

The Life and Times of Altcee

Anonymous

Being the true and marvelous story of the life of a young guileless boy growing up in a small destitute village under the stern sway of a wicked father, told in the most plain and simple prose without use of cliché or exaggeration.

Chapter 1: Altcee buys the bread. Altcee had the most vicious father who was always inventing the most perverse punishments for the wretched little boy. Take for example the story of the bread. This was a most one of the most terrifying experiences in the weekly life of Altcee. And that while he had so much to do. There were so many comic books to be read and so many hours to invest in lying on the carpet of his room doing nothing, that every time he thought of the bread experience, he shuddered with horror. How could he have been so unfortunate to have had a father with such a twisted turn of mind.

The facts are the following. Each Sunday - every Sunday - it had become his duty to go and fetch the bread from the village baker. Altcee had to walk the long tortuous route to the baker's shop every Sunday morning to bring back the bread for the following week. His mother liked this particular bread very much and it was a pity that the torment his father inflicted upon him should be associated with one of his mother's rare pleasures, eating her slice of raisin bread in the morning with her coffee. You can appreciate then the predicament in which Altcee found himself.

Our story here concerns one particular Sunday in the middle of February. The weather can be so adverse in the middle of winter but I leave that to your

imagination and shall say no more about it. Altcee donned his boots and jackets and set off before lunch to the village, a long, long way off. Never again in his whole life was he to have such an experience. First there was the descent into the valley. I shall not describe the horrors as the hours passed. You would not believe me. And then came the turn towards the east and the long arduous climb to the heights where the road joined with the one which led to the savage northern steppes. Here he was always frightened because of the barbaric tribes which were known to descend upon the unsuspecting children of the valley peoples. Here was the point at which he risked literally his life and limb. This time he survived without incident. Luck and the gods were with him. He had a relatively easy path after that. Only a few hours arduous walk - Altcee, it must be said, was a very fast walker - would bring him to his destination. There remained the loathsome experience of buying the bread. The bicker with the baker was something that the sensitive mind and soul of Altcee could not abide. And during the winter months the baker was particularly in bad disposition.

Altcee nevertheless survived that and began the long trek back to his house which was an unending way to the west of the village. He arrived exhausted. All his loathsome father could say was that it was lucky for him that he had come back alive. Otherwise he would have been punished.

Chapter 2: Altcee cleans his room. As usual Altcee was reading a book while picking his nose instead of cleaning up his room as he was supposed to do before going to bed. There was bound to be an exchange of words in the next few minutes once his mother came up and found that the floor was littered with what can only be described as a mess. As a matter of fact the situation was worse than I had expected. It soon became clear to me after examining attentively the height of the ceiling that there was something amiss. Indeed what had happened was the floor had become so covered with rubbish that there was a distinct impression that the ceiling had come down a little. So all we could do to remedy the situation was to procure a shovel and a large truck and hire some men to scoop the junk out of the front window immediately into the truck below. After a week of hard work, we finally reached the carpet. We found it indeed in very good condition which was a bit of a miracle but I am not out to worry about such things and I went to bed happy, with the feeling that for once I had accomplished something

worthwhile.

Chapter 3: Altcee's secret fear. There once was a little boy who lived in a big house near the lunatic asylum, known to the inhabitants of the street as the nut house. The little boy was a bit scared of this big imposing edifice because his father had always told him since his most tender infancy that in fact he should be living there and not in the big house with his father and mother. He was a strange little boy with the most unusual behaviour, a behaviour which manifested itself every day in the most ordinary circumstances, much to the chagrin of the father, who wanted nothing so much as to have a normal little boy, or little girl, like the other fathers who lived in the street. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the ways in which the boy reacted to the usual circumstances which confronted him in his everyday life. For example, there was the story of the six french francs, which is a very small sum of money as every one will admit. It is about one dollar, a sum which is not worth mentioning, a sum which is hardly worth picking up from the street. Well, this was the sum of money which our little boy left strewn about the oak chest which is in the entrance of the house. It was picked up inadvertently by the father during one of the numerous occasions which he had to walk past the chest going in or out of the house. As soon as the sum was seen to be missing by the little boy he raised the greatest fuss. Tears flowed from his eyes and the loudest wails were heard coming from his room. He was in hysterics and the poor parents were forced to call the hospital and cry for help. The gentle doctors came and put the little boy in a straight-jacket for the evening, an evening of peace for the father and mother. Many other examples could be given, but this one should suffice to show that the little boy was in fact not quite normal, to say the very least.

Chapter 4: Wherein Altcee is Unable to Sleep Disaster had struck once more and this time in the most insidious manner. The shrew which lived at the end of the street decided to throw a large party in honour of a visiting relative and from all around the neighbourhood the guests flocked to attend. Altcee did not know what to do. Should he stick it out or give up and move into the hotel which was several miles away, distant enough that he would not be bothered by the noise. Or should he just join the fun. Altcee hesitated for most of the afternoon. He was in a quandary. What should he do! What could he do. He was really too old to join the group. There was probably in the entire crowd of guests not one

individual older than three. He would feel really out of place. After all, he was over four times that in years. He was also a little short on funds at the moment since someone had stolen a large sum of money which he had carefully stocked away on the chest in the hallway. Imagine that! What a blow that was. He had to cut down on all of his expenses for the entire week and he was still not in a position to spent too freely.

So there was only one solution. He would have to stick it out. How horrible it would be. He knew what shrews were like. The noisiest of creatures. Once the party got going he was really going to suffer. But that was the way it would have to be. He had no alternative but take a sleeping pill, put some wax in his ears and stuff his head under the pillows. The worst thing was that everyone else on the street was completely insensitive to noise. They could sleep through an atomic war, or even a shrew party. He could complain to no one. Not even the elderly gentleman across the road with the big dog, who was usually very touchy about pandemonium. They would be all asleep, even during the height of the party.

