

The
**SECRET
LIFE**

of **WALTER MITTY**

**BY JAMES
THURBER**

RETOLD BY
SARA SIMPSON



The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (1939)

James Thurber

Retold by Sara Simpson

"We're going to fly through the storm!"

The air force commander was shouting. He pulled his cap down over one eye.

"We'll never make it! A bad storm is coming!" Lieutenant Berg yelled.

"I'm telling you we're flying through it!" the commander shouted. "Turn the engine all the way up!"

The engine went faster. It made a sound like pocketa-pocketa-pocketa. There was ice on the plane's windshield, making it hard to see out. It didn't matter; they had to fly anyway.

"Turn all the engines up to full power!" the commander yelled to the crew.

The crew smiled at each other.

"The commander will get us through the storm!" the men said. "He isn't afraid of anything! Not even Hell itself scares him!"

* * * * *

"Stop driving so fast!" Mrs. Mitty said to her husband. "Why are you driving so fast?"

"What?" said Walter Mitty.

Walter Mitty looked at his wife sitting next to him in the car. He had been daydreaming again, and it took him a minute to come back to reality. He wasn't the commander of an air force plane, driving his men through a storm. He was middle-aged Walter Mitty, driving his wife on her errands.

"You were driving 45 miles an hour!" said Mrs. Mitty. "I don't like to go faster than 40, and you were up to 45!"

Walter Mitty didn't say anything. He just kept driving. His daydream was fading away.

"You look stressed again," Mrs. Mitty said. "You're having one of your bad days. You should let Dr. Renshaw look at you."

Walter Mitty stopped the car in front of the hair salon to drop off his wife.

"Don't forget to go buy snow boots while I'm getting my hair done," Mrs. Mitty said.

"I don't need snow boots," said Walter Mitty.

"Don't argue with me," Mrs. Mitty said. "You're not a young man anymore, and you need to wear snow boots to keep your feet dry so you don't get sick."

Walter Mitty was getting annoyed, but he didn't say anything else to his wife. He revved the car engine a little.

"Why aren't you wearing your gloves?" Mrs. Mitty asked her husband. "Did you lose your gloves?"

Walter Mitty got his gloves out of his pocket. He put them on. His wife went into the hair salon. Walter Mitty drove down the road. At the next red light, he took the gloves off again.

"Hurry up!" yelled a cop when the light turned green. Mitty put his gloves back on quickly and drove. He drove around for a while. He drove past the hospital on his way to park the cart...

* * * * *

“Hurry, doctor!” cried the pretty nurse. “Millionaire banker Wellington McMillan is in surgery. Dr. Renshaw and Dr. Benbow are in there now. So are two doctors from London, Dr. Remington and Dr. Pritchard-Mitford. They are doing their best, but they need you right away!”

Dr. Walter Mitty slowly took off his gloves. He was calm and ready.

Dr. Renshaw came out of the operating room. He looked tired and very upset.

“You have to come right now!” Dr. Renshaw said. “It’s McMillan, millionaire banker and close friend of President Roosevelt! He has obstreosis of the ductal tract! It’s bad! We need you!”

“Glad to help,” Dr. Mitty said calmly. “Let’s see the patient.”

Dr. Mitty put on a surgical gown and gloves and went into the operating room. All the doctors looked up at Dr. Mitty.

“Dr. Mitty, it’s an honor to get to work with you,” said Dr. Pritchard-Mitsford. “I read your book on streptothricosis. It was brilliant!”

“I couldn’t believe our luck, catching you home from traveling the world,” Dr. Remington said.

Just then, a huge, complicated machine full of wires and tubes started to go pocketa-pocketa-pocketa.

“The new anaesthetizer is breaking!” cried a nurse. “There’s no one within 100 miles who knows how to fix it!”

The machine was now going pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-queep, which was even worse.

“Everyone be quiet,” Dr. Mitty said in a calm, cool voice. “Give me a pen!”

Someone handed Dr. Mitty a pen. He pulled a piece of metal out of the machine and put the pen in its place.

“That will fix the machine for 10 minutes,” Dr. Mitty said. “Let’s finish this operation.”

“Oh, no!” cried Dr. Renshaw. “Coreopsis has set in! McMillan will never make it!”

“I’ll take over,” Dr. Mitty said. All the other doctors looked relieved. Dr. Mitty put on gloves, a nurse handed him a scalpel, then---

** * * * **

“Mister! You’re trying to go in the parking lot the wrong way! Look out for that car!” shouted the parking lot attendant. “The sign says ‘exit only!’”

Mitty slowly and carefully backed his car out.

“Just leave the car there,” the parking lot attendant said. “I’ll put it away. Give me the key.”

Mitty got out of the car and gave the key to the parking lot attendant. The attendant jumped into the car and parked it perfectly.

“That guy is a jerk,” Mitty thought to himself as he walked down Main Street. “He thinks he knows everything.” One time, Mitty tried to take the snow chains off his car himself, but he got the chains so tangled up the car had to get towed to the repair shop to get fixed. After that, Mrs. Mitty made him go to the mechanic to get the chains taken off.

