

The Secret Wife of Walter Mitty

by Beth Black

With love and thanks to James Thurber.

“My meager attempts have not adequately described the breadth of your magnificence...” His handsome face, pallid from the man's many great mental efforts, drew the attention of all the women on the street, but the Poet Laureate of the United States, Mr. Walter Mitty, only had eyes for her. And those eyes — such dark, intense windows to the artistic soul within, gazed at her with infinite love. Yes, Walter Mitty, whose vigorous imagery folded into robust rhyme had earned him the sobriquet, *Gritty Mitty* — begged to write yet another sonnet in her honor. A breeze whooshed through his long, black hair and blew leaves into the air, encircling them, softly singing *sheesheeshee*. He reached for her delicate hand and clasped it firmly, displaying the adoration of a poet's soul, and she knew he would never let her go...

“Will that be cash, check, or charge?” the clerk repeated, tugging at the dress in her arms. The young man relented, and she realized he needed it to ring up the total. She released the dress into his hand. Mr. Mitty stood in the corner, face to the wall, making those damnable clacking noises again: ta-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-*pocketa-pocketa-pocketa*. She thought about dragging her husband to the dentist for another look at those dentures. Before she could mention it, however, he loped out of the store. Edith Mitty reached over the counter, wrenched her dress and receipt from the astonished clerk's grasp, stuffed it into a bag, and raced to catch up.

Outside, she found Walter and handed him the bags. They walked past a billboard advertising the new art show downtown. She turned into his studio and hurried up the stairs to the cool garret where she knew he waited, paints and brushes at the ready. The great artist Señor Galtero Mittéo insisted on nudes,

always nudes, and always of *her*. She loosened her scarf and felt his hot Spanish eyes undressing her further. He stood ready to paint, mixing his colors with a brisk *sheesheeshee*. She felt shy for the first time, wondering if he lusted after her the way she had secretly dreamt of him. His intense, dark eyes told the truth...he had! He motioned for her to strike a pose.

“Get in, already.” Walter held the car door open. She slid in. On the way home, Mr. Mitty drove like a maniac and she lost her temper. Finally, he slowed the car to sixty-five, but not before she tore her blouse in fear when they nearly ran over a cat. “Do not worry about that!” he commanded. “It’s a minor event in a life we shall fill with major beauty.” The master couturier, *Halter de la Walter*, fashion designer par excellence, snapped his fingers and immediately two aides rushed forward with gorgeous blouses for her to admire and enjoy. They were followed by more aides, arms out, laden with many more clothes. Silk brushed against suede with a lovely *sheesheeshee*. “You, Mrs. Mitty, possess the figure I have dreamt about all these years. I can never design for anyone else, ever again. All that I draw is to dress your beauty. It is all for you!” Laughing, she seized the blouses, skirts, pants, coats, sweaters –

“Hand me your bags, dear,” Mr. Mitty said. The car was parked and he had the door open, his hand held expectantly in her face. She pulled the bags out of the back seat and gave them to him. He stood there while she climbed out of the car.

“Gee, I’m hungry. What are you fixing for dinner?” he asked.

The aroma drew large crowds to his trendy bistro as world-renowned chef *Sir Salter "Old Salt" Mitty* stirred his most famous dish with a large wooden spoon, Poulet au Voila! The utensil in his powerful-yet-creative hand brushed against the sides of the glorious, steaming pot with a *sheesheeshee*...

"Mac and cheese...again?" Mr. Mitty's voice betrayed a slight irritation.

"I thought it was your favorite," she replied.

"Well, yes. It is. But this is the fifth time this week, dear." His face softened and he smiled faintly at her. He shrugged.

Stirring the pot of thick, cheesy goo, she mixed in the cooked elbow macaroni. "Hey, it's not every man who can say his mac and cheese is homemade. Secretly, Edith was ashamed that she'd forgotten how many times she served it this week. "I'm sorry. I've been a little preoccupied."

He stroked her lower back gently, right on the spot where her arthritis felt tender. The warmth from his palm eased the pain, somehow. She was very fond of Walter and promised herself to make him steak the next evening. Turning into his arms, she nuzzled his ear. "Don't worry. I have a surprise for tomorrow night," she whispered. The spoon in her hand began to drip, so she quickly withdrew and resumed her cooking.

She thought he might be miffed at her abrupt departure from his grasp, but Walter stared blankly ahead. In fact, she wasn't sure he noticed that she had pulled away. He wandered off, making that noise again. She sighed and stirred.

The doorbell rang. Tapping the spoon and setting it down, she turned off the stove and hurried from the kitchen to the entry of their apartment to see who it was. Mr. Mitty had already opened up and was staring at their visitor. A mysterious man stood holding a bag. He appeared mysterious, first, because she did not know who he was, and second, because Walter was apparently also at a loss. But also, the strange man's appearance filled her with foreboding. His fedora slung low over one brow, reaching toward a pair of disturbingly dark eyes. The stranger's black pencil-thin mustache stretched mightily to trace the full length of his sneer.

