

care & danger

by Shelagh Power-Chopra



When Roger was small, his two favorite toys were a tiny, squat doll named Care and a rubber millipede. The millipede fit well under Care's arm and Roger took them on picnics and other outings,

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always making sure Care and Danger were together at all times.

Care was named Care because Roger always named his stuffed animals and toys after a word taken from the toy's label. In this case, Care's label read: "Handle with Care". Danger on the other hand had no label at all which bothered Roger enormously until one day out of desperation he looked everywhere for a sign and found one in the school's chemistry lab. "Danger, Flammable" was hastily written on a scrap of paper in red marker over the utility sink. Roger thought the name suited the rubber insect perfectly.

Yet, it never occurred to Roger's little brain that the two might not like one another and often when he wasn't around, Danger whipped Care with his miniature legs and Care stamped on Danger's head with his cheap plastic slip-ons. They also bickered until the wee hours of the morning. Care was stubborn and cruel and felt Danger's points futile and unconvincing, "Your view of the world is so—how can I phrase this—wiggly and inconclusive. Danger would mope and cry but then suddenly laugh hysterically and point out that Care's molded hair could never be brushed or styled and that he had to wear the same silly farmhand outfit for years on end.

Roger would prop them up near his pillow—once again with Danger under Care's arm—and they'd stand stoically together and watch as Roger fell asleep. But when the morning came they'd be gone. Once, Roger found the two of them at the bottom of the toilet, bits of wet tissue covering their tiny faces. Another day, Danger was found lying in the driveway, tiny tire marks across his back. His mother discovered Care in the hot oven during dinner one evening; his polyester polka dotted shirt fused to his skin. And one rainy day, Roger found both of them in the pantry, a sewing needle wedged into Care's heart.

Roger thought that was surely the end of Care and dug a small hole the size of his fist in the backyard and placed Care down with great

care. He placed Danger on a tuft of grass and read a eulogy he had hastily written on a torn page of his favorite storybook.

*Here lies Care; fell by an unfortunate end
unbeknownst to Danger, my only true friend*

Danger thought the tribute tired and far too sentimental and wished he could be playing with the other toys like the red velvet tarantula named China, he met in Roger's shoebox under the bed.

Roger was called in for lunch and had to abandon the pair and Danger stared down at his friend and enemy and twitched one of his many little legs and swept dirt onto Care's eyes and cheeks. I'm free, he thought and started to crawl away towards the house. But then a porcelain doll with the terrible name of Agatha (someone had no doubt named her carelessly without label) came running over, spied Care's little pug nose sticking out and remembered the imaginary crumpets they had nibbled once together and her attempts at roping them both in for a round of cribbage she grabbed the silly millipede with her pudgy cotton fingers and threw him in the pit with Care and tossed more soil on them and stomped down on the earth with her clumsy velvet shoes.

When Roger came back he searched in the grass for Danger but couldn't find him. Agatha was lying nearby, face down, her synthetic curls in shambles and her pinafore muddy. Roger looked down at the little mound of earth and sighed. Care is in a better place now and tomorrow's my birthday and many more delightful things will be presented to me, he said aloud and laughed, a childish little crackle that carried itself through the grass and the trees and blew up towards the sky and settled somewhere beyond. He then dragged the doll inside by her curls, tossed it on his sister's bed and played chess against himself the rest of the afternoon, pushing his childhood aside.

