

Temptation 02 – Special Delivery

By Dragonien

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It had all started with a package. A nondescript little brown box left on my front porch the same as any other package might have been. My first tip off that something was amiss was that, as far as I remembered, I hadn't ordered anything. I doubted it was some random present from the scant friends and family members I was on good enough terms with that they might even consider a surprise gift. I became even more suspicious when I looked on the return label and saw that it was from someone named Dr. Professor at 1234 Fake Street in some town I had never heard of: obviously a fake name and address. For a split second I felt a small, irrational twinge of fear as I lifted the box up to hold near one of my ears expecting to hear an ominous ticking noise. Thankfully, there was none. So, seeing no other reason not to simply open the box and find out what was inside, that's exactly what I had done.

There had been no note, instructions or anything else in the box. All there had been was a single, strange looking gun. At first glance it almost looked like a toy; one of those cheap plastic ray guns you could buy at the bargain bin at a toy store that lit up and made weird noises when you pulled the trigger. Despite its slightly tacky appearance, though, this one looked and felt like it was made of quality materials. The body of the gun was a sleek and glossy tungsten grey and the thing felt like it had to weigh at least two or three pounds; definitely a real metal casing at the very least which means that it couldn't have been cheap. It didn't seem to have any moving parts though, other than the trigger. There was no seam along the top where a slide would pull back whenever the weapon fired. Instead there were small tube-shaped protrusions running lengthwise from the back of where the slide would be all the way to the protrusion of the muzzle almost like hollow glass 'wires' running down the gun to 'plug' into the front of it. The barrel itself wasn't even hollow, instead having a small glass lens in the front of it that refracted like a kaleidoscope when I tried looking through it into the device's interior. Only other notable thing on the exterior were the two dials and single 3-position switch along the very top of the device: recessed into the metal so that they were almost unnoticeable to the touch when you ran your finger over them. The first was the 3-position switch that had a tiny red minus symbol on the bottom side, an equally tiny green plus symbol on the opposite end, neat black lettering reading "*Off*" right in the middle of the switch. I assumed it was the power switch but I had no idea why it seemed to have two different on settings. The first of the two dials, which thanks to their recessed state required you to either press down fairly hard on them or use your fingernail to wedge into the narrow ridges around the edge to get enough purchase to turn them, had a red minus and green plus on opposite ends of its spectrum which I took to

mean it was some kind of volume or intensity setting. The other dial was a bit more of a mystery. The left side, what I assumed was the minimum setting if it mirrored the other dial's layout, had a narrow white line jutting out at an angle as its only indicator on that side. Opposite of that, on the 'maximum' side it had a much larger, broader cone-shaped white line that stretched out from its narrow base into a broad arc near the end.

I had no idea what I was looking at. Some kind of expensive toy, from the looks and weight of the device. No one made something this heavy out of what I was certain was actual metal and glass without it costing at least a few hundred dollars. Why someone would want such an expensive, high quality toy ray gun I couldn't fathom. I had even less idea how it had found its way to me. But of course I was both a guy, and a bit of a nerd so I had little resistance to the temptation of trying it out if only to see what all the fuss was about. Looking over at my still pajama-clad reflection in the mirror hanging on my living room wall I couldn't help but smirk at myself. Then, in that perfectly dorky way that you can only manage to do without shame when you're entirely alone and confident no one will see you; I struck a pose; gun held up in the ready position while aiming right at myself in the mirror. My thumb pulled the switch back towards me, flipping it to the minus position, then started pushing against the edge of the volume slider to raise it up a few notches.

"Phasers set to stun, Captain" I said aloud, grinning despite how self-aware I was how dorky and uncool I was at the moment.

So, it was particularly surprising, with me lost in my own little momentary adult nerd fantasy, that when I pulled the trigger the gun hummed for a split second like the sound of an old camera flash charging then emitted a narrow beam of scarlet-red light directly at my reflection in the mirror!

Reflexively I dove behind the couch beside me to avoid the light despite it being aimed at my reflection rather than myself. The moment the light hit the mirror it immediately rebounded and, unfortunately for me, headed straight towards the couch I was hiding behind. For that split second as I was falling behind the couch where I could still see the light beam, as if in slow motion, zooming towards the couch I had this terrifying mental image of it burning a hole straight through both the couch and myself exactly as I imagined any kind of high-powered laser would. When I landed, however, there was no sizzling smell of burning fabric, couch padding, and flesh nor a sudden explosion of pain as I was artificially granted a new hole in my body. Instead, I found myself staring at the back of the couch as it began to ever so slightly glow. By this point the confusion of the situation had overwhelmed me to the point I was struggling to make sense of things anymore. After all, who the hell would send a working laser gun to some random person; or even had a real-life laser gun in the first place! But as I lay there, dumbly staring at the couch it slowly began radiating a dull aura the same shade of red as the light the gun still clutched in my hands had released. Only after the entire couch had been enveloped in that glow as if the light were some kind of intangible plastic coating did I get a front row view of the couch doing the most amazing thing I could have imagined.

