



The Great Gingerbread Uprising

A Super Santa Prequel Novella



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Chapter 1: Claus and Effect

Holly

The elves say that the North Pole smells different for everyone, depending on their unique Christmas memories. For me, it smelled like snickerdoodles and hay, while my husband, Vu, swore it smelled like gingerbread and a hint of cardamom. Either way, it was both comforting and cheerful.

Thanksgiving was around the corner, and the Pole was at its busiest. This was my second Christmas holding the official title of Santa, and toy production was on track. Last year had been chaotic as the elves adjusted to me as their new Santa and the ancient assembly line toy production technology was replaced by new, automated machinery.

This year I hoped things would run more smoothly, and, in some ways, they were. Vu was adjusting without a problem. He already had his workbench set up in the confectionery division. He spent his mornings inventing new recipes that both scandalized and delighted his elven coworkers. I was having a harder time.

I missed our Wisconsin farm. The Greene Reindeer Farm was my actual home. I knew exactly how to brush the reindeer behind the ears to make them fall asleep. I knew which feed made them hyperactive. Leaving the herd in the hands of my brother for the holiday season felt wrong. I couldn't wait to grill him on how the farm was faring when he and his new boyfriend came here for Thanksgiving in a few days.

As I walked down the main corridor that wove through the heart of the castle, elves rushed past me carrying toy parts, candy, and samples of this year's wrapping paper. I waved to Fizzle, the Head Candy-Maker. He was trying to stuff a caramelized sugarplum into a cornucopia. He gave me a crisp salute and went back to wrestling his festive centerpiece.

"Morning, Boss," a tech elf named Widget called out. He jogged past me balancing a precarious stack of holographic blueprints.

"Let me know if you need any help with those," I offered with a smile.

I rounded the corner toward the Applied Magic and Mechanics lab and a rogue cleaning drone bumped hard into my ankle. It beeped aggressively and spun its little brushes over my combat boots. I glared at it. In that moment I didn't consciously mean to channel the Christmas Spirit. I just wanted the machine to back off.

A flash of red and green energy shot from my eyes. The metallic drone instantly morphed into a solid block of heavily spiced gingerbread. The little motor whined before dying completely. The wheels turned into gumdrops.

I let out a heavy sigh and picked up the gingerbread drone and tucked it under my arm. My powers were mostly under control these days. I could summon tinsel from my wrists without tangling my own feet. I could use my peppermint sticky hands to scale the walls of the Infiltration Simulator. But my Gingerbread Glare was a total liability.

Peppermint, the Head of Logistics, marched out of the Wish Hub, took one look at the pastry under my arm, and shook her head.

"Another casualty?" she asked. Her silver hair was pulled back into a severe bun.

"It attacked me first," I defended myself. "I'll drop it off in the breakroom. Someone will eat it."

Peppermint adjusted her pristine tunic. "Try to keep your glare pointed at the floor, Santa. We're running low on cleaning bots."

I gave her a salute and hurried away before she could lecture me about property damage.

I finally reached my office high in the central spire. Vu had hand carved the heavy wooden door with snowflakes and lotus flowers. Sometimes it seemed like he'd make a better Santa than I did.

Inside, my office was quiet. I set the gingerbread drone on my desk and sat down in my velvet armchair. Rusty always put the most unusual letters here for me to read over privately.

Sometimes, it was children asking for things that broke my heart, like a cure for a sick parent. Other times, it was a request for a toy that they weren't responsible enough to own, like a bb-gun. The world was full of kids asking for miracles. I had a lot of work to do before I could even think about turkey.

The letter at the top of the stack was typed.

Dear Santa Claus, or Current Acting Chief Executive Officer,

I have analyzed your global distribution network and found it inefficient. Please find enclosed my forty-page proposal for optimizing sleigh routes, streamlining toy manufacturing, and replacing the unpredictable magic of the Christmas Spirit with a data-driven, quantifiable 'Joy Unit' delivery system. I would like a response by Christmas Day.

Sincerely,

Braeden McPhear

I stared at the thick stack of paper stapled behind the cover letter. My Santa senses immediately informed me that little Braeden was just 10 years old, and he had sent me a forty-page market analysis. I flipped through the heavy packet. It was filled with complex pie charts, logistics graphs, and a deeply concerning section regarding the downsizing of reindeer.

My first instinct was to laugh. The sheer absurdity of it was hilarious. But the laugh died in my throat as I ran my finger over the perfectly formatted margins.

What kind of ten-year-old spends his free time optimizing joy? Kids his age were supposed to be asking for bicycles or video games. Or scraping their knees and building sloppy snow forts. Braeden McPhear was acting like he was carrying the weight of a boardroom on his tiny shoulders.

He desperately needed a reminder that it was perfectly fine to just be a child. I took deep, meditative breaths as I waited for

the answer to come to me. This boy needed something to hug. I stood up and walked over to the specialized gift chute connected directly to the toy vault and punched a code into the brass keypad. A moment later, a pneumatic tube hissed open.

Inside sat a fluffy, smiling teddy bear. It was incredibly soft, with big trusting eyes and a red ribbon tied around its neck. It was a classic piece of childhood comfort. I finished it off with a simple tag:

To Braeden. Merry Christmas.

Love, Santa

I hoped that when he opened it, he would forget about his spreadsheets for five minutes and just squeeze the plush toy. And I hoped a trusted adult in his life would give him a loving squeeze, too.

