A COMIC ADAPTATION

THE COLONY WHERE NOBODY IS ALLOWED TO SLEEP



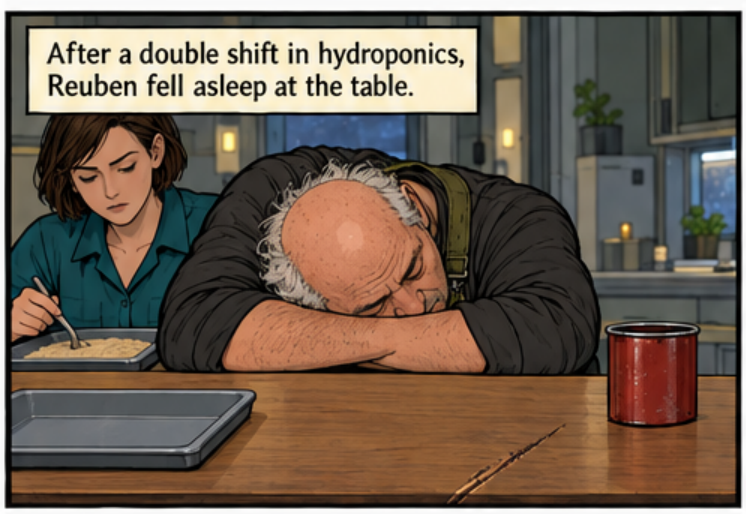
SUVRO GHOSH

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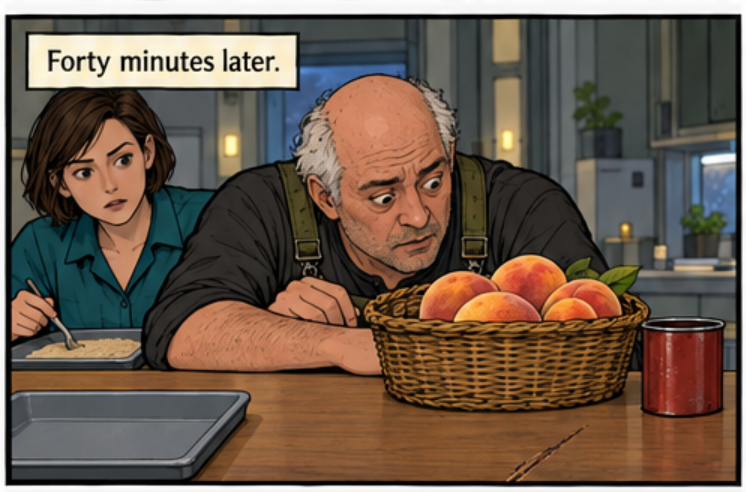
Original story by Suvro Ghosh.

Comic adaptation and AI-generated artwork produced with Codex.

