

BRAVE MAEVE

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Illustrations by Liew Hooi Yin

There was once a little girl named Maeve.



She had a stone.

It was not an ordinary stone.
It was a poisonous stone.

Maeve didn't know this,
for it was hiding secretly in her tummy.

The stone lay very still...

It lay there as she slept.
It lay there as she played.
It didn't make a sound as she ate.





Then, one day, the stone started to grow.

It grew and grew.

And when it stretched out,
it gave Maeve a pain in her tummy
the kind that feels squeezey and icky, the kind that goes up and down.



Maeve's Mum and Dad brought her to her favourite doctor who
gave her lots of medicine to make the pain go away.

The pain did go away, and Maeve played,
and slept,
and ate, quite happily...

for a little while.



But the stone was still there.
It was still hiding.
Even the doctor didn't know this.

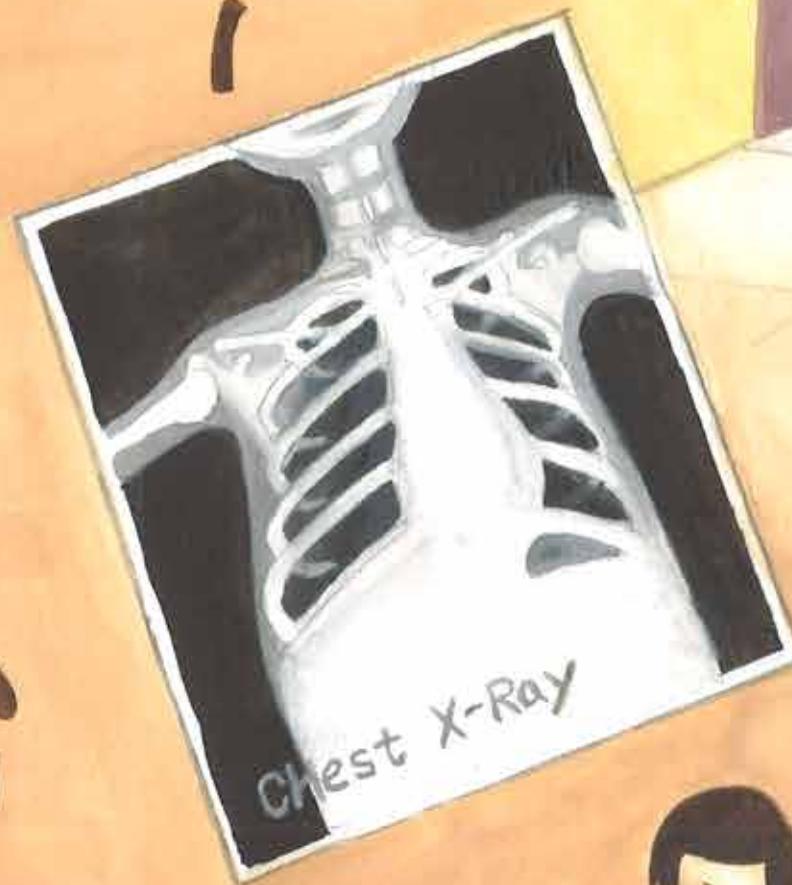
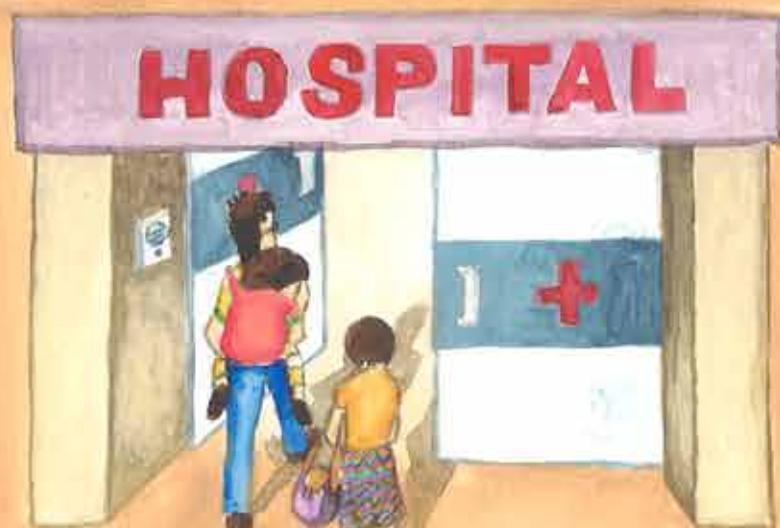


Then it stretched again.
And little Maeve didn't feel like sleeping,
or playing,
or eating anymore.