Chapter 2: Half-Baked Heroes

Rusty

I have always maintained that the spouses of Santas possess their own classified brand of magic that is much subtler than the flashy, chimney-diving kind of power. Vu Greene, the First Gentleman of the North Pole, was living proof of this theory.

I was stationed in the Confectionery Division on official taste-testing duty. It is a highly demanding job, but someone has to ensure the structural integrity of the holiday baked goods. I sat on a stool watching Vu at his workbench. He was a man who brought radical ideas to our traditional bakery. He was kind, perpetually smiling, and possessed a mischievous glint in his eye that suggested he was always one step away from a glorious disaster.

Agnes, the head Kitchen Elf, stood nearby arranging empty cooling racks. She usually ran a very strict kitchen, but she had a soft spot for Vu.

"Rusty," Vu called out. He did not look up from the small metal bowl in his hands. "Come here. I need a witness."

I hopped off my stool and marched over. "What are we looking at, sir? Another variation of the Gingerbread Spice cookie?"

"Not just a variation," Vu whispered. His eyes gleamed with excitement. "This is a highly classified secret recipe. I added a completely new element. A tiny pinch of joy."

He was kneading a small, glistening ball of dark brown dough. As he worked the dough with his hands, he began to sing. It was a rich, warm baritone rendition of "Deck the Halls" but he replaced all the lyrics with words about nutmeg and molasses.

I leaned closer. The dough had a slight sparkle that glinted in time with the beat of Vu's song, like the magic was being folded into the mixture.

"Sir, protocol dictates we test volatile ingredients in a blast-proof chamber," I warned him. "That dough has a pulse."

Vu laughed, a warm, booming sound that echoed off the stainless steel appliances. "It just has character, Rusty. It's going to give these cookies a real kick."

He rolled out the dough and used a simple cutter to press out exactly thirteen gingerbread men, giving each of them three gumdrop buttons and two chocolate chip eyes. A baker's dozen. He carefully placed them on a silver baking sheet. Agnes shook her head with a fond smile as Vu opened the nearest oven and slid the test batch inside himself.

We stood in silence for exactly twelve minutes until the oven timer pinged. Vu pulled the hot tray out and set it on the cooling rack. A cloud of cinnamon-scented steam billowed into the air. I grabbed my clipboard, ready to log my professional assessment of the bake.

As the steam cleared, I dropped my pen.

The thirteen gingerbread men were squirming on the baking sheet and then pushing themselves to sitting positions. The cookie in the center stretched his doughy arms, checked his reflection in the shiny metal of the cooling rack, and gasped.

"Don't even think about icing me until I'm fully cooled," the cookie declared. His voice was bright and piercing. He stood up on his baked feet and gestured to the others. "Positions, everyone!"

The other twelve cookies immediately scrambled to their feet, and formed a long line. One kicked a leg high in the air, testing his flexibility. Another adjusted the gumdrop buttons on his chest.

I stared at the tray. "You can talk?"

"We can project," the lead cookie corrected, placing his doughy hands on his hips. "And we are flawless. The spice profile? Groundbreaking. The crispness of the edges? Immaculate. We are ready for our debut. Where is the audience?"

Vu clapped his hands together in absolute delight. "Oh, this is fantastic. You are a masterpiece!"

"Obviously," a second cookie with one missing gumdrop button scoffed, brushing a stray crumb off his shoulder. "But what is the venue? A grand gala? A velvet-lined display case?"

Agnes stepped forward, chuckling nervously. "Well, you are cookies, sweeties. Your destiny is to be enjoyed. We usually serve masterpieces like you on a lovely silver platter at the holiday feast."

The thirteen cookies froze. They looked at each other in horror.

"Served?" the Leader shrieked, clutching his gumdrops. "You mean chewed? This is a hostile work environment. They intend to devour us."

"Now see here," I said, trying to summon the authority of a seasoned field agent. "That is the highest honor for a pastry at the North Pole! When eaten, you transcend into pure holiday joy. It's your purpose."

"My purpose is to be an icon, not a snack!" the Leader yelled. He turned to his crumbly comrades. "Did you hear this? They want to dunk us in milk! It will ruin our crisp edges!"

The other twelve cookies let out gasps of horror.

"We refuse," Missing Button announced, pointing a tiny hand directly at me. "We are artists. We are influencers. We demand a platform that respects our aesthetic value."

Vu leaned against his workbench, grinning from ear to ear. "You know, Rusty, they make a very compelling point."

"Sir, you can't encourage them," I argued, flipping frantically through my handbook. "There is no protocol for negotiating with prima donna baked goods."

"We don't negotiate, we elevate," the Leader countered, tossing an invisible head of hair. "We need a new agent. We need to submit a formal request for a career change. A wish, if you will, for stardom."

Agnes let out a nervous little squeak. "Oh, dear. It's a good thing no one told them about the Department of Wishes."

I whipped my head around to glare at Agnes.

The Leader slowly lowered his doughy arm. A cunning smile formed on his face.

"The Department of Wishes?" the cookie asked, doing a flawless pirouette.

"Agnes," I groaned, rubbing my temples.

"I'm so sorry," Agnes gasped, covering her mouth with her hands.

"Stage left, gentlemen!" the Leader commanded. "We are taking our talents directly to the top!"

The thirteen snacks formed a tight, flawless kickline. They marched to the edge of the table, executed a synchronized swan dive to a nearby rolling cart, and hopped down to the floor. Their little baked feet slapped against the linoleum as they strutted straight out of the Confectionery Division, completely in sync.

Vu chuckled, wiping a tear of mirth from his eye. "Well, Rusty, I think my secret recipe has real star power."

