

Walter Mighty – A Secret Life

Many, many feet above the ground, the heat seeking missile flew west along 57th avenue, stopped abruptly at the corner of 5th, and made a sharp left toward Trump Tower. It crashed through the windows of the penthouse where President Trump, surrounded by his staff, was making small hand gestures to Republican senators. The New Year's Eve party came to a halt. The missile ricocheted off the ceiling and pieces of it separated, barricading the doors. Shaped like a six foot bullet, the missile settled on the floor, intact and erect. It's gold-colored walls split open and a man in a cowboy hat stepped out. Everyone recognized the intruder as Astronaut Walter Mighty, planetary explorer and renegade. Secret service men reached for their guns, but a wave of the hand from the astronaut immobilized them. In fact, everyone seemed frozen, unable to move from the spot they had been standing in a moment earlier, toasting and boasting. Renegade Mighty, chewing a large wad of gum and popping bubbles, tilted his Stenson hat back on his head and walked confidently over to the president. He placed a hand on Trump's throat, lifting him slightly off the ground. Trump chortled defiantly as he teetered on his toes in a dance to find equilibrium. "Is that a fact?" Mighty said, with sincerity, popping another magenta bubble. "This is how you treat Americans, after all the promises you made to us? First, you destroy our clean water and air, and then you steal our health care." With his other hand, Mighty squeezed the president's balls. "How do you like the groping now, Mr. Celebrity?"

"Walter!" his mother screamed from the kitchen. "Quit dreaming about saving the world and roll over here. Dinner's ready!"

Walter Mighty inched down the hall toward the kitchen in his motorized wheelchair. Two weeks earlier, Micky McPhearson had broken Walter's kneecaps with a baseball bat. Now he was on opioid pain killers, still waiting for the swelling to subside before going in for knee replacement surgery. Micky and his crew hung out every evening outside the Circle-T Mart on the corner. They smoked unfiltered Lucky Strikes and drank beer from cans, concealed in plastic bags. Walter had gone for groceries. Micky McPherson had been terrorizing Walter since they were kids. Twice in the same month, when they were six, Micky had knocked him out cold. The bat had descended on his right temple and two weeks later the same bat had connected with his left

temple. Both times he had needed hospital care. After that, Walter's mother moved to another neighborhood, terminating that lethal relationship. But now, the jobless McPhearson had taken to hang out with his buddies at the local market up the street.

Consequently, two weeks ago, as he approached Circle-T and saw his nemesis and crew, Walter Mighty felt a few drops of sweat on his temples and a few more drops of pee dribble into his underwear. The shirtless McPhearson cupped his own solid pecks and squeezed them lewdly. He then pursed his lips to make smooching sounds and throw Walter a mock kiss. His crew laughed and burped.

"Hey, hey, lookie Louie, what do we got here?" Micky said to one of his crew. "If it isn't Pretty-Little-Momma's-Boy. Did mommy make a grocery list and give you extra change for a lolipop?" The crew had another good laugh. "And what's this faggoty thing on your head?" Micky pointed to Walter Mighty's green Stenson hat with a button pinned to it that read, "Make America Green Again!"

"Our parents are coal miners." Walter said, looking away nervously.

"What'd you just say, little wiener?" McPhearson leaped up from the red fire hydrant he had been sitting on. He lunged for Walter's throat before Walter could blink and lifted him up onto his toes. When he didn't speak, Micky groped Walter's nuts until he did speak.

"I ... I said our fathers are coal miners. Nobody uses coal anymore. Those jobs aren't coming back, man, and Trump has destroyed our clean air and water regulations. So our local river, the water used to make your beer, will be contaminated. And you voted for that uncharitable nightmare?"

Micky let Walter Mighty go and stood there wordlessly fuming as he watched him gasp for air, bent over holding his groin, his face sickly pale. Then McPhearson smacked the Stenson's green brim so the hat flew backwards off Walter's head. It landed in the gutter. When Walter bent down to pick it up, Micky gave him a good boot that sent him flying onto the pissy drain cover. Stunned for a moment, Walter rose awkwardly, brushed the sewage off his clothes and shook his hat on his pant leg.

Micky McPhearson towered above him. "Your crooked little bitch lost, girly-boy. My man won. And he's gonna kick ass to make America great." He jabbed his middle finger into Walter's sternum. "Your liberal crap's a total failure. Democrats are spineless – a failed project. The right is always right and the left is always left behind."

