



Gutted

Anna Madorsky

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A troubled woman is fast to accept the vicious shortcomings of her new love in the startling psychological thriller Gutted, the first book in a series.

In Anna Madorsky's exciting thriller *Gutted*, a troubled woman enters into a dangerous romance.

While on her way to her favorite late-night diner, insomnia-plagued Elliott stumbles upon a handsome, mysterious stranger, Jason. He is quick to make her acquaintance; at the diner, he recommends that she order a cup of chamomile tea instead of her usual hot cocoa. He seems intrigued by Elliott, who, in turn, is fast to overshare the details of her life with him. But while Jason claims to work in finance, Elliott soon discovers that he's less ordinary than this. Indeed, he uses the act of murder as his sinister remedy for the occasional migraine.

The novel is rear gazing: Elliott recalls conversations with Jason and her therapist while formulating plans or talking with other people. And in a comical start to the narrative, Elliott gives the disclaimer that even though she is in love with a serial killer, she believes that she is a reliable narrator. It's an unconvincing declaration. Still, Elliott is intriguing as she shares the story of how she fell in love with Jason in spite of his dark past and presumed future kills.

The story's progression is swift and energetic; the chapters rarely exceed four pages. They focus on scenes, and they jerk from one to the next—reflective of Elliott's rash decisions regarding her relationship with Jason and of Jason's own impulsiveness. Excitement is generated via marriage proposals decided over coffee and kills chosen at will.

Elliott is a fascinating heroine. She's well versed in philosophy and incorporates references to it in her discussions with Jason, her internal monologues, and her imaginary, comical consultations with her therapist. Her continual inner struggles are well fleshed out here and elsewhere.

But some of Elliott's references are vague, as with her repeated declaration that she has been gutted before. One of her strongest friendships is with a man she met online—a placeholder as a father figure. There are suggestions that she has experienced trauma and that her relationships with her father and stepmother are strained, but these threads are underdeveloped.

Nonetheless, it is clear that Elliott is emotionally unstable and that she has cause for seeking out therapy. In contrast, Jason is underdeveloped. While Elliott develops apparent apathy toward anyone but him, coming to believe that theirs is the only relationship that matters, he remains an unknown quantity. This suits Elliott, who is content to know little, but is a point of slight frustration for the audience as the novel progresses toward its end.

In the romantic thriller *Gutted*, a traumatized woman learns the effects of giving up too much trust too early in a relationship.

ERIN NESBIT (May 16, 2023)

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