

# THE WANDERING WIDOW WALTZ

(A tale of treachery and terror in the classic EC Comics style)

by

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The rusted hinges on the weathered oak door shrieked in protest as the door swung open to reveal a gaunt man sitting at a vintage rolltop desk.

He swiveled in his chair to face the door, squinting to see better in the dim light. The side light from the lamp on the desk sculpted his harsh grimace, his oily hair parted in the middle. His features relaxed then, softening into his best effort at a welcoming smile. He sat hunched over, not unlike a vulture sizing up fresh roadkill.

“Well, hello there! I didn’t realize it was time for my guests to arrive already.” He gestured at the wall behind him, a pair of bodies on gurneys covered with soiled sheets.

“My... *residents*...don’t follow a regular schedule, you see.”

He chuckled as he closed a large ledger book on his desk, an unpleasant sound nearly as grating as the door hinges had been.

“I am Myron, the Mortician of our humble village, and I believe you’ve come to hear a story that one of my new arrivals shared with me only this morning. I call this tale the ‘*Wandering Widow Waltz*’.”

He glanced back at the gurneys, a peaceful expression on his face.

“Do have a seat and make yourselves at home, won’t you? I don’t think our... *neighbors*...will mind the company.”

He chuckled again, repeating that obscene phlegmy rumble, and began his tale...

“Edward Caruthers the third was old school and old money. He was also something of a recluse in his later years, preferring to remain at home, surrounded by the possessions he’d accumulated during his lifetime. His wife Dorothea was one of those possessions, a “trophy wife” much younger than he. He believed she would serve as his caretaker once old age settled in and took its toll on him.

Dorothea was a very intelligent lady who’d seen Edward’s proposal as the means to secure her future. She had no romantic notions at all but managed to play the role of a doting wife quite well while biding her time.

Unfortunately for Dorothea, Edward’s health was a *bit* more robust than she’d anticipated, and he showed no signs of reaching the end of the line anytime soon. Becoming impatient, she announced a desire over dinner one evening...”

“Edward dear, I would like to take some formal ballroom dance lessons. I’ve always loved dancing, but I know your knees won’t allow you to participate with me.”

“Dance, eh? Not interested, never was, but if you want to have a go at it, I can have Wilson investigate some schools, try and find something reputable for you.”

“I’ve seen advertisements for the Tomas Montague ballroom method, and it looks rather intriguing.”

“Oh? Well then, go ahead and set up an appointment so you can see what they have to offer.”

“Thank you, darling. Would you care for more wine?”

“Old Edward didn’t know that ‘*Tomas Montague*’ was an alias for a con man named Tommy Valdez that Dorothea knew in the old days, when *she* was still known as Dasha Petrovitch. He *also* didn’t know that she thought Tommy might be able to help her speed up Edward’s path to...well, to that gurney right back there, heh heh. Too bad Dorothea didn’t realize that Tommy had *other* ideas of his own. Just as she planned to use him to rid herself of Edward and inherit his fortune, Tommy schemed to win her over, marry her, and wind up with Edward’s fortune to enjoy for himself. It didn’t take too long at all for her private lessons to become *very* private indeed, *heh heh heh...*”

“Whew, that was something else!” Tommy sighed, rolling over to his side of the bed and reaching for his cigarettes on the night stand.

“It sure was... I’d forgotten how good that feels.” Dorothea replied.

“Guess the old boy isn’t much in the sack, eh?”

“His get up and go got up and went a long time ago, believe me. Oh, if only I could rid myself of the old goat, we could live the good life.”

“Yeah, I wouldn’t mind laying in the sun on the Riviera instead of twirling those old broads around at the school, believe you me, sugar!”

“I’ve been thinking. Edward has a bad heart and carries a tin of pills that he must take when it acts up. His tin looks a lot like the one filled with mints that I keep in my bag. I wonder...”

“Don’t you think he’d notice if you switched the tins?”

“If he’s having an emergency, I’m not sure, he’d probably just grab for his pills.”

Tommy took a deep drag of his cigarette and looked at the ceiling, thinking. If he could get Dasha to bump off the old coot and score his dough, then he could really put the moves on her and line his own pockets.

“How often does he have these emergencies and need those pills?”

“Rarely,” she pouted. “He avoids excitement, and he doesn’t let himself get overstimulated. That’s what would make him need the pills, if his heart began racing out of control.”

“Hmm... maybe an armed burglar breaking into the house and pulling a gun on him might get his old engine running?”

She rubbed his upper arm, “Now where are we going to find a big, strong burglar to break in to my house?”

Tommy stubbed out his cigarette and rolled back on top of her.

“Let’s see what we can do...”

“Yep, old Dorothea and Tommy had quite a romp, using each other in more ways than one. They planned to have Tommy stage the break in on a night when Edward’s butler Wilson had the night off, so it would just be the two of them in the house. With Edward gone, Dorothea would take her young trophy husband Tommy to the tropics, not knowing he’d already planned to poison her and make it look like tainted food,

leaving him the grieving, wealthy widower. All she had to do was to switch the tin Edward kept in his dinner jacket while he showered and then keep him occupied so he wouldn't notice..."

