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The Minstrel

By: Caleb Brown

I once was passing through a town and happened across a minstrel who played the harmonica. He bore a sign which said "Instruments sold here." I was eying one of his harmonicas when he said, "Do you want to hear the story of Saint Bernard the minstrel?" I having no interest in such tales told him that I just wanted to buy a harmonica, but right before I could take the harmonica he spied a group of kids and said "Don't give thy flak, but cut me some slack as I am a minstrel through and through." With that he sat down and started telling them a story.

"There once was a town, this very town in fact which was plagued by ants. They were everywhere, and they did all sorts of monstrous things; they drank the holy water, ate all the food and crawled on everything! There were so many of them that you had to wipe them off your feet on the doormat before you came in!" With this comment all the little children giggled. I had no interest in such tales normally but the sheer talent of the minstrel wound me within the tale he weaved and I stood rooted to the spot. The minstrel continued, "The lord was so distraught that he offered ten pounds of gold to anyone who could get rid of just half the ants in the town. So many exterminators came through with poison and vinegar to kill the ants, but none succeeded for the ants had already tasted poison and no longer succumbed to that trick.

Then one day a young minstrel named Bernard came through the town and noticed the fliers advertising for an

exterminator. These posters gave him an idea and he thought to himself *this could be a test of my skill for if I can entrance a tone-deaf ant surely I can entertain a mere knight or peasant*. So then he headed off to the lord's house to take on this enormous task. But when he arrived the guards just laughed at him and teased him for even attempting to get rid of the ants, so Bernard played his harmonica. Its sound was so beautiful that the guards broke into tears and they let him pass out of kindness, although they knew quite well that there was no way a penniless minstrel could succeed where so many others had failed.

When he told the lord of his goal the lord obliged out of sheer hopelessness because as he said, "You may do this task but if you do not succeed I shall fall upon my sword and die for in heaven there are no ants." And so Bernard went to the town square and spied a hole in the wall of a house, he then sat down and played his harmonica three times in front of the hole. At first nothing happened, but then ten seconds later a deep rumbling was heard. The rumbling got louder and louder, simultaneously the walls of the houses bulged outwards and the walls pulsed as if alive! Then the walls burst and the ants poured out and flooded the square. Everyone fled except for a single knight rooted to the spot by fear, feeling that something was to happen, Bernard grabbed the knight's sword with one hand and raised his harmonica to his lips. Then he played, suddenly all the ants stopped moving and turned towards him transfixed by his heavenly music.

Now another wall started quaking and as the ones before it had, it burst but this time instead of a torrent of ants pouring out, out shot a giant ant queen 2 ft in diameter at the middle and 8 ft long! Bernard stopped playing and brought down the knight's

sword on the queen ant whose head rolled off into a nearby gutter! Sensing that their queen was gone, the ants all spread out into the wilderness in an instant, these ants never returned and not a single one was ever seen again in the town.

Upon seeing this, the town rejoiced and there was feasting and merriment. Just as the lord finished paying Bernard, the silversmith rushes up, his heavy apron flapping in the wind, while still several yards away he begins saying, "I heard about what you did in the town today! Thank you so much for getting rid of the ants! Please take this harmonica as payment in addition to the gold offered by my lord," and with that he handed Bernard a harmonica made of the finest silver that shone like the moon. Bernard refused, but the silversmith insisted, so he took the harmonica. Then content Bernard set off to ply his trade at another town.

One day he saw a poor minstrel dressed in rags with only a small wood flute that squeaked when it was played, having mercy on the poor minstrel, Bernard handed him the harmonica made by the silversmith. The poor minstrel was shocked at this but still gladly accepted the harmonica. The minstrel paused and told them, "I was that minstrel/" with this last comment he whipped out a harmonica and began playing. He played for about a half a minute before he stopped and told the children to *run along now* then he handed me my harmonica and apologized for the wait.

Just as I began to walk away I realized something this harmonica was made of metal, the one that I bought had been made of wood! Then I looked down and realized another thing: the harmonica wasn't made of any old metal it was made of smooth polished silver that shone like the moon. I turned around and hollered "wait!" but the minstrel had already disappeared into the

crowd. Then I realized I had been chosen to bear this great gift and that it must continue to be used to help others and someday I would also in the fashion of the men before me pass it on to a worth person.