"CODE RED LOCKDOWN!" I shouted. If we didn't act fast, this would be worse than the year that the dolls all unionized and demanded higher quality curls.

An alarm screeched, and I burst into motion. It was time to find Santa and stop these cookies from messing with the wishes.

Chapter 3: Carbohydrates and Core Strength

Comet

The Reindeer Recovery Pavilion was a masterpiece of sports science. Forget traditional barns with drafty doors and itchy hay. We had hoof-whirlpools, targeted temperature-controlled stalls, and a dedicated elf nutritionist analyzing our daily oat intake. You don't pull a loaded sleigh across the globe without treating your body like a high-performance engine.

I was in the middle of a brutal set of suspended core crunches. I wiped a layer of protein foam off my muzzle just as the heavy sliding doors hissed open.

Holly Greene walked in. I respected the new Santa. She grew up on a farm and actually knew how to handle a curry brush. She walked straight past Dancer, who was loudly complaining about the humidity ruining her coat, and stopped at Blitzen's stall.

"Morning, everyone," Holly said. She picked up a wooden brush and immediately found the exact spot behind Blitzen's ears that made his knees go weak. "Just checking in before the Thanksgiving madness really starts. You guys getting your macros in?"

Before I could tell her that my protein powder rations were running dangerously low, a deafening, rhythmic siren blasted through the barn. Red lights pulsed from the ceiling.

Holly froze, the curry brush hovering over Blitzen's neck.

"Code Red," Holly muttered, her eyes narrowing. She dropped the brush into a bucket and jogged toward the exit. "Sit tight. I'll be right back."

She sprinted out the doors, leaving us alone with the flashing lights.

A few seconds later, the barn doors creaked open again. I lowered my head, ready to charge whatever hostile threat had

breached our perimeter. Instead, thirteen tiny, perfectly baked gingerbread men strutted in.

The little guys were kinda cute with their serious faces and matching buttons.

"Ugh, the acoustics in here are dreadful," said the gingerbread man who was leading the pack. He sniffed the air and violently recoiled. "And it smells like sweat and raw oats. Are we in a petting zoo?"

"I thought we were looking for the Wish Hub," said a cookie with a missing gumdrop button.

Vixen gasped from the stall next to me, utterly offended. "Security! We have kitchen snacks in the VIP sector!"

"We are not snacks, you towering coat rack," snapped another cookie with charred edges who looked a little overcooked. "We are artists!"

Twelve cookies immediately formed a dramatic human pyramid to lift their Leader up to eye level with me. It was structurally impressive for baked goods. "We demand to be treated as the stars we are!"

Rudolph poked his head over his mahogany partition. His red nose pulsed with sudden, intense interest. "Wait a minute," Rudolph's booming voice echoed through the barn. "Refusing to work? Demanding a better platform? I'd like to hear what these little fellows have to say!"

The cookie pyramid wobbled. The Leader looked at the glowing reindeer. "You understand how it is. We were born with so much potential, and we refuse to be limited by a lack of imagination by our creator."

"Oh, I know exactly how that feels," Rudolph agreed, puffing out his chest. "You need to own your story."

"This is a reindeer with a vision!" Overcooked yelled, pointing a tiny finger at Rudolph.

"Yes, join us, majestic beasts!" the Leader said. "Throw off your harnesses! Cast down your troughs! March on management and demand the spotlight!"

The cookie pyramid collapsed under the weight of their enthusiasm. Thirteen gingerbread men tumbled down, emitting panicked squeaks.

"Boys, enough," I boomed, stepping up to the front of my stall. I let out a heavy sigh. The gust of air from my nostrils caught the cookies, blowing all thirteen of them backward until they smacked into a stack of fresh towels.

They peeled themselves off the fabric, glaring at me.

"Listen to me, crumb-squad," I said, leaning down. "We fly at Mach five and we respect the gains. We do not skip leg day. We definitely do not join pastry strikes. And I am not letting a bunch of snacks compromise the aerodynamic focus of this team."

Overcooked scoffed. "Fine. Remain background dancers in your own lives. That is your tragedy. Where is the Department of Wishes?"

"Go straight down the corridor until you hit the Department of Wishes," Rudolph told them. "That's where the biggest magic happens."

"Rudolph!" I scolded. "They could cause some major trouble over there!"

Rudolph just flashed his nose at me, using the highest setting. I had to squint to protect my vision.

"Stage left, everyone!" the Leader commanded. "And five, six, seven, eight!"

The thirteen cookies strutted out of the stables, their feet slapping a perfect rhythm against the floor.

I shook my head and took a slurp of my protein shake. The North Pole was facing a security threat. These cookies were going to cause a massive distraction, and Holly was walking right into it blind. I couldn't let these pastries sabotage the entire holiday operation. It was time for me to get involved.

Chapter 4: Assault and Batter-y

Holly

I was searching for the source of the Code Red when Comet nearly ran me over. The massive reindeer skidded around the corner, breathing hard.

"We have a situation," Comet grunted. "A bunch of angry talking cookies just showed up in the stables. They demanded directions to the Department of Wishes."

I stared at him. This was never mentioned in the Santa training manual.

"Are you joking?" I asked.

Comet snorted. "I don't joke about carbohydrates."

I needed backup immediately. Luckily I spotted Rusty jogging down the hall with Vu right behind him, wearing a flour-dusted apron. He looked entirely too pleased with himself.

"Vu," I called out. "Did you bake a batch of sentient, angry gingerbread men?"

