

Dr. Obersteen told Mike, Frank and Richard no coal until everyone was back.

Harold was cold, but he would sneak him a bucket of coal every evening.

Dr. Obersteen and Natalie would hear him.

The first time Harold stole some coal, Dr. Obersteen heard a noise but he could not identify what it was.

Dr. Obersteen was sitting in the chair next to the window reading a medical journal.

He would lean the rifle, within reach, on his chair.

He looked at Natalie and she had her eyes on the little girl.

Dr. Obersteen said, "Do you hear that?"

Natalie looked at him.

Dr. Obersteen stood and put his journal in chair and picked up the rifle.

Natalie was about to go in hysterics.

Dr. Obersteen looked at Natalie in surprise because he thought she was rowdy she was also a rough neck. He thought she was used to violence because she threw him off the porch.

Then the little girl moved and Natalie touched her very gently.

Dr. Obersteen shook his head to shake out her disposition until he had time to process her behavior.

He knew someone was outside and he had to find out who it was and put an end to it.

He thought, "Wes and those country people would be back in two more weeks and I'm not going to let anybody intimidate me or kill me."

Dr. Obersteen eased the front door opened and walked out on the front porch.

Harold had piled his bucket high with the coal and was swinging it when he met the barrel of Dr. Obersteen's rifle.

Harold jumped and said, "Jes."

He looked at Dr. Obersteen and walked out the yard to Betsy's campsite.

Dr. Obersteen took a deep breath and looked back at Harold.

Dr. Obersteen turned and walked into the house.

Natalie was so afraid and looking at Dr. Obersteen.

Dr. Obersteen said, "Harold."

He sat and placed the rifle against the wall.

He sat and watched Natalie for a long time.

Natalie cut her eyes at him and did not say anything.

Since the supply trip she and Wes made into the big city she has been quieter.

She has been fragile and no one can figure out what happened to her.

Dr. Obersteen said, "When did it happen to you? Five, Six?"

Natalie began to cry silently and wipe her tears and nose with the sleeve of her dress.

Dr. Obersteen, who is usually very tender with the ladies, looked at the crying Natalie picked up his journal and adjusted it in his hands and looked at Natalie again and continued to read.

Natalie cried for hours.

Dr. Obersteen looked at the little girl and said, "Natalie she hears you. Go into the living room and close this door."

Natalie tried to stop crying but could not stop. She did not want to leave the little girl.

Dr. Obersteen looked at the little girl and then at Natalie.

He tried to finish reading his journal but sighed because of Natalie.

He stood and walked over to Natalie and picked her up by the arm and carried her into the living and sat her on the sofa. He closed the door to the living room.

He double checked the front door and went into the bedroom and closed that door.

Dr. Obersteen still could hear Natalie.

He said to the little girl, "I'm sorry for her behavior. But don't worry she will be ok."

The little girl wiggled and said, "Natalie."

Dr. Obersteen leaned forward in his chair almost dropping his book.

He ran to the bedroom door and opened and opened the living room door.

Natalie, jumped around in total fear.

Dr. Obersteen looked at her and said, "She called for you."

Natalie rushed to the little girl and gently touched her hand, as she continued to wipe her tears.

Dr. Obersteen sighed and looked at Natalie.

He said, "Are you going to continue all night. The others do not know what is wrong with you, but if you continue even they can put two and two together."

Natalie continued to cry and wiped her nose with her sleeve.

Dr. Obersteen sighed and looked in the dresser drawer and give her a washcloth.

He watched her all night as she wiped her tears and blew her nose.

He thought, "Where is Wes? Well does not like her so he would not help. Maybe he would change his opinion once he finds out about her situation."

Natalie blew her nose.

Dr. Obersteen said, "Maybe not."

He opened his medical journal and read until he dozed off to sleep.

Natalie finally drifted into sleep holding the little girl's hand.

The house was quiet.

Harold got there at daybreak.

He started a fire at the black pot.

Dr. Obersteen woke when he heard someone calling his name.

He realized it was Harold at the front door.

He said, "Harold."

Dr. Obersteen moved his quilt off himself.

He stopped and said, "Where did this come from? It was outside."

He looked at the sleeping Natalie and realized she went outside and got it and covered him.

Dr. Obersteen said, "Damaged sweet child."

He walked to the front door and when he opened it Harold was shivering.

Dr. Obersteen did not say anything.

He looked around outside and got the water pails and began the day.

Harold sat on the sofa for about an hour.

Dr. Obersteen brought two pails of water inside and saw Harold still shivering.

He said, "Harold why are you cold? It's not that cold outside."

Harold said, "You have not walked a mile."

Dr. Obersteen said, "Where is your coat? I know you have one."

Harold said, "It's too good for every day."

Dr. Obersteen turned and poured water in the first basin they washed their hands in and then in the little girl's beautiful blue and white water basin.

He poured water in the pitcher they kept in the house.

Dr. Obersteen went out side and poured two pails of water in the black pot and lit the fire under it.

He feed his horse and gave it water.

Dr, Obersteen walked towards the backyard and beheld the beautiful scenery.

