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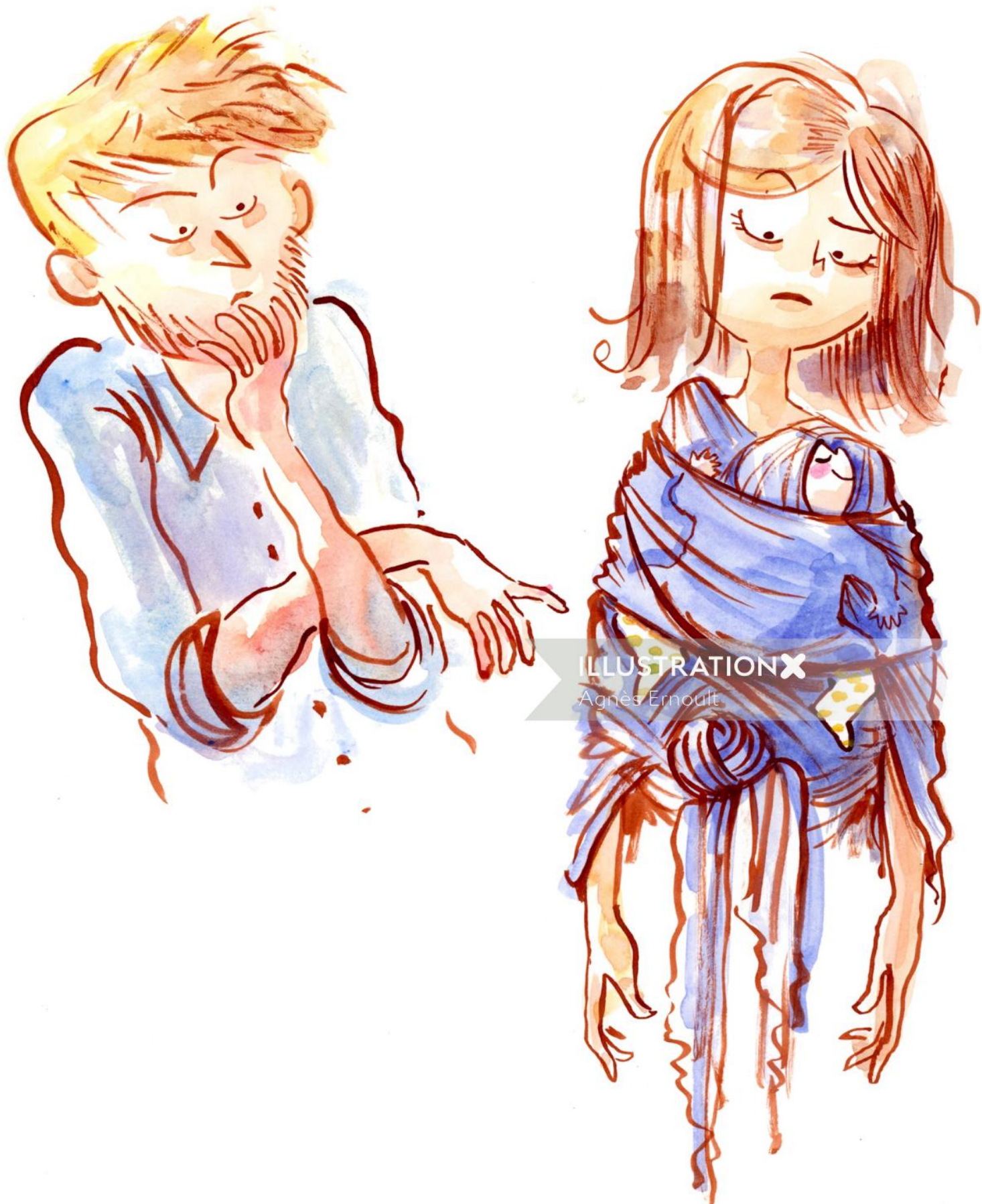
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