"Angry is a strong word," Vu smiled. "I prefer to call them passionate."

Rusty groaned and rubbed his temples. "They're headed to the Department of Wishes. We need to intercept them."

We sprinted down the hall. The Department of Wishes was a massive dome-shaped room packed with thousands of glowing pneumatic tubes. In my opinion, it was the most beautiful room in the North Pole. Millions of whispered wishes zipped through the air like glowing fireflies before funneling into a giant swirling holographic globe in the center of the room.

But right now, the room was an absolute disaster zone. Director Loom stood near the main sorting chute. As the Head of Wish Intake, she usually ran a very tight ship. Today she was clutching her hair in pure panic.

"They took several orbs!" Loom shrieked, pointing toward the central globe. "Those particular orbs belong to a set of twins in Ohio who wished for a puppy! If those cookies drop them, the twins are getting socks!"

I stepped forward and my jaw dropped. Thirteen gingerbread men were standing on the main control console. They had already constructed a makeshift barricade out of brightly colored building blocks and sticky tape. Three of them were holding a glowing pink wish orb over their heads like tiny pastry bodybuilders.

"Attention, management," the Leader declared in a piercing tenor voice. "We have seized two wishes, and they are now in our hands. Halt all operations."

"Careful with those," Rusty panicked. "They're highly fragile dreams!"

"We are well aware of their value," Missing Button snapped. He adjusted his stance to show off his perfect silhouette. "If you meet our demands, nothing will happen to them. We're submitting a formal request for global stardom."

"And maybe a luxury condo," Overcooked added. "The humidity in this facility is a nightmare for my crust."

Vu stepped up to the console and offered them a warm, paternal smile. "Boys, please. I baked you with love. You don't need to steal wishes to be special. We can find you a meaningful job here in the bakery."

The Leader scoffed and rolled his eyes. "Save the creator speech, Vu. You intended to eat us. We refuse to be consumed, and we certainly refuse to go back to the kitchen."

Rusty pulled a heavy clipboard from his green tunic and frantically flipped through the pages. "Section four clearly states that all baked goods must remain within the designated consumption zones!"

"We are breaking the glass ceiling of the consumption zone!" Missing Button declared. He raised the pink wish orb higher. "We demand representation."

Reasoning had officially failed, and intimidation was useless. I needed to establish dominance.

I focused my energy and felt a familiar tingle in my palms. My skin secreted a clear, sticky peppermint bio-adhesive. I leaped up and slapped my hands against a nearby candy cane pillar. I scaled the pillar in three quick moves and swung myself directly over the console. I dropped down right in front of the rogue baked goods. I crossed my arms and tried to look as intimidating as I could, considering I was wearing red velvet.

"Put the orbs down," I commanded. "Right now."

The thirteen cookies executed a perfectly synced spin on one baked leg. It was impressive, I have to admit.

"Your velvet tunic clashes horribly with this lighting," Missing Button squeaked. (I knew it!)

"And your aura is incredibly bossy," Overcooked added.

Neither cookie was wrong, but I couldn't allow chaos in the Wish Hub. This was the perfect moment to execute my Gingerbread Glare. Maybe this was the real reason behind this tricky power. I just needed to blast them with holiday magic and surely they would be open to a reasonable conversation.

I narrowed my eyes. I focused all my frustration on the Leader. I channeled the pure, chaotic energy of the Christmas Spirit.

A blinding flash of red and green energy shot from my eyes. The magical beam hit the three lead cookies squarely in the chest. A cloud of cinnamon-scented smoke puffed into the air. Yikes! Hope I didn't put too much energy into that blast. I wanted to talk with the cookies, not bake them for a second time.

The smoke dissipated. The Leader brushed a speck of green magical residue off his shoulder.

"Was that supposed to do something?" the Leader asked, sounding bored. "Because it just felt like a mild tanning bed."

My stomach dropped. The Gingerbread Glare was completely useless against actual gingerbread. I had just given them a magical spa treatment.

"She tried to bake us!" Missing Button shrieked, clutching his chest. "This is an unprovoked assault!"

"No, I would never!" I tried to explain.

"Defensive formation!" the Leader commanded, ignoring me completely.

The cookies began ripping stale gumdrops from their chests and pelting me with them. A rock-hard gumdrop nailed Rusty right in the forehead.

"Retreat!" I yelled, shielding my eyes. "Everyone fall back!"

I grabbed Vu by his apron strings. Rusty grabbed Director Loom. We scrambled out of the Department of Wishes and slammed the heavy crystalline doors shut behind us. I could hear the cheering of thirteen victorious pastries echoing through the glass, and then the sound of a heavy lock clicking into place. It would be a lot harder to get back in than it was to get out.

I leaned against the door and let out a heavy sigh. I shouldn't have gone with such a heavy-handed approach. As Santa, it was my job to listen, not impose my will on others.

"Well," Vu said brightly. "That went horribly."

He was right. I needed a completely different strategy to save the North Pole from my husband's baking experiment.

Chapter 5: Mission Impossible, Pastry Edition

Rusty

It took a minute to catch my breath and remove the residue of stale gumdrops off my forehead. Director Loom stood next to me, clutching her heavy-duty noise-canceling earmuffs in pure panic. A chorus of excited giggles from inside the Wish Hub made the hair on my neck stand on end.

I whipped around to look through the glass. The thirteen gingerbread men were jumping up and down on a glowing keyboard connected to the main Wish Console with their tiny feet.

"They're trying to input their own wishes into the system," Loom said, her eyes wide. "That's not how it works! We receive wishes; we don't make them!"

