



# LARGE McDONALD'S MEAL

BY NICHOLAS ALEXANDER CLARKE

2024

Based on a true story.

LARGE McDONALD'S MEAL, half-eaten, strewn along the curb. This didn't have to happen. . .

If it happened during the day, someone might have done something about it. But it was night. A foggy night, forbidding all but the lowly likes of him. It always fell on him. All the low tasks everyone left discarded in their wake, saying, well, someone else will do it. Well, fuck them all. Council paid litter-pickers for a reason. And he had places to be. Had to salvage a day stolen by others. He was better than all the others.

White plastic bag, a little further ahead. The McDonald's would be cleared up come tomorrow morning—but the bag? He had heard tales of cats getting their heads stuck in plastic bags. Well, it was unlikely any of the cats in *this* lovely neighbourhood would be stupid enough to do such a thing.

A spit of rain. They said that meant God was crying. For him.

*If I don't do it, who will? A cat will die. That didn't have to happen. I could've stopped it.*

He peeked over death's ledge. From the abyss he could see this moment reflected. Him walking away. The cat suffocating. Its dead hollow eyes judging him for his needless sloth. Sure, he was better than the others. But how could you be better than a cat?

The bag lay waiting for its victim. No cars around, no judgement. He went for it.

There was something inside, something light. Paper, maybe. He didn't linger to look. People might be watching through the windows. People might think he was a bad man doing bad things in their lovely neighbourhood. So he threw the bag into one of the lovely neighbourhood bins and walked off.

He had done a good deed. He was among the few who didn't ignore a bad deed. He was a good man.

He froze.

*Papers, maybe. Maybe something else. . .*

The bin wasn't far back. He could turn back and check. No one would think much of it.

One of the rooms in the bin's house lit up. Someone peeked through the blinds. No chance of checking, now. It was done.

And he would never know what was in the bag.

The bedroom ceiling kindly asked him not to ignore the question.

*Not ignoring anything serious. It was just a bag.*

Would he bet Mummy and Daddy's life on it? He knew what might have been in that bag—anything. Because he didn't look. Not really. Could have been delivery boxes. With labels left on them. Labels with names and addresses. Bin man might be malevolent. An identity thief. Innocents could get scammed, lose all their savings. Because of *him*.

*Litter-pickers aren't like that. They don't look for that sort of thing.*

Was he a litter-picker?

*It doesn't matter. The Council wouldn't hire a bad*

*person like that, anyway.*

How could he know?

*Whatever. It's on them. The idiot who left the label on the box and put the box in the bag and put the bag in the bin. . .*

But the bin was *his* blunder. Maybe someone benevolent from that lovely neighbourhood would have seen the bag and given it back to its rightful owner. If only he hadn't binned it.

*It's on them. They put their life on the line.*

Life?

*Money. I mean money. No one is dying here.*

Was he certain of that? Was he certain it wasn't something else? Something more sinister?

He laughed. Of course he laughed. That was all he did.

*Sure. Some dealer's going to drop off a bag of cocaine at the side of the curb. With cars passing. With rain on the forecast. Sure.*

Was *he* a dealer? How could *he* know how it worked? How could he know the intentions of the rain? Maybe God sent it to tell him to face his cowardice and do the good deed. Or maybe God sent it knowing he would do the opposite. That he would get bad people involved over a plastic bag. That, come morning, he would find Mummy and Daddy bloodied and grey-eyed on his front porch.

He looked out the window. A downpour, now. So many tears.

God had tried to stop him. But people never change.

And he turned to his side and sank his face into the pillow and thought about all the things his friends might be doing tomorrow. Fun things. And Mummy and Daddy were going to die. Because he couldn't just walk

on. Because he had to be a *good man*.

It didn't have to happen.

Getting brighter, outside. But all the bins were still there. There was still time.

He approached *that* bin, the cursed bin. He lifted the lid quietly. Bag was still there. He nabbed it out and walked away. Checked his pocket for his lighter. Still there. All was well. The bag and whatever its dark contents would be turned to ash. Unsalvageable. Untraceable.

He trotted on home. Sang a sweet, sweet song. An ode to himself—a good, good man. His song went:

*All's well in Hope Town, my love,  
Doves sing of the hope in town,  
And I bring you my love,  
So why the frown?*

A sharp pain shattered his beautiful song.

Something warm, wet, against his skin. His shirt, soaked red. A stabbing pain throbbed in his side. He fell to his knees. Shouts, slurred. All was slurred. . .

A pair of boots stood before him. In a muffled voice they said, 'That'll show you lot! No more of you fuckers will fish through my bins or step near my house again.'

Strange that boots could talk and walk off on their own. Strange thing, that cat. It just sauntered by, like nothing was happening, like it were deaf. And it *didn't*

suffocate. It was alive. It was purring.

It lay by his head and licked his cheek.

‘Thank you,’ it meowed.

Then it closed its eyes. And so did he.

THE END