THE DAILY BREAD

The Fiat of the Beloved



Beloved

Who God Says You Are

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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INTRODUCTION

Before You Do Anything

There is a word spoken over you that came before anything you have ever done, and it will remain long after everything you do is forgotten. It is not a word about your accomplishments, your usefulness, your appearance, or your goodness. It is a word about who you are, spoken by the One who made you, and it is this: beloved. Before you had earned a single thing, before you had succeeded or failed, before you were old enough to try to be good, you were already loved, already His, already beloved. This is the first and deepest truth about you, and almost everything in your life and your faith depends on whether you believe it.

Most women do not believe it, not really, not all the way down. They may affirm it in the abstract, may know that God loves everyone and therefore, presumably, loves them too. But beneath that general assent runs a quieter and more powerful conviction, a secret suspicion that in their particular case the love must be earned, that they are loved to the degree that they are good, useful, lovely, or enough, and that the love could be lost. This suspicion does not stay in the background. It shapes how a woman prays, how she comes to the sacraments, how she reads Scripture, how she loves her family, and how she offers herself to God, coloring all of it with the anxious striving of one who is never quite sure she measures up.

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us. — 1 John 4:10

This book is about letting the truth of your belovedness go all the way down. It will not offer you affirmations or ask you to work up a feeling. It will tell you, as clearly as it can, who God actually says you are: made in His image, loved as the very ground of your existence rather than as a reward for your performance, known completely and loved anyway. It will name the specific lies that keep women from receiving this truth, and set against each of them the word of God. And it will invite you, perhaps for the first time, to believe that the love you have been trying to earn was already yours before you began, and that everything changes when you finally let yourself receive it.

CHAPTER ONE

Made in His Image

The Dignity That Was There From the Start

The first thing to know about who you are is where you came from, and the answer is more astonishing than you may have let yourself believe. You were not an accident of nature, a bundle of cells that happened to become a person, a more or less interchangeable member of a species. You were made, deliberately, in the image and likeness of God Himself, and that image is not a faint or secondhand thing but the very foundation of your dignity, stamped into you at the root of your being. Before you consider anything else about yourself, you must begin here, with the truth that you bear the image of God.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. — Genesis 1:27

Not a Lesser Image

Scripture is careful and deliberate: God created the human person, male and female, in His own image. The woman is not a secondary or derivative image of God, an afterthought or a lesser reflection, but fully and intentionally made in His image, as truly and completely as any man. This matters enormously, because women have been told, in a thousand ways across history and still today, that they are somehow less, secondary, defined by their usefulness to others, valued for what they provide rather than for what they are. The first page of Scripture contradicts all of it. You bear the image of God fully and in your own right, not as a reflection of someone else's dignity but as a bearer of the divine image in your own person, and this dignity is not earned, not granted by any human authority, and not able to be taken away. It was there from the start, written into what you are.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

This image is not an abstract theological label but a truth about the particular woman you are, knit together deliberately by a God who wanted you to exist. The Psalmist marvels that God formed his inmost being and knit him together in his mother's womb, that he is fearfully and wonderfully made, and the same is true of you, not as a species but as a particular person, intended, designed, and made with care by a God who delighted in making you. You are not a generic instance of humanity but a specific woman whom God deliberately brought into being, wanting you, this exact person, to exist. The implications are staggering if you let them land: your existence is not an accident but an intention, not a happenstance but a deliberate act of a God who wanted you here, and the dignity of bearing His image belongs to you not in general but in particular, to the specific woman reading these words.

A Dignity Nothing Can Erase

Because this dignity is rooted in the image of God and not in anything you do or anything that happens to you, it cannot be erased, diminished, or lost, however far you may have fallen or however badly you may have been treated. Many women carry the sense that their dignity has been damaged, by their own failures, by what others have done to them, by the ways they have fallen short of who they were supposed to be, and they live as though their worth were a fragile thing that their mistakes or their wounds have broken. But the image of God in you is not so easily undone. It is stamped into the root of your being, deeper than your failures and deeper than your wounds, and it remains whole even when you feel most broken. Your sins may obscure it, your wounds may make it hard to feel, but nothing can erase it, for it was given by God and belongs to what you fundamentally are. You bear the image of God, and you will bear it still, whatever you have done and whatever has been done to you, for it is a dignity that nothing in heaven or earth can take away.