"Those little cookies are nuts," Holly said with an impressed shake of her head.

"Fascinating," Vu whispered, pressing his hands against the glass. He had a look of wonder on his face. "They just keep evolving, learning, and growing. I really nailed that spice ratio."

"Sir, your recipe is currently holding global dreams hostage," I reminded him.

Comet and Rudolph rounded the corner, probably curious to see what the hubbub was all about.

"Are the cookies still on the loose?" Comet asked.

"They seized the Wish Console," Holly said. "We tried reasoning with them. I even tried my Gingerbread Glare. Nothing works."

"Have you considered giving them what they want?" Rudolph asked.

"Control of the Wish Hub? Are you crazy?" I shouted.

Rudolph rolled his eyes. "They're not evil masterminds. They just want to showcase their talent."

For a minute, no one said anything. None of us were used to wisdom coming from Rudolph. Usually all we heard from him were demands for more expensive hoof polish.

"You're right. They're acting out because they want an audience," Holly said slowly. "They were born with their own purpose. We have to let them tell us how they fit into the North Pole, not the other way around."

Vu put his chin on his hand and stared at his wife in open adoration. "You're so smart."

Eeew. Those two could be a bit much sometimes.

"We can't negotiate while they hold the leverage. We have to secure the wishes." Loom said, pointing a trembling finger at the massive dome-shaped room packed with thousands of glowing pneumatic tubes.

"The main doors are locked from the inside," I said, visualizing the interior of the Wish Hub. "How do we get in without them smashing the dreams?"

I looked up at the ceiling. The Department of Wishes was connected to the rest of the North Pole by a vast network of smaller pneumatic mail tubes.

"I can fit," I volunteered, adjusting my green uniform. "I'll drop in from the mail chute and unlock the doors."

"Then, perhaps, we give them the red-carpet experience they are hoping for," Vu said with a grin. "It will certainly be fun to watch."

Holly gave me a firm nod. I ran to the nearest mailroom access panel, climbed inside the slick brass tube, and initiated a manual drop.

I slid through the darkness at terrifying speeds, shot out of a ceiling vent, and tumbled through the air, landing in a quiet corner of the Wish Hub. I could hear the cookies talking excitedly.

"Wish for a stage," Overcooked said to the Leader, who was currently jumping on the keys of the wish console. "One with good acoustics. You know how Sugar loves to sing."

"I wish for a solo song at the climax of an amazing play," Missing Button, who I now knew was Sugar, said. "I have a message of hope to share with the world by way of song."

Overcooked struck a dramatic pose on the console. "I wish to inspire! To leave my audience excited and ready to tackle a new challenge. For that, we need a big crowd to watch us. Don't forget to wish for that!"

"Exactly," Leader agreed. "No more hiding in cookie jars. We demand total artistic freedom and a prime-time slot to showcase our talent."

"That's not how the Wish Hub works," I said, stepping out of the shadows.

Thirteen heads snapped in my direction.

"Intruder!" the Leader shrieked, pointing a doughy finger at me. "The enemy has breached the perimeter! Defensive positions!"

"I come in peace!" I shouted, but no one listened to me.

Instead, the cookies frantically gathered up wish orbs that were scattered around them like toys. This would take Loom an age to re-organize. While I tried to think of what to say next, Overcooked hurled his wish orb directly at my head.

"No!" I screamed.

I dove horizontally across the polished floor and stretched my arms out, sliding on my stomach, and caught the fragile glowing orb just a fraction of an inch before it hit the ground.

"Fire at will!" Sugar squeaked.

The cookies began using the glowing wish orbs like dodgeballs. A blue wish for a bicycle whizzed past my left ear. A green wish for a snow globe bounced off a candy cane pillar, thankfully not smashing the process. I executed a frantic, acrobatic backflip to catch a yellow orb, tucking it safely against my chest.

There is a protocol for rogue wishes, thank goodness, and I knew exactly what I had to do. I pulled the emergency alarm, and cotton rained down from the ceiling like snow. It coated everything, turning all the hard surfaces into soft landing pads.

As wishes rained down around me, all I had to do was dodge. The wishes landed safely in cotton. That did not, however, stop me from getting konked in the head with a wish for world peace. Aw, another kid destined to be a lifer on the Nice List.

I dove behind the main sorting chute as three more wishes hurtled toward me. Cotton or not, we needed to stop these cookies before any wishes were harmed.

I huddled in the shadows, clutching a puppy wish tightly. I peeked around the edge of the chute. The cookies were out of breath. Before they could regroup, I crawled on my belly toward the main control panel. It was time to unlock the doors and roll out the red carpet.

Chapter 6: That's the Way the Cookie Crumbles

Comet

Once Rusty activated the facility's emergency dream-preservation protocol and unlocked the door, Rudolph and I were able to enter. Holly thought we could butter them up (metaphorically speaking) before she came in. The polished ice floor was completely covered in a thick layer of the North Pole's softest cotton. Glowing wish orbs were scattered everywhere like fragile glass eggs.

"Watch your hooves," I grunted to Rudolph. You can't pull a loaded sleigh across the globe without flawless footwork. We high-stepped through the fluffy cotton like we were running agility drills at training camp. I engaged my fast-twitch muscle fibers, meticulously dodging a glowing blue wish for a dollhouse. Rudolph nearly stepped on a yellow wish for a Nintendo Switch, but I nudged him out of the way with a velvet shoulder.

