

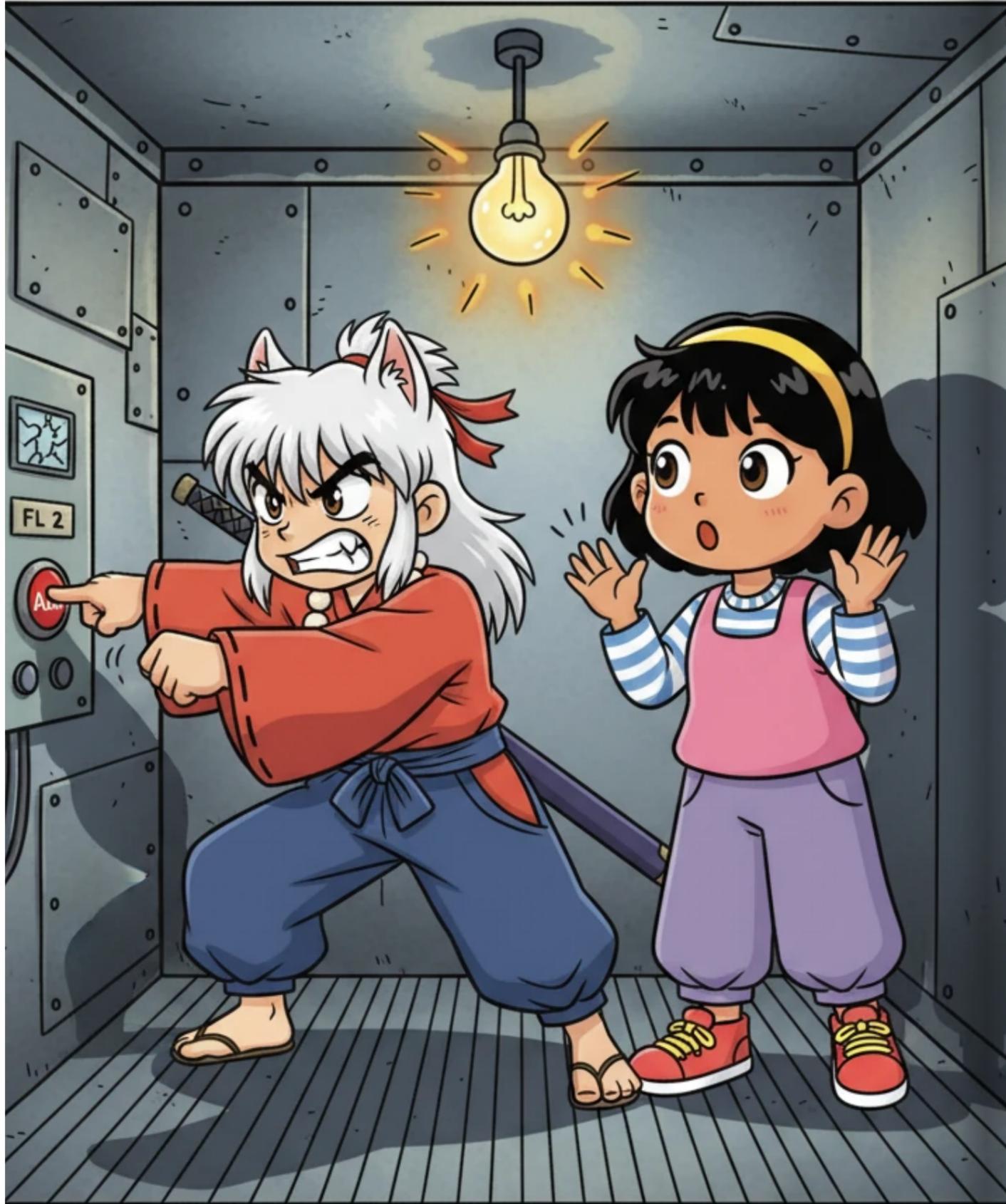


The Elevator Baby

Islam Smawi



The old elevator groaned with a tired hiccup, then suddenly stopped with a jolt between the sixth and seventh floors. The lights flickered nervously, once, twice, before settling on a dim, sickly yellow glow. Kagome's hand instinctively tightened around Inuyasha's arm, her eyes wide with a mix of fear and concern.



Inuyasha, ever impatient, punched the elevator panel with a frustrated grunt, muttering about the ancient machinery. He jabbed the alarm button, but only silence answered his efforts. Above them, the single light bulb flickered again, casting their exaggerated shadows in a dance across the metallic walls.



Kagome exhaled sharply, pressing both palms to the round swell of her belly as another strong cramp rippled through her. Sweat beaded at her hairline, the air-conditioning having died with the lift. Her knees buckled slightly under the unexpected intensity, a clear sign that their situation was becoming urgent.



Quick as a flash, Inuyasha caught her before she could fully collapse, his rough voice a mix of worry and determination. He shucked off his bright red windbreaker, folding it carefully to cushion the cold metal floor. "Sit," he urged, pulling her down gently so she could lean against his sturdy chest.



With Kagome leaning back against him, her head nestled against his shoulder, Inuyasha began to coach her, mimicking the rhythmic breathing the midwife had taught them. The flickering light revealed the dampness on her temples and the brave tremor in her lip. He breathed deeply, his own ears flattening slightly as he guided her through the difficult moments.



