Getting What He Deserved?

There were seven or eight of us in the line, waiting to pay the cashier for our lunches. We were all in a hurry because that's the way of the American business-day lunch. At the front of the line there was a pretty woman with a small boy of about eight. He was a cute little fellow wearing black jeans, white sneakers and a blue pullover sweater. A shock of dark hair fell over his eyes. He looked very much like his mother. The boy had a charming face with chiseled features but he was depressed.

As the woman fumbled in her purse, looking for money to pay her check, the kid noticed a display of candy bars beside the cash register and immediately wanted one.

"You can't have any candy," said his mother. "You had a pie with your lunch." She took out her handkerchief, then put it back and went on fumbling in her purse.

"But I want some candy," said the kid. His tone was surprisingly insistent. Almost aggressive.

The mother continued her search for money in her purse, and the kid continued to whine about the candy. Then he began to stamp his feet and shout.

The rest of us in line were beginning to get fidgety. We bunched a little closer together and several folks began mumbling under their breath. "Ought to snatch him bald," said one man quietly.

The kid by now was reaching for the candy display in open opposition to his mother. She grabbed his arm and pulled it away, but not before he clutched a Snickers bar in his hand.

"Put it back," she said.

"No!" shouted the child. It was an arrogant "No!"

The line bunched even more closely together, and the man who had suggested snatching the kid bald appeared ready to do so himself. So much for the kid's shock of dark hair, I thought.

But the mother moved suddenly and with purpose. She paid the cashier, took back her change and dropped it into her purse. Then with one quick motion, she grabbed hold of the child's pullover sweater and lifted him off the floor. The moment his sneakers came back to earth, she turned his back toward her and began flailing him. A look of disbelief came across the kid's face. His eyes filled with tears. He tried to break away but that made his mother flail him again.

When she had finished administering the punishment, she turned the child around and pointed a finger squarely in his sobbing face. With a voice strong and certain, she said, "The next time I tell you do something, young man, will you do it?"

The child looked at the floor. Meekly and sincerely, he replied, "Yes, ma'am."

The mother turned to go. The child returned the Snickers bar without further hesitation and marched dutifully out behind her.

The people in a line broke into spontaneous applause.

"Did the kid deserve the punishment he had? What would I do if I were his mother? She may have been absolutely right for all I know. I have no children. I have no right to argue with the mother" I thought. "There is nothing I can do but wait. Perhaps the best way to get an idea of normal behavior of children is to get married and raise a few."

The people in a line broke into spontaneous applause because the child...

1. ...was forced to obey.
2. ...managed to get his way.
3. ...had already eaten the candy bar.
4. ...manipulated his mother skillfully.