It's a cold, gray evening in the middle of a frozen January. A light snow is falling outside. It's 6:05, and rush hour traffic throughout Manhattan has been delayed by a thin, fine layer of the snowflakes which are falling steadily. By the time the residents of the apartment complex make it safely back home, the temperature will have dropped three more degrees.

In the dimly-lit lobby of the apartment building, a tiny elderly man sits behind a small receptionist's desk, staring blankly at the front page of this morning's Daily News. He flinches occasionally at the loud clattering of doors as the working class slowly starts to emerge from the streets, cursing, swearing at the weather. Most are already an hour late for dinner.

Suddenly, a bus screeches to a halt along the curb outside, spraying slush onto the sidewalk and carbon monoxide fumes downward into the virgin snow. More members of the working class trudge off the bus and enter the lobby of the building, which is becoming increasingly more congested as the minutes pass.

Tough people. Tired people. New Yorkers at the end of another working day. They all live in this dwelling--this is what they call home. Together, in small groups, they will continue to flow through the lobby, seeking shelter from the icy streets as the delayed rush hour continues.

The heat inside the lobby is stifling. There are small puddles of melted snow everywhere. Muddy footprints
provide a path from the lobby entrance all the way over to the elevators.

(6) There are two identical elevators in the lobby, side by side. But only one works tonight, so the gathering crowd is larger than usual.

(7) The off-duty police officer taps on the arrow-shaped button pointing upward as the mass waits for the doors to open. A half minute passes before he hits the button again; only this time he pounds on it harder. Finally, he hears an active rumbling. The noise draws nearer, and suddenly there is a muffled bang, followed by silence. Slowly now, the old metal gates creak as they part, and the small empty space of an elevator is mugged by a dozen rushing people. Sighs of relief fill the air, as well as an occasional curse by those unfortunates who will have to wait for the elevator's next appearance.

(8) Inside the elevator, the heat seems even more unbearable, and the air seems to be filled with a sense of tension. No one is conversing with anyone else. A Spanish mother tries desperately to quiet her baby with soothing yet inaudible words in her language. The child pays no mind to "madre," however, and bawls consistently throughout the elevator's excursion (this upset embarrasses mom somewhat).

(9) The young stockbroker mumbles an apology to the nurse for accidentally stepping on her foot. The nurse, a middle-aged woman with gray hair, nods and says nothing, wiping sweat from her brow. The tension grows thicker, it seems, as the quietness consumes the mass. It's 6:12, and dinner is cold. The rush hour would be a memory by now if this were an evening in spring. The streets would be clear. It would still be light outside the lobby doors. Both elevators would probably work, and the city air of spring would probably be lighter.
Suddenly, a bell rings, and the elevator settles. Second floor. The doors creak open once again, and seven or eight people push for the exit. This is their great escape.

But the second floor people are off in plenty of time because the elevator doors never shut. The elevator does not move. There it sits, with open doors. The lights on the buttoned panel inside the elevator have gone out. It has no power at all.

Quickly, almost as one, the remaining people revolt. The off-duty cop is practically punching panel buttons, mumbling about how this has happened before. The baby still screams, while the mother still soothes. Gradually, however, they all decide to leave. They all must get off here. One by one they head for the stairs, searching still for the end of the day, which by now seems to be a never-ending quest.

It's 6:19, and dinner is ruined.