

## A Dangerverse Christmas

18 December, 1986

*Hark, the herald angels sing,  
Glory to the newborn King...*

Danger hummed to herself as she removed another sheet of pecan cookies from the oven. "One full batch," she said contentedly, setting the hot tray down on the stovetop and shutting the oven with her foot. The aroma of fresh cookies made her lick her lips. *They always smell the best when they're just baked.*

She pulled her wand from her pocket and waved it at the four cookie sheets perched in various spots around the kitchen. The cookies soared from them and landed in eight orderly rows of twelve on the cooling rack on the kitchen table. "Ninety-six cookies," she said in satisfaction, holding her hands above them to feel the warmth. "Beautiful."

The front door opened. "We're home!" shouted her husband's voice, with several children's voices repeating it. **And did I hear someone mention cookies?** he continued silently.

**Don't you dare,** Danger shot back. **They're still too hot, you'll burn your tongue. Besides, these are for gifts. For your friends at the store, and mine at the booksellers, and Letha's at work.**

Remus' voice took on a wistful quality. **You didn't make any for us at all?**

Danger laughed aloud, coming into the front room. "You're a bad influence," she informed Sirius, who was shaking snow out of his hair. "Remus is starting to sound like you."

"Yes!" Sirius pumped his fist in the air. "Victory!"

"Of course it couldn't be the other way around," said Aletha, shutting the front door behind herself. "That would be useful to someone, and what I've been working for these last four years." Her wicked smile showed she didn't mean it.

Danger had time to enjoy a chuckle at this before the cubs noticed her and flocked to her feet, all shouting to be heard at once.

"Danger, Danger, we bought presents!"

"I have yours, but you can't look at it!"

Danger smiled and made her way to a seat, flicking a sign over the cubs' heads. *You lot go on, I'll take them for a while.* The other adults in the group waved their thanks and disappeared their separate ways, Aletha through the archway into her own side of the house, Remus upstairs, Sirius back towards the den room and the bathroom.

"We stopped for snacks and saw lots of other people Christmas shopping!"

"We play in the snow!"

"Padfoot let us bury him, and then he shook off and got everyone all wet!"

"We went to so many stores I couldn't even count them all!"

"Meghan keeps telling everyone what she bought, she's such a baby—"

"Am not!"

"Are so!"

"Draco," Danger said in mild reproof, laying a hand on her newest Pack-son's shoulder. "Maybe Meghan has more fun telling people what she bought them for Christmas. She's allowed to do that."

"But I like being surprised," Draco protested. "I like opening the presents on Christmas morning."

"I think we all do, but you have to let her have her own fun. She'll learn how we usually do things. Just give her some time." With a smile and a squeezed hand, Danger turned to the other boy in the group, waiting impatiently for her attention. "Yes, and what can I do for you, Master Harry?"

"Promise you won't look in my closet," Harry said seriously.

"I promise." Danger held up her hand. "I won't go near your closet until after Christmas. But that doesn't mean that you don't have to hang up your clothes," she added quickly, seeing the smile starting on Harry's face.

Harry slumped. "Damn."

"Told you it wouldn't work," said Hermione smugly. "I found the best presents for everyone, Danger, except I need your help to put Padfoot's and Moony's together. Will you help me, please?"

"Of course I will. We'll pack the boys off to bed early tonight and work just girls for a while."

"I got you book," Meghan said proudly, digging in the bag she held and holding it up for Danger's admiration. "Moony said you like it."

"I do like it. What a beautiful cover it has. I can't wait to read it."

Meghan beamed and tucked the book safely away again.

Remus came back down the stairs, tucking in his shirt. "Does anything need doing for dinner?" he asked.

"If you wouldn't mind washing some potatoes, that would be a big help." **And how many men would think to ask that?**

**As many as want that chocolate you've got in your underwear drawer under the tree with their names on it Christmas morning.**

Danger grumbled under her breath. **I knew I never should have married someone whose sense of smell is better than mine.**

Remus chuckled, blew her a kiss, and disappeared through the door that led back to the kitchen.

"Shall we read a Christmas story?" Danger asked the cubs.

Hermione leaped up and ran to get a book off the shelf across the room. "*A Christmas Carol!*"

The boys nodded in agreement, and Meghan abandoned her bag to clamber onto the couch and snuggle into Danger's lap. "No scary parts," she said, looking up at Danger pleadingly.

"Well, where did we leave off?" Danger ruffled through the pages, looking for her bookmark. "Ah-ha, the Christmas dinner at Fred's house—no, this isn't a scary part, Meghan. This is a funny part. You'll like it."

**Danger?** Remus sounded confused.

Danger set the book aside. "Just a moment, cubs." **Yes?**

**Why did you only make thirty-three cookies?**

**I didn't. I made ninety-six.**

**Ninety-six? Are you sure? There are only thirty-three here...**

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Aletha straightened her favorite Christmas blouse and stepped through the archway to join the rest of the Pack. Meghan ran to meet her. "Danger's mad," she said, holding out her arms to be picked up.

"She is?" Aletha scooped up her daughter and came around to where she could see her friend, sitting stiffly with her eyes closed. "What about?"

"Dunno," said Harry. "I think she's talking to Moony."

"He was going to wash potatoes for dinner," Hermione added. "And Danger was going to read to us. But now she isn't."

Draco, ever practical, picked up the abandoned book and brought it to her. "Will you read, Letha? Please?"

"Maybe in a minute." Aletha set Meghan down. "I have a feeling, whatever's going on here, we won't want to miss it."

"You're so right," said Danger, opening her eyes. "Letha, have you seen today's paper?"

"It's over there," Aletha said, waving towards a far corner carpeted in black and white. "The cubs were playing ocean with it before we went out."

"Go put it back together, please," Danger said politely. "I need it."

The four scurried to obey, Harry and Draco sorting the sheets into order, then turning them over to Meghan and Hermione, who refolded them. In a very few minutes, Hermione presented Danger with the reconstituted *Daily Prophet*.

"Excellent." Danger rolled the paper into a tube and gripped it like a bat. "You may want to come and see this."

"Was Dadfoot bad?" Meghan asked Aletha as Danger led her little parade back through the hallway.

"I don't know, darling. Was Sirius bad?" Aletha asked Remus, who was standing in the kitchen doorway.

Remus pointed over his shoulder. Aletha looked, then looked again, and raised an eyebrow. "Yes, he was bad," she said to Meghan. "I think Danger will be very vexed with him."

Meghan clapped her hands and laughed.

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"SIXTY-THREE COOKIES AND YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE THE DECENCY TO GET SICK!" The voice echoed around the Den, along with penitent yelps, the occasional smack, and the sound of six feet a-pounding. "BAD DOG! VERY BAD DOG!"

Harry hung over the balcony rail, cheering on his godfather. Hermione whooped every time Danger got in a particularly good smack. Draco was too busy laughing at the whole business to be partisan, and Meghan gravely offered the plate containing the remains of the pecan cookies to everyone in turn.

"Happy Christmas to all," Remus remarked, "and to all a good night."

"Almost all," Aletha corrected blandly.

Six glasses of milk clinked together.