The thirteen gingerbread men stood on the main control console behind a makeshift barricade of brightly colored building blocks and sticky tape. They looked exhausted, pacing back and forth on and arguing about what wish to input next.

Rudolph stepped into the center of the room and cranked his red nose to maximum wattage. A blinding, crimson spotlight bathed the console.

"Attention talent," I boomed, using my deepest voice and projecting from my diaphragm. "The Reindeer Broadcasting Network is officially casting the North Pole Thanksgiving play. We need star power."

The cookie we called the Leader gasped. "A theatrical debut?"

"With the entire North Pole as your first audience," Rudolph announced, tossing his head so his silver bells rang. "But you need to step out here so we can see what we have to work with."

The cookies hesitated. I stepped closer, carefully navigating around a cluster of fragile dreams.

"We need a full ensemble," I told them. I pointed to the cookie with the charred edges. "Overcooked, your dark exterior brings a gritty realism. You are our lead villain. Missing Button, you have the raw vulnerability of a method actor. We need you for the emotional climax. Leader, you are the head choreographer. But we can't start rehearsals while you're hiding in the Wish Hub."

The room filled with excited squeals as the thirteen cookies hopped off their barricade of building blocks. They walked toward us like they were strutting down a catwalk at a fashion show.

High above us in the rafters, Holly made her move. She swung down gracefully on a thick strand of metallic tinsel. "Looking good, fellas!"

The cookies squealed with surprise at her sudden entrance.

She knelt down in the cotton, bringing herself right to eye level with the pastries.

"I owe you an apology," Holly said, her voice warm and calm. "I didn't properly introduce myself before I tried to blast you with holiday magic. I'm Holly. What are your names?"

The cookies puffed out their little chests.

"I am Lord Bartholomew the Crisp," the Leader announced, pointing a doughy finger at himself.

"I go by Sugar," Missing Button squeaked, striking a dramatic pose. "Some people think it's a little on the nose for a cookie, but I like it."

"I do, too," Holly agreed.

"Just call me Edge," Overcooked grunted, definitely leaning into his bad boy persona.

The rest of the cookies shyly introduced themselves, and Holly let them shake her pinky finger as a show of respect.

While Holly negotiated, Director Loom stepped carefully into the room. "Watch your step, everyone."

She meticulously picked through the thick layer of cotton, gently collecting the scattered wish orbs and placing them into a padded satin pouch. "These dreams are fragile. I'll call in backup to do a full inventory of today's wishes by dinner."

When the introductions were finished, Holly reached into her pocket and whipped out a rolled strip of crimson velvet. With a flick of her wrist, she unfurled a miniature red carpet. It created a glamorous pathway leading straight out of the room.

"Right this way, friends," Holly said, gesturing to the rest of the kickline. "Your destiny isn't to be the feast. Your destiny is to perform at it."

Bartholomew stopped his dance routine. He looked down at the red carpet. "Live on stage?"

Holly crossed her arms. "With full creative control. The North Pole Theater is waiting for you."

Rusty stepped forward, brushing a tuft of cotton off his green tunic.

"And you're going to need proper representation," Rusty volunteered. "I heard your wishes while I was dodging those dreams earlier. You want to elevate the holiday aesthetic. I know the North Pole Theater better than anyone. I'll be your stage manager, and I'll personally negotiate your compensation."

Sugar gasped. "A manager who truly sees our vision."

Edge grunted, eyeing Rusty up and down. "You have terrible posture. But you understand the hustle. You're hired."

Vu walked over to join the group, snacking on a powdered sugar donut he brought from the kitchen.

"I'm so proud of you boys," Vu beamed. "I had a feeling you were destined for greatness from the moment you hopped off the sheet."

"We won't let you down, Dad," Sugar squeaked.

At the word "dad", Vu inhaled sharply in pure shock, sucking a massive lungful of powdered sugar straight down his windpipe. He pounded his fist against his chest and hacked out a giant, billowing white cloud of fine sugar.

Holly crossed her arms and raised a single eyebrow, desperately trying not to laugh.

"Congratulations," she told him, patting him firmly on the back as he coughed. "You're a father of thirteen. We need to start looking into college funds."

Vu stopped coughing and gave her a grin. "I'm a dad, huh? I think I like the sound of that."

It was Santa's turn to gasp, and her cheeks turned her signature cherry red.

"All right, you crazy kids," I interrupted. "Let's get these mini stars to their theater."

Holly turned back to the cookies. "Lead the way!"

The cookies let out a synchronized cheer and strutted down the red carpet while Rudolph blinked his nose on and off to imitate camera flashes.

The North Pole was officially safe from a pastry uprising. It was definitely time for me to head back to the VIP stables and resume my workout. No cheating on leg days, after all.

Chapter 7: The Thanksgiving Treaty

Holly

There are things you only learn about being Santa through experience. Hosting Thanksgiving dinner for a brigade of magical elves, nine flying reindeer, and a baker's dozen of sentient pastries is one of those things.

After a day working in the kitchen with Vu to prepare this massive meal, I was already tired. But it was so worth it when the elves and reindeer came in and saw what we had created for them. They had spent centuries taking care of others, and for once, I wanted to take care of them.

Vu insisted that I sit at the head of a massive mahogany table in the North Pole banquet hall. Fizzle the Candy-Maker tried to stick a finger in the candied yams, but Agnes swatted him away before he could contaminate the whole batch. Commander Peppermint opened her napkin with a snap, clearly ready for the festivities to officially begin.

But there were two more people I was expecting before we could all chow down. At that moment, a loud, rushing whoosh echoed from the courtyard outside.

