Lion and the Just-Right Basket

A little adventure about listening

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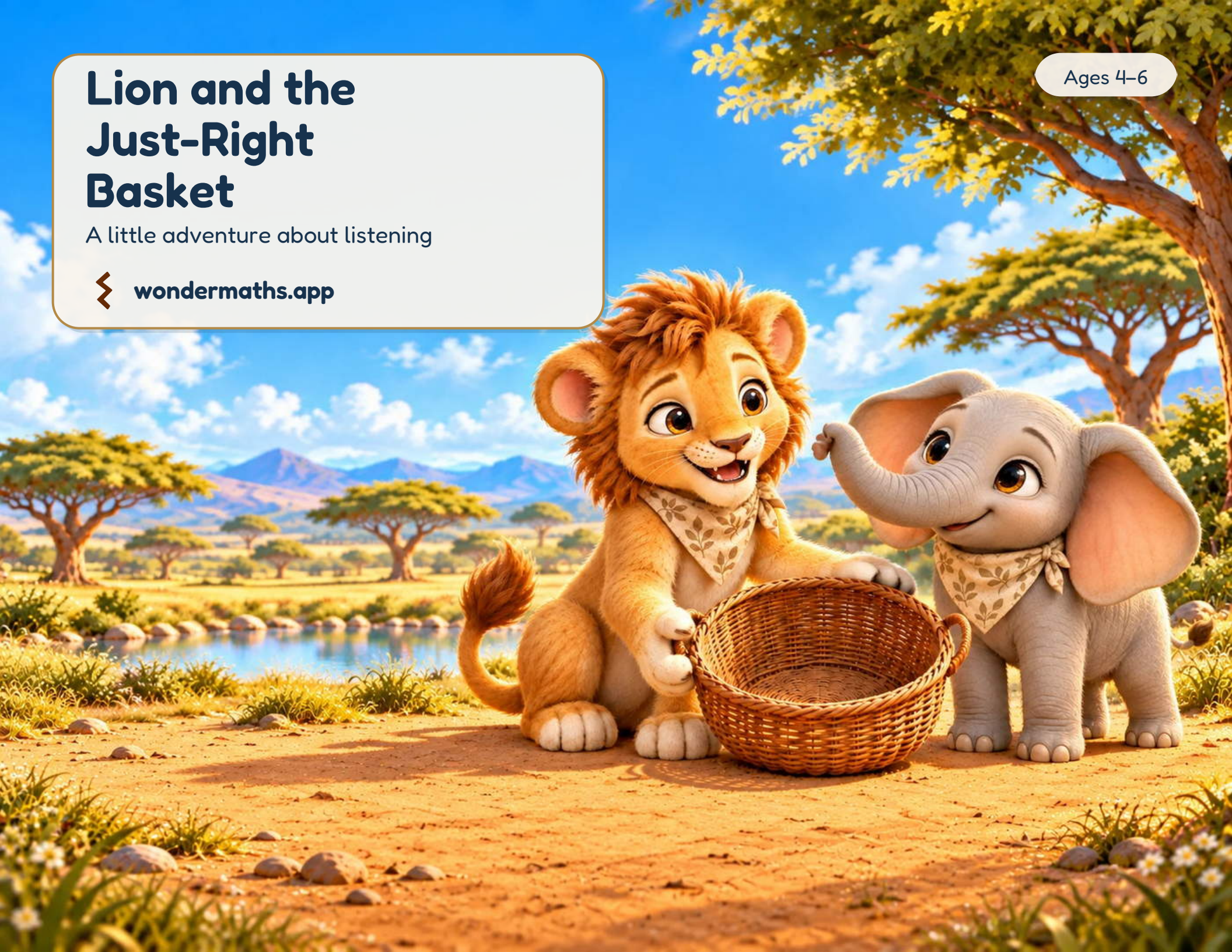
Ages 4–6





