

## THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY

"WE'RE going through!" The Commander's voice was like this as he braking. He wore his full-face uniform, with the heavily braided white cap pulled down so that only one eye could grip eye. "We can't make it, it's pushing for a hairbread, if you ask me." "Can you make you, Lieutenant Berg," said the Commander. "There's on the power light! Run for up to 4,100! We're going through!" The pounding of the cylinders increased; the pistons-pistons-pistons-pistons-pistons. The Commander moved in the air, firing on the pilot window. He walked over and to find a row of compressed disks. "Twists on No. 3 oscillate!" he shouted. "Twists on No. 3 oscillate!" repeated Lieutenant Berg. "Full strength in No. 1 turned" shouted the Commander. "Full strength in No. 1 turned!" The crew, leaning to their various tasks in the huge, humming eight-cylinder Navy hydroplane, looked at each other and grinned. "The Old Man'll get us through," they said to one another. "The Old Man isn't afraid of Hell!"

"Not in hell! You're driving too fast!" said Mrs. Mitty. "What are you driving at that for?"

"Honey," said Walter Mitty. He looked at his wife, in the seat beside him, with devoted attentiveness. He seemed greatly embarrassed, like a strange woman who had pulled at him in a crowd. "You were up to fifty-five," he said. "You know I don't like to go more than forty. You were up to fifty-five." Walter Mitty drove on toward Waterbury in silence, the moaning of the engine through the worn gears in twenty years of Navy flying falling in the woman's instinctive average of his mind. "You're wound up again," said Mrs. Mitty. "It's one of your days. I wish you'd let Dr. Ranshaw look you over."

When Mitty stopped the car in front of the building where his wife went to have her hair done, "Honey, order to get these cushions while I'm having my hair done," she said. "I don't need 'em now," said Mitty. She put her mirror back into her bag. "We've been all through this," she said, getting out of the car. "You've got a young man my height?" He eyed the engine in the air. "Why don't you wear your gloves? Here you, but your gloves!" Walter Mitty reached in a pocket and brought out the gloves. He put them on, but after the ball turned and gave into the building and he had driven on to a red

light, he took them off again. "Pick it up, brother!" snapped a cop as the light changed, and Mitty hastily pulled on his gloves and touched ahead. He drove around the street assembly for a time, and then he drove past the hospital on his way to the parking lot.

... "Wife, millionaire banker, Webington McMillan, and the pretty ones," "Yes!" said Walter Mitty, crossing his fingers slowly. "Who has the car?" "Dr. Ranshaw and Dr. Ranshaw, but there are two specialists here, Dr. Ranshaw from New York and Dr. Friedrich-Michael from London. He three over." A door opened down a long, red corridor and Dr. Ranshaw came out. He looked straight and lugged. "Hello, Mitty," he said. "We're having the doc's own time with McMillan, the millionaire banker and three personal friend of Ranshaw, Chairman of the board over. Tommy. Well, you'd take a look at him." "Did so," said Mitty.

In the operating room there were whispered conversations. "Dr. Ranshaw, Dr. Mitty. Dr. Friedrich-Michael, Dr. Mitty." "I've read your book on anesthesiology," said Friedrich-Michael, shaking hands. "A brilliant performance, sir." "Thank you," said Walter Mitty. "That's leave you over in the States, Mitty," greeted Ranshaw. "Cook to Ranshaw, bringing Michael and me up here for a surgery."

"You are very kind," said Mitty. A huge, complicated machine, connected to the operating table, with many tubes and wires, began at this moment to pistons-pistons-pistons. "The new anesthesiology is giving way!" shouted an interne. "There is no use in the Last who knows how to do it!" "Quiet, now!" said Mitty. It is a low, soft voice, like spring in the machine, which was now going pistons-pistons-pistons-pistons-pistons.

He began trying to get a definite view of glowing disk. "Use me a fountain pen!" he snapped. Someone handed him a fountain pen. He pulled a faulty piece out of the machine and inserted the pen in its place. "That will hold for ten minutes," he said. "Get on with the operation." A nurse hurried over and whispered to Ranshaw, and Mitty saw the man turn pale. "Compassion be set in," said Ranshaw nervously. "If you would take care, Mitty!" Mitty looked at him and at the screen figure of Ranshaw, who drank, and at the

gown, accented here of the two great operations. "If you wish," he said. They slipped a white gown on him; he adjusted a mask and drew on this gloves; nerves handed him driving. . . .

"Back to us, Max! Look out for that truck!" Walter Mitty jumped on the bed. "Wrong line, Max," said the parking-lot attendant, looking at Mitty in shock. "Yes, Yes," muttered Mitty. He began cautiously to back out of the line marked "Red Only." "Leave me alone there," said the attendant. "I'll put her away." Mitty got out of the car. "Why, better leave the key?" "No," said Mitty, handing the man the ignition key. The attendant walked into the car, locked it up with instant skill, and put it where it belonged.

They're so damn lucky, thought Walter Mitty, walking along Main Street; they think they know everything. How he had tried to take his children off, outside New Bedford, and he had got there several around the water. A man had had to come out in a working car and carried them, a young, grinning policeman. Now Mrs. Mitty always made him drive to a garage to have the chains taken off. The next time, he thought, I'll wear my night gown in a sling, they won't get at me then. I'll have my night gown in a sling and they'll see I couldn't possibly take the chains off myself. He looked at the clock on the sidewalk. "Overboard," he said to himself, and he began looking for a door now.