"Wilson, tonight's dinner was truly spectacular. You've outdone yourself this evening!" Edward sighed as he pushed his empty plate away.

"Thank you, sir. It was a new recipe I'd found and thought you might enjoy."

"What time is your show this evening? You'll be off soon, I imagine?"

"Yes sir, once I clear away the dishes, I'll have time to catch the train into the city with ample time before the performance begins."

"A well-deserved treat, to be sure, don't you agree my dear?"

"Oh yes, do enjoy yourself Wilson."

Wilson thanked them both and set about cleaning up as Edward and Dorothea moved into the parlor where she poured them both an after-dinner aperitif.

"You seem preoccupied this evening, Dorothea... is anything the matter?"

"No, dear Edward, not at all. I'm just tired, that's all."

"I'm not surprised, what with how often you go off to your dance lessons these days. Quite the workout, it seems."

She struggled to keep a straight face. *Oh, if you only knew*, she thought.

Edward settled into his wing chair and opened the first of the evening papers that Wilson had set out on the end table beside his chair.

*Just a little longer now*, she thought, an hour or two to insure they were isolated and Tommy would stage the break in as planned. The tin had been switched during his shower and he'd never checked beyond patting the pocket as he always did to make sure he had it with him.

"Darling, would it distract you if I turned on the television? I'm not in the mood for reading."

"No, not at all, go right ahead." He said from behind the Times.

Dorothea tuned to a public broadcast station, knowing he'd approve of her choice. She didn't care what was on, she just wanted the sound of the television to cover any noise Tommy might make when he entered through the window she'd left unlocked for him. She wished she could have a cigarette, but instead nervously opened the tin of mints in her bag

and let one melt, frowning at the bitter aftertaste. She glanced at her empty glass and realized the aperitif wasn't an appropriate choice to have along with a mint.

Time seemed to move slowly, her anticipation ramping up. She tried to watch the show, to occupy her mind, but she couldn't stop looking at the antique Grandfather clock in the corner of the room.

*Where is he?* she wondered.

The door to the parlor *finally* opened and Wilson walked in as Dorothea gasped. Edward folded his paper and set it down.

"Ah, Wilson. Is it done?"

"Yes sir. He's unconscious, and I took the liberty of securing his hands and feet. The police have been summoned and are on the way."

"Wha...?" Dorothea gasped, suddenly feeling flushed, her heart racing.

"My dear Dorothea, did you think me so feeble and foolish that I wouldn't have your '*friend*' and his dance school investigated? Once I uncovered his past, I had you followed and know exactly what kind of dancing *you* were doing. I also learned of your plan and had Wilson ready and waiting for your friend's arrival."

She was perspiring freely now, her heart pounding. Was this her nerves? She began feeling lightheaded. Edward smiled.

"Oh, and when you switched the tin with my heart pills, you couldn't have known that I had Wilson supply *both* tins with my medication. That way, if I needed one, I'd be fine, however if someone with a strong heart like yours should accidentally take one, well...the result would be catastrophic. Sadly for you, neither Wilson nor I *could* have known you'd switched them, so the police will find mine filled with your mints, and yours with my medication. I believe your autopsy will show death resulting from a myocardial infarction, my dear."

"Oh, and yes...that's *exactly* what they found during her autopsy, folks...her heart literally beat itself to death, *heh heh heh*." Myron interjected.

Dorothea was now gasping for air looking frantically from Edward to Wilson, pointing at herself, silently beseeching them for help. Wilson looked on, his expression impassive, as Edward began laughing.

“Oh, you foolish gold digger. You thought yourself so wise, didn’t you?”

Dorothea fall back on the sofa, her erratic heart rhythm finally slowing, then stopping altogether as Edward brayed laughter. He laughed so hard, he felt his own chest tighten and took out his tin, dry swallowing two of the pills within.

“Wha...? These taste different, sweet...” the seizure hit then, the force driving Edward back in his wing chair as Wilson looked on with approval.

“Indeed sir, as well they should. Those *are* your wife’s mints, you see. Madam did not know that you’d originally left your estate to *me* prior to your marriage, nor was she aware that you’d never changed your will... but, *I* was. Your generosity is highly appreciated, I can assure you, sir.”

Wilson smiled as Edward slouched, dead in his seat. He’d left nothing to chance, knowing the police would follow the trail of betrayal, Edward’s discovery of Dorothea’s plan, and her *own* error after switching the tins, effectively killing them both. Tommy’s testimony to the police blaming it all on her would close their case. Hearing cars arriving in the driveway, Wilson walked to the door while preparing an appropriately shocked expression to greet the police with.

“And, there you have it. This time, the butler *DID* do it!” Myron cackled loudly, an even *more* horrific sound than before.

Edward and Dorothea, take a bow...oh, I suppose that might be difficult, strapped to your gurneys back there, hahahahaha!

I so hope you enjoyed my tale of terror and treachery. *Do* come back again soon, won’t you? Each day brings me a new client with their *own* story to tell!”

THE END

(for now)