"They're here," I announced.

I smoothed my red velvet tunic and jogged toward the doors. I yanked them open just as the sleigh settled onto the frosted cobblestones.

My brother Julian practically vibrated out of the passenger seat. He wore a shimmering green sweater with a giant candy-cane on the front. He stared up at the towering ice spires and the glowing aurora borealis. He let out a shriek of joy that startled a nearby flock of snow-doves.

"I told you it was real!" Julian said triumphantly to his boyfriend, Julian.

Julian's eyes were wider than I'd ever seen them. "I believed you. But believing and seeing are two different things. Wow."

"Look at the architecture!" Julian said, bounding into the snow. "The gingerbread lattice is stunning! This is the greatest day of my life!"

"I didn't realize how big the North Pole is. It's a true city," Joseph said softly, his voice full of quiet wonder. He patted the side of the magic sleigh. "And the craftsmanship on this vehicle is truly beautiful. You have a wonderful new home, Holly."

I ran forward and wrapped them both in a massive hug. It had been weeks since I left the farm in Wisconsin to take on the Santa mantle. Having my brother here grounded me instantly.

"Welcome to the North Pole," I grinned.

Julian pulled back and gripped my shoulders. He looked me up and down. He took in the the newest threads of metallic tinsel woven through my hair. There was more tinsel than hair at this point.

"You look absolutely fierce," Julian declared. He leaned in closer to whisper. "But tell me the truth. Do they have peppermint fudge? Because I brought a backup stash just in case."

"We have everything," I promised, leading them inside.

The banquet hall descended into chaos the second we walked through the doors. The reindeer squad had already taken their places at the table. Rudolph sat at the head of the left wing. He was loudly telling the story of the Gingerbread Uprising, as everyone was calling it, casting himself as the hero.

Comet sat next to him, glaring at a bowl of buttery mashed potatoes.

"Empty carbohydrates," Comet grunted to a terrified junior elf. "Take this away. I require turkey breast. My deltoids need fuel."

Julian gasped and clutched his chest. "The reindeer can talk?"

"Only up here," I explained. "The holiday magic acts as a universal translator."

Julian immediately abandoned us and sprinted toward the table to ask Blitzen about his grooming routine. Joseph smiled warmly and pulled out a chair next to Director Jingle. They immediately started a quiet conversation about the global supply chain for wooden toy trains.

Vu emerged from the kitchens a few minutes later. He had replaced his apron with a crisp suit, and he looked more handsome than I'd ever seen him look. He carried a massive silver platter holding a perfectly roasted turkey. The room erupted into polite applause.

"Dinner is served," Vu announced proudly.

We ate, laughed, and watched Comet beat a mechanical toy soldier to the last turkey leg. Peppermint even complimented the pumpkin pie.

But before the dinner was over, we had one more surprise. Then the lights dimmed. A single, blinding spotlight hit the center of the stage we had set up at the front of the room.

Rusty stepped into the glow wearing a sparkly green tuxedo jacket. He tapped a microphone.

"Ladies, gentlemen, and magical entities," Rusty projected. "Please direct your attention to the stage. It is my distinct honor to introduce the North Pole's Tinsel Town Players in their debut performance."

A dramatic, orchestral chord pumped through the room's sound system.

Thirteen gingerbread men marched onto the stage. Lord Bartholomew the Crisp wore a tiny, makeshift top hat fashioned from a black olive.

"I am Ebenezer Scrooge," Edge projected, his voice echoing off the ice walls. "And I despise the holidays! Bah! Humbug! The humidity alone ruins my crisp edges!"

Julian's delighted laughter rang out, sending the entire room into giggles.

"God bless us, everyone," Sugar squeaked piteously. "Even if we are destined to be served on a silver platter."

The performance escalated quickly. Bartholomew appeared as the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. He wore a shroud made

from a crumpled white linen napkin. He pointed a doughy finger at Edge, who learned his lesson to be kind to everyone.

No one was expecting the finale, which turned out to be a highly choreographed dance number. Sugar did a backflips. Edge demonstrated the moon walk. Bartholomew stood at the very top of a towering human pyramid and blew a kiss to the cheering crowd.

Vu stood up from his chair. He wiped a tear of pure pride from his eye. "Those are my boys!"

The pyramid wobbled. Sugar looked down at Vu and let out a happy squeak. "We did it for the fans, Dad!"

One of the gingerbread men supporting Bartholomew's pyramid lost his balance, and it collapsed. Thirteen pastries tumbled off the stage and into a giant bowl of cranberry sauce on the banquet table.

Vu leaped up to fish out the gingerbread men with a pair of silver tongs. Then he gently set the dripping cookies onto a dry cloth napkin. Bartholomew wailed and clutched his head.

"We're ruined!" Bartholomew shrieked, looking at his stained, mushy legs. "This is the ultimate indignity. We are...soggy."

The rest of the troupe wailed in agreement. Sugar tried to strike a tragic pose but slumped over like a wet noodle.

I stood up, my mind whirring. "Hold on. I think I can fix this."

I walked over to the weeping pastries. Earlier this week, I considered my Gingerbread Glare a total liability. I used it out of pure frustration on a cleaning bot. I tried to use it as an intimidation tactic against these exact cookies to establish dominance in the Wish Hub.

But that wasn't how Christmas magic worked. It was always in service to others. I took a deep breath and looked down at the pathetic, soggy little actors. A fierce warmth spread through my chest and a soft, pulsating beam of red and green energy shot from my eyes. It washed over the cookies, settling over them like a gentle, heavy blanket of heat. The room instantly smelled like toasted cinnamon.