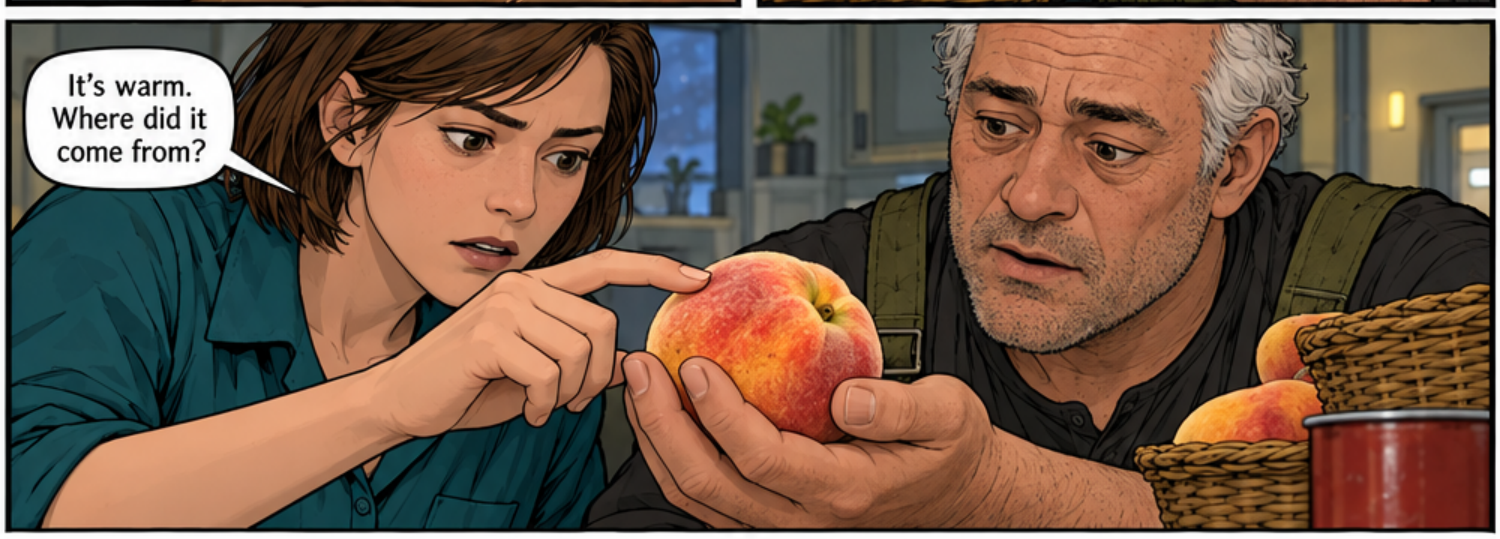


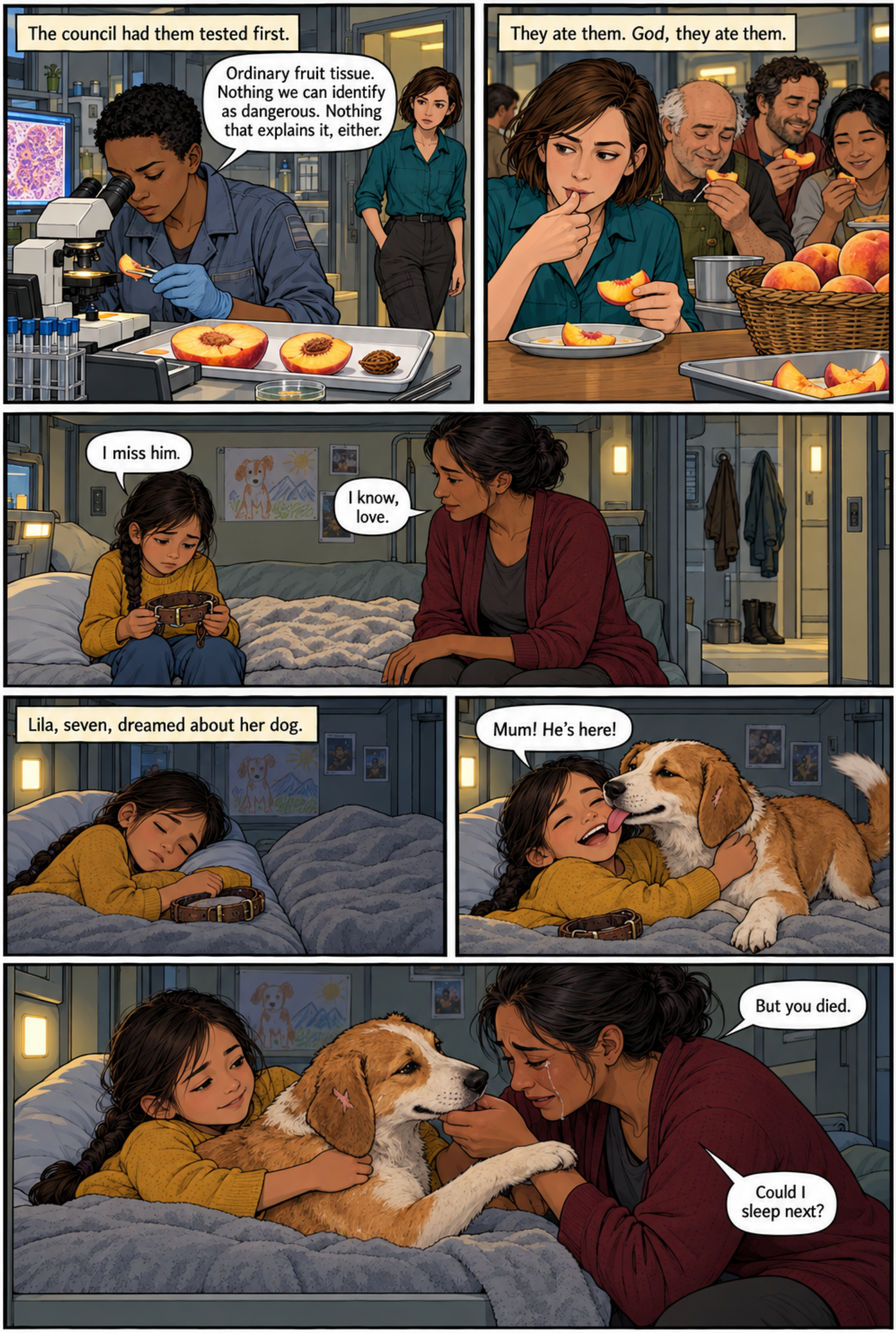




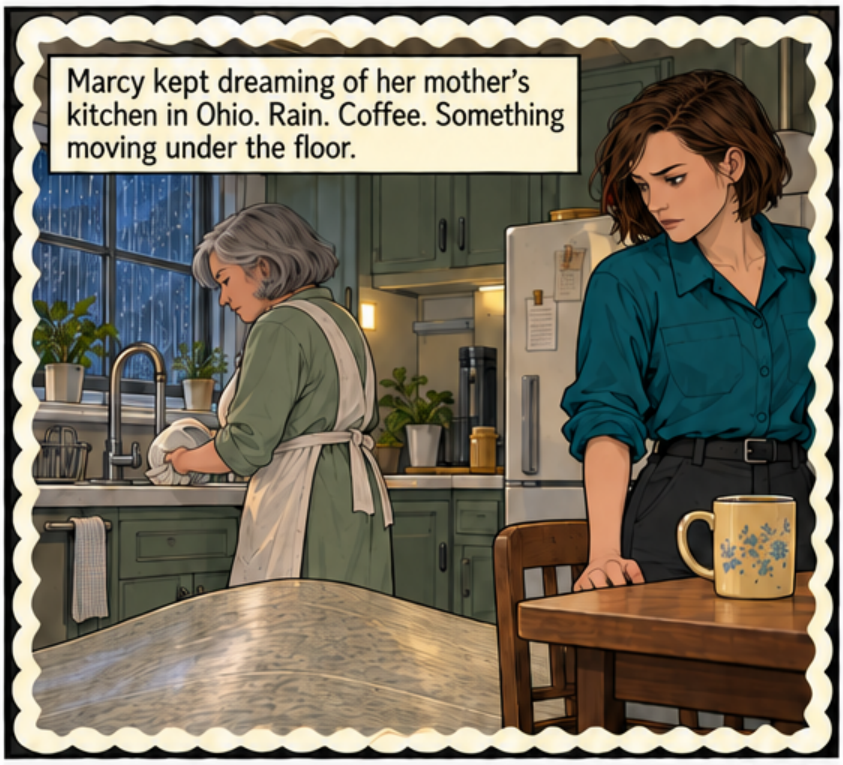




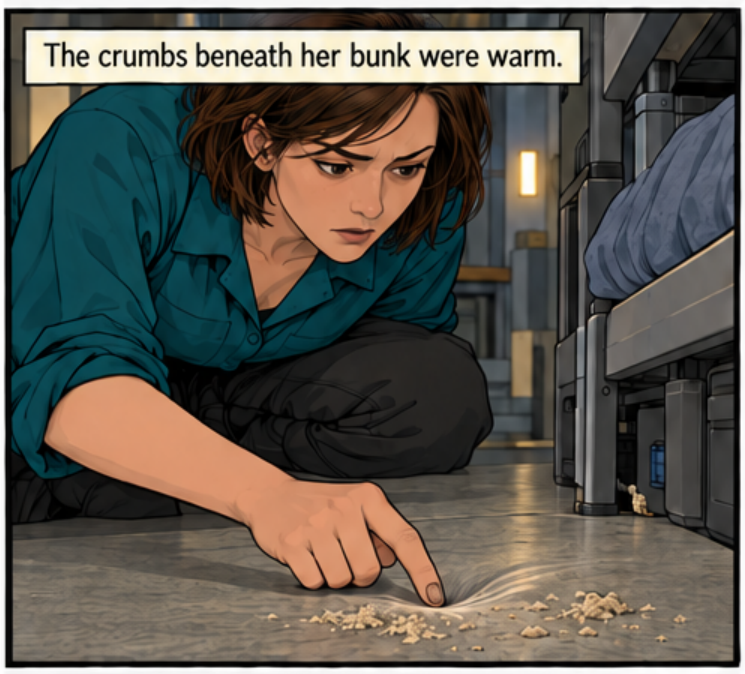



The council had them tested first.
Ordinary fruit tissue. Nothing we can identify as dangerous. Nothing that explains it, either.
They ate them. God, they ate them.
I miss him.
I know, love.
Lila, seven, dreamed about her dog.
Mum! He's here!
But you died.
Could I sleep next?


The council said to wait.
People slept anyway.
Coffee. Think about coffee.
WAIT FOR SUPERVISED TRIALS.
Fresh bread. Wine. Clothes that fit.
A shower that actually washed something off.
Then a man dreamed of his dead wife.
I missed you.
Your face is from before. But you weigh what you did at the end. When you were dying.
Is he angry with me?
No.
MEDICAL BAY
Her husband was sedated inside.
The heat bore hit a pale layer before the peaches. Mineral deposits?
Or something in REM sleep. We don't know.
Further monitored sleep was permitted.
Someone had dreamed a piano.
She heard a song she'd forgotten she knew.


Marcy kept dreaming of her mother's kitchen in Ohio. Rain. Coffee. Something moving under the floor.