The boys hollered with pleasure, always entertained by Micky's bumper-sticker aphorisms.

Looking down at the dark asphalt that transferred the day's heat onto his ankles, Walter repositioned his green Stenson on his head and mumbled beneath the shadow of its brim. "How many times does Trump have to give it to you in the ass ... before you realize you're being raped?"

That's when the bat struck Walter Mighty's knees, knocking him out cold—for the third time.

At the end of the hall Walter reached the kitchen. He was surprised to see his dad sitting at the dinner table. His father hadn't been around in months, traveling great distances for handiwork jobs. But he kept the gravy pot consistently full so Walter and his mom would have one less worry to chew over.

His mother approached the table carrying an iron skillet. She filled their plates with steaming groats and eggs over easy, fresh from the chicken coop. "You need to stop your violent Trump fantasies, Walter Mighty, it's not healthy for you ... or me."

“How d’ you know my fantasies are violent, mom? And how d’ you know they’re about Trump?”

“Because I’m your mother. I pay attention. For twenty years now, every time you breathe from the other room, I’m aware of it.” She set the heavy pan down on the stove. “So when I hear the motor rev up and your wheelchair jerk, I know you’re concocting some Trump violence in that smart head of yours, because that’s all you think about these days.”

His dad laughed. Good-natured and generous, Walter Mighty’s father was always there for him.

“Why don’t you give the man a chance, son? It’s only been a hundred days.”

“Yeah, and that’s a 100 days too many. He’s morally reprehensible.”

“What makes you say that?” His dad chewed slowly, appreciating every bite.

“What makes me say that? Dad, have you not been paying attention? He gropes women against their will and then brags about it.” Walter spread jam on his toast with the same vigor his father would use to paint a fence.

“Son, that’s just locker room talk.”

“Uh ... sorry dad ... even if it *is* just talk, he’s bragging about the *act* of sexually assaulting women! And you voted to make him President? Dad! Where is your moral compass pointing these days? Besides, it’s not just talk. In your life time, have you ever heard even one guy in a locker room claim that he went out to a nightclub the previous night, and because he wields so much clout, he was able to grope every woman there, whether they liked it or not?”

“Sure I have. I just walk away from guys like that; but I’ve heard plenty of that kind of jock talk.”

“Whoah! Hold up a minute here. You’re telling me you heard guys admit they sexually assaulted women the night before and you just walked away without punching those guys in the face or at the very least call the police? What kind of a man are you, dad?”

His father looked over at him, eyes as tired and sad as an abandoned coal shaft. “I’m the man that puts food on the table. That’s the kind of man I am.”

Walter felt his father’s hurt and regretted having shamed such a charitable human being. He backpedaled. “I’m so sorry, dad, I got carried away ... I feel like shit now.”

They all ate in silence. The kitchen was so quiet they could hear, outside the window, the hungry anguish of hatchlings fallen from the nest—stragglers, abandoned in a stubborn season. Gently, Walter Mighty reached over and touched his dad’s hand. This was such a special treat to have his father home. He missed him.

“But see what I mean?” Walter continue with an even greater onslaught of enthusiasm. “It’s the Trump Effect! I’ve never felt so much hatred for any man.” In tears, Walter began to shake. “It’s the unfairness ... You know, dad, they did a study where preverbal children sat at a table and watched a puppet show.” Walter was always reading the latest studies. “Two *good* puppets played with a ball, throwing it back and forth. The kids sat amused on their moms’ laps. But when the two good puppets threw the ball over to a third puppet, this new *bad* puppet ran off with it, making the first two puppets cry over the loss. The children were deeply upset. And dad, after the show, when they gave the ‘good’ puppets to the children to play with, it was all fun and giggles. But when the researchers gave the children the *bad* puppet, they grabbed it by its feet and whacked its head on the side of the table.”

Walter loved to share outlandish and educational stories, especially when his father was around. Mr. Mighty always listened attentively to and with adoration for his son’s vigor and passion, having lost his own long ago.

“And dad, do you know why the toddlers banged the bad puppet’s head on the table?”

“No.”

“UNFAIRNESS!” Walter said, always delivering his punchline with dramatic flare. “Even preverbal kids understand UNFAIRNESS. And Trump is just plain UNFAIR.”

“Why is he more unfair than any other politician?”

“Because he doesn’t play by the rules of common decency that even the creepiest politician plays by just to pass the mustard.”