He went to his saddle and got his toiletry bag and some hot water and went to the bath shed.

He came out a half hour later.

Dr. Obersteen put some eggs in a smaller pot and put it in the black pot.

He wondered how the eggs would turn out.

He went into the house and Harold was still sitting on the sofa.

Dr. Obersteen noticed it was cold in the cute house.

He watched Harold sitting on the sofa with his arms folded and leaning forward.

He said, "Harold."

Harold slowly turned his head towards Dr. Obersteen.

Dr. Obersteen walked into the bedroom and bathed the little girl and gave her the herb therapy.

Dr. Obersteen watched Natalie.

He was no psychiatrist but he knew Natalie was at a make or break point with her ordeal.

He thought no cared enough about her to get through the layers of pain.

He had to be careful.

Dr. Obersteen walked passed Harold on the sofa and wondered.

He went outside and brought in some coal and put it both fireplaces.

He took the little girl's bath water and disposed of it.

Dr. Obersteen took the eggs out of the pot and cracked them.

He smiled. They were perfect. He cut bread and placed it on a platter and went inside and closed the front door with his foot.

He walked to Harold and offered him breakfast.

Harold took two eggs and a piece of bread.

Dr. Obersteen pot coffee on before he returned to the house.

He gave Natalie her portion.

They ate in silence.

Dr. Obersteen stood and carried the platter outside and washed the dishes.

He made coffee and saw Harold finally coming out the house.

Dr. Obersteen sat by the fire and drank his coffee.

The weather was cold, but it was bearable.

Being in the new settlement reminded Dr. Obersteen when he served in the military and they lived in horrible conditions. That's why he decided he will be a doctor and the best one so they could never ask him to serve in the military again.

Harold poured a cup of coffee and sat next to Dr. Obersteen.

Dr. Obersteen said, "Why are you cold Harold? Beside no coat and a mile walk."

Harold stared at Dr. Obersteen.

Dr. Obersteen turned and met Harold's stare.

He said, "Harold the woman you lusted after and thought because she was nobody you could have her and she could be your somebody off in a distant place where you are not known and you could accept what in your mind Betsy being your second best. Now since your second best is gone you are alone and cold."

Harold turned his head and looked straight in front of him. He looked down in his coffee mug and took a long drink of coffee.

Dr. Obersteen said, "Like these country people did not know your ideas that's why they beat you away from Betsy. Because she was better than your second best. I know what I am talking about."

Dr. Obersteen took a sip of coffee and shook his head at Harold. Thinking a bum thought he was better than Betsy.

Harold leaned forward and looked at Dr. Obersteen rubbing his coffee mug between his hands.

Harold said, "I used to be somebody."

Dr. Obersteen did not look at Harold.

Harold said, "I come from a family of educators. As far back as I can remember. I liked education but I did not love it. I wanted to be different. I went to the state university and majored in journalism. I finished but I wanted to play baseball. I loved baseball. The girls. The crowds. The excitement. I started drinking and gambling. I started fixing the games to cover my gambling debts to the bad ones. I was fired and ran out of town. I disgrace my family, my team and above all the woman I loved. She eventually moved on and married a college professor and have several children. I cry over her each night. I want to take back time and make everything alright."

Harold took a drink of coffee.

Dr. Obersteen poured Natalie a cup of coffee and stood up.

He looked at Harold and said, "God gave Betsy a better than a second best."

Dr. Obersteen took Natalie a cup of coffee.

Harold sat and thought.

Dr. Obersteen sat and read a medical book.

He heard the front door opened.

Harold stuck his head in and said, "I'm to take off early."

Dr. Obersteen said, "Good evening Harold."

Natalie looked at Dr. Obersteen somber attitude.

He was usually arrogant but he had a different attitude that evening towards Harold.

Dr. Obersteen closed the medical book and held it under his chin.

Natalie squinted her eyes at Dr. Obersteen, because she knew something had happened between Dr. Obersteen and Harold, but what.

Dr. Obersteen said, "Natalie I don't feel like cooking dinner."

Natalie just shook her head profusely for ok.

Dr. Obersteen stood.

He went and put on his coat and hat and walked out.

Natalie turned and looked back as Dr. Obersteen walked out.

DR. Obersteen took one of the torches from the porch and lit it from the fire underneath the black pot.

He went to his saddle and walked to Harold.

He called Harold before he reached him.

Harold was sitting and staring in the fire.

Dr. Obersteen walked over and sat with Harold.

Harold went to his tent a few hours later.

Dr. Obersteen watched Harold stand and walk to his tent.

He thought, "God keep him from hurting himself."

Dr. Obersteen walked back to the cute house and put his pistol back in the saddle and the torch on the porch.

He went into the house and locked the door and check on the little girl.

He went back outside and got a bucket of coal and put coal in the fireplaces.

He lit the oil lamp in the living room.

Dr. Obersteen sat in deep thought.

He pulled off his boots and sleep on his quilt he placed on the floor.

Natalie placed her quilt in front of her and went to sleep in the chair.

Harold laid awake on his mattress until the morning.