



Albrecht the Not Altogether Pleasant Little Mouse

There once was a little mouse named Albrecht. And while Albrecht was not an outright wicked little mouse, he had bad habits, and had no intention of correcting them.

He wouldn't brush his teeth. Even when his mother put the toothpaste right on the brush for him and told him to brush, Albrecht just stared at it.

"What's the matter?" his mother would ask.

"I'm just not in the mood," Albrecht would answer her.

He liked to pick his nose and stick the boogers on the wall next to his bed. It was like a map, in which every booger stood for a major city, like Paris or Berlin.

Or a constellation of stars in the night sky. Though what the constellation was (a zebra standing at a cash register?) was by no means clear.

His mother was horrified when she discovered all the crusty little dots sticking to the wall.

But Albrecht did not care. All that mattered to him was that he

got the boogers out of his nose.

Sure, he could have used a tissue, like civilized little mice. Albrecht was kind of a little stinker, basically.

Worse, he pooped in the sugar bowl. These weren't "accidents," like anyone can have from time to time. These were on purpose. He waited until everyone was gone, then climbed up on the kitchen table and did his business. He liked when his mother or father dipped a spoon into the sugar and saw the offending lumps. He felt he had accomplished something.

His father, a busy and emotionally distant mouse, told his mother, "Why don't you do something about that little mouse? This is starting to get on my nerves."

His mother, a good, hard-working mouse who had no choice but to leave Albrecht alone every afternoon to run errands, was aghast. This was not the sort of thing pleasant little mice did. And she could not think what provoked Albrecht to such a dastardly deed.

"Why don't you use the toilet like other little mice?" she wanted to know. "I know you know how to."

"I guess I wasn't in the mood," was all Albrecht would say.

Albrecht liked storing cheese in his underwear drawer. He stored quite a good deal of it there, and it got very smelly and very moldy.

Now, this violated every canon of good manners, because it made his underwear smell like sharp cheddar, which was hardly conducive to proper social development. The other little mice at mouse care would wrinkle their noses when Albrecht came by.

"There goes Stinky Cheddar Pants," one of the crueler little mice said, and the nickname stuck.

Albrecht's father, who was gone a lot on business trips, sat the little mouse down for a mouse-to-mouse talk. He talked about

the importance of good grooming, and the value of making a good impression on others.

"See, if you just act like a weird little mouse, who's going to want to do business with you? They won't see you as the fine young mouse I know you to be. All they'll see is a smelly little mouse with gunk hanging from his teeth."

To the father, that seemed like a perfectly compelling argument. But Albrecht just yawned. He was in no mood to change his ways just to please other people.

One day, while his father was away on business and his mother was busy running errands, Albrecht was in his room engaged in his favorite activity, sticking crayons in his ears.

This was another bad habit, because a crayon can puncture a young mouse's eardrum, and make a mouse deaf. Not a good outcome at all.

But you know Albrecht -- he never listened, so why would he want to hear? He did what he wanted to do, and disregarded good advice.

He had got a purple crayon in his right ear, and a burnt sienna crayon in his left, when he heard -- just barely, on account of the crayons in his ears -- the doorbell.

"Oh, what is it this time," said the exasperated, smelly little mouse with bad teeth and crayons in his ears.

But when he opened the door, a big yellow cat named Eddie swiped him with one swift paw, and gobbled poor Albrecht up.

It really wasn't fair. Eddie smelled Albrecht miles away.

Sometimes, child, we forget that rules are for our own good.

Anyway, it was extremely sad. The father mouse felt it was his fault for being away on business so much. "I never really spent much time with Albrecht," he said to himself. "And after a

while, I really didn't want to."

The mother blamed herself. "What good is it to buy the groceries if there is no little mouse to cook them for?"

The two spent many evenings by the fire, thinking about Albrecht and what he really needed.

After a while, they were lucky enough to have another little mouse, whom they named Estelle. And they raised Estelle differently than they raised Albrecht.

The mother did not leave Estelle home alone, ever. And the father made trips less frequently, and did more things with her.

When Estelle did something wrong -- like peeing in the bathtub -- the mother lifted her up and covered her tummy with kisses.

"No matter what a naughty little mouse you are, I will always love you," she said.

And when Estelle put maple syrup in her father's best shoes, he just laughed.

"What a wonderful idea," he said, putting down his newspaper. "Let's make waffles."