

Gus and the Imperfect Harmony

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"It's Christmastime across the magical airwaves.

Welcome to the:

Shadow's Swingin' Singin' Show.

This is Shad the Swedish Elf, your talented tomte, on a perfect December day. We are coming to you live, from the rockin' mythical town of Tomteberget, nestled in the very closest invisible mountain to the North Pole."

"We have a great interview for you today with this up-and-coming tomte."

"Well, Gustaff III, what brings you here today?"

"Well, I go by Gus, actually. And I, um, am trying something new."

"Yes, that's right. That's our motto: 'Step through and do something new.' It is what all tomte should aspire to do. What makes your quest so special?"

"I wanted to learn what it's like to be on the air. It's a talent I might need someday." Gus finished his thought so no one could hear, "because I really want to be the greatest tomte of all time..."

"What was that?" Shad was leaning across the desk to his guest, hoping to hear something he could make sensational.

“I meant to say that at Christmas, we tomtar look for ways to be kind and I have a good story to share, about a human being kind. It all started that night not too long ago when I made an...um...rather large mistake. I took on the winds while I was at a farm in Kalla Dalan and...”

“Took on the winds, did you? And you’re still here to tell about it? That must have been quite a stand-off. Who won?” Shad turned on the studio’s Snow Globe Communicator, the SGC, with recorded audience laughter and just as quickly, turned it off again.

“I did, in the long run.” Gus started to relax as this story warmed his heart. “Not so much out-blowing the wind as much as finding a way to calm the animals while the storm was raging. You see, the human, Old Jonasson, on the Jonasson’s Farm, sings to his animals and during that storm, I learned that by sharing his song...”

“Wait, you sing too? Well, this we have to hear. Better yet, the Tomte Tellers are in town for the Winter Festival. How about we follow you as a ‘fresh new voice?’”

“And that’s all we have for you folks on the airwaves tonight. This is Shad of the Swingin’ Singin’ Show signing off. Until next time, “Step through and do something new!”

“And we’re off,” Shad signaled to his SGC technical crew.

“Gus, this is going to be great! Kind of a reality...”

“Wait! No. I mean, all I did was share his song with...”

“Got it. Now, you can share it with the world. I’ll have my tomtar set it up with your tomtar and you’ll be a hit! Gotta run.”

And with that, the broadcaster was on his way out of the room, switching off the microphones, which looked like upside-down ice cream cones, with a practiced hand as he raced by. The sign *'Off the Air'* held a steady green as Gus shrank out of the studio, about 2 inches shorter than his very short self.

“What have I done? That’s not what I said. I sing old Jonasson’s song ... to the animals ... I mean, I think I can sing, but ... It’s about Old Jonasson’s song, not me...” he grumbled. “Then again, how bad can it be? Who knows, maybe I’ll be good at it,” he said with timid hope, trying to balance his pride and his quest to share a story of kindness.

The next day, Gus arrived at the backdoor of the historic theater in Tomteberget for the only practice before the event. He watched the ‘a cappella’ group members take their places as he settled down on a crate backstage to listen.

“Ah,” he said with a sigh. “So much beauty. All those songs performed without a single instrument, just their glorious voices.” He sighed again in warm anticipation.

Gus caught the eye of Petre warming up in the tenor section, a tomte he knew from other classes they had both been in. He nodded back, thankful to have a friendly face in the group.

The tomte at the theater’s piano motioned for Gus to take his place center stage. Gus turned a million shades of red as he tried not to be noticed, looking down for the dot marking his spot on the floor. For practice this afternoon, the pianist played a medley of all the songs they would be singing, blending one into the next as the choir got ready. Then he played the scales for each section.

With all heads nodding in time, he played the first two bars of music and stopped as the harmonies took over from there.

The room seemed to swell as if the dancing notes had created colorful swirls of harmonies rising from the simple line of music. Altos sang the melody, and sopranos took off to the higher ranges, spiraling into the heavens. The tenors were next, singing just below the simple lines. And the bass voices added in, resonating in the lower register of notes.

Gus was inspired. The tomte closed his eyes, and a tear dripped down from one corner of his eye. It was ethereal.

The voices carried on, and the high sopranos soared even further into the clouds.

