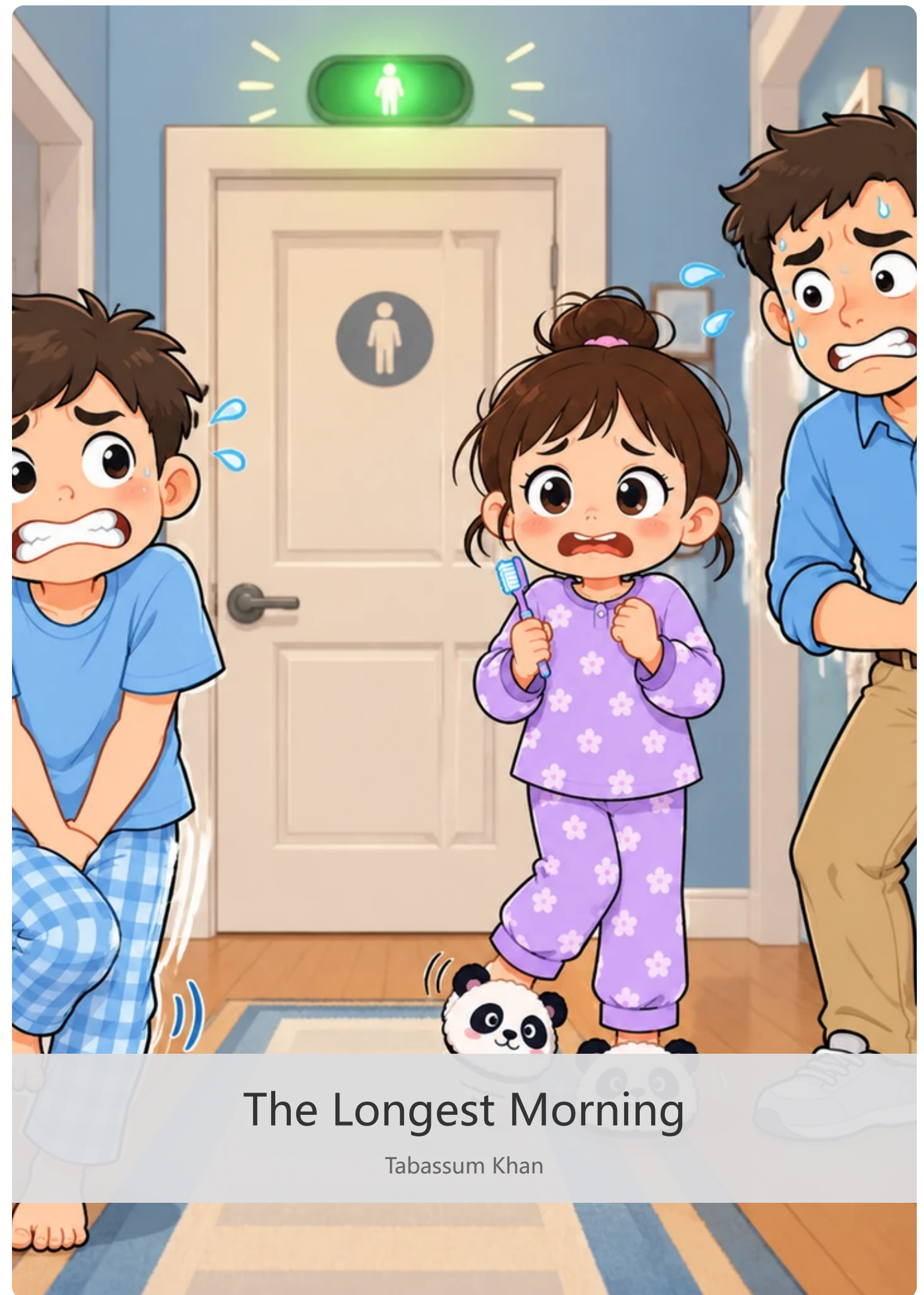




The Longest Morning

Tabassum Khan



Leo jumps out of bed with a huge stretch, his stomach rumbling after drinking a giant glass of apple juice before bedtime last night. He heads straight down the hallway, humming a happy tune, ready for his morning routine.



Just as Leo reaches for the shiny brass doorknob of the bathroom, the door clicks shut with a firm lock. A loud voice from inside calls out that someone is definitely, absolutely, not coming out anytime soon.



Big sister Maya shuffles down the hallway wearing fluffy panda slippers and holding her toothbrush, looking absolutely horrified when she realizes Leo is already waiting. She immediately joins the queue, tapping her right foot anxiously on the floorboards.



Dad joins the growing line next, balancing a steaming mug of coffee in one hand while frantically clutching his stomach with the other. His eyes dart toward the closed door as he silently begs the person inside to hurry up.



Even Barnaby the golden retriever trots over to the bathroom door, sitting down right in front of it and letting out a worried little whine. The tension in the hallway reaches a whole new level as every single occupant starts doing the tiptoe dance.



Maya begins pacing back and forth like a caged tiger, checking her watch every two seconds and groaning dramatically about missing her school bus. Dad tries to read the morning newspaper upside down, completely sweating from the pressure.



Leo starts hopping from one foot to the other, making funny faces as his bladder stages a full-scale rebellion against the delay. He whispers a little pep talk to himself while staring intently at the stubborn wooden door.



Suddenly, the heavy bathroom door clicks and slowly begins to swing open, revealing a totally relaxed Mom who spent the last twenty minutes doing a luxurious facial mask. She smiles brightly and asks who is next, completely unaware of the absolute chaos she caused.



Leo dashes past Mom in a blur of motion, diving into the sanctuary of the bathroom just in the nick of time with a huge sigh of ultimate relief. Maya and Dad collapse against the hallway wall in utter exhaustion, celebrating their collective victory.



Peace finally returns to the sunny hallway as everyone takes turns brushing their teeth and getting ready for the day with big smiles. The great bathroom crisis is officially over, until tomorrow morning comes around again.