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# McDonald's: The End of Charity

A fictional piece about McDonald's Market in New Montgomery, San Francisco.



Photo by [Janica Chioco](#) on [Unsplash](#)

"I once had a nightmare where a McRib with legs chased me to my doom," Pedro tells his neighbor Anthony. "I think it was from seeing too many ads about the McRib being permanently removed from the menu."

"How do you even come across so many ads that it affects your dreams?" Anthony asks, scratching his chin.

"It's easy," Pablo replies with a smirk. "You work there."

Anthony raises an eyebrow. "Funny hearing you talk about succumbing to capitalism. What's it like working at McDonald's?"

Pedro pauses for a moment, thinking back to his days working at McDonald's. He remembers the daily routine of waking up, getting dressed in his uniform, and commuting to work at the McDonald's on New Montgomery in San Francisco. As he walks to the bus, he bets that a homeless person will be sleeping on the bench. "Him again," Pedro was correct. Though he was unsure whether to be amused by his accurate prediction or saddened by the homeless problem in the city.

Pedro was no stranger to the homeless folk. Literally. *Regulars* greet him, many of whom are homeless. Less than five minutes from setting foot in McDonald's and he is already flipping patties for 12 orders of Big

Mac. The usual. Pedro is grateful that he ate breakfast before coming to work because the smells emanating from some of his customers are so putrid that they take away his appetite.

“...After submitting your fake email account, tap the ‘Rewards’ section, and voila: a free Big Mac,” Pedro overhears a homeless person teaching another about exploiting the McDonald’s rewards system. Pedro’s eyebrows furrow as he listens to the mechanical cackle of the printer producing a new receipt for a free Big Mac. Strangely enough, he also feels a sense of warmth when he hands the free Big Mac to a homeless person.

The burger exploits started when McDonald’s launched a promotion that offered new accounts on their mobile application a free Big Mac burger, which costs \$5.99. But the exploitation didn’t stop there—the same people would return to purchase large fries at a discounted price of \$1 instead of the usual \$4.79. This would give them enough rewards points to redeem a free McChicken burger, worth \$3.19, which they would come back for in the evening. As a result, McDonald’s lost \$13 per person daily. Pedro estimates that around 33 consistent people use this technique daily, resulting in a loss of at least \$429 per day for the fast food chain. He is even surprised to catch some people in business suits using the exploit.

As Pedro is about to take a break from his shift, TonTon arrives. His eyes light up as he excitedly says, “I got the goods.” Pedro covers his face with his hands, creating a playful and mysterious mood. He then hands TonTon a bag filled with two Big Macs, large fries, and McChicken combos—one for TonTon and one for his mother.

“Thanks for helping me with statistics,” TonTon exclaims. “I aced my finals, and I’m finally graduating from high school!” Pedro feels like a proud father. “I’m so proud of you,” he says. “How are your college applications going?”

TonTon quickly shushes Pedro, saying, “Not now—let me grab a bite first.”

Pedro and TonTon have been friends for months. Whenever Pedro has time off work, he likes to help TonTon with his studies or let him play games on his smartphone. TonTon’s mother is homeless, but his struggles have motivated him to finish his education and lift his family

out of poverty.

Their friendship began when TonTon told Pedro about the burger exploit at McDonald's. Since then, Pedro has been impressed by TonTon's passion for his future. In fact, Pedro has even created fake email accounts to provide TonTon with free burger meals. Pedro wants TonTon to succeed and not end up working at McDonald's as he has. He wants TonTon to follow his dreams and make a better life for himself and his mother.

After finishing his meal, TonTon looks at Pedro and asks, "So, what's the plan?" Pedro presses him for an answer, urging him to take action.

TonTon laughs and replies, "I guess I'll start writing the essays required for my college applications. And don't worry, I won't need your help anymore—I'm an adult now."

Pedro playfully shoos him away, saying, "You better get to it!" TonTon then heads home with the combo meal for his mother.

Pedro was just handing off a Big Mac to the last homeless person when a man with a clipboard suddenly appeared from the side of the counter. "It's ironic, isn't it?" the man said with contempt. "This McDonald's is supposed to be in San Francisco's Financial District, yet it's being used as a makeshift shelter for the homeless."

"They're just trying to survive," Pedro replied, surprising himself by siding with the people who had been the source of his frustrations.

"Sure, but it shouldn't be at the expense of our economic productivity," the man argued. "You're an accomplice, you know?" he adds, holding up his I.D. to reveal that he is a government official.

The man smirks. "Don't worry; we're working on a solution. This will change, one way or another." With that, he turns and walks away, leaving Pedro to contemplate his actions and the uncertain future ahead.

"That's intense," Anthony says, wide-eyed. "Do you think he knows about the burger exploit?" Pedro was pulled back from his storytelling. "Well, I'm here. You know what that means, right?" Pedro proceeded to return to telling Anthony about his story.