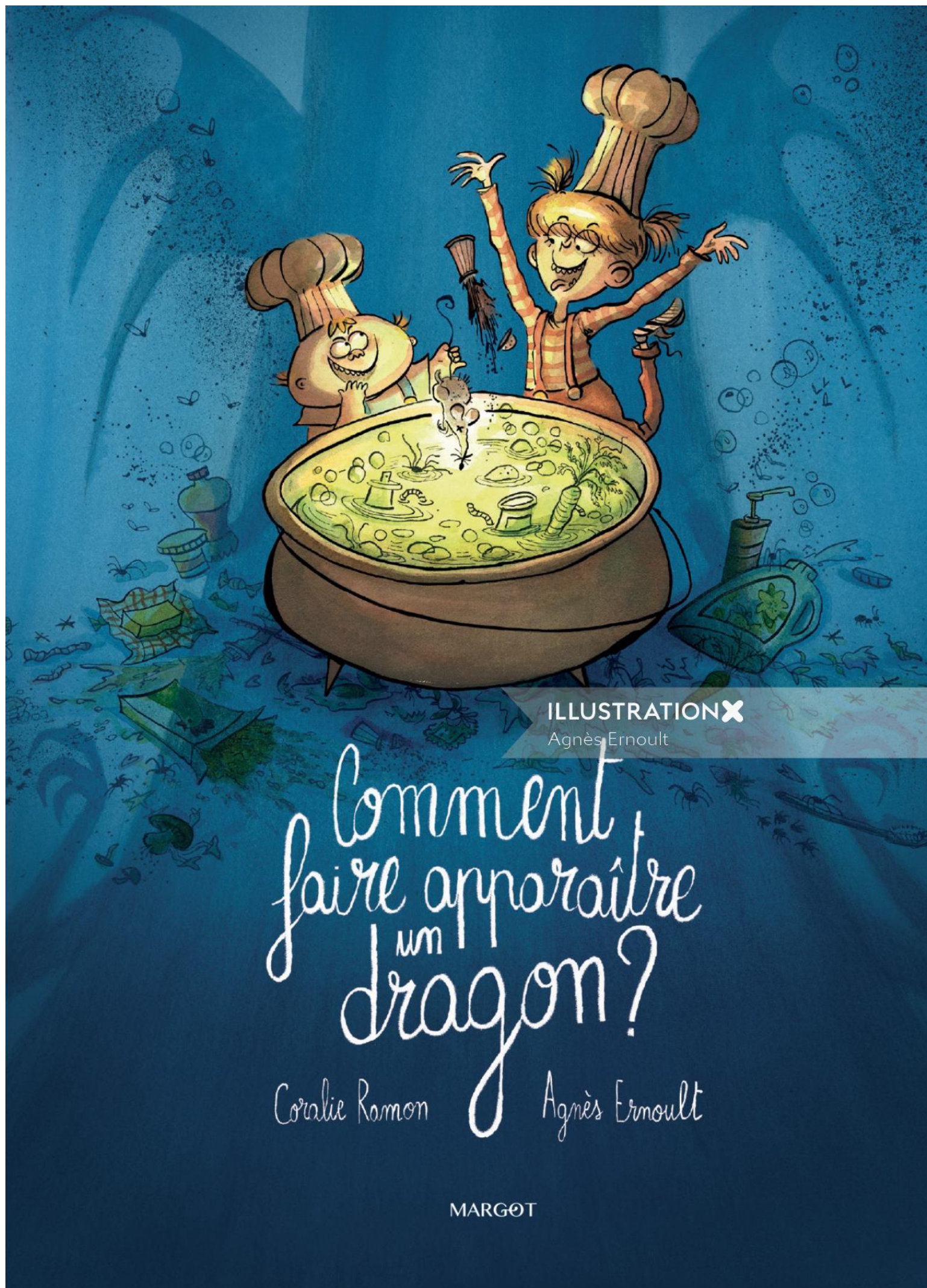
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KIDS & TEENS / HUMOR



