

Pip's Fear at the Christmas Table

It was Christmas Day, and my sister had prepared a great feast. On the table stood a huge piece of beef, two roasted chickens, a shining ham, and a small meat pie. But the most important dish of all was a fine pork pie, waiting to be eaten at the end of the meal.

I sat at the table full of fear. Early that morning, I had stolen bread, cheese, and brandy from the kitchen, and also that very pork pie, to take to a poor escaped convict hiding in the marshes. Now, surrounded by my family and neighbors, I felt the weight of my secret.

The adults spoke in loud voices about good children, good manners, and honesty. Uncle Pumblechook gave long speeches about gratitude, while Mr. Wopsle the clerk preached about sin and punishment. Each word seemed to strike me like a hammer, as if they all somehow knew of my crime.

My hands shook. I could not swallow my food. Every sound—the clink of a spoon, the cutting of the meat—echoed in my ears like thunder. I felt smaller and smaller, trapped at the table, waiting for the truth to break out.

At last, my sister said sharply, “Now, fetch the pork pie!” My heart stopped. The room turned dark before my eyes. I knew the dish was gone, and that discovery would surely expose me.

But just as the terrible moment came, the door flew open. In rushed soldiers with muskets, their boots heavy on the floor. Everyone jumped in surprise. And so my secret was saved—for now.