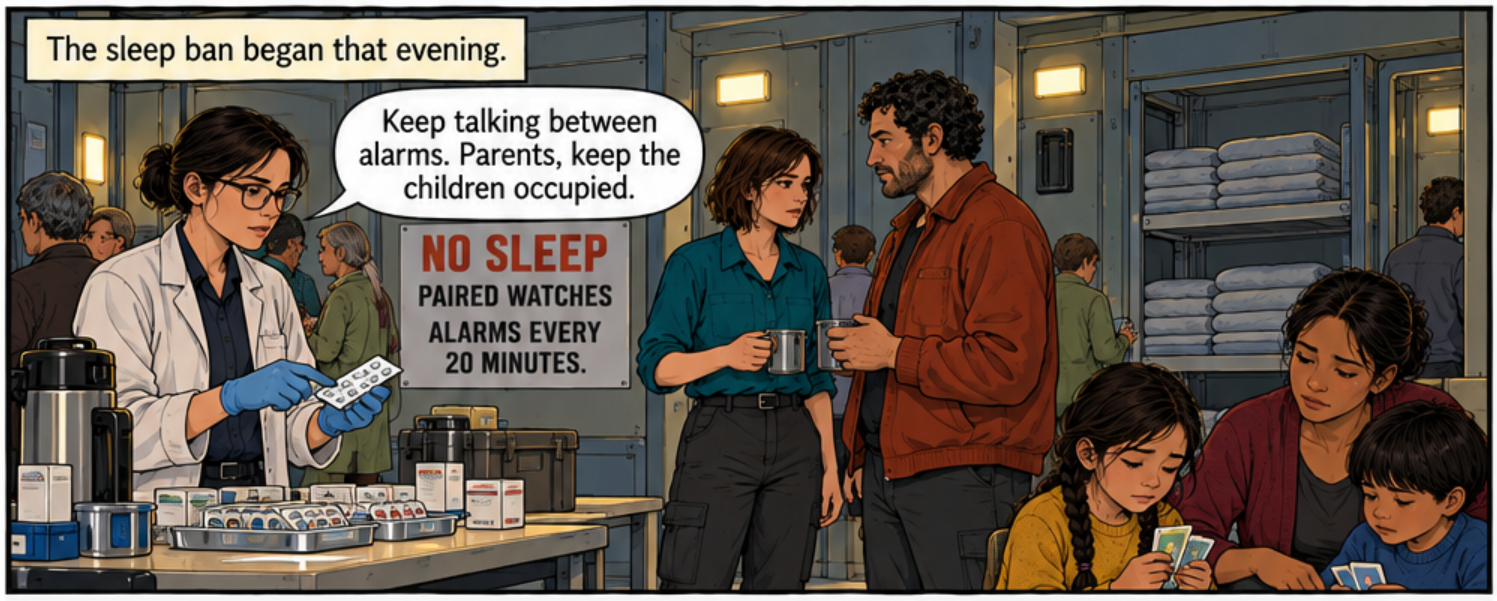

The first bite was small. Her tongue didn't heal. Grit under her nails. Once, soil behind her teeth.


The crumbs beneath her bunk were warm.


Then Reuben slept, and roots grew out of his mouth.

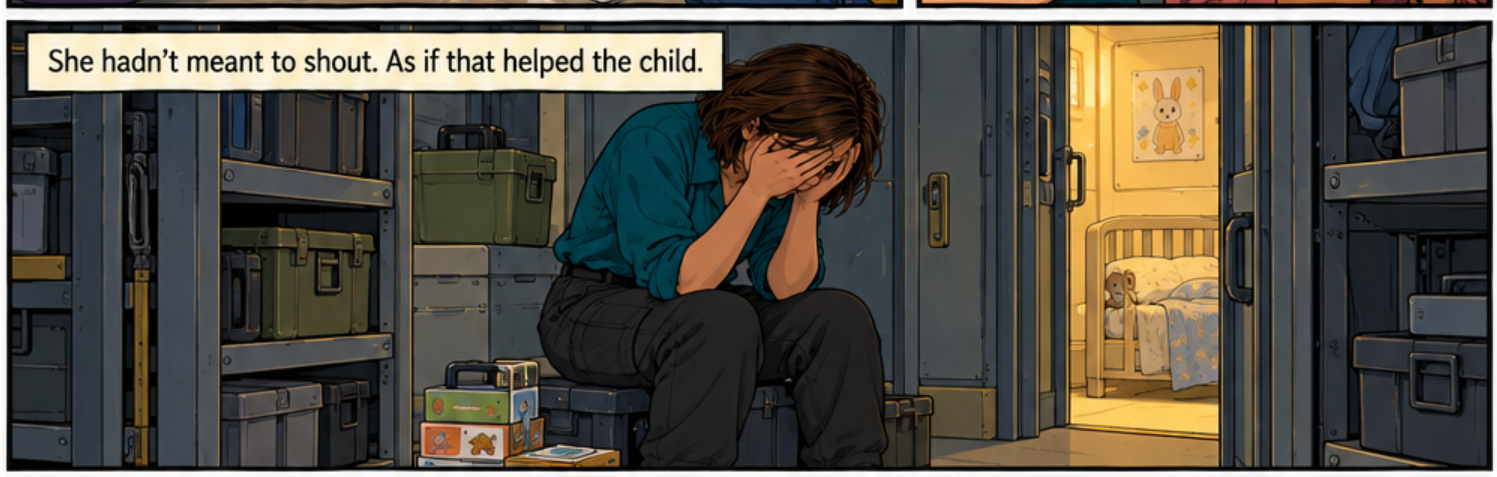

Stop. That's muscle. He can feel it.

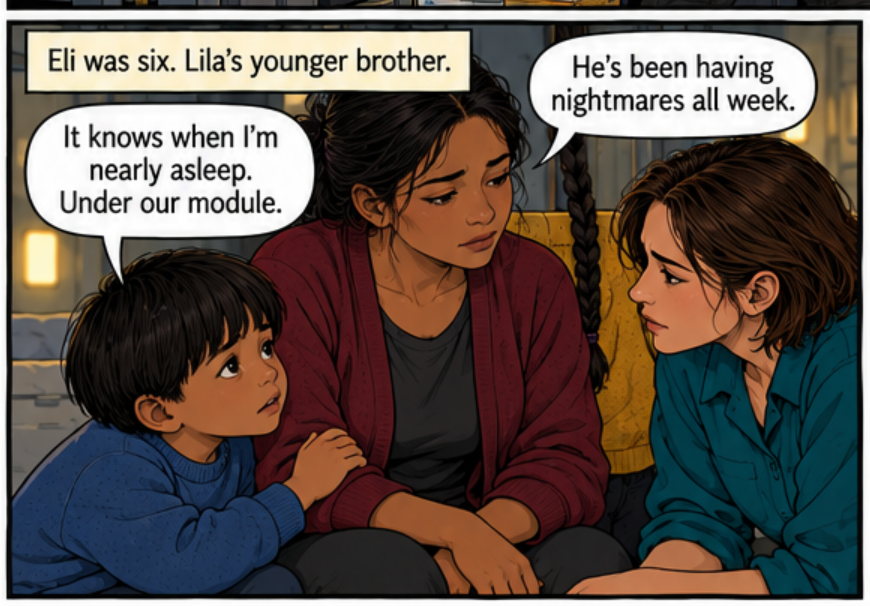

The floor's coming with him.

