia jumped up as though she was going to get one of the children.

Emma grabbed her arm and slammed her down on the seat.

Abraham saw Emma and thought she was a little rough.

Abraham said, “Doc your woman is kinda rough. Don’t you think?”

Dr. Obersteen looked at Emma and trying to figure out what Abraham saw.

Mattie said, “You helped me. You kept me from losing my mind. Please help her.”

Shelia said, “Suzzane, put down that dirty rabbit. You see her Emma?”

Wes was watching Shelia.

Thomas said, “I remembered that it was the last Easter they were here.”

Emma said, “Shelia you remembered my name. You remember your children’s name. You remembered food and the different taste of the food. You remembered how to walk and sit. Now stop trying to kill how to live. Honor your children by living. You did not die that day nor any other day. God gave you a choice. I pray you choose the right choice.”

Emma stood and walked to the food and looked at it and said, “Who divided this up? Where is Cate’s food?”

Dr. Obersteen did a double take at Emma and watched her walk away.

Abraham looked at Dr. Obersteen and stood he said, “You didn’t know she had it in her.”

Dr. Obersteen raised his eyebrows and shook his head.

Abraham walked over and showed Cate’s portion

Emma said, “I am going to take Cate’s food to her. Mattie come and go with me.”

Wes said,”Take Frank and Glenda back home. Let them get their share of the goodies.”

Shelia jumped up and said, “I want to go.”

Mattie was walking back from the brook.

Frank and Glenda were waking from their nap.

Emma said, “Shelia I am not playing with you. I am not running behind you trying to find out where you are and I am not running behind Suzzane and no damn rabbit.”

Betsy laughed so hard that her body shook.

Mattie was not happy with Shelia going.

Dr. Obersteen liked that firm part of Emma.

He smiled.

Thomas did not like the way Emma spoke to Mattie and said, “You don’t know what she has been through. Lighten up.”

Emma walked over to Thomas and leaned in his face and said, “God did not take her nor you. That means you are to live. Not live and be crazy but live and enjoy this life he gave you. My beloved grandmother who raised Mattie lost her mind. Do you Thomas know she got her mind back. She got it back just before she died so she could boss me and make me take care of Mattie and Betsy. For three years before my grandmother died I had to take care of her. I am not going through that again when I know God can heal…”

Emma shaking her head said, “And I aint running behind no damn dead rabbit.”

Betsy continued to laugh.

Mattie was not happy.

Wes watched Mattie because he did not want her to get sick. But they all were wrapped up good.

Dr. Obersteen was so stunned by Emma he just stood and watched her.

Emma said to Thomas, “And you stink. You stink Mike. You’ll did not care enough about God that you did not wash and shave and put on clean clothes.”

Emma stood up and said, “Whoever you are stop stealing our coal.”

Emma said, “Come on Shelia. Thomas you and Mike go and get your portion from Abraham and stop by and pick up Shelia now.”

Emma got Shelia by one arm and Mattie by her arm and walked them to the wagon. They all got in the wagon.

Abraham had given Frank and Glenda their portions which were a lot they barely could carry to the wagon.

Frank was still stealing tasty cakes and putting them in his pockets.

Glenda was laughing and giggling.

Abraham looked at Frank and said, “That was Shelia’s pile.”

Frank said, “She’s crazy. She won’t eat these.”

Emma shook her head and said, “Get your asses in this wagon.”

She stopped for Frank and Glenda to get out the wagon.

They waited for them to get everything out and they continued to Cate’s homesite.

Mattie got out the wagon and helped Shelia down.

Emma and Mattie did Shelia the way they did their grandmother.

They would sit their grandmother between them so she could run away or jump out the wagon or get up and dance in church.’

Emma hated those bad memories of her grandmother and vowed she would never go through that again.

Mattie strained her stomach a little but bite her lips from crying out in pain. She did not want Emma to curse her out.

But Emma heard Mattie and said. “There’s a little of the herbal pain therapy there if you need it.”

Mattie was shaking her vehemently.

Shelia walked and called for Cate.

Cate stuck her head out the tent and saw them.

She said, “Come in.”

Emma began bringing in her share and Mattie reached in the wagon to get stuff. Emma gave her a glare.

Mattie acted like she did not see Emma but walked into Cate’s tent.

Cate went outside and helped Emma.

Mattie was staring at Shelia.

Cate walked in and said, “What’s going on yall?”

Shelia said, “I’m crazy and Mattie does not like it.”

Cate put her stuff down and said, “Shelia you are not crazy.”

Emma said, “Abraham divided this stuff. Why did you leave Cate?”

As looked at Cate’s tent.

Mattie said, “You can start your own knitted covering business. You can make a lot of money.”