Gus was wavering with the music, enjoying the rhythm and swaying as he was taking in every note.

The group of 16 singers nodded back and forth to each other as the practice turned into a 'jam session,' each tomte adding their own take on the song in turn.

Gus watched as it came around, tapped his boot, and got ready to add the favorite sound he would make while walking through the woods or in the vast farmland. He fluted his lips, moistened them, and fluted again, reaching for the notes, ready to blast out in time.

The time was perfect. It was coming around to him. He was ready...

and then he wasn't sure...

and then he was ready to run!

A boom of thunder shook the hall. Lights flickered off and on, the voices stopped.

With a quick nod to each other, one by one, the Tomte Tellers disappeared while they still could before the electricity in the air made it impossible.

Gus was saved...for the moment.

He chose to appear at the Jonasson's farm and talk things over with his two friends, Margot and Henesey, the North Swedish Horses.

"Hej, mina vackra", he said gently, smoothing their soft noses as they reached over the half-stall doors. "Hello, my pretty ones. I see old Jonasson has you ready for the night."

He was at home with the animals, that had no expectation of him other than the care he would give them.

The short tomte paced the short, clean aisle between them and Bessie the cow, with his hands crossed behind his back as he mumbled aloud.

"I know I was telling Shad about the marvelous effect of Jonasson's song...how did I get trapped into being a singer, I ask you? Yes, of course, I wanted to be on the air... but this story could help other tomtar. It is more important that the story be told."

The long noses followed him back and forth with earnest caring in their eyes.

He counted the steps he was taking in his favorite red boots as he mumbled some more. With his mouth twisted up into one cheek beneath his pointy white beard, he walked over to Margot as she leaned her head down to his three-foot height. Gus stood with his back against her door, so her head stretched over his shoulder and stroked her neck and cheeks as he spoke. "Tell me what to do. They think I can sing."

Margot brought her dark brown head up and looked at him as if to laugh.

"Ok, so you and I both know I love to sing to you, as long as no humans or tomtar can hear me," he said, turning red in the face.

Heneseey joined with a nod of her golden head and her white mane fluttered and settled back down as Gus walked over and stroked her thick neck.

“Now, what do I do?”

“It’s getting late, my girls. I’ll let you sleep. After all, a song is no more than five minutes, right? It will all be over in a mere five minutes,” he said, sliding down to the floor and leaning against the stall door. “Only five minutes,” he mumbled, drifting off to sleep.

The morning came, and Gus was looking forward to being done with the nervous anxiety, the anticipation of being in front of tomtar. Stretching his arms over his head, he straightened his bright blue coat over his belly. He pulled his precious red sock hat down to his eyebrows and over his blondish-white hair, then wiggled his wide mouth from side to side, his beard moving with it.

“So long, my friends. This might be the end of Gus the tomte and his dream of being the greatest tomte of all times...ohhhh!”

Bessie the cow let out a long ‘mooow’, to lend support but Gus was too busy moping to respond, and then he disappeared.

The tomte’s favorite place to go in Tomteberget was the local Smorgasbord run by a cook who seemed to have just the right thing to say when Gus needed a little thought to consider. And Gus needed a treat this morning.

He stood in line and, on his turn, asked for a thick slice of Swedish Cardamom Braid and icing, hoping to see his friend, the owner, baker, and cook. But Gus learned he was also preparing for the night’s events, with a spread of delicious treats. So, Gus sat and drizzled

more white vanilla icing on his slice of sweet bread than usual, and drummed his fingers on the table, hoping the day would disappear.

When it was clear *that* was not going to happen, he cleaned off his table, placed his dishes in the tub by the door, put his tray on the stack, and wandered out. Without thinking, he drifted to the path surrounding the town of Tomteberget, known as the scenic route. The waterfalls filled him with their joyous sounds, and the park area gave him a sense of peace. He smiled, looking out across Tomte Dallon and the reindeer feeding at the lake's edge on the valley's far side, and passed the familiar trail leading to Tomte Hall, finally arriving at the historic event venue. He took his time walking to the small theater, trying to whistle as if nothing was unusual about this day.

Gus quietly slipped in the door marked 'Backstage' and stayed on the fringe of the commotion as the Tomte Tellers got ready. The piano gave the background music as people filed in, filling the event area.