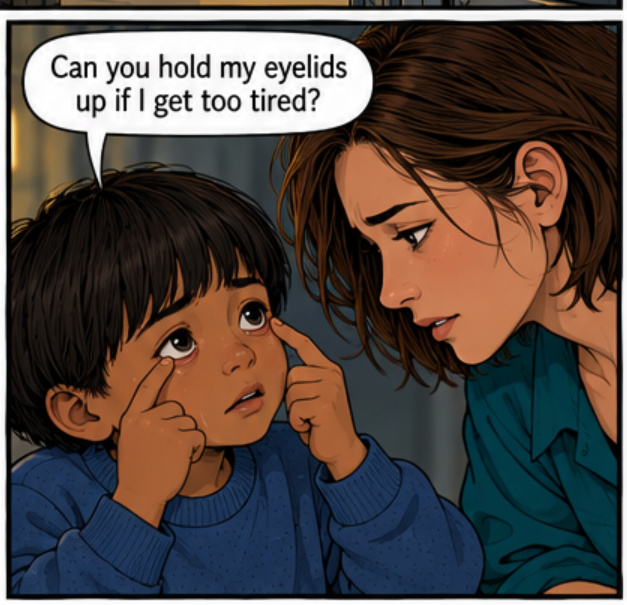

The sleep ban began that evening.
Keep talking between alarms. Parents, keep the children occupied.
NO SLEEP
PAIRED WATCHES
ALARMS EVERY 20 MINUTES.


She'd been a teacher on Earth. She knew games. By midnight, they couldn't remember the rules.


Keep your eyes open!

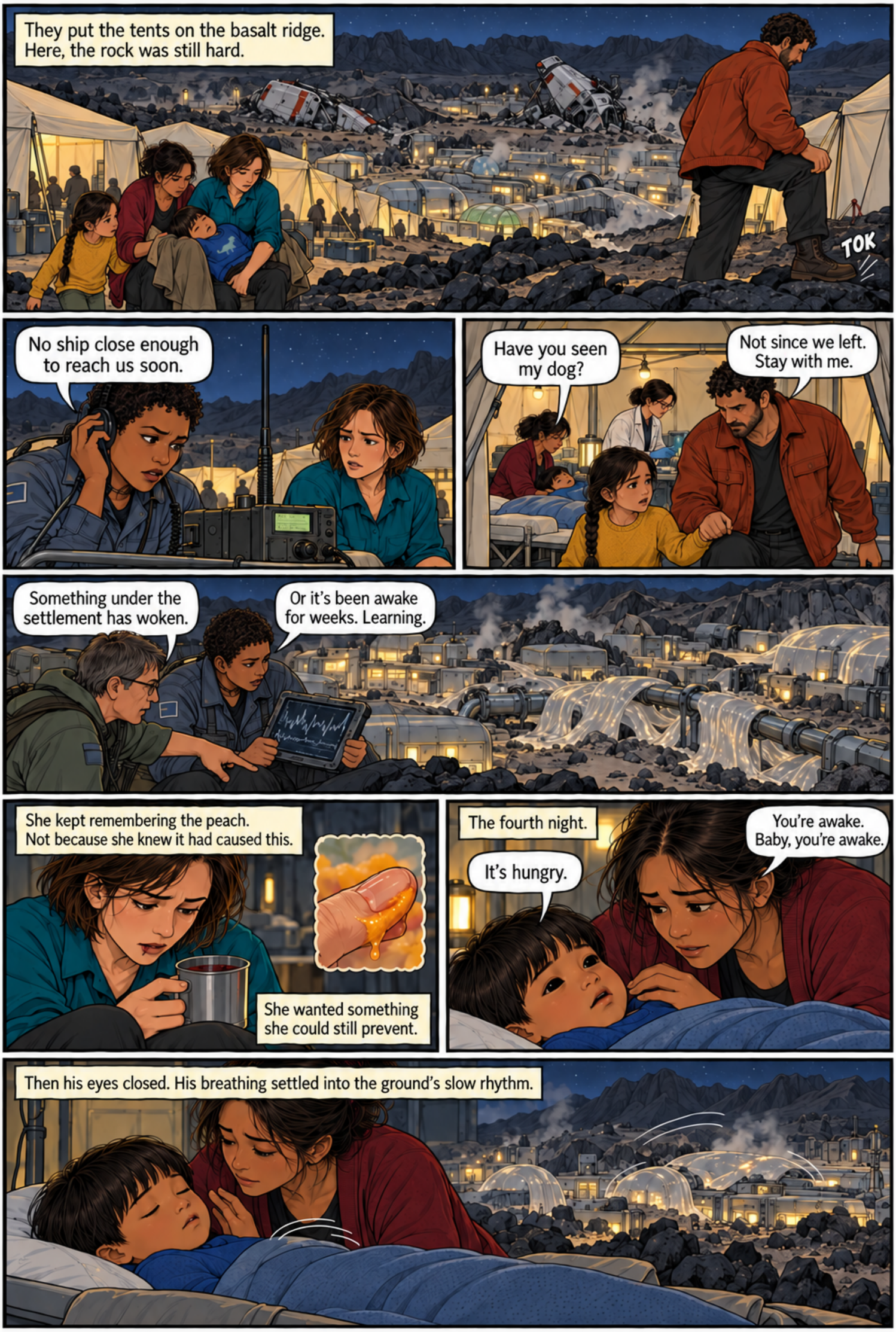

She hadn't meant to shout. As if that helped the child.