Cate said, “Me and brothers never got anything for Christmas. Our mother and father would beat us constantly. My father gambled and lost a lot. He would sell me to pay his debt. I was terribly sexually abused from the men and women from ten years old until I ran away at sixteen.My mother wanted to sell me at eight but my father wanted me to himself. I wanted to die. The only thing Mattie I knew how to do was to sell my body and not let the hurt and pain of life kill me. I just existed.”

Emma said, “Where did you train to become a teacher?”

Cate said, “That’s was a lie I made up. The janitor let me stay at the university in his room as long as I provided him service each night.”

They heard a wagon pulled up outside and it was Mike, Thomas and Harold.

Thomas said, “Come on Shelia.”

Shelia said, “Cate I will come and visit.”

Cate walked Shelia out followed by Emma and Mattie.

Mike stuck out his tongue at Emma,

Mattie said, “What is that five years old? My students don’t do that.”

Mattie slip her foot and hit her stomach and screamed out as they pulled off.

Emma ran to her and Cate.

They helped Mattie into the wagon.

Abraham passed them with a loaded wagon for him and Richard.

Emma stopped by their campsite and got the herbal pain therapy.

Mattie said, “Can you put some more coal on the fires to keep them from going out and light the oil lamp sticks?”

Emma said, “I was thinking about that Mattie. Here, take only a capful.”

When Emma finished lighting the oil lamp sticks and putting more coal on the fires, she walked back to the wagon and reached for the bottle of herbal pain therapy from Mattie.

Mattie was looking sheepishly and handed the near empty bottle to Emma.

Emma looked at the bottle.

She took it and put it back in their tent.

Emma walked to the wagon and Mattie was waiting for Emma cursing rage.

Emma looked at Mattie and said, “You will be in terrible pain tonight.”

Mattie said, “But you will bring me the herbs.”

Emma said, “No I will be with John.”

Mattie bending over said,”He called my foul mouth.”

Mike said, “Harold didn’t you smell turkey and ham? Didn’t you say you had to kill the turkeys?”

Mike started turning the wagon around.

Shelia said, “The governor and the first lady sent us a lot of goodies. They did not send us turkeys and ham.”

Harold was so glad Shelia said that.

He followed up and said drop me off.

Mike pulled up to Harold’s homesite and helped him unload his stuff.

Mike said, “They got rid of us to keep us from sharing their food. I am going back tomorrow and get me some meat.”

Thomas said, “We did not act right yall. They had invited us for the Christmas Eve celebration but when we got there, we acted like pigs. That’s when they sent us away. I won’t be going back tomorrow. We have a lot of food from the governor and the first lady.”

Mike dropped off Shelia first so Thomas could help unload her stuff.

Mike and Thomas took her goodies inside and Thomas hugged her good night.

Mike dropped Thomas off and kept looking down the road.

Thomas waved at Mike.

Thomas build up his fire and lighted his two oil lamp sticks.

He saw Wes had two extra oil lamp sticks and said, “I want two more oil lamp sticks.”

Mike went to his tent and made three trips to unload the wagon.

He gave the horses food and water.

Wes looked at the horses before Mike left and said, “Have you been feeding therse horses and giving them water?”

Mike did not say anything.

Harold looked at Mike.

Wes said, “The horses and the wagon were bought for the new settlement, if you don’t want the responsibility then someone else can do it. The reason why the attendant asked you was because you were too far from everybody else.”

Mike did not say anything.

Wes stood in Mike’s face.

Mike walked away.

Shelia laid on her bed.

She looked at the picture of her five children.

She squeezed and gripped her quilt with anguish of soul.

She fell asleep and woke at dark.

Shelia went to her tent door and the cold air hit her face.

She ducked back into the tent and was about to freeze.

She walked outside and looked at Thomas’s homesite.

He had a fire going outside of his tent and his oil lamp sticks lit.

Shelia jumped and tiptoed to see Mike’s place.

 She saw the tip of his oil lamp sticks.

Shelia sit and build her fire.

She lit the oil amp sticks. She went inside the tent and got a whiff of her underarms.

She heated water and washed herself and put on a clean nightgown and socks.

Shelia put all her coverings on the bed and laid there by torch light and looked at the picture of her children.

She turned and reached for her bible and placed the children’s picture in it and sat in the bed with a shawl thrown about her.

She read way into the night and she saw her clock and got of the bed and got on her knees.

She did not say anything but was there on her knees.

Mike was in his bed reading his mother’s reply to his telegram.

Thomas ate so much of his goodies that his stomach hurt.

He rolled over and slept until daybreak.

Harold lit his fire and the oil lamp sticks.

He thought he wanted a few extra oil lamp sticks and will Joshua to make him a few more.

As Harold slept, the conversation with the man calling him selfish and unthankful to God, kept repeating in his head.