Once the singers were on stage, Gus dressed in complimentary attire to create the right ambiance and theme.

He stood behind the curtain at the edge of the stage and wiped the sweat from his brow with the sleeve of his bright blue coat.

"Maybe they'll forget about me. That would be super ok with me... oh, yes, yes ..."

With a gentle tap on the shoulder, the stagehand pointed and said, "You're up."

Quaking in his boots, Gus walked to the mark on the floor at center stage at the very front of the chorus. He warmed up and fluted his lips, trying them out as his body rocked with the tune.

At the nod of the directing tomte, he started...

Gus's notes screeched a little and sounded like a kazoo, using his strange, creaky voice, pushing it through his pursed lips.

The whole crowd was stunned, and some tomtar started to giggle. Even the choir stopped singing.

Petre was in the tenor section, and he moved to the very side and started a hremn and created a *bop, bop, bop*. Another singer, a printer from the bass section, stepped to the side and dropped into a *bee-p-da, bee-p-da, bee-p-da*. And with that encouragement, Gus started adding his odd voice to theirs.

Shad, the radio personality, was in the audience with a microphone, sticking it under the noses of many a tomte, hoping to catch their reaction to the strange noise coming from Gus.

"What's your reaction to this ridiculous sound? No comment huh?"

"And what about you, You are an older lady tomte that looks like you can distinguish good music from noise, what do you think?"

"Out of my way dear boy. This is one of the most extraordinary events of the year. A tomte trying something new, and willing to be in front of us all. Remarkable!"

The next tomte in the row gently pushed him farther away, adding, "We all are here for the animals, so this is way out of our comfort zone. I don't think I could ever do what that Gus guy is doing."

The next one was a bigger tomte and was able to guide Shad back into the aisle and to the back of the theater. "I want to hear him, too!"

Then the printer in his deep voice overrode what Petre and Gus were doing with a bom, bum de de de bum bum. The audience was hushed. The singers were stilled, looking toward the printer and nodding their heads with his count.

A tomte from the crowd started with the soft and mesmerizing song like a beautiful hum and another across the theater stood up, adding to the strength of the first.

The printer recognized the song as the one he had heard about tossed down the valley during the thundersnow storm earlier that month. He transitioned his sound to back up the song as other tomtar recognized it as the saving sounds they had used in the farms under their care.

With that as the baseline, Petre sang the refrain as some of the 'a cappella' singers took the cue on their own, adding another layer of notes of the repeated words.

Petre nudged Gus back to center stage as they heralded him as the tomte who passed on the calming human's song for all the tomtar to use.

As Gus found comfort in the song himself, he sang ever more confidently, and the chorus followed.

It was a free-for-all! The choir ran all kinds of scales and harmonies and the tomte in the audience filled in the bottom. The room was electric, and no one wanted it to end.

But at the printer's deep voice creating a space again, the high sopranos finished with a flourish and quieted. The sopranos did likewise, letting the altos control the melody. One by one, they too, dropped off, leaving the tenors to carry the tune. And the crowd quieted with the pure joy of it all.

Petre and his fellow tenors did their quartet harmony, letting it fill the air, then stopped, handing it off to the bass section. The tremendously low voices grandly ended on a note so low that the resonance hung in the still auditorium for a full count of 12.

Thunderous applause filled the space.

The crowd exploded with cheers and clapping until their hands hurt. The smiles were huge as the tomtar nudged each other, agreeing on the tremendous moment they had just been a part of.

By this time, Shad had made his way backstage and erupted from the left wing, his voice booming through the speakers.

“And THAT is how it’s done, *mina vänner*, my friends. Anything to add, young tomte?”

Gus sighed contentedly, “It’s all about the animals and...”

“The animals will love what we bring home to them from this night,” Shad said, finishing Gus’s sentence.

“Maybe being a radio personality is not terribly important on my tomte journey after all,” Gus thought, smiling and shaking his head.

“I knew all along that this tomte was something special. Gustaff !!! is one to watch! Step through and do something new! That’s right. And you heard it first from Shadow the Showman, right here on the tomte airwaves!

Merriest of Christmastimes to you all!

Shad of the **Shadow’s Swingin’ Singin’ Show** signing off!”