It helps to notice what this does not depend on. The dignity of the image is not greater in the accomplished woman than in the struggling one, not greater in the admired than in the overlooked, not greater on your best day than on your worst. A newborn who has done nothing bears it as fully as a saint; a woman at the lowest point of her life bears it as fully as she did at her highest. This is precisely what makes it a foundation worth building on, for a worth that rose and fell with your circumstances would be no foundation at all, only another thing to anxiously maintain. The image of God in you is fixed, equal, and permanent, and because it does not move, you can finally stand on it.

CHAPTER TWO

Loved Before You Earned It

Why His Love Is Not a Reward

The deepest lie that women carry about God's love is not that it does not exist but that it must be earned, that it is a reward for being good, useful, lovely, or enough, and that it can therefore be lost by failing to be those things. This lie is so woven into how women have been formed that it operates below awareness, shaping the whole of their relationship with God, and it must be named and rejected before the truth of belovedness can be received. The truth is that God's love is not a reward for anything you do but the very ground of your existence, given before you had done anything at all.

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world… In love he predestined us for adoption. — Ephesians 1:4-5

Chosen Before You Began

Scripture makes a claim so radical that it is hard to take in: that God chose you, in love, before the foundation of the world, before you existed, before you had done a single thing to deserve it or against it. This means His love for you does not come after your performance, as a response to your goodness or usefulness, but before everything, as the very reason you exist at all. You were not first evaluated and then, if found worthy, loved; you were loved first, chosen in love before the world began, and brought into existence out of that love. This reverses everything the lie teaches. The love is not the reward at the end of a life of earning; it is the ground at the beginning, there before you drew a breath, the reason you are here at all. You did not earn your way into God's love. You were loved into existence, chosen before you began, and the love that made you is the love that holds you still.

Not Because You Are Good

It follows that God does not love you because you are good, useful, or impressive, and this is not an insult but a liberation. If God loved you because of your goodness, your love would depend on your continuing to be good enough, and you would live, as so many women do, in anxious striving to maintain a worthiness you can never be sure of. But God does not love you because you have measured up; He loves you because He is love and because He made you and you are His. Scripture says plainly that this is the nature of the thing: not that we loved God, but that He loved us, first and freely, when we had nothing to commend us. This means your worth does not rise and fall with your performance, your love from God does not increase on your good days and shrink on your bad ones, and you cannot lose it by failing. It was never based on your being good enough, and so it cannot be forfeited by your not being good enough. You are loved not because you are good but because you are His, and that love does not move.

This is harder to believe than it sounds, because every other love a woman has known has been, to some degree, conditional. The love of people must usually be earned and can be lost; approval is given to performance and withdrawn at failure; even the people who love her best love her imperfectly, with strings she has learned to anticipate. It is natural, then, to assume that God's love works the same way, only on a grander scale, and to bring to Him the same anxious managing she brings to every other relationship. But God's love is of a different kind entirely, not earned and so not losable, not conditional and so not

anxious, and learning to trust that it is truly different from every human love she has known is much of the work of receiving it.

The Freedom This Gives

To grasp that God's love is not earned is to be set free from the exhausting treadmill on which so many women spend their whole lives, forever running to be good enough, lovely enough, useful enough to deserve a love they imagine they must secure. The woman who believes she must earn God's love lives in anxious striving, never at rest, always performing, always afraid that she is slipping, and her faith becomes one more arena of the endless effort to measure up. But the woman who grasps that she was loved before she earned it, loved not for her goodness but freely and first, is released from the treadmill, free to rest in a love she does not have to secure and cannot lose. This is not permission to stop growing in holiness, for love naturally wants to respond; it is freedom from the anxious striving that poisons the response, the freedom of a daughter who knows she is loved regardless, and who can therefore love and serve and grow out of security rather than fear. The love was never a reward to be earned. It was a gift given before you began, and receiving that gift is the beginning of freedom.