one dirty diaper at a time

Surviving the frenzied pace of caring for your newborn as a first-time parent

BY PATRICK DUNN | ILLUSTRATION BY AGNÈS ERNOULT

WATCH FOR THE SIGNS:

- shut blinds
- lights on at all hours of the night
- disheveled adults staggering about

Unscrupulous activity in your neighborhood? Nope. First-time parents.

A baby thrusts well-adjusted adults into a frenzied pace of feeding, clothing, burping and changing, along with other new *ing* words. One of those words is *protecting*—and even the most rational parents can go overboard.

It's a slippery slope, fueled every time you look into your precious little angel's eyes.

You may say, "Goochey-goochey goo. Aren't you the most beautiful baby!"

What you're thinking: *Mommy and Daddy have no idea what to do.*

Love turns to worry

Family, friends and strangers are swabbed and tested for signs of illnesses and germs—and you treat crying like a four-alarm fire. The situation goes from bad to worse when you replace your baby monitor with an Obsessor 2000—which includes video, thermal imaging, vital-sign monitoring and a mood ring. But you hit bottom

when you start analyzing diaper contents for proper weight, color and composition, as if you're the star of "CSI: Scatological Division."

Baby-care books instill fear. Their underlying message is that your child is one step away from the emergency room. *Let's see . . . Keep baby from sun, wind, hot, cold, overstimulation, noise, germs, chemicals, salsa music and cat lovers!* Every beloved item in your home is a death trap.

Mentor advice

Many new parents find the counsel of other parents helpful, a "here's how we did it" savvy. But then there's everyone else who feels obligated to offer unsolicited advice: "She's not wearing a blanket? She'll freeze!" "I'd get rid of that _____ (insert any noun); he'll lose an eye!"

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Consulting empty-nest parents and grandparents can offset these worries. However, this increases the risk of swinging too far in the other direction. "Hand sanitizer? Hmmmph! When you and your brother were 6 months old, I had you poop-scoopin' on the goat farm!" "When I was a baby, a child seat was wherever they set you."

Being a caretaker of a new, vulnerable life is a challenge. But somewhere between constant panic and complete obliviousness is a prudent approach.

You may ask, "How did you find the balance?"

I'd be happy to answer that—right after I install our newest SWAT-team-resistant baby gate. ●

Patrick Dunn is a visual media producer for Focus on the Family and stays involved in the Christian music industry. He is the father of two. This article first appeared in *Thriving Family* magazine.