“So Trump’s more honest then?”

This stumped Walter for a minute. “No dad, it’s not exactly ‘honesty.’ It’s a kind of ‘integrity’ based on blunt persistence of character. You know, like, remaining an ‘honest’ asshole to the end?” His father smiled. Walter noticed it and was glad and encouraged to continue. “But it’s not a voluntary integrity for the sake of transparency. Instead, it’s because Trump always shows the true colors of his selfish nature. He doesn’t reveal his taxes like he said he would. There’s certainly no integrity there. And his hypocrisy is as loud and in your face as a mine blast. He bitched about Obama occasionally playing golf on the job, rather than working to help Americans, but then Trump gets to exercise conflicts of interest, with free trips to promote his private golf club, every weekend ... and paid for by your tax dollars, dad. We live in a democracy, not a kingdom. But Trump pontificates like he’s the king of the free world.”

Walter Mighty was in a truly agitated state, now. He picked up the butter knife and thrashed it furiously through the air like some insulted Samurai. Respectfully, his father tried to suppress laughter.

“I just want to drive the wakizashi blade into his gut and disembowel the bastard until I’m playing jump rope with his small intestines.”

Unable to control himself now, his father laughed from the depths of his belly. “Well then, maybe Trump is good for you.”

Walter Mighty set the blade on the table and dropped his jam-covered jaw. “What do you mean, dad?”

“Well, you’ve got all this bottled-up rage. Just rotting in your gut. Trump is helping you release it, son. Otherwise it might just sit there festering up a tumor.”

Walter reached suddenly for his glass of orange juice, miscalculated, and knocked it crashing against his plate, juice and glass shards scattered everywhere.

His mother shook her head as she helped him mop up the orange juice and carefully gather the glass pieces. “Ah, you see Walter? This is what me and your dad are talking about. All that anger is *not* healthy. It makes you lose your grip. And then you have accidents.”

After dinner, Walter Mighty got an uncontrollable urge to roll over to Circle-T for a carton of orange juice and bubble gum (he was out of the former and low on the latter). Along the way, the street was energized with colored lights and music from all the families celebrating Cinco de Mayo. He heard a funny sound. Ta-trumpata-ta-fucata-sucata. He looked across the street and noticed a tiny Hispanic boy, about four or five years old, all by himself, whacking away at a discarded Trump-Head Piñata laying on the ground. Ta-fucata-trumpata-sucata. The boy was determined to produce a prize from the empty head, but his repeated thwacks yielded no reward.

As he swerved and wobbled down the broken sidewalk toward Circle-T, chewing his last stick of gum, Mighty thought about what his parents had said. Maybe they were right on this account. Maybe his fantasies had been too violent all these months. Maybe rage was not the way to get past his feelings of helplessness. What could he do to make himself feel like he possessed even a pebble of control over his wobbly world?

The renegade astronaut, Walter Mighty, returned from his base station on the moon and landed in Florida. An important investor had set up a meeting with him at Mar-a-Lago. He arrived early and sat waiting at a private table eating a dish of specially prepared groats, eggs over easy, and vegetarian steaks (not Trump's). At one point the President happened to walk by. Recognizing the astronaut, Trump stopped abruptly, hovering over him at the dimly lit corner table. Walter looked up from his plate and tilted his green Stenson hat way back on his head. They looked at each other a long time in silence.

Then Trump spoke up. "I hear you don't like my policies or my executive orders."

"Not much," Mighty said, directing his gaze back down to his plate, ignoring the orange giant scraping the sky above him. A dark shadow spread across the white table cloth.

"So what would you have me do different?" The Commander-in-Steaks asked in a moment of honesty. "Something big league that might change your mind?"

Without looking up, the renegade spoke between chews. "Well, you could start by increasing your approval rating."

"What do you mean, Mighty? I have great ratings."

"If you believe that, then the moon is a giant green Stenson. But I can assure you, it's not. Besides, don't you want your ratings to always be improving? Always breaking records?"

"Sure. But how do I @#%#%^&^!" Trump mumbled, unintelligibly.

"Well, now that you've won the presidency, you might want to appeal to the majority of Americans who didn't vote for you."

Trump frowned. "But I don't want to betray my loyal following."

“Then maybe you can assure the small base of supporters that got you elected—on a lark—that they really don’t need a border wall after all. You know you can sell your followers anything and they’ll believe you.”