"Yes?" queried her husband.

"You received a ... call," the man said. His voice somber, his speech slow.

Suddenly, the infamous spy, "W" Mitty, thrust a hand out and yanked her back, away from the man. "Run!" he commanded. "So long as I am able to fight, they shall never capture my glorious queen!"

The strange man tossed the bag aside and struck an evil Karate pose, but he was no match for "W" Mitty, who spun and leaped — his feet slicing the air with a *sheesheeshee*. He kickboxed the stranger to the floor, slammed the door and pulled her into his arms — all in a single, smooth move. "That was too close for comfort," he warned, keeping a firm hold on her hand. "I must protect you — "

A shopping bag slipped over her wrist, its weight straining her arm. "How could you forget to pick up my pants from the men's tailoring department?" he asked. "Anyway, can you hang'em up?"

Before she could reply, Walter galloped across the room and stared at a wall that often fascinated him. She knew it would be pointless to try and recapture his attention. Sighing, she lifted his pants out of the bag and withdrew to their bedroom to hang them up.

Rock music beat the air while handsome *Sioux City Mitty* boogied his way toward the audience. She watched, backstage, transfixed at the sight of her chiseled lover swiveling his hips her way. His tear-away pants, already discarded on the floor, no longer covered what everyone had come to admire. Mitty's 6-pack belly rippled as each muscle contorted to the beat, and she knew that he danced with the passion he felt only for her. Mitty blew a kiss her way. His heavy loins swung slowly in a tiny little G-string with a *sheesheeshee*... Her breath caught at the sight. Gyrating, he mouthed her name ...

"Edith! What's with you today? You dropped my freshly ironed pants on the floor." Mr. Mitty's face displayed obvious exasperation. This was the face Edith had grown used to seeing over the years. Though it wasn't always like that. Walter Mitty used to stare at her with love. He used to listen to her. Their first year of marriage had been heaven ... followed by 29 years of oblivious hell. Bending down to pick up the pants, she spied an old baseball cap on the floor of the closet, behind a dusty shoebox.

The infamous Edith, code-name *Kitty Van Mitty*, adjusted a nurse's cap on her silky red hair. "Walter, you know that I must go. The troops sent a communiqué directly to the President. I must go and help our brave men and women in uniform."

Walter's eyes filled with tears. "Must you? But Edith, you are the light that fills my soul. I cannot live without you."

She rested a hand on his brawny chest. "I must, my darling. It could turn the war."

He nodded sadly. "Yes, I know you're right."

"I will go and nurse them all back to health. Then, I will entertain the troops as they have never been entertained before. " She smoothed her gold lamé ball gown that she had of course sewn by hand. It clung like a lover to her luscious curves.

"Oh, Edith," Walter begged. "Please, just do it one more time for me? Just once?"

"But of course, my love," she whispered in his ear.

Lifting her gown to reveal gleaming black tap shoes, Edith performed a perfect time step, *shuffle, ball, step, shuffle, ball, step*. Her gown brushed Edith's perfectly proportioned legs with a *sheesheeshee*.

"Thank you!" Walter cried piteously, bringing his massive knuckles to his teeth.

She reached into the closet for her cloak. "Now, I really must go," Edith announced. "The President has sent a helicopter to carry me to the front. It's parked outside on the street. They've held up traffic for me.

He turned to her suddenly. "You're going to meet *him*, aren't you?"

She gazed squarely into his dark, lachrymose eyes. "Yes, after I tend to the troops, I must help the one man who can turn the tide of this war."

"And when he fails, then you will have to do the job," Walter said.

"Of course. And I will. I will save the world."

"Do you have your tiara and ray gun?" he asked. "You'll need them."

"Yes, not to worry, my dear. I am fully packed." Edith's tiara boasting 59.7 carats of brilliant blue diamonds set in white gold filigree waited in her overnight case to charm the enemy into submission before it would be necessary to blast them with her 25 mini-megaton burst X-ray laser baby-cannon.

Tossing her cloak over one shoulder, smoothing her gold lamé gown, feeling the ray gun nestled securely into her ample bosom, Edith lifted her overnight case, gave one last shuffle off to buffalo, then tossed open the door. "Farewell, Walter! Remember, we'll always have Pittsburgh!"

Making her way down the cement stairwell, Edith disregarded a familiar rhythm tapped by her shoes. It seemed little more than the evaporating echo of a lost love: ta-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-*pocketa-pocketa*.

The President of the United States greeted Edith as she emerged from the building. "We have your ride ready, Ma'am." She leaned in and added, "Good luck, Edith. The world is depending on you."

At long last, Edith Mitty stepped into the sunlight and gave POTUS a commanding nod. She marched to the chopper, its blades slicing the air with a faint *sheesheeshee*.

###