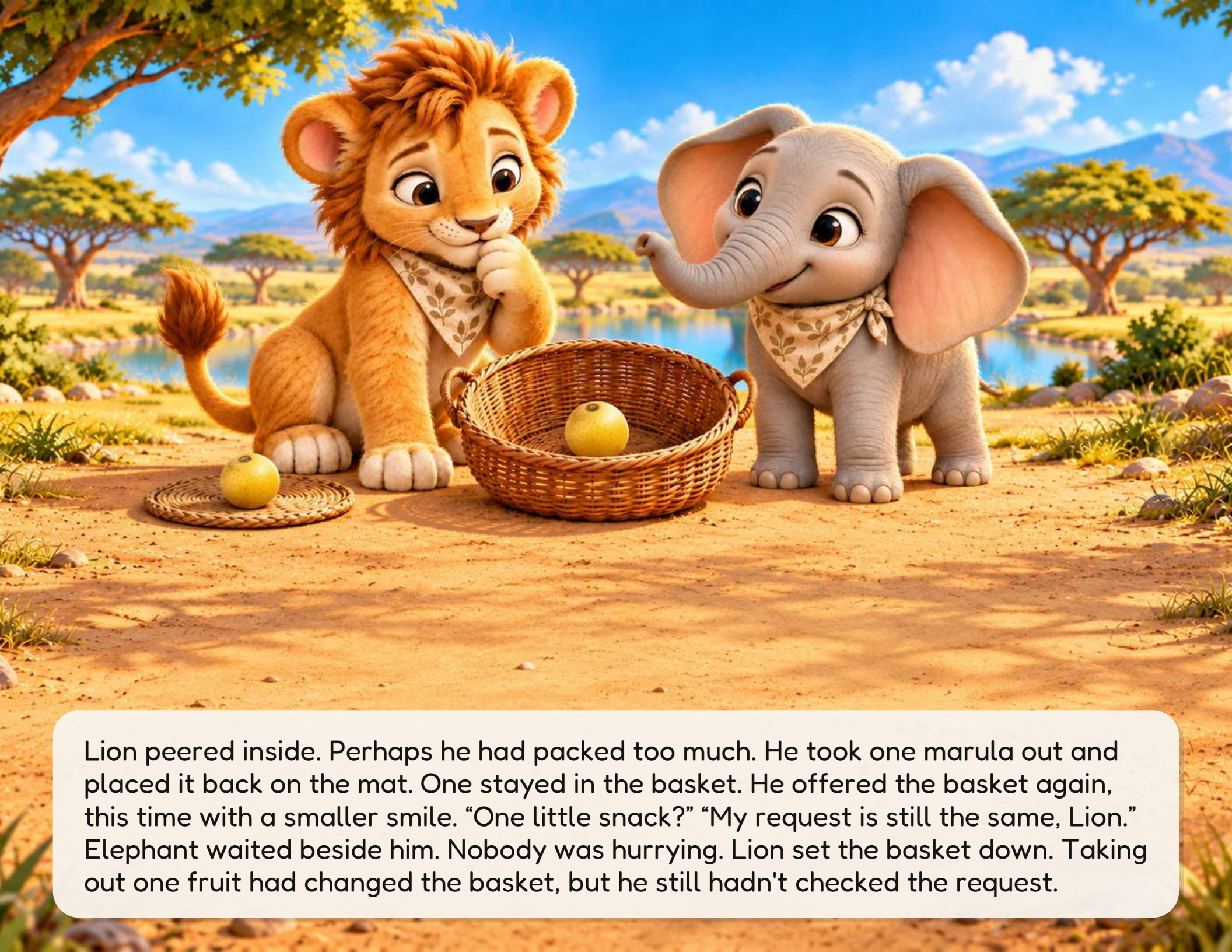
Lion was polishing a wicker basket with the tip of his tail. Swish, swish. He wanted to get everything ready for a walk with Elephant. Two marulas rested on a little mat beside him. Elephant's footsteps stopped at the mat. “Lion, may I have a basket with zero fruit inside? We can collect fresh marulas on our walk.” Lion's ears perked up. He had heard the word fruit. “I'll get your order ready!”



Lion picked up the first marula. Into the basket it went with a little thup. The second marula waited on the mat. Lion leaned over the rim and admired his work. One piece of fruit. That seemed like a kind thing to pack for a friend. He imagined Elephant nibbling it on the way. “A snack for the walk!” But Elephant had asked for zero fruit inside.



Lion's paw paused over the second marula. “What if Elephant gets hungry twice?” He put that marula in, too. Thup. Now both fruits were inside. Lion carried the basket to Elephant, lifting his chin just a little. The two fruits rolled against the wicker with a soft rrr-tup. “Two lovely marulas! Your order is ready!” “Thank you for wanting to help. That isn't my order yet.” Lion lowered the basket carefully.



Lion peered inside. Perhaps he had packed too much. He took one marula out and placed it back on the mat. One stayed in the basket. He offered the basket again, this time with a smaller smile. “One little snack?” “My request is still the same, Lion.” Elephant waited beside him. Nobody was hurrying. Lion set the basket down. Taking out one fruit had changed the basket, but he still hadn't checked the request.



Lion tucked his tail around his paws. He had tried two fruits, then one. Both times, he had guessed what Elephant wanted. He lifted his ears toward his friend. “Could you tell me your whole order again? I'll listen to every bit.” “A basket with zero fruit inside. We'll collect fresh marulas on our walk.” This time Lion stayed still until Elephant finished. “Zero fruit inside. I heard it now.”



Lion took the last marula out of the basket and put it beside the other one on the mat. He looked all the way around the inside, then gently tipped the basket. Nothing rolled. He looked once more. Both marulas were on the mat. None were in the basket. Lion lifted it without adding anything back. “Zero fruit inside. This basket is ready.” His paws had finished the order by taking something out.



Elephant curled her trunk around the basket's handle. “Yes. That's the basket I asked for.” Lion grinned. He had thought an empty basket meant he hadn't helped. But Elephant could take this one to the marula tree and collect fruit there. The empty space was useful. His tail gave the mat one proud swish, carefully missing both fruits. “I packed just what you asked for!” “And you listened to all of it.”



They set off together. Elephant carried the empty basket. Lion walked beside her, leaving the two marulas safe on the mat. A breeze ruffled his mane, and he chuckled. “Zero snacks in the basket. But I did bring one good listening ear.” “Just one?” Lion wiggled both ears. “Two! Both ready.” Elephant laughed softly, and their footsteps went swish, swish through the grass. When you want to help, listen to the whole request, then check what you have done.

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An empty basket.
A helpful friend.

When you want to help, listen to the whole request, then check what you have done.

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