

# Minty

by Alan Schroeder and Jerry Pinkney

Her bare legs shivering, Minty started up the dirt path. The night air was cool; autumn was coming on.

She had nearly reached the big house when she saw a buckskin mare tied to an oak tree out front. Minty figured it belong to a guest, someone visiting the Brodases. The horse stood very still, watching her with uneasy eyes. Minty was about to turn away when a thought suddenly occurred to her. Reaching up, she placed her hand on the saddle. It was still warm – and not too high...

This is it, she said to herself. This is my chance to run away! Remembering what Old Ben had told her, she looked up at the sky. There it was, the North Star, shining bright. By now, Minty's heart was beating rapidly. She wanted to run back to tell Old Ben and Old Rit good-bye, but she knew there was no time. It was now or never.

Holding her breath, Minty reached for the rope. She tried to untie the knot, but her hands were shaking badly. The horse let out a nervous whinny.

"Shh," Minty whispered. "Don't be afraid." But it was her own fear that was growing. Then, just as the knot started to come undone, the door of the big house opened. Minty heard her master's voice.

"Come outside, Nathaniel. We'll have a smoke."

At that moment, Minty lost her courage. She couldn't do it. Not now. Not tonight. With tears in her eyes, she ran back down the hill to the cabin.

At the door, Old Rit caught her by the shoulder. "Where's the flour? What did Missus say?"

But Minty pulled away and wouldn't answer.

"Leave her be," said Ben. "Just leave her be, Rit. I'll fetch the flour."

That night, after everyone else was asleep, Minty sat next to the fire, thinking. Why, why hadn't she jumped on the buckskin? She could be long gone by now, halfway to Philadelphia. She might never get the chance again.

Minty began to cry. She cried for a long time, until the fire had nearly burnt itself out. It was getting cold in the cabin, and to keep warm, she buried her toes in the ashes at the edge of the pit. Up at the big house, a dog started to bark. Old Rit stirred in her sleep. Minty sniffled, then she wiped her nose with the back of her hand.

But someday... someday she would run away. She would jump on the buckskin's back and ride, ride, the north wind whipping through her hair, and nothing would stop her. Nothing!

Minty could feel her eyes beginning to close. Then, little by little, she fell asleep. Curled up between her brothers and sisters, she dreamed to sunflowers and stars, and the call of the whippoorwill, and a road through the forest that one day, when she had the courage, would carry her to freedom.