

## CURIOUS

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"Mommy! Is that woman talking to herself?" asked a curious Jeff to his busy mother.

Startled by the interruption in her tank top perusal, she tried to ignore him, hoping he would let it go.

But Jeff wouldn't comply. "Mommy! Why is that woman talking to herself?!"

Annoyed, she replied without shifting her gaze from the tops, "She has an invisible friend. Someone only she can see, she's probably talking to him."

Jeff was slightly taken aback. "Well if only she can see her friend, then how do you know it's a him?"

Sadly, Jeff had pulled the last straw. "Be quiet Jeff! Mommy has to shop. Besides, it's not a good idea to look at people talking to themselves."

*Weirdos!*

"But mommy..."

"Jeff! Another word out of you about the woman and you're grounded for the week!"

Unconvinced, yet left without a choice, Jeff continued to look the other way quietly.

It was a good hour before the mom finished her shopping.

The cashier returned the third credit card that she handed over, apologizing, "I'm sorry ma'am. This one's maxed out as well."

"What's maxed out mommy?" Jeff was back on.

"Shh, it just means mommy needs another card because this one isn't working."

"But daddy said you're not supposed to use them anymore."

"I won't tell daddy if you won't, okay sweetie?"

Jeff nodded but she wasn't impressed at the cashier's judgmental smile.

Crossing her fingers with a slight hint of embarrassment, she handed him over the last card in her wallet.

"Yes, it works ma'am!"

The mom's face lit up as she exhaled with relief.

Finally, they were out of the mall and headed to the car in the parking lot.

She found it quite weird that Jeff did not speak for almost an hour now which was quite digressive from his usual self.

Even she did not speak much, because the only thing that ran through her head were the monthly bills. The alimony and child support payments she received from her ex didn't help much with her shopping addiction.

"What's wrong sweety? Why are you quiet?" She was just pulling the car out.

"I wanna go home." Jeff seemed uneasy.

"Is it a cold sweety? Are you not feeling well?" She tried to be caring in the midst of her drive.

"I wanna go home!"

"Ok ok. We're going there now." She was slightly taken aback by Jeff's mode of speech but acceded nonetheless.

Jeff had been withdrawn since the divorce. He feared and hated the fact that his parents would break into a fight every time he was dropped off even though the meetings seldom lasted more than a minute.

It was almost midnight when they pulled up into their lonely house in the suburbs. It was after Christmas, and most of the residents had gone home for the holidays to spend new year's. The street was practically deserted.

As soon as the car pulled into the garage, Jeff opened the doors to run into the house.

"Jeff! Come back here and help mommy with the bags!"

But he was long gone. Annoyed, she picked all of them up with great difficulty and went in.

She set out dinner by the TV, the way they always used to since the divorce. They no longer had a family anymore. She couldn't bear to be in the same room with Jeff's father.

"Jeff! Mommy's made spaghetti. Come down and finish your dinner!" She was completely beat and just wanted to drop onto her bed.

"Jeff!" She called out again.

But there was no reply.

Infuriated, she proceeded upstairs and opened his room. She found him cringed on his bed staring at their family photograph.

"What are you doing? What's wrong?"

Jeff seemed to be shivering.

"Jeff, tell mommy what's wrong." She was getting curious and impatient now.

"Mommy, promise me you won't ground me." Jeff was quiet.

"What do you mean? What did you do Jeff?" She started to picture a mess in a part of the house.

"I'm sorry mommy! Please don't ground me." Jeff began to cry.

Realizing that she wouldn't be able to get anything out of him with the tone, she switched to a calmer voice.

"It's ok sweety. I won't ground you. Now tell me what's wrong?"

Jeff looked at the door behind her.

"Do you remember the woman who was talking to herself in the store?"

She couldn't remember the woman at first but it came back to her. "Yeah, what about her?"

Jeff looked gravely at his mother.

"She's right behind you mommy..."

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