

# JUST MINARD

by Richard M. Burns

Everyone kept thinkin' I was crazy 'cause I took fits. I used to have a friend I could go see. He lived away over in them woods. It was hard findin' the place but I knowed the woods good. Folks said he was crazy too, but he laughed when he heard that, he said it didn't hurt him none. James Ivor Turner, that was his name but folks around here called him "Tont", Tont Turner. I asked him how come he got that name and he said it was teasin' everyone; stringin' them a line. He laughed so hard at the things he done to them, he laughed at their crazy ways but never once did he ever make fun of me. He talked on an' on, showed me lots.

Old Tont told me his Ma was a Indian and that's how come he knowed so much about the woods an' animals an' that. He told me he was born right in the woods, said that Indian dug a hole in the snow and got right down and he was born right then, right out in the winter.

"Minard's crazy, don't pay him no mind", everyone was always sayin' but I knowed the names of every bird, I knowed every track. I could eat roots and make raspberry tea if I wanted. I knowed a lot more and Old Tont, he learned me all that. Tont got sick and then they made him go away and he never come back and Ma told me he was never comin' back. I knowed he would come back if they let him but Ma said he was away too far.

I was sittin' there, by the pond, throwin' them stones, watchin' them as they went down, down into all that black. I watched the ripples goin' out and out, makin' them white lillies rock, teeterin' and then restin'. I looked down at the water and wantin' to know what was down there on the bottom. You could see your own face in that water, not all yourself at once, just your face, shakin' some. I wasn't big, not like my brother Cilas. I come to just under his arm standin' up. I got blue eyes. "Blueberry eyes", is what Stella called 'em. Aussin said they was crazy eyes, always part way shut like I was drunk or like I was all tired out, and that was sign enough for him that there was somethin' wrong up in my head.

I liked the pond, like goin' there with the dogs. They like it too. The pond looked prettier when the sun was shinin' and in the evenin' it got darker, looked like molasses. It would get real still and looked like you could walk across it. I tried but the water went right up to my knees, Ma was some mad when I got home. I liked the pond 'cause it was quiet, no one naggin' at ya, I could think about things a lot better there.

I used to go down to the river, too. I could sit there in the alders and watch the 'Merican girls swimmin' and sometimes they went into that river without a stitch on. I was feelin' different down there and when I touched myself it was gettin' hard. Cilas

called that a pecker and it was like that in the mornin's when I first got up, sometimes. I asked Cilas about it and he laughed, he said it was good. There was a name he called it, when it got bigger, and he said to rub it lots and I'd get a surprise. In the night, once, I rubbed it and rubbed but nothin' happened except my arm got tired. I think Cilas was tellin' a lie. He was always tellin' me stuff and then laughin', rubbin' my head an' walkin' away laughin'. I liked Cilas lots a times but not when he was foolin' and makin' fun.

I felt some rain and then the top of the pond started to jiggle. I looked up at the sky and then closed my eyes and lettin' the rain come on my face. It stopped right up and I took for the house, Ma would be hollerin' if I got wet.

I come around the corner of the house, walkin' close. I fell on the wall, there, and again, there, 'cause I was walkin' puttin' one foot in front of the other one. When I used to do that Stella said I looked like a lad on a rope, walkin' on the rope in the air. I did that lots. There wasn't much to do then, Cilas nearly always gone and Stella goin' for waiks by herself. Aussin was there, he was always there, and Ma was at the house. She talked to me some and she was always watchin' me, watchin' for a sign. She was waitin' for a fit. I knowed when it was comin', I could hear that sound in my head. Everything would shake like when you look in the water at your face and it moves all over. Everything I saw did that when a fit was gonna come. My insides would get feelin' bad, scared stomach, and I was sayin', "No, No", and then I don't know nothin' else and I can only remember wakin' up and feelin' real hot and sick. It was over then but I don't remember the part where they got to hold me down, Cilas and Ma and Aussin sometimes, stoppin' me from runnin' and fallin'. I bit a chunk outta Aussin's arm once and I was glad to know that. Aussin kicked me lots and he hurt me, once he made a whole wood pile go on top of me. He said it was an accident and Stella saw him do it but he hit her so hard that she said it was an accident too.

I went to the back of the house and sat down and watched the ants runnin' all over. I put rocks over the holes they made and then I let them run up my hand and they got runnin' real fast and get scared and fall off. I put my head on the wall and I could hear voices comin' from the window over my head.

"He ain't the brightest but he can do an odd chore", Ma said.

"Tess was sayin' it might help him. He could come home at times. She said they got visitin' days or something", that was Aussin sayin' that.

"Tess has always got her nose stuck in where it don't belong. She sits over in Keystead, sewin' herself dresses and gettin' all dolled up. Always runnin' around the country, shootin' off her mouth, lettin' on she's somebody."

"She's tryin' to help ya", Aussin said. "It's none of her business. He ain't steppin' a foot off this place. He don't harm a soul."

Aussin's voice got louder at the window. "It's gonna rain, them is rain clouds."

"Poor Minard is out, he'll get soaked."

"Proves my point right there, even a dog got enough sense to crawl out of the rain."

"He's scared a lightin' but he won't stand under no tree."

"Do us all good if he went away", Aussin said.

"He ain't goin' no place, Austin, and I ain't sayin' it again."

"Tess knows better."

"Tess can go square flyin' to hell, she got no more sense than God gave a louse. She's do better to keep an eye on her own bunch. I suppose there ain't nothin' wrong with that daughter she rissed, that Marnie, three bastardly young lads and she ain't hardly twenty. That one would squat for a quarter. Do Tess a world of good to tend to her own."

"That's a whole different thing. She can work, she talks sensible and she don't go flyin' into a fit every other day."

"Minard ain't had no trouble in a long spell."

"It's comin', you watch. The full moon is near, he'll be out somewhere on the ground, kickin' and thrashin' and stranglin' himself. He ain't safe, Ira, and you know it. He got a crazy streak in him and he'll have us all in our graves."

"You're right sensible, ain't ya? Come back from O'Leary's last week, drunk and fightin', gonna chop me in two 'cause I couldn't find the key to that old truck, it ain't more than five miles since you got it. I'm tellin' you, Austin, he ain't goin' to no home while I breathe air."

Aussin didn't say nothin'. Then Ma talked again.

"Igotta go down to the camps and see if them folks need anything. I ain't got time to fight over foolishness."

"You wait 'till you're gone away one day. I throw Minard into a bag and drag him down the road and once I get him in that place you'll never be able to get him out."

"I'm so worried, cripes almighty, you wouldn't walk that far if your life depended on it."

My face was gettin' hot and I was tremblin'. My eyes was gettin' bigger and I couldn't stop my teeth from bitin' my lips. I was squashin' them ants, everyone I could see, twistin' them into the ground. I got up and brung the dust with me and I was runnin', sayin', "Aussin, no good Aussin".