So Altcee went to bed, with a heavy heart. And then it all started. Worse than he had anticipated. Horrible! Even with his head under the pillow and with all of the windows closed, the loud peals of laughter and reverberations of conversation kept surrounding him in the most intolerable way. There was nothing he could do but suffer, and suffer he did, all through the night, into the wee hours of the morning as the party continued and continued and continued. It seemed that it would never end. Finally the last guest left the abode of Mr. and Mrs Shrew, and silence fell over the street and the exhausted body of Altcee. He sighed with relief. There was silence. He fell asleep. He had suffered misery and torment, hell itself and he was exhausted.

Chapter 5: Altcee studies Russian There once was a little boy named Altcee¹ who spent the entire evening dutifully studying his Russian lessons². Because he wanted to become the Russian ambassador when he grew up he knew that he would have to spend much time studying his Russian grammar and

¹His full name is Altcee Alexander Madorski

²That is, most of the time he just dreamed

vocabulary. There was however only one problem with all this. His father³ insisted on using the computer which caused a lot of noise⁴ and he could not work properly with the noise so he had to concentrate even more and this gave him headaches, impossible headaches. He could not even think his headaches were so bad. So he gave his father⁵ a nasty look and continued writing with his red and white pen which he had received as a gift for Christmas, not from his father for his father had refused to give him a Christmas gift since he had been very rude and had refused to rake the dead leaves in the Autumn⁶. All of this is so to speak an introduction to the real subject of this story which is not in fact Altcee himself but the cat. The real hero of the story is in fact the cat. We have not chosen to start with the most obvious character of the story, the cat⁷, but have chose a secondary character the son of the husband of the owner of the cat.

Chapter 6: Altcee does his homework. As usual, punctually on the minute of the eleventh hour of the last day before school, Altcee decided to start his homework. Since the desk was cluttered with all sorts of what is normally called junk, he sprawled himself out on the carpet, spread the books in front of him, and took pen in hand. He yawned once or twice, rolled over on his back gazing at the light for a few minutes and then with all deliberate haste, commenced to work. First to French history. He always began with the easy subjects and left the harder ones to the last, when his delicate little mind was warmed up and operating at maximum efficiency. But this time, at the very start he was stumped. The first question was to occupy him for a greater part of the evening. It was a profound one, requiring breadth of thought and a deep sense of European history. "Who is buried in Grant's tomb?" What first of all intrigued him was what Grant had to do with French history. If the question had concerned Napoleon, he would have been able to answer in a jiffy. There was then a deep and subtle connection between France and America which had not been so far discussed in the curriculum, something beyond La Fayette. He started to write but the words had no inner coherence. He could not seem to get the logic precise. There was only one thing to

3A very nice man indeed

4The fan did not work correctly

5The very nice man we have already mentioned

6That is, the autumn of 1989

7The cat was in fact much more intelligent than **censored**

do in such distressing circumstances. He bellowed out for help from his mother. He knew that she was a wizard in French history and would be able to immediately answer the question. But she was stumped also. Who could it have been. Who was Grant anyway. That was the first question to be answered. Altcee was a bit shocked. After all they had not studied Grant yet in French history. After an hour or so of reflection, consulting the encyclopedia, and pondering together on the importance of burial in modern society, they decided there was only one answer. The question was a trick and was really quite stupid. This last adjective made Altcee think of his father and he howled out once more. Twice as hard as the first time since he was beginning to become impatient.

"Who is buried in Grant's tomb?"

"Grant."

came back immediately.

"Yes," cried out Altcee,

"who is buried in *Grant's* tomb, not Napoleon's." Silence. So his father was baffled also. Altcee tore up the piece of paper and started on the next subject.

Chapter 7: Altcee as Sportsman. Altcee was a very clever boy. By the age of 13, he could add, could count to 6 without using Peano's axioms, and he was beginning to have a vague notion of the workings of the Universal Law of Gravity. He knew how to spell his name in five languages, and at one time could cite off from memory the names of all ten of Canada's provincial capitals. He was a unlimited genius, accomplished in science, languages and history.

But contrary to most gifted young men who are primarily immersed in books, Altcee was an exceptional sportsman. This was one of the things which so pleased his parents. To have such a universally gifted son was something that they could not have expected, since neither of them could be considered more than mediocre at intellectual activities or sport. I shall just mention a few of the many activities in which Altcee excelled. His most brilliant achievements were in a domain which is not generally recognized as being a sporting activity, one which has not as yet been included in the Olympic games. Altcee could sit for hours on end without being tired. Not only this but he could sit in the most difficult circumstances, on a tiny chair in a little room in his parent's house which had a big hole in the seat. This made the exercise unusually difficult. Another sport in which he dominated was rope-jumping. He could do this for minutes on end. In general Altcee was an

all-round accomplished sportsman.

However, his father was still not satisfied. So often it happens with parents. They have a brilliant son and they wish to make him even more outstanding. So Altcee's father decided that Altcee should be also able to do push-ups. Here however was the legendary straw which breaks Altcee's back. His father naturally exaggerated the whole affair (Which, let it be said, is something which the author of the present biography would never do). Altcee was to do one push-up per month! That was unreasonable. He tried his best but the effort was too much. Not only did he break his back and die immediately, but the effort and strain had an adverse effect on his brain, and he forgot even his name thereafter, in all of the five languages.

Chapter 8: Altcee relieves himself.