For the Aotearoa book community—
thank you for the warmest welcome—SH

For Halle and Logan—BM

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# Reggie Rabbit and the Metro Mice

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# Chapter Three

Reggie arrived at the big oak early. He'd almost thought he wouldn't make it at all when he had been caught on his way out by Lettice.

Seeing him in his detective coat and matching hat, Lettice had known immediately that Reggie was on a case. And, of course, despite being supportive of his investigations, she was still his bossy big sister and had insisted he tell Mum and Dad where he was going.

'I'm running out of excuses to cover for you, Reggie,' she'd said.

'Tell them I'm brushing my teeth,' Reggie had suggested.

'All night?'

'Tell them I went to bed early because I wanted to watch the sunrise in the morning.'

'Reggie, you barely make it out of bed for *sunset*!' Lettice had scolded. 'They'll never believe that!'

'You can figure something out, Lettice,' Reggie had encouraged his sister. 'I believe in you.'

Lettice's frown had softened and she'd clamped her paws firmly on her little brother's shoulders.

'You know, I'm really proud of you and Pipsquark,' she'd said. 'You are both great detectives.'

'Thanks, Lettice,' Reggie had replied, with a grin.

'But remember, be careful. And don't go jumping to any conclusions too quickly,' she'd added.

And with that, she had glanced down the hallway to check the coast was clear and let her brother out of the front door, closing it silently behind him so their parents wouldn't hear.

As Reggie waited for Pipsquark and Mo at the old oak, he thought about what his sister had said. There was no way he could tell his mum and dad about his detective cases. He knew he would be grounded for eternity. *And* he would probably get Pipsquark, Detective Fox, and Fox's detective partner, Nancy the ladybird, in a lot of trouble, and he wasn't about to tell on the friends he cared about the most.

No.

Telling Mum and Dad was out of the question.

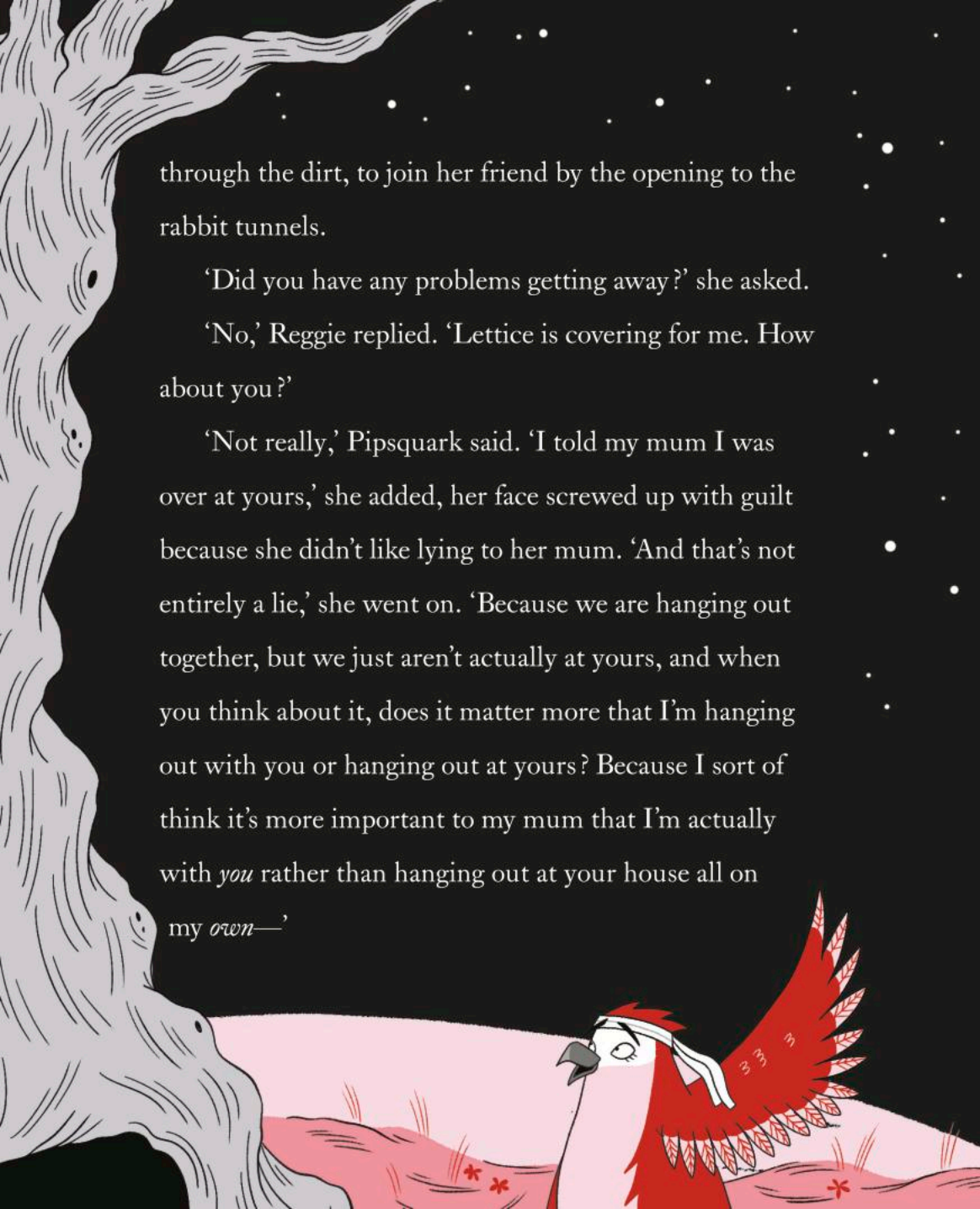
But what Lettice had said about not jumping to conclusions hit a nerve. He'd been off his game that day, which was unsettling for him as he always trusted his detective skills. And, he had to admit, he could have been a bit more open-minded on the case of the Ghost of Seagull Rock. While he would never confess that to anyone because he was far too proud, he made a mental note to himself to do better at paying attention because more than anything, he just wanted to be the best detective he could possibly be.

'Reggie!' came the excited squawk of Pipsquark from the opposite side of the tree.

She skipped across the huge gnarled roots of the oak that rose

through the dirt, to join her friend by the opening to the rabbit tunnels.

'Did you have any problems getting away?' she asked.

'No,' Reggie replied. 'Lettice is covering for me. How about you?'

'Not really,' Pipsquark said. 'I told my mum I was over at yours,' she added, her face screwed up with guilt because she didn't like lying to her mum. 'And that's not entirely a lie,' she went on. 'Because we are hanging out together, but we just aren't actually at yours, and when you think about it, does it matter more that I'm hanging out with you or hanging out at yours? Because I sort of think it's more important to my mum that I'm actually with *you* rather than hanging out at your house all on my *own*—'