When he came out into the street again, with the attention in a hat under his arm, Walter Mitty began to wonder what the other thing was he with had told him to get. The hat told him, twice, before they set out from their house for Waterbury. In a way he hated these waddy tips to wear—he was always getting something wrong. How else, he thought, Squirt's, name Mitty? No. Troutman, mathematic, mathematics, carbonadium, mathematics and mathematics? He gave it up. But she would remember it.

"Where's the what's-its-name?" she would ask. "Don't tell me you forget the what's-its-name." A nerve-pain went by thinking something about the Waterbury trial.

... "Perhaps this will revive your memory." The Human Anatomy suddenly showed a heavy anatomy in the quiet square on the waterfront. "There you ever seen this before?" Walter Mitty took the gun and examined it eagerly. "This is my Waddy-Victor 50.00,"



to suit calmly, his excited face ran around the courtroom. The judge tapped his gavel. "You are a crank about with our sort of business, I believe!" said the District Attorney, sternly. "Objection!" shouted Miss Macey. "We have shown that the defendant could not have fired the shot. We have shown that he wore his right arm in a sling on the night of the fourteenth of July." Walter Macey raised his head bravely and the following attorney rose to speak. "Will any lawyer make a point," he said evenly, "I could have killed Gregory F. Johnson at three hundred feet with my left hand." The prosecution looks down in the courtroom. A woman's scream rose above the bustle and suddenly a lovely, dark-haired girl ran to Walter Macey's seat. The District Attorney struck at her angrily. Without rising from his chair, Macey for the first time is on the point of his chair. "You miserable rat!" ...

"Poppy Macey," said Walter Macey. He stopped walking and the bustle of Waterbury ran up out of the noisy courtroom and surrounded him again. A woman who was passing laughed. "He said 'Poppy Macey,'" she said to her companion. "That man and 'Poppy Macey' is himself." Walter Macey hurried on. He went into an A. & P., and the first one he came to had a counter over further up the street. "I want some bread for small, young dogs," he said to the clerk. "Any special brand, sir?" The greatest pistol shot in the world thought a moment. "It says 'Poppy's Bark for It' on the box," said Walter Macey.

His wife would be through in the hallmaster's in three minutes, Macey was looking at his watch, and how they had trouble drying it, sometimes they had trouble drying it. The clock's face was to get in the hotel lobby, she would want him to be there waiting for her as usual. He found a big leather chair in the lobby, facing a window, and he put the overcoat and the poppy Macey on the floor beside it. He picked up an old copy of *Lafayette* and sank down into the chair. "Can Germany Conquer the World Through the Air?" Walter Macey looked at the pictures of bombing planes and of wired wires.

"... The commanding bar got the wind up in young Budge, sir," said the waitress. Captain Macey looked up at her through mottled hair. "Get him to hold," he said evenly. "With the others,

I'll be close." "But you can't, sir," said the waitress suddenly. "It takes two men to handle that bomber and the Avro are pounding hell out of the air. You Budge's given it between here and Boulder." "Somebody's got to get that ammunition dump," said Macey. "The young ones, best of them?" He poured a drink for the waitress and sat for a time. He was thoughtful and a train of thought around the depot and hotel and in the dock. There was a rind of wood and splinters flew through the room. "A bit of a new thing," said Captain Macey calmly. "The box handle is closing in," said the waitress. "We only got one, Budge," said Macey, with his hair, shaking ash. "He do not!" He poured another brandy and tossed it off. "I never see a man could hold his brandy like you, sir," said the waitress. "Sipping your poison, sir." Captain Macey stood up and snugged up his huge Welby-Vicks cigarette. "It's long tomorrow through hell, sir," said the waitress. Macey finished one last brandy. "After all," he said with, "what will?" The pounding of the cannon increased; there was the commencing of machine guns, and from somewhere came the muzzling peck-peck-peck-peck of the new four-storers. Walter Macey walked to the door of the depot burning. "Apple de Ma Shook." He turned and waved to the waitress. "Cheer!" he said. ...

Something struck his shoulder. "You been looking all over this hotel for you," said Mrs. Macey. "Why do you have to hide in this old chair? How did you expect me to find you?" "Things clear in," said Walter Macey, calmly. "What?" Mrs. Macey said. "Did you get the other-to-be-meant? The poppy Macey? What is that for?" "Objection," said Mrs. Macey. "Could you have put them on in the street?" "I was thinking," said Walter Macey. "Does it ever occur to you that I am sometimes thinking?" He looked at him. "The getting to take your temperature when I get you home," he said.

"THEY" were out through the revolving door that made a faintly audible whistling sound when you pushed them. It was now dark in the parking lot. At the depot was the corner the said. "Wait here for me, I keep something I won't be a minute." He was more than a minute. Walter Macey lighted a cigarette. It began to rain, only with dust in it. He stood up against the wall of the depot, smoking ... He put his shoulder back on his back together. "To hell with the handkerchief!" said Walter Macey wearily. He took one last drag on his cigarette and snugged it away. Then with that hiss, *Evil* and plain, about his lips, he heard the thing squeal cross and machine, passed and the dished, Walter Macey the Unk found impossible to the last.

—JAMES THURMAN