“True ... so ... how do I spin it?”

“Easy. Tell your supporters that you’ve already started building the wall. Even bigger than you had promised them: a better, cheaper ‘techno’ wall of security using drones, cameras, improved roads, and increased border patrol.” President Trump looked down on Walter with his Mussolini eyes and condescending jaw. “And even though this enhanced security system has been going on since the 90s, making your wall idea outdated, just take credit for it anyway, as you do for everything else, and your loyal minions will believe you. Besides, crossings have diminished. Immigrants are flowing back across the boarder from the U.S. into Mexico because of better paying jobs. So your supporters can now have their old jobs back – picking spinach in the hot sun and mopping up restaurant toilet bowls.”

The glazed shell covering Trump’s downward-sloping mouth cracked open and the embryo of a smile pecked its way out. “That’s a brilliant idea. Let me run that by Bannon, my Minister of Bigotry. And of course, Ivanka, my moral compass. Anything else?”

“Well, do you want to boost your approval ratings in the US and abroad?” Trump’s pupils widened with anticipation. Walter leaned forward, absent-mindedly caressing his drinking glass.

“Every time a loaded concept enters your head – and I’m sure brilliant ideas flood your cranium by the minute – please *run*, as fast as you can, in the opposite direction.” The President looked perplexed. “That’s right. It seems counterintuitive; but in reality, opposing the thoughts that arrive in your head will be in everyone else’s best interest – a refugee fleeing from your own thinking process is the exact thing everyone on the planet wants you to do.” Trump reflected and Walter wondered if it was a first.

“Do that, Mr. President, and I guarantee you’ll be loved beyond your base. It’s just simple arithmetic. If you turn your policies around, your ratings will greatly improve ... by at least three million votes.”

The astronaut picked up a large crystal goblet filled with orange juice and leaned back in his chair. “By the way, Mr. President, I know you’re still exploring the Washington landscape. But you’re all over the map. You better find your bearings soon. You’re lost in the woods. The bears have surrounded you. And you’re going down fast.” Walter sipped the fresh juice through a tall green straw. Satisfied. He was done talking.

President Trump took all this in, quietly.

Reading his face, Walter Mighty tried to decipher the thoughts behind it. He couldn’t tell if the stone-cold pout meant this man of dubious integrity was contemplating Mighty’s words or merely posing for Mount Rushmore.

“Oh my God, lookie here,” Louie shouted to Micky McPhearson in front of the Circle-T as Walter approached in his wheelchair. “He has the balls to show up here again? Damn, he must be one of them Sado-Maso-kissers.”

McPhearson, hunched over the red fire hydrant, stared into Walter Mighty’s eyes for a wavering moment. Walter held his ground—stared fearlessly back at him. Something had changed. McPhearson slowly turned his eyes away, reflecting in the distance before him a vague image from a distant past. Then he looked down at the asphalt, still radiating the day’s heat onto his face.

Louie leaned over and whispered in Walter’s ear. “Micky’s mom passed away last week. Her insurance wouldn’t cover her pre-existing heart condition. He’s got no family now.”

Walter was about to roll past McPhearson, but hesitated. Settling in front of him, he noticed the grief on Micky's face and the observation surprised him. He never imagined McPhearson could ever *feel* anything. But more importantly, Walter was surprised by his own reaction. He never thought he could have any kind of empathy for the likes of Micky McPhearson. Yet here he was now, given the perfect opportunity, finally, to gloat, to feel vindicated—satisfied that justice has been served. Instead, all he felt was sympathy for another man's pain. Walter Mighty addressed Micky now, easily, free of any past resentment or fear, a testament to his own true colors, "Sorry to hear about your mom ... My condolences."

Continuing to stare at the black turf, his shoulders slumped, his chest trembling slightly, McPhearson spoke in a dry, lifeless tone. "Thanks ... Walter." A moment later he added a scattering of broken words, fragile, unintelligible phrases, in an almost inaudible whisper. "Sorry, man ... for being @#%#%^&^&! ... and for being such a #^&@%* ass."

Walter received the apology without responding, his eyes fixated on Micky's sad face and crippled posture. Even though word had spread that it was McPhearson who had busted Walter's knee caps with a baseball bat, Walter had not pressed charges and claimed it was an accident. Revving up the wheelchair motor and popping a magenta bubble, Mighty rolled forward to grab his juice at the Circle-T.