

Kids These Days

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It was well after midnight and I was at the grocery store with a friend. At this time of night, there were only a few employees in the store, and only a single cashier. There were two people in front of us. One was a middle aged man paying for his items at the register. The cashier was a middle aged, slightly overweight, soccer-mom type of woman.

The other person in line before us was a younger kid, perhaps around eighteen or even younger. He had a shaved head, earrings, nose ring, lip ring, eyebrow ring. He wore torn and baggy jeans that sagged below his hips, his boxers clearly visible above them. A long chain dangled from his wallet. Tattoos adorned his arms, and across his torso he wore a dirty, stained and torn Pantera Tee shirt—the one with the giant marijuana leaf across the front.

The kid did not, however, have any items on the conveyor belt, nor did he have a basket. My first thought was that he was buying nothing more than cigarettes, but then I noticed his right arm pointed rigidly downward, his hand against his thigh. He had one item in his hand, and had turned away to block our view. It was difficult not to jump to the conclusion that he was buying Sudafed or whatever it is people use to make methamphetamines.

So I did a subtle little dance with him, turning to try and see what he had in his hand without making my curiosity too obvious. He saw me and tried to turn away to compensate, but the item was far too large to hide.

In his right hand he held an economy sized box of Tampax tampons, and nothing else.

I felt bad for the kid at that point so I looked away.

He finally placed the box on the belt just before stepping up to the register. The cashier took a long look at the tampons, then at the kid, then back at the box. She pointed at it. “Is this yours?” she asked.

He nodded.

But still she looked back and forth from the Tampax to the kid. “*This is yours?*” she asked again, her mouth betraying a repressed smirk.

The kid spoke slowly, holding several dollar bills and some change in his hand. “Well...” he said. “I would like to purchase it...”

And the cashier simply stared back. “I can’t sell you those,” she said.

He looked back in sudden shock, as though taking her seriously just for a second.

“You need to go home and tell your girlfriend that you decided to be a man and she needs to get her own tampons.”

The kid stared back, still holding the money. His shoulders slumped and he sighed. “Can I please just buy it?” he said.

And the cashier let out a wild laugh as she grabbed the box and scanned it. She set it aside, but before taking his money she raised her right arm and flung her wrist like a whip as she imitated a dramatic whipping sound. She shook her head as she took his money and rang up the purchase. “Such a whupped little boy,” she said. She turned back to stare at him. “She had better be damn good in bed.”

“Yes,” he replied decisively. “She is.”

“These had better not be for your mom,” said the woman.

“They’re not for my mom.”

“I swear to God, if these are for your mother I’m going to get a switch, I’m going to track you down, I’m coming to your house and I’m gonna *beat* you.”

“They’re *not* for my mom,” he repeated.

“Either way, next time you gotta remember to be a man about it... Tell me, what is she doing right now that she can’t come down here herself?”

He sighed and rolled his eyes. “She’s playing football.”

The cashier’s head rocked back in surprise. “What?” she said. Then her chin went up. “Ohhhh... like on a Playstation.”

“Yeah,” the kid nodded.

Then the woman suddenly grinned uncontrollably. “Let me guess – it’s your Playstation isn’t it?”

He grunted and replied after a long pause. “Yes.”

And her laughter came back in force. She gripped the counter to steady herself.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and shuddered, as though fighting an urge to strike her. Finally he raised his voice. “For Christ’ sake lady! Can’t a guy do something nice for his girlfriend? She has a cold right now.”

“There’s no amount of PMS and snot that would make me do that to my hubby,” the cashier replied. But the kid just shook his head angrily and stared at the ground.

She laughed as she handed him his purchase and shooed him away. She continued laughing as he walked

away, then she went back to making whipping noises and snapping her wrist. She ignored me and continued her loud taunting until he had completely left the building.

Finally she turned to me, shook her head dramatically, and said, “What are we going to do with these kids these days?”

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