Eli was six. Lila's younger brother.
He's been having nightmares all week.
It knows when I'm nearly asleep. Under our module.


Can you hold my eyelids up if I get too tired?


BEEP BEEP
03:00
You went under.
So did you.
You were clicking again.
I bit my tongue.
How long?
NEXT ALARM (MIN:SEC)
20:00
I don't know.
Lunch. The day after the ban.
One spoonful, love.
CLINK
Eli?


Eli. Wake up. Please.
He didn't wake.
That cup's going uphill.
I'll clear the outer hatch!
KLIK KLIK KLIK
Eli opened his mouth. The clicking came out of him.
Hold on to him!
KRRUNCH
They kept carrying the boy.


They put the tents on the basalt ridge. Here, the rock was still hard.
TOK
No ship close enough to reach us soon.
Have you seen my dog?
Not since we left. Stay with me.
Something under the settlement has woken.
Or it's been awake for weeks. Learning.
She kept remembering the peach. Not because she knew it had caused this.
She wanted something she could still prevent.
The fourth night.
It's hungry.
You're awake. Baby, you're awake.
Then his eyes closed. His breathing settled into the ground's slow rhythm.


We've tried everything. If we stop his heart, perhaps the ground will stop.
It may be necessary.
Can you hear me?
It likes yours. The kitchen.
Your mommy keeps you there.
Marcy knew. She could still have told his mother.
Come outside with me, Lila.
When Eli's heart stopped, the ground stopped moving.
For three minutes there was silence beneath everything.
No. Please, no.
THUM
hh


Help me lift him.
Stop. Look underneath.


Seconds went missing. Now some people simply lay down.


She blamed them. Then found herself somewhere she didn't remember walking to.

