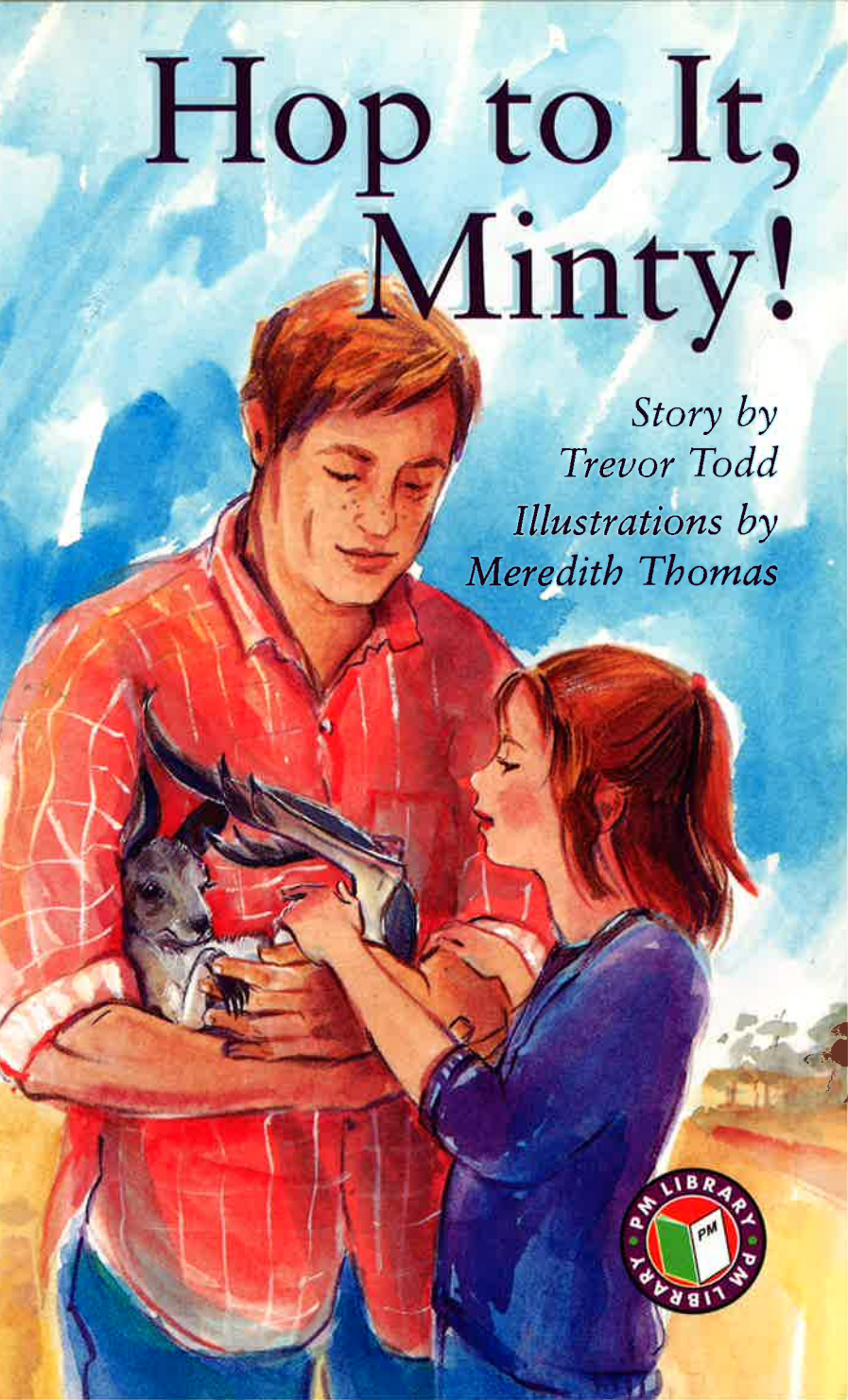
Hop to It, Minty!

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Chapter 1

Sounds in the Night



Melanie could hear Copper, their farm dog, barking furiously. What a nuisance! She'd woken Melanie from a deep sleep, too. As Melanie walked out onto the back verandah to quieten the dog, she stiffened. There were lights up in the back paddock. The sound of a screaming four-wheel-drive engine drifted across the cool night air. Excited shouts could be heard above the noise.

"Dad! Quick!" shouted Melanie. "Someone's in the back paddock!"

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Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, John joined his daughter on the verandah.

"How dare they!" exploded John.

He called to Copper. "Come on, girl," he said in a grim voice. "Let's see them off!"

Enjoying the unexpected opportunity for a trip, the dog ran straight to the old farm truck and sailed through the open window in an effortless leap.



"I'm coming, too," declared Melanie. Before John could protest she had pulled on her boots and was sitting in the front of the truck next to Copper.

John made no comment. His daughter certainly had a mind of her own. Still, there were just the two of them on the farm so he included her whenever he could.

As John swung himself up into the cab of the truck, Copper started barking madly.

"Quiet, girl!" ordered Melanie.

She patted the dog and looked at her in admiration. The dog was all muscle. She was fearless with cattle and could run like the wind all day and never complain.

Copper stopped barking. This dog understood everything that was said to her. Copper's eyes gleamed and her ears pointed forward. She was going on a late night drive — and there was trouble to sort out. This could be fun!

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Chapter 2

Trouble!



As the truck lurched onto the rough ground of the back paddock they heard loud shouting and car doors banging. John slowed the truck down. His face revealed his concern.

"Perhaps I'd better take you back?" he suggested.

Melanie frowned. "No way! They'll get away, if you do!"

John nodded, put the truck into gear and drove on. As they reached the back fence they caught a glimpse of red tail-lights disappearing down the gravel road.

"We're too late!" John cried, but drove on towards the gate and stopped.

Standing in the light from the truck's headlights they could see that the chain on the gate had been cut.

"Who'd do that, Dad?" Melanie was furious. How dare anyone do such a thing to their property.

"It was someone wanting to cause trouble. Come on, let's go home. We'll fix the chain tomorrow."

Just then the dog ran off into the darkness. "Copper! Heel!" John called after her.



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