It shrank.

Right before my eyes I watched as the full size, six-foot long piece of furniture began to push in on itself. It almost seemed like it was the light itself that was contracting inwards and the couch was simply in the unfortunate position of being trapped inside of it and was just along for the ride. Within seconds the couch stopped shrinking and the light faded away as if it had never been there. All that was left in its wake was my couch, now the size of a loaf of bread. For the longest time I just lay there, uncomprehending. Not even noticing the dull throb that had built in my shoulder from landing so roughly on it. Then, tentatively, I reached out to poke the back of my shrunken couch with the same reluctance of poking something to test if it was scorching hot. When it didn't burn me, shrink me as well, or explode at my touch I pushed myself up to my feet and scooted closer. I started to reach for it only to realize I still had the strange toy-no, the strange device in my hand. I made a point of ensuring it was pointed away from me as it set it down before reaching down to pick my couch up with a hand on either side of it. It still felt the same; the same soft, if worn, fabric with just enough cushion to be comfortable without being too soft. it was light though, lighter than I expected and before long I was tossing it up and down a few times in simple amusement that I could.

"I can juggle couches" I laughed aloud to no one in particular.

It was then that my attention was drawn back to the device sitting on the floor. Carefully putting the couch back down where it had been, I picked up the device once more and examined the controls. Now, I'm about as much of a nerd as anyone can be and I've read enough books, seen enough Tv shows and played enough games that it wasn't exactly hard for me to intuit what most of the controls did after having seen what happened to the couch. With a quick flick of my thumb I pushed the setting switch from minus to plus and took aim at the couch, firing intentionally at the piece of furniture this time. Once again light bloomed from the end of the device, but this time in a radiant neon green rather than the deep crimson than it had been before. Other than the color change the effect seemed to mirror the red light. The beam smacked against the couch and then green light rapidly spread across the entire couch like a protective coating. Once the glow had fully engulfed the piece of furniture it began to stretch outwards instead of push inwards like the red light had. Within moments the couch had swollen back to its original size as if it had never changed. In my wonder and amazement at what the device was able to do, I made my first mistake. Curious to see if the device could make things larger than normal rather than simply turn them back to normal; I fired the gun at the couch again.

Just as before the green light covered the couch and began stretching it larger. Unfortunately I hadn't really thought through the changes in scale so before I had a chance to rethink my actions I was being shoved against the wall by a growing, car sized, piece of furniture shoving other tables and chairs in my living room out of the way as it expanded to nearly the size of a bus! Mercifully the couch stopped growing before it smashed through one of the walls or crushed me but that didn't stop me from being uncomfortably pinned against the wall by the now-enormous back of my couch. Thankfully I still had the device in my hand and I

was able to twist my thumb up to push the switch back to the shrink setting. I had to wiggle my arm a bit, bracing myself against the wall and pushing for all my little 5'8" was worth to shove the couch a half inch away. It wasn't much, but it was enough I could twist my wrist enough to press the barrel of the device against the couch and fire, rapidly reducing it back to a normal size.

The moment the couch had shrunk enough to release me I fell, panting and gasping onto all fours as I struggled to regain the breath both fear and the crushing weight of the couch had robbed me of. I wasn't exactly claustrophobic but you didn't have to be to get terrified when something was constricting you with crushing force. When I had finally regained my faculties I pushed myself back up to my feet to examine the couch once more. Again, I could see no visible change other than a bit of white along the corners where its abrupt growth had ground divots into the drywall around it. If I hadn't just been nearly killed by the thing I would have never believed it had changed size. Hell, I had just shrunk and grown the damn thing right before my eyes and I STILL wasn't sure if I believed it had actually happened. Yet, at the same time, there was a sense of giddiness welling up inside of me. A sense of wonder and glee at the realization that I actually held in my hand something that I thought only could exist in fantasy stories and sci-fi movies. But, in that same vein, I had seen plenty of stories and movies about things like this and how things could always go wrong. Television had taught me not to be not to be hasty with things that seemed too good to be true and powers I didn't understand. Before I even considered what I would do with this thing long term, I had to figure out exactly how it worked and what its limits and capabilities were. For all I know it might have only worked on organic things and made inanimate objects like my couch blow up, or vice versa! I'd have to test it first, see how it worked on things like rocks and simple plants before I moved on to animals. I'd have to be smart about this.

I couldn't even imagine being stupid enough that the first thing I'd do with such a potentially dangerous device was trying it on another living person.