

Guthrie François Swartz

By

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Guthrie, or Gut, as most people called him was a romantic sort of fellow - well read, steeped in theater and an unabashed lover of the crooners of the forties and fifties. He had a Victorian nature, full of etiquette, pomp and ceremony, often bowing deeply as he opened doors for a lady. Yet, for all of his romanticism, he was alone.

While he would like to be able to say that he had not found the right woman for him, the truth of the matter is that he had found some, actually many, but they would have nothing to do with him. It seems that his penchant for all things romantic and ascription to pomp and ceremony, which could only be characterized as a storybook courtship technique was viewed by most people who knew him, as not just delusional but goofy. Weird, some said.

Undeterred in his demeanor, however, Gut, as a result of poor brain chemistry or, perhaps, having fallen down a lot as a child, seemed to either gloss over such criticism about his behavior, or was simply oblivious altogether to the comments coming his way. Instead, continuing the cultivation of his courtly ways was an obsession—another symptom that his synapses were firing improperly. But, because he was considered harmless, most of Rockdale’s citizens left Gut to his own little world and went on about their business.

While in the Rockdale Public Library one day, Gut met the new librarian’s assistant, Marion, becoming instantly smitten. (Gut, often interpreted any woman’s common courtesies or willingness to say something to him as a signal of their interest in a pursuing a deeper relationship with him.) Hence, after Marion told him, “Be sure to return these in seven days or there will be a twenty-five cent per day late fee,” ending with a courteous smile, Gut assumed she had sent up a *I’m interested in you*, flag.

He became so smitten with Fair Marion—as he now referred to her- that he began returning books on a daily basis. To which, Fair Marion exclaimed, “You are a remarkable reader,” when Gut laid ‘War and Peace’ on the counter the very day after he had checked it out. But, Gut only heard, *you are remarkable*, and gave her a debonair smile. He bowed deep saying, “Thank you for noticing mademoiselle.” Filled with a burst of newfound confidence, he seized on the opening and asked. “Might I come by and see you sometime?”

Marion flinched, and turned her back on Gut, putting ‘War and Peace’ on the return rack. With a blush in her cheeks, she turned back explaining, “Well Guthrie, that notion does seem a tad premature to me, since we barely know each other.”

Gut’s demeanor wilted like a drought bitten rose, almost perceptibly, until he realized that she had not actually said no. “Well, Miss. Marion, just how much time do you suppose is necessary to get to know someone well enough to allow him to come calling?”

“Two months.” Marion curtly replied, as she focused intently on a pile of forms to be filed, feigning reviewing them.

“Two months? Is that two months from when you first met the person, or, do you mean two months from today?”

Marion took off her glasses and let them hang from the gold chain around her neck. “Well, I suppose that would mean from the day I first met the guy, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes. Yes I would my Fair Lady.” With her confirmation in hand, Gut hustled back to his room at the Cheap Sleep Boarding House, double stepping up the two flights of steps to his floor, which left him gasping for air and wishing he hadn’t rushed so. But, he was in a hurry to calculate the precise day he’d met the Fair Marion and mark his calendar when the two months will have elapsed.

After marking the date on the calendar, the planning began—and grandiose planning it was. Elaborate planning it was, for this was not just any woman, thought Gut. This was *The Woman*. He spent the better part of the remaining week (week three of the two month waiting period) laying out an elaborate plan that would prepare him for T-Day (The Day).

During the remainder of the waiting period, Gut continued to make his daily trips to the library, returning unread books and replacing them with titles sure to impress Fair Marion. As planned, he began staying longer with each visit, and later into the evenings, checking out his books near closing time. After leaving he would lurk in the bushes nearby and wait for Fair Marion to begin her walk home. At a far enough distance to be unnoticed, Gut followed her home, then, hid in the shrubs until all the lights in the house were turned off, trying to determine which of the second-floor rooms was Marion’s.