CHAPTER THREE

The Lie That You Are Not Enough

When You Feel You Fall Short

Among the lies that keep women from their belovedness, the most common is the quiet, pervasive conviction that they are not enough, that they fall short, that whatever they are and do is somehow insufficient. This lie rarely announces itself; it works as a background hum, a chronic sense of inadequacy that colors how a woman sees herself and relates to God. It must be named for what it is, a lie, and set against the truth of a God who, far from finding you insufficient, delights in you.

> *The Lord your God is in your midst… he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. — Zephaniah 3:17*

The Hum of Not Enough

For many women the sense of not being enough is so constant that they no longer notice it as a distinct thought; it has become the water they swim in, the background assumption from which they operate. Not pretty enough, not thin enough, not successful

enough, not patient enough, not holy enough, not a good enough mother or wife or daughter or Christian, the specific forms vary but the underlying conviction is the same: that she falls short, that she is insufficient, that she does not measure up to some standard she can never quite reach. This hum shapes everything, driving the anxious striving, the comparison, the inability to rest, the sense that she must always be doing more to make up for her fundamental inadequacy. And because it operates below awareness, it is rarely challenged, simply assumed, a settled fact about herself that she has never thought to question. But it is not a fact. It is a lie, and the first step to freedom is to name it as such.

What God Actually Feels About You

Against the lie that you are not enough stands one of the most astonishing verses in all of Scripture, which describes not God's tolerance of you, not His grudging acceptance, but His delight. The prophet says that God is in your midst, that He rejoices over you with gladness, that He quiets you with His love, that He exults over you with loud singing. This is not the language of a God who finds you barely adequate; it is the language of a God who delights in you, who sings over you, who rejoices in your very existence. Try to take it in, for it contradicts the lie at its root: the God you fear finds you insufficient actually delights in you, rejoices over you, sings over you with gladness. You are not someone He puts up with. You are someone He delights in, and the distance between what you feel about yourself and what He feels about you is the measure of how deeply the lie has taken hold. The truth is that you are not a disappointment to be tolerated but a delight to be sung over.

Enough Because He Says So

The deepest answer to the lie that you are not enough is not to prove that you measure up, not to finally become good enough, but to receive your sufficiency from God, who declares you enough not because you have earned it but because you are His. You will never win the battle of not enough on its own terms, never finally become pretty, successful, patient, or holy enough to silence the hum, for the standard keeps moving and the striving never ends. The battle is won on different ground: not by becoming enough but by receiving the truth that you are already enough in God's eyes, not because of what you have achieved but because of who He says you are, a beloved daughter in whom He delights. Your enough-ness does not come from your performance but from His declaration, from the love that made you and delights in you, and it is secure precisely because it does not depend on your measuring up. You are enough, not because you have proven it, but because the God who made you and delights in you says so, and His word about you is truer than the lie you have believed.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Lie That You Are Too Much

When You Fear Being Seen

If some women are haunted by the lie that they are not enough, others, and often the same women at different moments, are haunted by its strange mirror image: the lie that they are too much. Too loud, too emotional, too needy, too intense, too sensitive, too demanding, too complicated, a woman can carry the conviction that her very self is a problem, that she is more than others can handle and more than God wants to deal with, and so she hides, shrinks, manages herself, and fears being fully seen. This lie too must be named and set against the truth of a God who sees you completely and does not turn away.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me… Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. — Psalm 139:1-6

The Fear of Being Fully Seen

The lie that you are too much produces a particular kind of hiding, not the hiding of shame exactly, but the hiding of one who fears that her full self, if truly seen, would be too much to be loved. The woman who believes she is too much learns to manage herself, to tone herself down, to present an edited and more acceptable version, to hide the parts of herself she fears are excessive, the big feelings, the deep needs, the intensity, the complexity, because somewhere she has absorbed the message that her full self is more than others want and more than she is allowed to be. This fear of being fully seen reaches even into her relationship with God, so that she comes to Him edited and managed too, hiding the parts of herself she fears are too much, never quite daring to be fully known even by Him. And so she is never fully met, because she is never fully present, always holding back the self she fears is excessive.