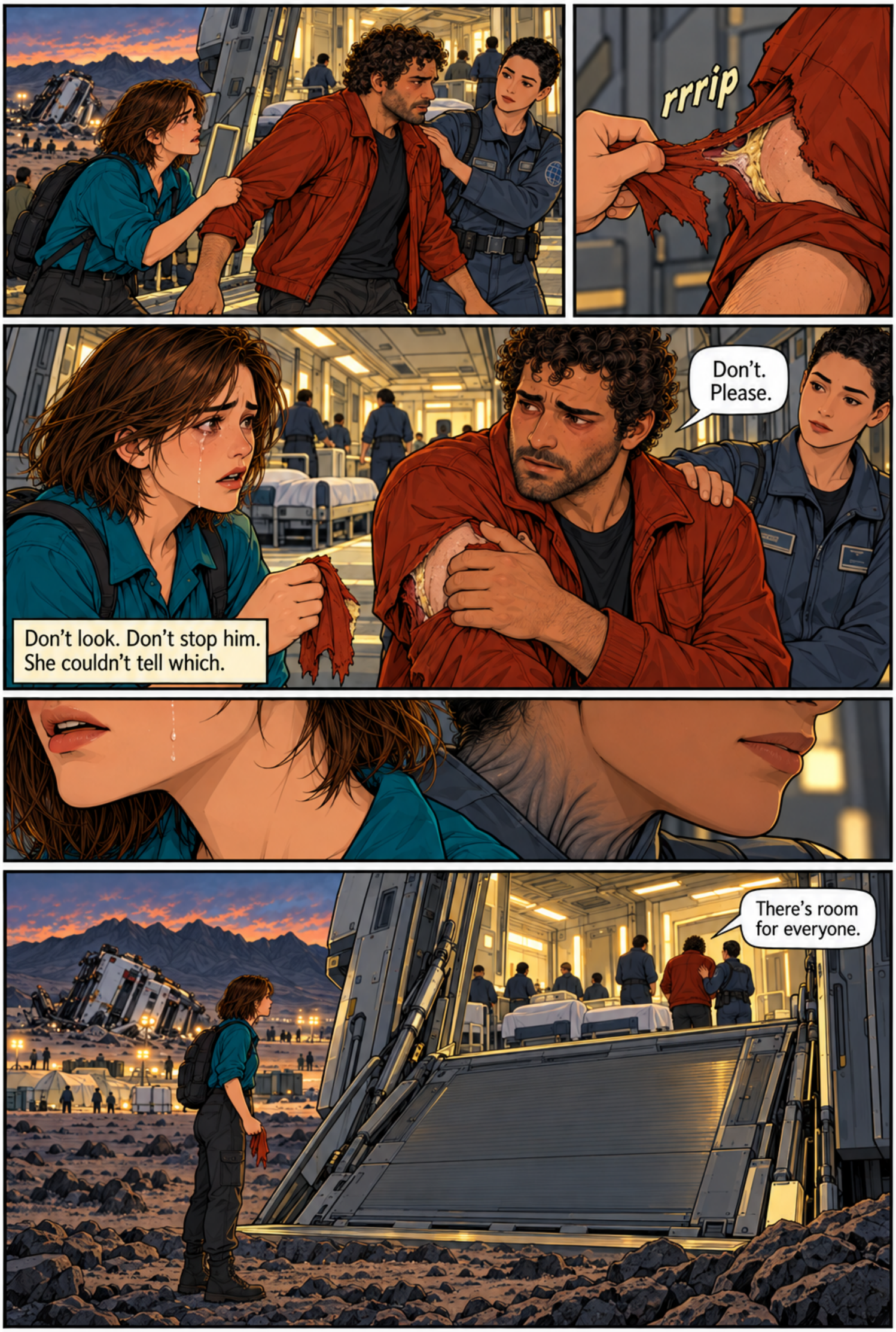

The fifth night.
Marcy?
I just need to sit a minute.