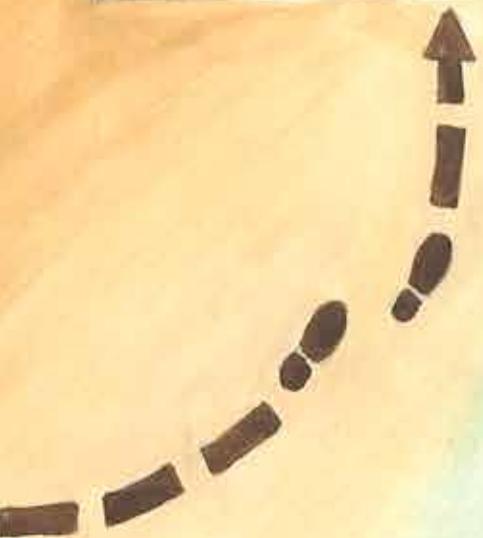


So, Mum and Dad brought her to the special doctors.
They felt her tummy, they took x-ray pictures of her tummy,
and asked her lots of questions which she answered
cleverly of course!

Still, the stone was hiding...



OPERATING
THEATRE
IN USE



But not for long.

The doctors discovered it through a tummy operation.
They took it out!



"A-ha!" they exclaimed. "We got you at last!"
"Fantastic!" shouted Daddy and Mummy.
"Goody!" yelled Maeve.
They all cheered as they threw the stone away.



But that is not the end of the story.

"We're going to put some good soldiers in you to fight the bad soldiers left by the stone," the doctors told Maeve.

"Alright," said Maeve, "but make sure you choose strong and mighty soldiers!"

"Of course," the doctors replied. "The strongest of soldiers to protect our precious Maeve."



So Maeve went to the hospital again and again to let the good soldiers in.

The nurses called it a complicated name, but Maeve called it "preparing for war".

The good soldiers were let in through special tunnels, secretly.



When the soldiers fought fiercely, the battles gave Maeve a fever.

Sometimes, the fighting made Maeve's food taste funny – chocolates tasted like cheese, and cheese like strawberries!



The battles also made all of Maeve's hair fall out, but she got to wear lots of interesting hats and colourful caps.



Most times, the good soldiers killed the bad soldiers left by the stone and Maeve would poo them out!

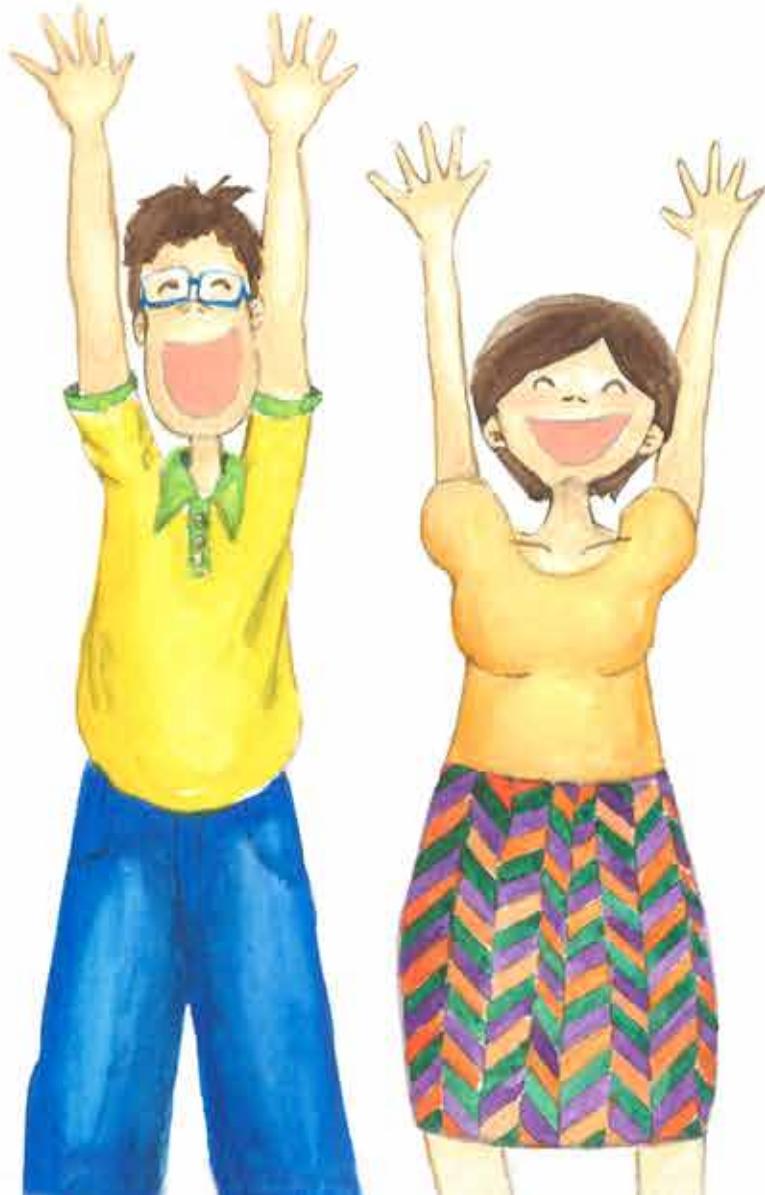
"Good riddance!" she yelled as she flushed them down the toilet.