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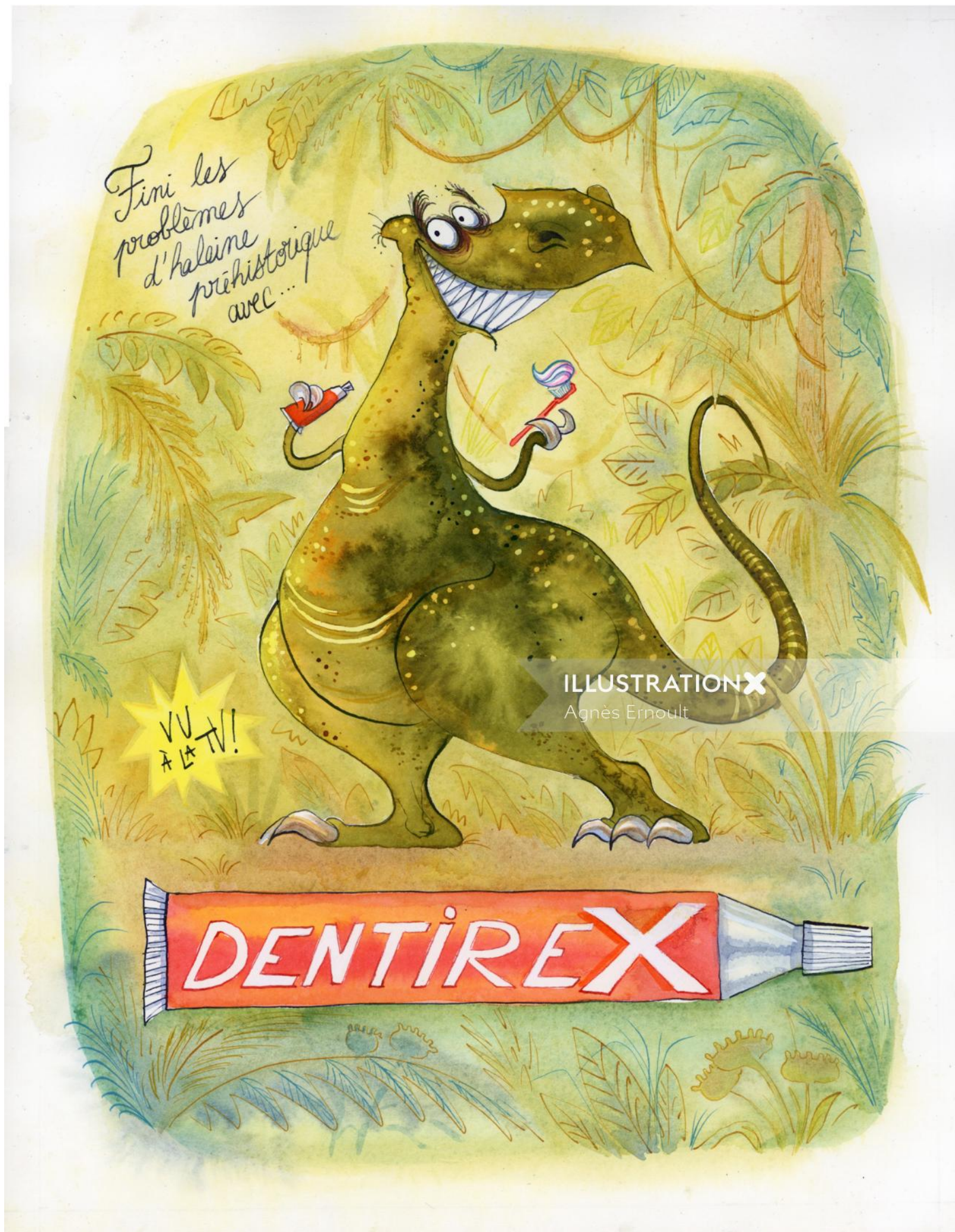
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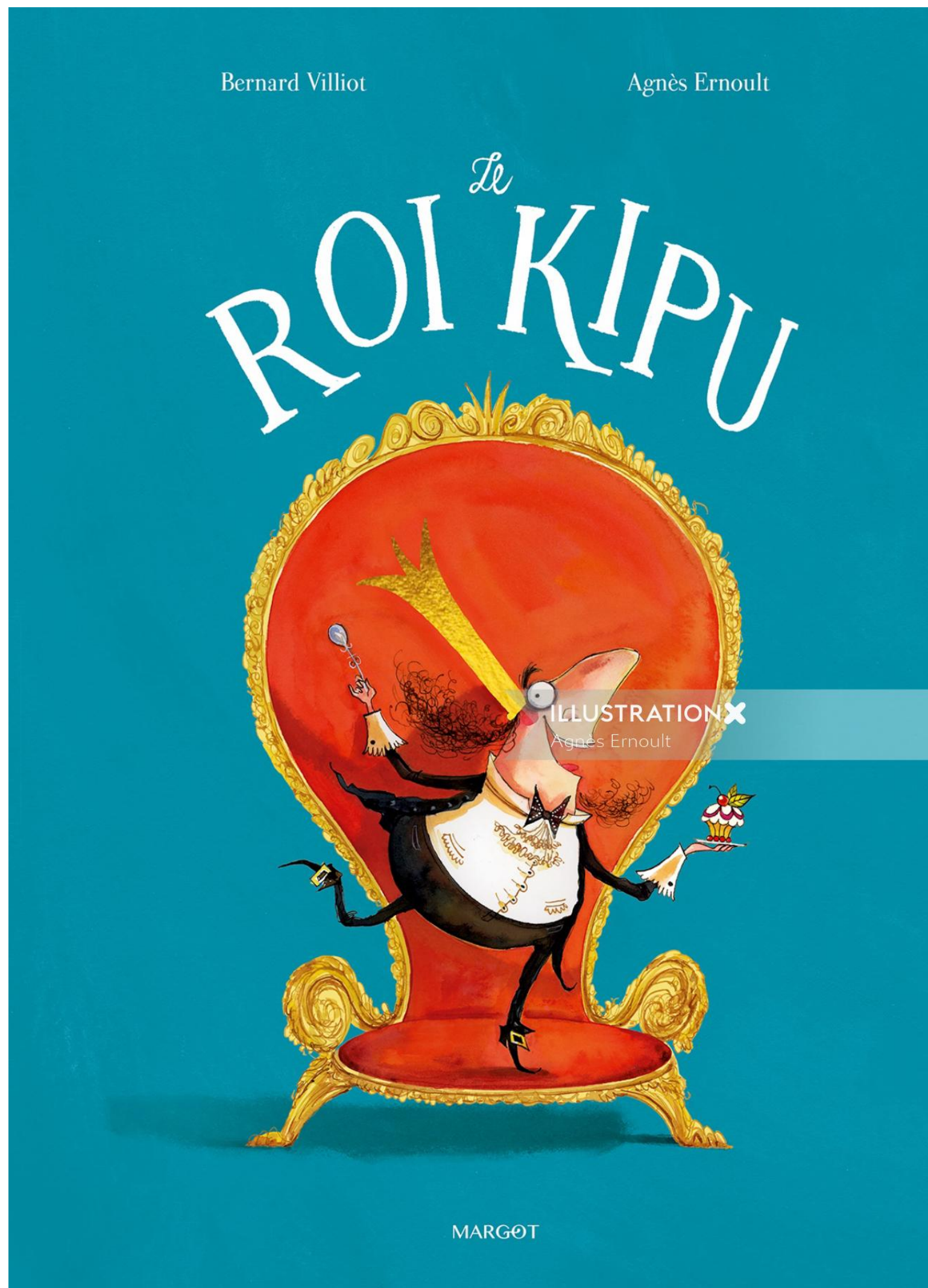