Searched, Known, and Not Turned Away

Against this fear stands the staggering intimacy of Psalm 139, in which the Psalmist marvels that God has searched him and known him completely, knows when he sits and rises, discerns his thoughts from afar, is acquainted with all his ways. God knows you completely, more fully than you know yourself, all your intensity, your needs, your complexity, the very parts you fear are too much, and knowing all of it, He does not turn away. This is the answer to the lie: you fear that if you were fully seen you would be too much to be loved, but God already sees you fully, already knows the whole of you, every

part you hide and manage, and He has not turned away, does not find you too much, loves you not in spite of your full self but as your full self. There is no edited version you need to present to God, for He already knows the unedited truth of you and loves it. You are not too much for Him. He has searched you and known you completely, and He calls you beloved still.

You Do Not Have to Hide From God

The freedom that answers the lie of too much is the freedom to stop hiding, at least from God, to come to Him as your full self, unedited and unmanaged, trusting that the One who already knows the whole of you will not be overwhelmed by it. You can bring God your big feelings, your deep needs, your intensity and complexity and mess, all the parts you have learned to hide, because He already knows them and loves you still, and there is no version of yourself you must become before you are allowed to approach Him. This is an immense relief if you have spent your life managing yourself, editing yourself, fearing that your full self is too much: with God, you can stop. You can be fully known and still fully loved, fully seen and not turned away, bringing Him the whole of yourself in the confidence that He who searched and knew you has already accepted what you most fear to show. You do not have to hide from God. You are not too much for Him, and in His presence you can finally be the full self you were made to be, known completely and loved completely, with nothing held back and nothing to fear.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Lie That You Are Your Worst Moments

Known Completely, Loved Anyway

A third lie imprisons many women: the conviction that they are defined by their worst moments, by what has been done to them or what they have done, that the damage in their past has marked them permanently and disqualified them from the love and the life they long for. This lie takes the darkest chapters of a woman's story and makes them the whole story, the defining truth about who she is, and it keeps her in hiding and shame. It is answered by a woman at a well, who met One who knew everything she had ever done and loved her anyway.

Jesus said to her, If you knew the gift of God… you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. — John 4:10

When the Past Becomes Your Name

The lie that you are your worst moments works by taking something true, that painful things have happened, that you have failed, that you have been hurt, and turning it into something false, that these things are now your identity, the defining truth of who you are. The woman who believes this lie carries her past as her name, introducing herself to God and to herself through her failures and her wounds, the abuse she suffered, the sins she committed, the ways she fell short or was let down, as though these were the whole truth about her rather than chapters in a longer story. And because she believes her past defines her, she hides it, lives in shame, assumes that if she were truly known she would be rejected, and keeps God himself at a careful distance, certain that the full knowledge of her story would end any love He might have. The past has become her name, and she cannot imagine being known beneath it and still loved.

The Woman at the Well

Into the life of exactly such a woman, Jesus walked one afternoon at a well in the heat of the day, when respectable women did not come, because she had arranged her life to avoid them. She had a past, a string of broken relationships and a present arrangement that invited the town's judgment, and she had learned to hide. And Jesus, who knew everything she had ever done, did not recoil, did not condemn, did not keep his distance. He asked her for a drink, spoke to her of living water, drew her out, and gently named the truth of her life, not to shame her but to show her that he knew it all and was offering himself to her anyway. She came for water and met the One who knew the whole of her story and loved her in the midst of it, and she ran back to the town she had been avoiding to tell them she had found a man who told her everything she had ever done, no longer hiding her past but transformed by being fully known and fully loved. This is the answer to the lie: to be known completely, worst moments and all, and loved anyway.

Your Story Is Not Over

The deepest truth that answers the lie of your worst moments is that you are not defined by your past but by what God is making of you, that your worst moments are chapters and not the whole book, and that the God who knows them all is writing a longer and better story than the one your shame has told. Your failures and your wounds are real, but they are not your name, not the final truth about who you are, for your identity is not fixed by your darkest chapters but by the God who loves you through them and is making something new. The woman at the well did not stay defined by her past; she became an apostle to her town, the first evangelist of her village, because her encounter with the One who knew everything she had done did not end her story but began a new chapter of it. The same is true for you. Whatever is in your past, whatever has been done to you or by you, it is not the whole of you, not your name, not the end of your story, for the God who

knows it all loves you still and is writing in you a story longer and more beautiful than your shame has let you imagine. Your worst moments are not who you are. You are His beloved, and your story is not over.