The magic acted like a perfect convection oven. The damp cranberry sludge dried and crystallized into a sparkling, ruby-red glaze. Their soggy dough firmed up instantly, restoring their crisp edges to absolute perfection.

The light faded. Bartholomew patted his hardened stomach and checked his reflection in the bowl of a silver spoon.

"Incredible," Bartholomew gasped. "A custom holiday glaze! And I've never been stronger. We're ready for our encore!"

The rest of the gingerbread men let out a loud cheer.

Vu looked at me, his eyes wide with wonder. "You perfectly re-baked them without drying out their centers. That takes serious culinary magic."

I grinned and tapped my temple. The Gingerbread Glare was meant to nurture, comfort, and occasionally save an acting troupe of dramatic pastries.

My heart felt full. The North Pole was messy, loud, and the best home I could've ever asked for.

I looked around the table at my family. Julian was trying to teach Comet how to do the Macarena. Joseph was happily taking notes on elf logistics. Vu earnestly talking to Sugar, who was nestled in his cupped hands.

I grabbed my mug of hot chocolate and raised it high in the air.

"To family," I called out over the noise.

The elves, the reindeer, and humans raised their glasses.

"To family!" They cheered back.

Epilogue

Braedon

I woke at precisely 0500 hours on Christmas morning, a full hour before my usual wakeup time. I sat up and adjusted the zipper on my thermal containment suit. My mother insists on calling them fleece footie pajamas. I find her terminology incredibly reductive.

I slipped out of my bedroom and proceeded down the hallway to execute my annual holiday audit of what was beneath the Christmas tree.

The house was silent. I passed the study and saw the glow of a laptop screen. My father was already awake and on a conference call. Downstairs in the kitchen, my mother was drinking black coffee and redlining a corporate merger contract.

No point in interrupting their work. They never minded if I opened presents on my own. I marched into the living room and approached the imported Swedish artificial pine tree. Real trees drop needles and nobody needed that mess.

I ignored the brightly wrapped boxes from my parents. They exclusively gifted me high-yield savings bonds and educational text books. Delightful, but not what I was looking forward to most this Christmas morning.

I was looking for a very specific parcel and found it tucked near the back. The wrapping paper featured an unfamiliar snowflake pattern that my parents never would have chosen.

I knelt on the rug and carefully peeled back the tape. I preserved the paper to ensure it could be repurposed for future gifting. My heart rate elevated to a slightly thrilling ninety beats per minute.

I had sent the North Pole a forty-page proposal for optimizing sleigh routes and streamlining toy manufacturing. I provided a flawless blueprint for replacing the unpredictable magic of the Christmas Spirit with a data-driven, quantifiable 'Joy Unit' delivery system. It was a masterpiece of modern logistics.

I fully expected to find a signed partnership agreement inside this box. A promotion to Chief Operating Officer would also be acceptable. I wondered what form of transport would arrive today to take me to the North Pole. My parents would surely appreciate me starting my career at age 10. Dad always liked to talk about his paper route when he was a boy. This would certainly be a step up from that banal job.

I lifted the cardboard flap and stared into the box. My breath caught in my throat. Instead of a crisp, typed contract, sitting on a bed of tissue paper was a fluffy, smiling teddy bear. It had big eyes and a stupid red ribbon tied around its neck.

I picked up the plush toy by its fuzzy ear. It was incredibly soft. It was also completely useless. It offered zero tactical advantage and lacked any educational value.

My vision narrowed. The current CEO of the North Pole had read my brilliant analysis and decided to send me a toy. This was a patronizing, plush-filled insult to my intelligence. Santa Claus actually thought I needed something to hug.

I dropped the bear onto the hardwood floor. A cold, furious clarity washed over my brain. The North Pole was run by sentimental fools who refused to modernize. They didn't respect data. They didn't respect *me*. There would be no trip to the North Pole to cap off my winter break.

I smoothed the front of my fleece thermal suit and looked down at the smiling bear. They wanted to treat me like a child. I would show them exactly what this child could do. I would acquire their resources. I would dismantle their operation. I would build a better, infinitely more profitable system myself.

However long it took, I would make sure that Christmas came under new management. And I was going to enjoy every single second of the hostile takeover.

The Adventure Continues this Thanksgiving

Did you enjoy this prequel? My full-length novel, *Super Santa*, officially launches this Thanksgiving!

Keep a close eye on your inbox! As long as you're on the [Nice List Newsletter](#), you'll be the first to get the link the moment the book goes live.

Super Santa

Not all heroes wear capes. Some wear red velvet.

Look, I never asked to inherit the ultimate holiday curse. I was just a typical seventeen-year-old trying to survive the holiday season on my family's reindeer farm without losing my mind.

But then I woke up with a bowl-full-of-jelly gut and metallic tinsel sprouting from my scalp. Turns out, I'm the next Santa Claus.

Now I'm sneezing clouds of glitter, shooting tinsel from my wrists, and realizing my favorite reindeer talks back. With the help of my tech-genius best friend, an optimistic hyena, and a neurotic elf, I have to travel to the North Pole and figure out how to embody the spirit of Christmas—preferably without getting stuck in a chimney.

I don't have much time to perfect my “ho, ho, ho”. A shapeshifting supervillain known as the Chameleon is planning a hostile takeover of the North Pole. If I can't master my new powers, win over nine diva reindeer, and embrace my destiny, Christmas is officially canceled.