As one contraction passed, Kagome sagged with exhaustion. Inuyasha gently checked her skirt, his demon senses picking up the unmistakable, urgent scent of amniotic fluid. A primal snarl threatened to escape him, but he swallowed it, locking his protective instincts behind human resolve.



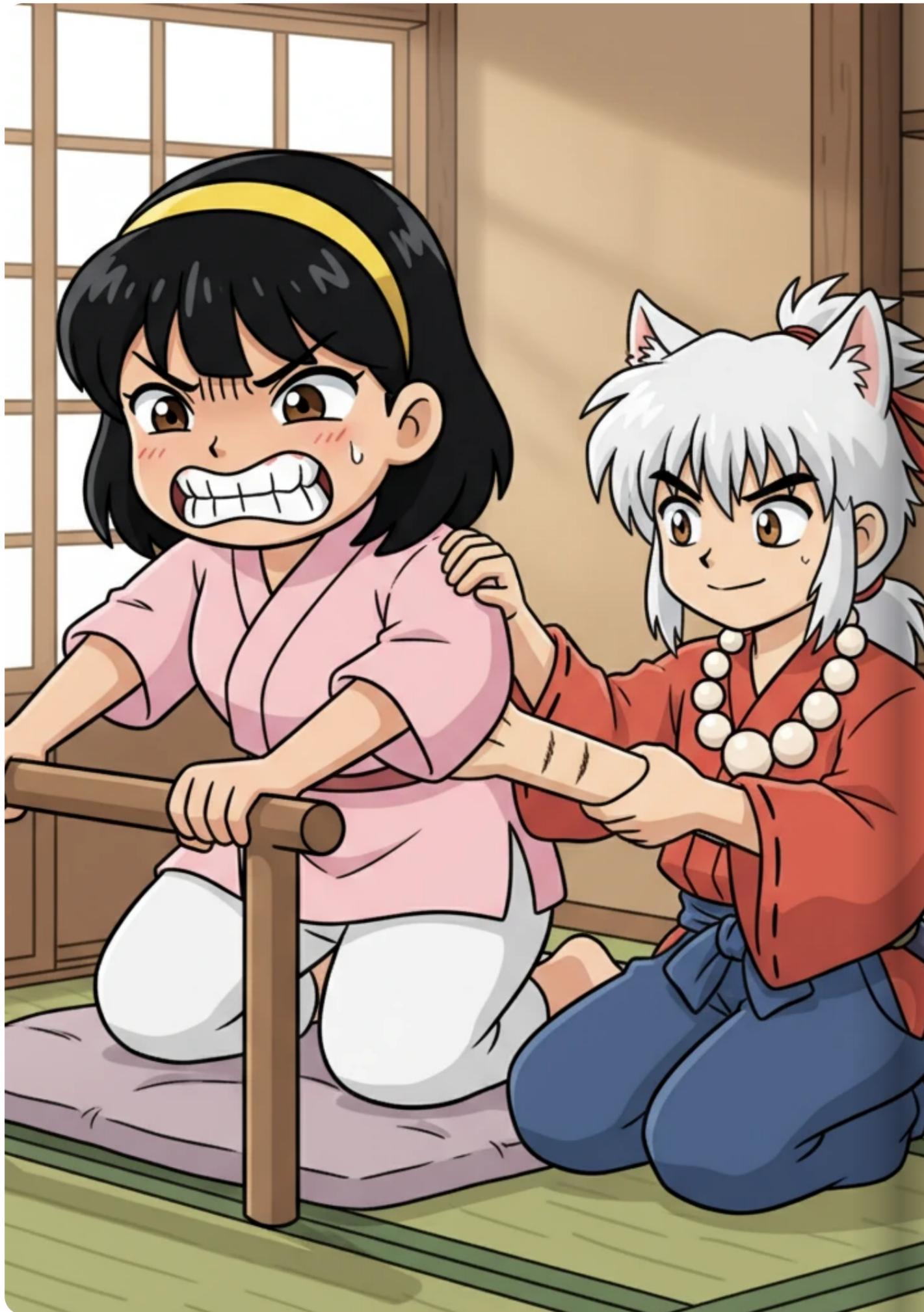
Kagome, sensing his inner turmoil, cupped his cheek, her gaze firm. "Stay with me, dog-boy. I need the man, not the beast," she said, her voice filled with trust. He turned his face into her palm, kissing it quickly, reaffirming his promise to be there for her, man and protector.



Another powerful pain arrived, making Kagome bear down involuntarily. “Elevator camera’s dead. No one’s coming. We do this ourselves,” she panted, her voice cracking with resolve. Inuyasha, his own voice hoarse, pulled his soft T-shirt over his head, bunching it to tuck behind her hips, creating a small, warm nest.



Their small elevator became their entire world, a cozy, if unusual, birthing room. Inuyasha found her half-full water bottle and her special red picnic blanket, which smelled of home. He shook out the familiar blanket, letting its cheerful color spread between them like a hopeful flag against the metallic walls.



As the next contraction built, Kagome gripped the handrail, her knuckles white, her strength making the metal groan. "Let it go," Inuyasha encouraged, offering his forearm instead. She bit down, and he welcomed the sharp pain, counting the seconds of her struggle with the imprints of her teeth, a testament to their shared courage as a new life began to crown.