“Next time I need the chains taken off,” Mitty thought, “I’ll wear a sling on my arm. The guys at the garage will think I have a broken arm, and they won’t laugh at me for not being able to take off my own snow chains.”

Mitty kicked a pile of slush on the sidewalk. He remembered: snow boots. Mitty went into shoe

store and bought snow boots. When he came out of the shoe store, he tried to remember the other thing his wife wanted him to buy. She told him twice before they left the house. He hated running errands for his wife; he was always messing up and getting something wrong. What was it she wanted...? Kleenex? No. Toothpaste? No. Toothbrush? No. He gave up. He knew his wife would remember. She would ask him "Where's the what's-its-name?" and he'd feel like a failure. Again.

A boy selling newspapers was shouting out a headline about a murder trial in the news...

* * * * *

"Perhaps THIS will refresh your memory!" shouted the District Attorney, shoving a handgun across the witness stand at Walter Mitty. "Have you ever seen this gun before?"

"Yes," Walter Mitty said calmly, picking up the gun. "This is my Webley-Vickers 50.80."

Everyone in the courtroom started to talk in excited whispers. The judge rapped his gavel and told everyone to be quiet.

"You are an expert at shooting guns, Mr. Mitty? It that true?" said the District Attorney.

"I object!" shouted Mitty's lawyer. "We have shown that Mr. Mitty could not have been the one who fired the shot. His right arm was in a sling on the night of the murder!"

Mitty raised his hand. The courtroom became silent. Everyone looked at him to see what he would say

"I could have killed him even with my LEFT hand," Mitty said.

The courtroom went wild. A beautiful girl with black hair screamed, then ran to Mitty and threw herself into his arms. The District Attorney hit the girl.

Without even getting up from his chair, Mitty punched the man in the face and knocked him unconscious.

"You should never hit a woman," Mitty said. The girl----

* * * * *

"Puppy biscuits!" cried Walter Mitty.

He stopped walking and looked up at the tall building on Main Street. A woman walking by him laughed.

"That man just said 'puppy biscuits' to himself!" the woman said to the man she was walking with.

Walter Mitty looked down at his feet and quickly kept walking. He went into the grocery store.

"I'm looking for dog biscuits," Mitty said to the clerk. "The kind you give to small, young dogs."

"What brand?" said the clerk.

"I can't remember the brand, but it says 'Puppies Bark for It' on the box," Mitty said.

Walter Mitty bought the dog biscuits and went to the hotel lobby to wait for his wife. He looked at his watch; his wife would be done at the hair salon in 15 minutes. He had gotten back just in time; Mrs. Mitty hated it when he wasn't there waiting for her.

Walter Mitty sat down in a big, leather chair in the hotel lobby. He picked up an old magazine. On the cover, it read "Can Germany Take Over the World With Its Planes?" There was a picture of bomber planes and ruined streets on the cover...

* * * * *

"Captain!" the young sargent said to Walter Mitty. "Airman Raleigh can't take any more! All the bombing has driven him crazy!"

“Get him to bed. He needs rest,” Air Force Captain Mitty said. “I can fly alone.”

“You can’t, sir!” said the young sargent. “It takes two men to fly that plane, and the Germans are bombing everything in sight!”

“It doesn’t matter,” Captain Mitty said. “Someone has to make sure the men on the ground get more bullets, and I’m the only man who can do it.”

Walter Mitty poured two glasses of brandy--one for himself and one for the young sargent. A bomb exploded outside, and the building shook. The sargent looked afraid.

“It’s getting closer,” Mitty said. He was totally relaxed in spite of the danger. “You only live once!”

Mitty drank another glass of brandy. He picked up his Weebly-Vickers gun.

“You’re about to fly through Hell, sir!” the sargent said, still looking scared.

Mitty drank one more glass of brandy. The sound of guns and bombs was getting louder. The bullets were hitting the building with a pocketa-pocketa-pocketa sound. Mitty walked to the door, humming a song.

“Goodbye!” Mitty said, going out into the battle.

* * * * *

“I’ve been looking everywhere for you!” Mrs. Mitty said. “You’ve been hiding in his big chair! How was I supposed to find you? Did you get the things I told you to buy?”

Mitty showed her the box of puppy biscuits and the snow boots. He looked at his wife.

“Does it ever occur to you that I’m thinking about things?” Mitty asked.

Mrs. Mitty looked at her husband. She looked confused.

“I’m going to take your temperature when we get home,” Mrs. Mitty said. “You aren’t making any sense when you talk. You must be sick.”

Mr. and Mrs. Mitty walked to their car. It was two blocks away. Mrs. Mitty stopped when they got to the drug store on the corner.

“Wait here,” she said to Walter Mitty. “I need to run in. I forgot to buy something.”

Walter Mitty waited on the sidewalk. He lit a cigarette. It started to rain. He leaned against the side of the building and smoked...

* * * * *

“To Hell with the blindfold!” Mitty said, yanking it off his eyes. “I’m not afraid to look death in the face!”

He took one more drag on his cigarette then threw it down. He smiled a little and turned to face the firing squad. He stood up tall. He knew what was going to happen to him, and he accepted his fate.

Walter Mitty stayed a mystery, even at the end.