

The Surprise Present

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It was the weekend before Christmas, and Kai had decided to make a surprise visit to his friend August. The plump, white-and-blue koi dragon shivered in his hoodie, already eager to be inside where it was warm and comfy. Usually he didn't mind the cold that much, but a brisk wind had made the outside air feel far chillier than it actually was, and he'd underdressed for it. Oh well, August's place was already in sight, and soon he'd be free of the wind.

As Kai got closer he realized there was something large sitting on August's doorstep. From a distance he could tell it was a box of some sort, and gradually it became clear it was an oversized present.

The wrapping paper was bright white with giant blue snowflakes printed all over. Red ribbon ran down every side, ending in an elaborate bow on the top. Kai had never seen a present so big before. He guessed it was nearly three feet tall and just as wide. Could it be an appliance? Or maybe new furniture, like a table or chair? For all Kai knew it was just a bunch of smaller items packed into one large, unwieldy box.

Curiosity quickly got the better of the koi dragon. He checked the tag on the top, and though it stated it was for August, the "From" section had been left blank. There wasn't a shipping label on it, or anything else to imply it'd been mailed and dropped off. If it was an anonymous gift it was certainly an unusual one.

Kai knelt down in front of the present, overwhelmed by the temptation to poke and prod and shake it to figure out what could possibly be inside. August would in all likelihood need help getting it into the house, which could hint at the contents as well.

Suddenly a pair of glowing blue eyes opened on the present's lid, glaring right at Kai. The koi dragon's jaw dropped, too surprised to react. The lid angled open to reveal teeth, and Kai found himself looking into a maw.

Before the koi dragon could react a tongue shot out from the open present and wrapped around Kai's neck, pulling him forwards and muffling his terrified yelps. Kai tried bracing himself on the side of the box but he simply couldn't match the creature's brute strength. His claws slipped in, followed by his shoulders and chest. He was kicking blindly in panic, the present shaking.

Strong gulps swallowed Kai's belly and hips, and his legs vanished inch-by-inch. A flailing tail fin was the last sign of Kai on the outside world, but that was slurped up in haste as well. The lid shut tight afterward, the glowing eyes closing. No one had been around to witness the koi dragon getting swallowed whole by a present, which now bulged and wobbled oddly on the lonely walkway.

Within the voracious box, Kai was struggling intensely. The present had been empty but was still cramped for the curled up koi dragon, who pushed in every direction with all his might. The interior walls of the present were almost rubbery. They stretched easily no matter how much pressure he applied, always rebounding to their original flat form afterward. Scratching at the material didn't leave any hints of tears or rips, either.

Kai had no clue what had just happened to him, and was beginning to doubt he was even awake. Presents didn't have eyes and teeth, they didn't eat people! Obviously it was just a bad dream.

The the koi dragon's scales started to itch and his limbs grew stiff. Unable to see in the darkness, Kai managed to pull out his cell phone to shine some light. He very nearly wished he hadn't. His slightly exposed middle had lost it's usual sheen, and his scales looked painted on. Seams were starting to appear on his body, which felt unnaturally soft—like a stuffed animal.

Even more frantic than before, Kai shook around within the present as he felt himself stiffen all over. The cell phone was frozen in his grip, Kai's shouts for help silenced as his mouth clenched shut into a faint grin. Slowly he lost the ability to move at all, shortly before blacking out completely.

Outside, on the tag attached to the present, Kai's name appeared in clear script next to "From:".

Hours later, a portly gray goat arrived at his house, having just finished a bit of last minute shopping. August grinned at the giant present he'd left on his doorstep, wondering if anyone had fallen for the trap yet. It was a rather devious yet creative ploy as far as he was concerned. Anyone who lingered too close to the enchanted present would first get gobbled up by it, and then transformed into a life-sized inanimate plushie.

The magic present was the ultimate surprise gift to himself, with so many potential victims to be the contents. Mailmen, neighbors, box thieves, or simply curious passersby—any one of them could end up as a present.

August gave the box a nudge, and his face lit up as he realized it was heavier than normal. Practically giddy, the goat picked up the successful trap and carried it inside. He resisted the urge to look at the tag, dropping it off by the Christmas tree with the rest of his presents. For the next couple days he'd be obsessing over it.

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On Christmas morning, August was congratulating himself on his self-restraint. The majority of his presents were in a neat pile, already opened and enjoyed. All that remained was the largest one, the one he'd given to himself.

With great anticipation August flipped over the tag and read the name that'd appeared: Kai.

Laughter and bleats filled the room. The goat had wondered why his friend hadn't been answering his texts the last couple days, but had assumed Kai was simply too busy with other things to get back to him. Now he knew the koi dragon had actually been sitting patiently under his tree the entire time.

The present's lid was lifted off and tossed aside, August grinning wide as he grabbed the plushie inside. It was big, with a belly almost too round for the strained shirt it wore. A cell phone was stuck in its soft claw, the screen blank after running out of power much earlier. Bright blue buttons made up the eyes, and there was a smile on its face.

August chuckled as he spun the plush koi dragon around, giving it a tight hug.

“Wow Kai, you look really cute as a plushie!” the goat teased, though he knew his transformed friend couldn't hear a word he was saying. “I was only planning on keeping the plushie for a day or two, but giving you up could be hard. I'm sure you won't mind staying like this for a few weeks...or months~”

All the plush koi dragon could do was stare blankly at the goat, smiling in forced approval...