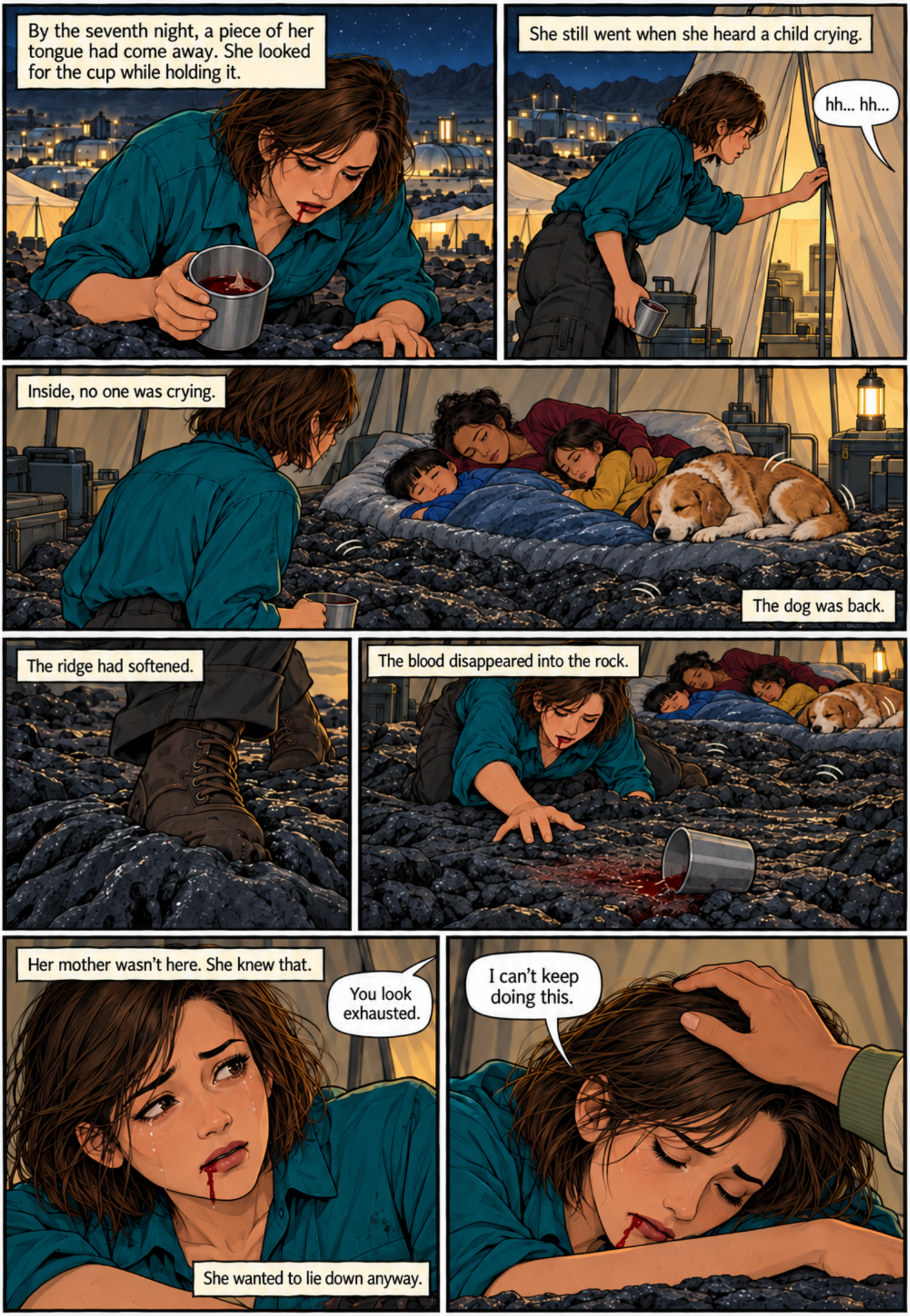


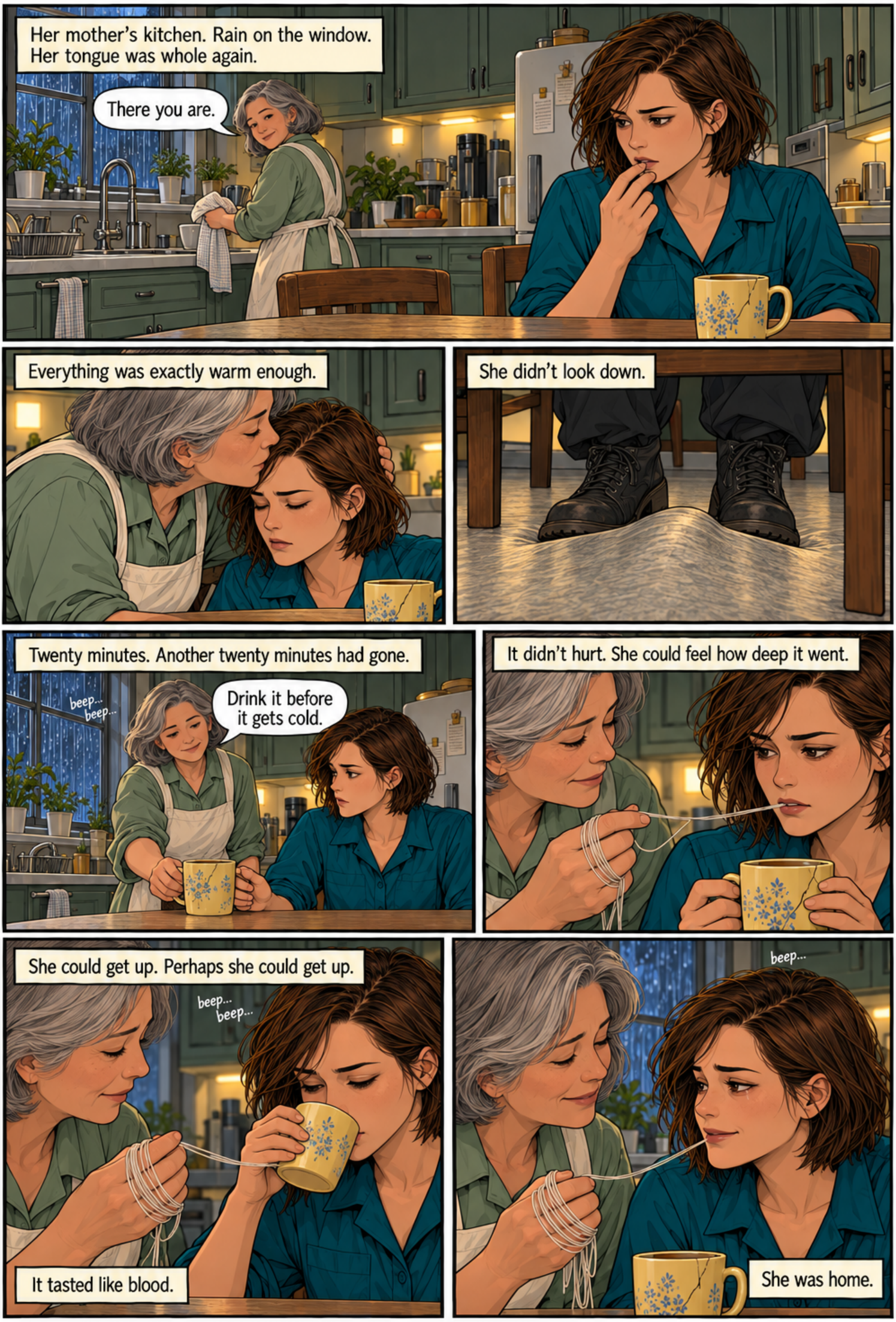

Dean. Wake up.


There was a ship. I dreamed they came for us.
Get up. Help me.


The ships came down at dawn.
Remain calm. Help has arrived.
EARTH
EARTH
She cried when she heard them. She would remember that relief.
That voice. It's the recording from our emergency drills.
Are there injured children?
You were asleep. Dean. These came after you fell asleep.
You know what they are.
I know.
I'm so tired, Marcy.


rrrip
Don't. Please.
Don't look. Don't stop him. She couldn't tell which.
There's room for everyone.


By the seventh night, a piece of her tongue had come away. She looked for the cup while holding it.
She still went when she heard a child crying.
hh... hh...
Inside, no one was crying.
The dog was back.
The ridge had softened.
The blood disappeared into the rock.
Her mother wasn't here. She knew that.
You look exhausted.
She wanted to lie down anyway.
I can't keep doing this.


Her mother's kitchen. Rain on the window.
Her tongue was whole again.
There you are.
Everything was exactly warm enough.
She didn't look down.
Twenty minutes. Another twenty minutes had gone.
beep...
beep...
Drink it before it gets cold.
It didn't hurt. She could feel how deep it went.
She could get up. Perhaps she could get up.
beep...
beep...
It tasted like blood.
beep...
She was home.

At first, sleep gave them what they missed.

Eight months into life on a distant planet, a tired colonist dreams of an orchard. He wakes beside a basket of peaches.

Soon there is coffee, music, even a little girl's dead dog. The gifts are warm. They are wanted.

Then the dreams begin to change the sleepers.

Marcy tries to keep the children awake. The alarms sound every twenty minutes. Beneath the colony, the ground is moving.



Original story by Suvro Ghosh
Comic adaptation and AI-generated artwork produced with Codex.
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