CHAPTER SIX

Knowing and Receiving

Why the Truth Has Not Reached Your Heart

Many women know, in their minds, that God loves them, and yet the knowledge has not changed them, has not reached the deep place where their sense of themselves is formed, has not silenced the lies or stilled the striving. There is a great difference between knowing that God loves you and actually receiving that love, between the truth held in the head and the truth that has gone all the way down into the heart, and the whole of this book comes to rest on closing that gap. Understanding why the truth of your belovedness has not yet reached your heart, and how to let it in, is the most important thing of all.

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. — Isaiah 43:1

The Gap Between Head and Heart

It is entirely possible to know a thing to be true and yet not to have received it, to affirm God's love with full intellectual assent while living as though it were not so, and this gap between head and heart is where most women live in relation to their belovedness. A woman can recite that God loves her, can teach it to her children, can believe it without doubt in her mind, and still carry in her heart the old conviction that she must earn love, that she is not enough or too much, that her past defines her, so that the truth she knows has never actually reached the place where it would change her. This is not hypocrisy or weak faith; it is the ordinary condition of fallen human beings, in whom the deep sense of self is formed early and runs below the reach of intellectual assent, so that a truth can be fully believed and yet never received. The gap is real, and naming it is the beginning of closing it: the problem is not that you do not know you are loved, but that the knowing has not become receiving.

Called by Name

What begins to close the gap is the move from the general to the personal, from knowing that God loves everyone to receiving that God loves you, by name, in particular. Scripture

does not speak of God's love only in general terms but in intensely personal ones: He has redeemed you, called you by name, declared that you are His. This is not a love distributed impersonally to humanity at large but a love addressed to you specifically, the particular woman you are, called by your own name, claimed as His own. The truth begins to reach the heart when it stops being an abstract proposition about God's general benevolence and becomes a personal word spoken to you: not God loves everyone, and I suppose that includes me, but God has called me by name, and I am His. To receive your belovedness is to let the love become this personal, to hear your own name in it, to believe that the God who loves the world loves you, this exact person, in particular and by name.

Letting It In

Closing the gap between knowing and receiving is finally a matter of letting the truth in, deliberately and repeatedly, through prayer, through sitting with the word God speaks over you, through choosing to believe His declaration about you over the lies you have long believed. The truth of your belovedness does not usually drop into the heart all at once but is received gradually, as you bring it before God again and again, sit with the verses that declare it, ask the Holy Spirit to make it real to you, and deliberately choose, in the face of the old lies, to believe what God says about you. This is not working up a feeling but opening a door, letting in a truth that has been waiting outside the heart, practicing the reception of a love that has always been offered. Over time, as you keep letting it in, the truth begins to move from head to heart, from assent to reception, until one day you find that you no longer merely know you are loved but actually believe it, down in the deep place where it changes everything. Let it in, again and again, and the love you have always known about will become the love you have finally received.

Do not be discouraged if this takes time, or if the old lies return even after you think you have let the truth in. The sense of self was formed over many years, and it is not usually remade in a day; the lies have deep roots, and they will reassert themselves, especially in seasons of failure, exhaustion, or pain. Receiving your belovedness is not a single victory but a practice, a returning again and again to the word God speaks over you, a patient choosing of His truth over the old familiar lie, repeated across months and years. Each time you return, the truth goes a little deeper, and though the old lies may never fully fall silent in this life, they lose their power as the truth takes root beneath them. Be patient with the slowness, and keep letting the love in.