Gut spent a considerable amount of time devoted to preparation for the rapidly approaching day, the day when he and Fair Marion would become a thing, and hopefully, in time, a couple. During the final week, Gut rehearsed his plan and during the late night hours traced and retraced the staging necessary to pull off his grand plan with perfection, believing that if he did, no woman could resist his romantic advances.

Anxiety was building though, and Gut’s nervousness manifested itself in a strange itchy rash - one that he had never experienced. Marion noticed the itching when it first began five days from her long forgotten two month waiting period end date. It first began as a slight scratching over the forearms, but with each passing day Gut was scratching incessantly in all manner of places, signaling to her that Gut was experiencing some sort of serious condition warranting generous amounts of anti-bacterial hand cleaner after handling anything he touched.

Finally, *T-Day* arrived. With his rash in full bloom and a heart full of love, he put the finishing touches on his preparations by renting a costume used in the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*. He particularly liked the long feathery plume jutting high over the wide purple brimmed hat. Gut thought the regalness of his dress would surely be pleasing to Marion’s eye.

The digital clock clicked over to ten pm, time for Gut to execute his plan. Standing before the mirror he adjusted the hat to a rakish tilt, picked up a case and set out to Fair Marion’s. By 10:20

he had arrived at the white picket fence along the sidewalk of her home and continued walking to the far side of the property line. He was alone on the walkway. Most folks in this town were early to rise.

Gut tucked himself into the shadows of a large bush and watched the lights in fair Marion's house sequentially go out - first the front rooms on the main floor, then the rooms farther to the back. After a few more minutes, one by one, the upstairs lights extinguished. "Perfect." He mumbled.

He squeezed between a bush and the picket fence, then, tip-toed down the side of the house to where he'd concluded was Fair Marion's room. He opened the case and took out the Ukulele and a bag full of marbles. After gently strumming a few notes and humming a few bars for warm up, he took a handful of marbles and tossed them up against the window to her room. Within seconds after the glass orbs clattered against the window pane, a light beamed out from behind the curtains and he heard a muffled, "What da hellll?"

Gut began strumming and singing his serenade, which, like the flip of a switch, silenced all night creatures mating calls, and set all nearby dogs and cat to howling mightily. As he gazed upward at the window, he saw the curtain rip back. Encouraged, he raised his voice another decibel and strummed a little more stridently. He assumed the silhouetted face was Fair Marion's and threw her a kiss, then the curtain closed. Undeterred and filled with hope he continued his serenade hoping for Fair Marion to come running out of the house into his arms.

Instead, the window was thrown open violently and through the curtains came a high pitched scratchy snarl, "I'll serenade your little ass you pervert."

Then, a beam of light from a high-powered flashlight slapped him in the face, blinding him, causing him to avert his eyes. His eyes adjusted just in time to see the shotgun barrel jutting out the window and the discharge flame that he was sure was going to hit him directly in the face. Gut reached up and felt for the plume and found it missing.

The shooter reloaded and poked the barrel back out of the window. Gut threw the ukulele up in the air, spun on his heels for the full blown adrenaline juiced sprint of his life. It would have impressed even the most seasoned Olympic Track and Field official. The shotgun blast blew the Uke into a bazillion splinters raining down on Gut's retreat.

As he zigged and zagged military style to avoid a direct hit, Gut looked back, and ran into a most unforgiving one-hundred-year-old swamp oak tree, knocking him out cold.

A beam of light surveyed the lawn for any evidence of the perpetrator and stopped on the purple clad form in bright yellow leggings splayed out at the foot of the old oak. Marion, looking over her mother's shoulder, said. "My god, mom, did you kill him?"

"Goodness no, my dear, the damned fool ran into that tree." Marion's mom said with a smile.

"Will he be alright? Should we call an ambulance?"

The mother closed the window and propped the single shot twelve gauge back beside her bed.
“Nah, that riffraff will be gone by morning.”

It was over three months before Marion saw Gut again. With a courteous smile, she said.
“Why, Mr. Guthrie, you seem to have significant late fees on these books.”