Finally, the doctors announced, "Hip hip hurray! There are no more bad soldiers left in Maeve!"

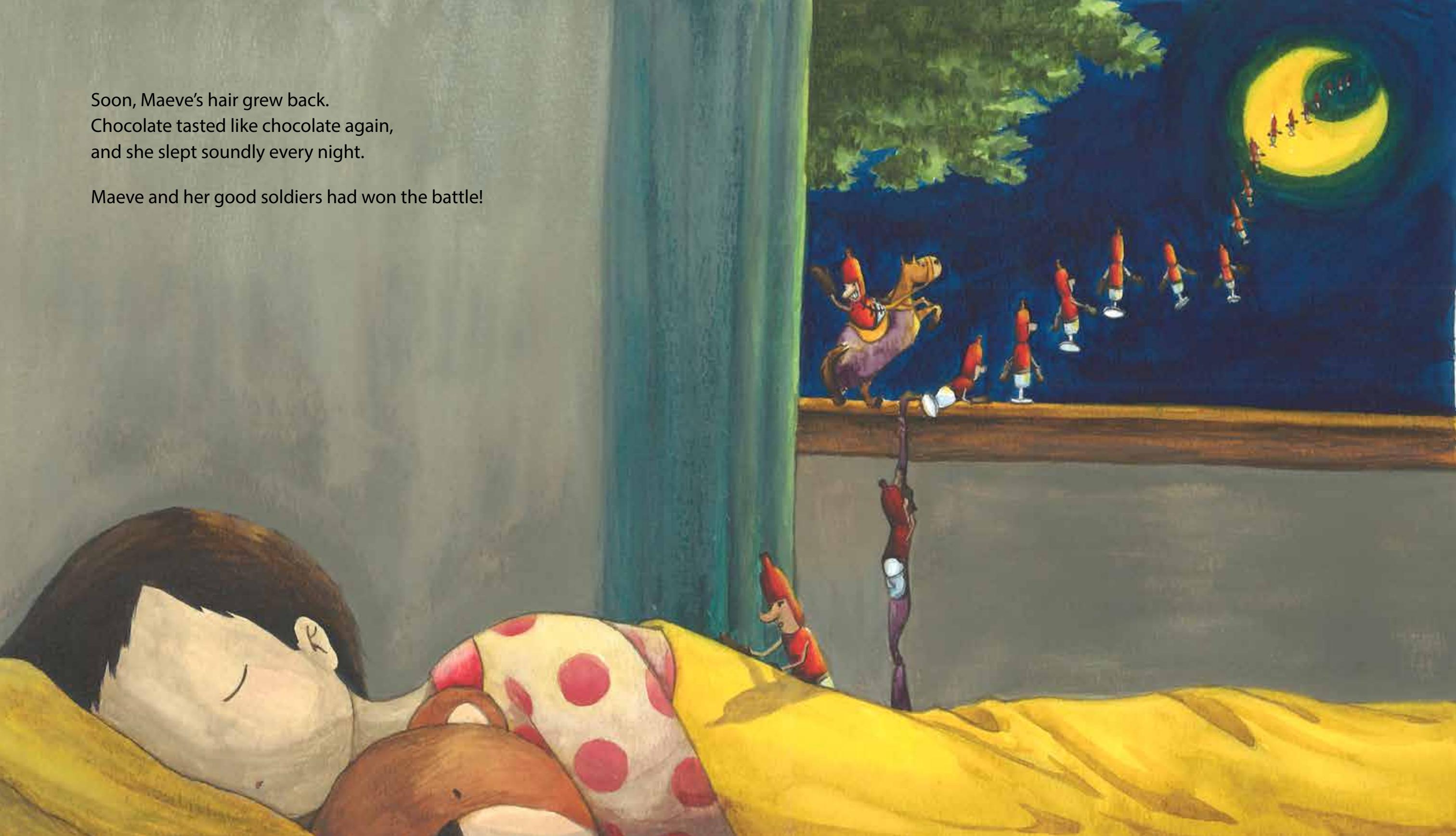
"Yippie!" Mummy and Daddy cheered.

