**Great Expectations by Charles Dickens**

**Chapter 4**

I fully expected to find a Constable in the kitchen, waiting to take me up. But not only was there no Constable there, but no discovery had yet been made of the robbery. Mrs. Joe was prodigiously busy in getting the house ready for the festivities of the day, and Joe had been put upon the kitchen door-step to keep him out of the dust-pan - an article into which his destiny always led him sooner or later, when my sister was vigorously reaping the floors of her establishment.

‘And where the deuce ha’ you been?’ was Mrs. Joe’s Christmas salutation, when I and my conscience showed ourselves.

I said I had been down to hear the Carols. ‘Ah! well!’ observed Mrs. Joe. ‘You might ha’ done worse.’ Not a doubt of that, I thought.

‘Perhaps if I warn’t a blacksmith’s wife, and (what’s the same thing) a slave with her apron never off, I should have been to hear the Carols,’ said Mrs. Joe. ‘I’m rather partial to Carols, myself, and that’s the best of reasons for my never hearing any.’

Joe, who had ventured into the kitchen after me as the dust-pan had retired before us, drew the back of his hand across his nose with a conciliatory air when Mrs. Joe darted a look at him, and, when her eyes were withdrawn, secretly crossed his two forefingers, and exhibited them to me, as our token that Mrs. Joe was in a cross temper. This was so much her normal state, that Joe and I would often, for weeks together, be, as to our fingers, like monumental Crusaders as to their legs.

We were to have a superb dinner, consisting of a leg of pickled pork and greens, and a pair of roast stuffed fowls. A handsome mince-pie had been made yesterday morning (which accounted for the mincemeat not being missed), and the pudding was already on the boil. These extensive arrangements occasioned us to be cut off unceremoniously in respect of breakfast; ‘for I ain’t,’ said Mrs. Joe, ‘I ain’t a-going to have no formal cramming and busting and washing up now, with what I’ve got before me, I promise you!’

So, we had our slices served out, as if we were two thousand troops on a forced march instead of a man and boy at home; and we took gulps of milk and water, with apologetic countenances, from a jug on the dresser. In the meantime, Mrs. Joe put clean white curtains up, and tacked a new flowered-flounce across the wide chimney to replace the old one, and uncovered the little state parlour across the passage, which was never uncovered at any other time, but passed the rest of the year in a cool haze of silver paper, which even extended to the four little white crockery poodles on the mantelshelf, each with a black nose and a basket of flowers in his mouth, and each the counterpart of the other. Mrs. Joe was a very clean housekeeper, but had an exquisite art of making her cleanliness more uncomfortable and unacceptable than dirt itself. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, and some people do the same by their religion.