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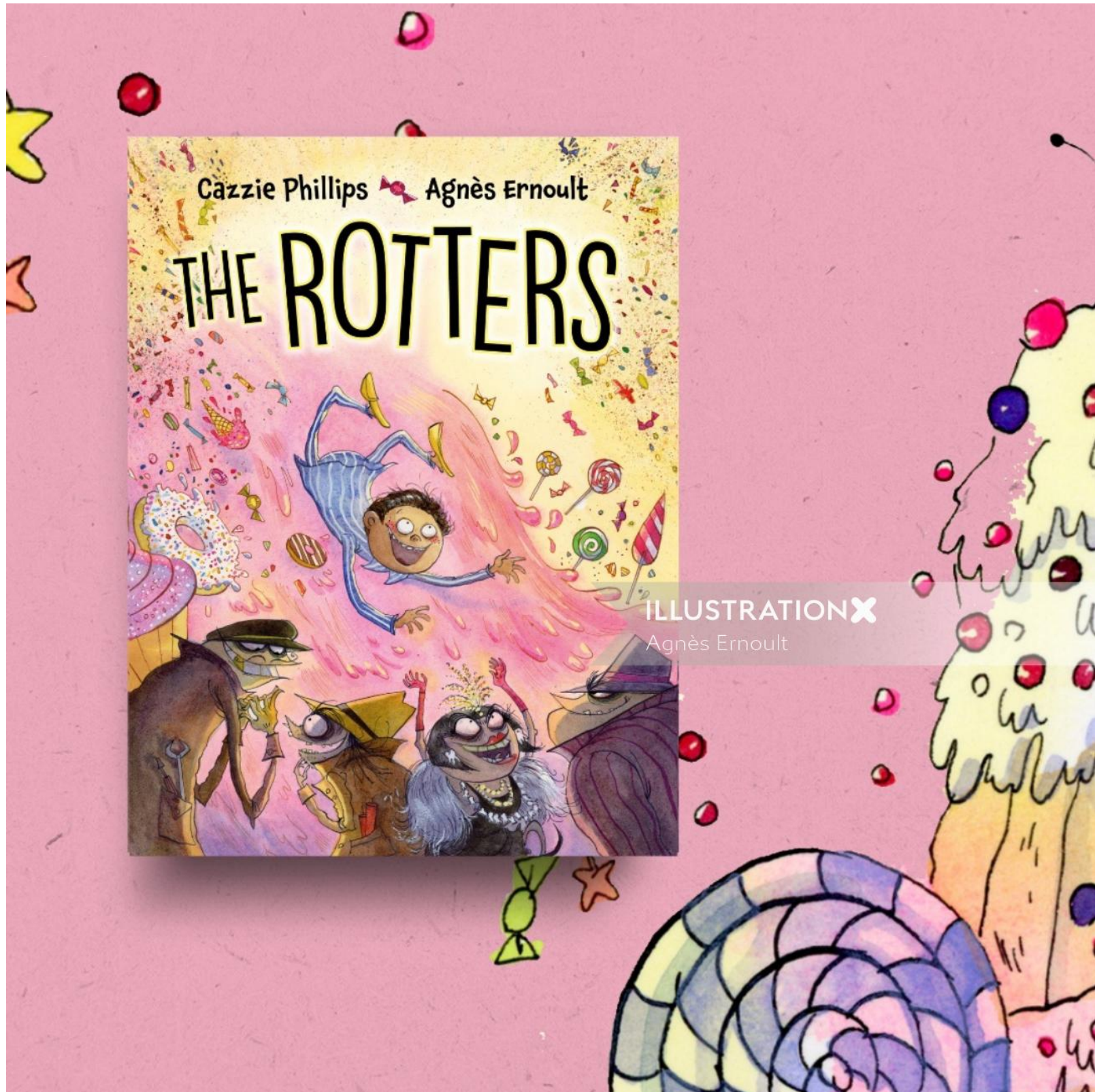
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