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Tomorrow arrives, and Pedro is surprised to see his manager by the counter. “We need to talk,” Pedro’s manager says, causing Pedro to gulp nervously. They walk behind the burger grills, where plenty of Big Mac orders are lined up on the receipt rack.

“The good news is that you’ll have a reduced workload,” the manager starts. “The bad news is that discounts, promos, and freebies have been banned in the entirety of San Francisco.”

Pedro is shocked. “But why?” he asks.

“The government says it’s because of economic unproductivity,” the manager replies with a sigh. “Our mobile app still hasn’t reflected this change, so we need to figure out a way to communicate with our ‘repeat customers’ and make sure they understand the situation.”

The manager pauses and then looks at Pedro with a grave expression. “I know about your tolerance towards the exploit that some of our customers use, especially with your friend Tony. But I have to warn you — there will be consequences for all of us if we don’t put a stop to this. And those consequences won’t just affect us, but also people like Tony.”

Pedro nods, understanding the gravity of the situation. He knows that he has to make a tough decision — continue helping the homeless, or protect himself and his friend from the consequences of their actions.

As the news of the ban on promotions at McDonald’s spreads, tensions start to rise outside the restaurant. The homeless, who relied on the free and discounted meals, become enraged and start mobbing the counter, demanding their breakfast. Pedro, feeling helpless and guilty, announces that the promotions are no longer available. The situation quickly escalates, with the homeless hurling heart-wrenching insults at Pedro and even spitting and kicking at the self-order kiosks. Words cannot describe how Pedro feels in the face of this betrayal from the same people who once greeted him with a smile. The police are called in to de-escalate the situation, but the damage has already been done.

TonTon arrives at the trashed restaurant, confused and upset. “What happened?” he asks Pedro. With a heavy heart, Pedro explains the ban on promotions and the resulting chaos. TonTon is devastated, as he and his mother relied on the free and discounted meals to survive. He had arrived late because he was tending to his mother, who fell ill. They

needed food. He begs Pedro to let him have one last meal, but Pedro is afraid of damaging his future. Instead, he uses his own money to buy TonTon a cheeseburger, even if it means skipping dinner.

TonTon takes the burger, but his mind is already focused on finding another food source. “Thank you,” he says half-heartedly before hurriedly leaving. Pedro notices that TonTon has left his college application on the counter, with all the essays filled out except for one.

Pedro clocks out and starts walking home. For the first time, the streets of San Francisco feel empty. No people sleeping on bus stops, no people asking for alms. As Pedro walks past an alley, he sees a prominent food bank closed off with bright yellow tape. “Why are they criminalizing kindness?” Pedro thinks. In front of it is a sign that reads, “Closed for promoting economic nonproductiveness. Food banks moved to Oakland.” Besides it, San Francisco police are handing out free one-way tickets to Oakland. Pedro is disturbed and outraged by the sight of it. “Why are they moving the food banks away from San Francisco? Don’t they understand that people need them here?” he wonders. As if things weren’t bad enough, Pedro receives a text message from his manager: “You’re missing the point. Don’t give.”

Weeks have gone by, and TonTon still hasn’t returned. Pedro managed to finish TonTon’s college essay while serving ungrateful customers in tuxedos. In front of McDonald’s, Fidelity Investment continues broadcasting messages about the city’s newfound economic success through its LED news screens. “It worked,” Pedro thinks to himself. San Francisco is free from homeless people now. He still cannot fathom how the San Francisco government could stomach what they did. It was simple power dynamics; they only needed to bar access to the homeless’ food and redirect them to food sources for them to go away—for the government to “solve homelessness.”

Pedro was deep in thought when he saw a familiar figure approaching. It was TonTon, but he was not alone. He had a group of people with him, and they looked angry. Pedro’s smile turned into a frown as he saw TonTon pointing at him. “It’s him,” TonTon announces. Despite the tension, Pedro’s excitement gets the better of him. He runs towards TonTon, holding his college essay in his hand, but before he can reach him, he is tackled to the ground by a group of people. The last thing he hears is TonTon sniffing, “I’m sorry. I had to. They offered me and my

mother a secure future.” Everything after that was a blur.

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Pedro is pulled back to the present by Anthony. “I’m sorry to hear that, man,” Anthony says. “I wish I could console you, but we’re separated by bars.”

A man in a blue uniform soon arrives at Pedro’s cell, clanging the door open. “Inmate number 12510,” he says. “It’s time for your arraignment.” The man escorts Pedro to court, where the judge speaks to him.

“Mr. Pedro Calombano, you have been charged with corporate theft and attempted assault,” the judge says. “Your relationships with the exploiters and the tolerance of the exploits have caused McDonald’s to lose a total of \$132,132.00 in your eleven months of employment.”

The judge then sentences Pedro to thirty years in jail for his role in causing today’s economic unproductiveness.

Pedro is escorted back to his cell. “The justice system. What can I say?” Anthony shakes his head. Pedro remains expressionless.

“At least we’re well-fed here.”

By [Carl Kho](#) on [December 2, 2022](#).

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