CHAPTER SEVEN

All the Way Down

How Belovedness Changes Everything

When the truth of your belovedness finally goes all the way down, when it moves from your head to your heart and becomes the ground you actually stand on, it changes everything, for your sense of who you are is the foundation on which your whole life and faith are built. This is why the whole journey begins here, with belovedness, because everything else rests on it. A woman who knows herself beloved prays differently, loves differently, serves differently, suffers differently, lives differently, and the transformation of her whole life flows from this one truth received. Seeing how belovedness changes everything reveals why it is the foundation of all that follows.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear… We love because he first loved us. — 1 John 4:18-19

From Fear to Love

The deepest change that belovedness works is the casting out of fear, for Scripture says that perfect love drives out fear, and the woman who has received God's love is gradually freed from the fear that has driven so much of her life. So much of what women do is driven by fear, the fear of not being enough, of being too much, of being found out, of failing, of not being loved, and this fear poisons their striving, their relationships, their faith, their rest. But received love casts out fear, and the woman who knows herself beloved is slowly freed from the fear that drove her, able to live and love and serve not out of anxious striving to secure a love she is unsure of but out of the security of a love she has received. This is an immense liberation, the exchange of fear for love as the engine of her life, and it transforms everything downstream, for the woman no longer driven by fear is free to love freely, having first been loved. We love, Scripture says, because He first loved us, and the love we receive becomes the love we are freed to give.

From Striving to Resting

Belovedness also exchanges striving for rest, freeing the woman who has received it from the exhausting effort to earn a worth that was always already hers, and giving her a place to stand that does not depend on her performance. The woman who believes she must earn love lives in perpetual striving, never at rest, always performing, always afraid of slipping, but the woman who has received her belovedness can finally rest, no longer needing to earn what she already has, no longer driven to prove a worth that God has already declared. This rest is not laziness or the end of effort but the end of anxious

striving, the shift from working to earn love to working from the security of love already received, from performing to secure her worth to resting in a worth that is given. She still loves, still serves, still grows, but out of rest rather than anxiety, out of fullness rather than lack, out of the security of belovedness rather than the fear of not measuring up. The treadmill stops, and in its place is the rest of a daughter who knows she is loved and no longer has to earn it.

The Ground You Stand On

Finally, belovedness becomes the ground a woman stands on, the stable foundation beneath everything else, so that her whole life and faith are built on the secure rock of God's love rather than on the shifting sand of her performance, her feelings, or the opinions of others. A woman who builds her sense of worth on her achievements, her appearance, her usefulness, or the approval of others builds on sand, for all these shift and fail, and when they do she is shaken to the foundations. But the woman who builds on her belovedness, on the unchanging love of God declared over her before she began and unable to be lost, builds on rock, standing on a foundation that does not move whatever happens to her performance, her feelings, or her circumstances. This is why belovedness must go all the way down and become the ground she stands on, for everything else in her life and faith will be built on it, and only this foundation holds. When the truth of your belovedness becomes the ground you stand on, you have a place to stand that nothing can shake, the secure rock of a love that was there before you began and will remain when everything else is gone, and on that ground your whole life can be built.

CONCLUSION

Beloved

Before you had done anything, a word was spoken over you, and it is the truest thing about you: beloved. This book has been an unfolding of that one word, and of all that it means to let it go all the way down. You are made in the image of God, fully and in your own right, with a dignity nothing can erase. You are loved not as a reward for being good but as the very ground of your existence, chosen in love before the world began. You are enough, not because you have proven it, but because the God who delights in you says so. You are not too much, for the God who searched and knew you completely has not turned away. You are not defined by your worst moments, for the One who knows them all loves you anyway and is writing a longer story. And all of this is not merely to be known but to be received, let in, until it becomes the ground you stand on.

The journey of formation that lies ahead, into Scripture and the sacraments, into prayer and the saints, into the Church and the mission, all of it rests on this foundation, because a woman's relationship with God goes only as deep as her understanding of who she is to Him. Everything that follows will ask more of you, will call you deeper, will cost you something. But none of it can be received rightly except by a woman who knows, in the deep place where it changes everything, that she is already beloved, already enough, already His, before she does any of it.

So let the word go all the way down. Name the lies you have believed, that you are not enough, that you are too much, that you are your worst moments, and set against each of them the word God speaks over you. Stop trying to earn the love that was already yours before you began. Let yourself be fully known and discover that you are fully loved. Build your life not on the shifting sand of your performance but on the rock of a love that cannot be lost. And come to everything that follows, all the formation and the challenge and the deepening, not as a woman trying to prove her worth but as a daughter who already knows she is beloved, standing on that ground, and ready, from that security, to say her yes. Beloved. That is who you are. Let it be the first word and the ground of all the rest.

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