Minimum Wage Payback

John Edwards
St. John Fisher College

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.
"'Merry Christmas Kyle' said his parents with a laugh . . ."

Cover Page Footnote
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"Merry Christmas Kyle" said his parents with a laugh... Merry Christmas my foot, thought Kyle. Kyle was always patient on Christmas morning, letting his younger brother, Gregory, tear through his presents in no time. He loved it: everyone would have opened all of their presents and Kyle would still have a good five or six presents just waiting to be torn open. It was no different this year. Four presents left—T-Shirt (nice, but Kyle was a junior in high school so the Jim Kelly t-shirt was destined for bed time or baseball practice). Three presents left—CD (Mariah Carey, he would later look back and wonder why he ever asked for that). Two presents left—Calendar (Kyle got one every year; not exciting, but it would have been weird if he didn't get one). One present was left; all eyes were on Kyle; he loved it. Kyle noticed an odd smirk on his father's face. Tearing through the paper, Kyle saw a JC Penney's box that was too light to have any clothes in it. He ripped off the lid to reveal the most cruel joke ever played on a 16-year-old on Christmas. Job applications! Burger King, Jubilee (the local supermarket), "Are you kidding," Kyle squealed. "Merry Christmas Kyle" said his parents with a laugh. Merry Christmas my foot, thought Kyle.

"Are you kidding," Kyle repeated still faintly hoping to hear a punch line. Kyle was beginning to regret leaving his presents for last. All of sudden, his audience had turned into a horde of hecklers. His Aunt Joanne yelled, "That's so funny!" His Grandma and Grandpa joked, "Do you think that's a hint Kyle." Kyle's mother sat in the background and basked in the praise her "witty" joke received. Kyle wanted to puke.

The day after Christmas came and went and the job applications remained under the tree. Kyle's father said, "I know it isn't that appealing to you, but your mother and I want you to fill out those applications today."

"Whatever," said Kyle.

"Well, I'm driving you down in two hours."

"Sure, sounds great," said Kyle with the sarcasm he got from his father, but that drove his father crazy when used at the wrong time. This wasn't the wrong time, though.

"Cheer up," said his Dad, "some extra money can't be all bad." Kyle never wanted money less in his life, and afternoons of homework never seemed more appealing.

Well, after getting rejected from Burger King (to Kyle's incredible delight), Kyle got a call from Jubilee saying that he could start on...
Monday. "Great," lied Kyle to his new boss Mrs. Flannery. Kyle moped up to his room wondering if he was destined to be a stock boy or a cashier.

As Kyle found out on Monday, it turned out to be neither. Mrs. Flannery told him to take his bag lunch back to the employee lounge. The bright green couches and cigarette butts made him feel far from home. He still couldn't believe that this was one of his Christmas presents. With an uncharacteristic boldness, Kyle asked, "So what am I? Cashier? Stock boy?"

Mrs. Flannery said, "Kyle, I've got something different in mind for you." As she said this, she was grabbing a blue and red Jubilee parka with a bright orange reflective strip on back and sleeves. "I hope this fits you Kyle," said Mrs. Flannery, "Cause it's the only one we've got."

"Am I going to be working outside?" asked Kyle remembering the snowy drive in and the chill he go upon exiting the car.

"Yes, you are, Kyle . . . parking lot . . . umm . . . coordinator; that's it . . . we'll call you the parking lot coordinator. You see, you round up the carts, shovel some snow, help old ladies walk in, that kind of stuff."

"Neat," said Kyle, trying desperately not to sound mortified. "Well, as long as I don't have to park cars I'll be fine, I haven't perfected the art of fitting my car between those two yellow lines yet," said Kyle.

"No Kyle, you don't have to park cars, but Saturdays are busy and with our small lot we fill up quickly. We may need you to direct traffic."

"Sounds good" said Kyle, not even believing the words as he said them.

The first few weeks went fast. Kyle organized the carts. He made sure that he put salt on the icy patches. He helped people in and out of the store. He made friends with a couple of co-workers. He didn't have to beg his parents for money anymore, and the job itself really wasn't that bad. However, he couldn't let his parents know that. Kyle still felt that it was a dirty trick that they had played on him. He wanted revenge and prayed nightly for an opportunity to arise.

One Saturday, he got his opportunity. Just as Mrs. Flannery told him his first day, the lot filled up fast on Saturdays. Armed with his reflective parka, Kyle stood in the middle of it all, directing cars to the few scattered open parking spots. This was an abnormally busy Saturday, however. The next day happened to be Super Bowl Sunday, so everybody and their uncle was going to Jubilee to stock...
up on party supplies. The store had only been open for a half hour and the lot was almost completely filled. In fact there was only one spot left. Kyle kept this in mind when he saw two cars pull up to the lot: one from his left, the other from his right. On his left was a boy his age, who he didn’t recognize from school. Kyle did recognize, however, the look in his eyes that said, “My mom got me up at eight o’clock on Saturday to do the shopping for her party at which I’m not even allowed to be present.” Feeling sympathetic for the guy, but trying to remain impartial as any good parking lot coordinator should, Kyle looked to his right. To his surprise, it was his father and mother. They liked to get their shopping done early in the morning so they had time to finish their respective Saturday to-do lists. Kyle hated those lists. Both cars knew there was one spot left. It was up to Kyle. One car would park and shop, the other would circle the block for a half hour or so until another spot freed up. Should Kyle sympathize with his fellow abused teen, or ensure a tranquil home life? With a nod of his head and a flick of his wrist, Kyle waved the young errand runner into the last spot. He walked d carefully over to his parents car and told them, “Unfortunately, the lot is full and Jubilee would appreciate it if you check back every fifteen minutes or so. Jubilee apologizes for any inconvenience. Have a great day!” Kyle saw that they weren’t too happy and he was pleased, but he knew he would have to make other plans for the Superbowl.

--John Edwards