"Good riddance!" shouted Maeve.



Soon, Maeve's hair grew back.
Chocolate tasted like chocolate again,
and she slept soundly every night.

Maeve and her good soldiers had won the battle!





Hurrah for victorious Maeve!
Long live brave Maeve!

FOR PARENTS

This story was written when I had to find a simple way to explain to Maeve, my 3 year old, diagnosed with stage 2 Burkitt's lymphoma in 2010, what would happen to her as she underwent chemotherapy.

Friends had sent me various picture books that dealt with cancer, but I found them either too direct and serious, or that they simply skirted around the issue. So I decided to write *Brave Maeve*, about a girl who, together with her "brave soldiers", goes into battle with the "poisonous stones". The battle causes lots of strange things to happen but it only means the brave soldiers are winning.

A 3 year old has no clue what chemotherapy is, but she understands that she has to poo out the bad soldiers. She gets upset by the falling hair, but is easily distracted by the chance to play dress-up with wigs and hats.

We always went to hospital armed with a crown and magic wand, amongst other adventure-type paraphernalia. As a family, we all shaved our heads (my 4-month-old baby was bald anyway), in anticipation of

her long beautiful hair falling off. This, we told her, was to look fierce and warrior-like for our battle!

And what a battle it was. Everyday, there was the poking and pricking and tears. Everyday, her words pierced my heart: "Mummy, they are hurting me. Tell them to stop. I'll promise to me good. I want to go home."

My husband, Bernard, and I learnt to not let things overwhelm us. We consciously put our thoughts and feelings on the back burner and focussed on the need to just do one thing at a time.

We were blessed with all the support we received. Maeve had a stream of visitors, bearing toys, colouring books, fairy wands, and all the things a princess would want. Friends whom I had lost contact with appeared with gifts.

Grandma and Grandpa brought specially cooked lunch every day, and friends took turns to bring dinner for us. Once, an uncle went all the way home many, many miles away, grilled her favourite chicken wings, and brought them all the way back

to the hospital in peak-hour traffic just to encourage Maeve to brave her nightly pricks on the finger for blood tests.

Friends overseas skyped with her in hospital to cheer her up. My ex-students took turns to visit and entertain. Good friends wrapped a whole lot of little rewards for Maeve to choose from after every single procedure. Other friends from church made princessy charts to persuade her to gargle after she ate to prevent mouth sores, to take her medicine and to drink lots of water.

So looking after Maeve became a collective effort. And this circle of family and friends also looked after me, so that I could look after Maeve.

I don't know how Bernard did it, sharing the night shift with me, despite having to work the next day. As chemotherapy causes constant diarrhoea and the super hydration causes her to pee every 1½ hours, we seemed to be with Maeve on the potty throughout the night.

After one bone marrow aspiration, three surgeries, four-and-a-half courses of chemotherapy, nine lumbar punctures, and

too many blood transfusions and finger pricks to count, our little girl is cured.

We will never know if cancer will strike again, or if there would be future problems related to chemotherapy, but we know that for now, our little girl is alive, and happy, and as precocious as any 6 year old, and for that we are thankful to God.

This story was initially meant for an audience of one, but after I shared with 200 Junior College students about childhood cancer and read the story to them in 2011, they encouraged me to get it published. They believed that it would benefit all children with cancer – and their parents.

As an answered prayer, Hooi Yin, came along and asked if she could illustrate my book. Being a doctor, she could illustrate with accurate knowledge of various medical procedures, and portray the good and bad soldiers exactly as I had imagined it.

My dream is to make this book available in all paediatric oncology wards around the world.

If you would like a copy, please write to xxx@xxxxx.



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