

Whatever Happened to the Guy Stuck in the Elevator?

Life can deal you some pretty strange days. You know, the kind that make you feel everything is twisted from the minute you wake up. And all the things that just might happen once in your life suddenly happen, one by one, like they've been waiting for the chance. Today was that kind of day for me.

My razor broke while I was shaving this morning. I really wasn't pressing very hard, but it suddenly just snapped off at the neck. "Was it a disposable?" you wonder. Hardly. It was some new contraption Gillette just came out with, and the thing cost me nearly 6000 won. You couldn't find a stronger razor, and wouldn't be able to break it if you tried. But even though I'd only been using it for a month, it suddenly snapped, just like that.

Because of that, I was only able to shave half my face. The left side was nice and clean, the right side wasn't. "You're going to work looking like a jackass," I thought with disgust. I looked at my watch. 7:40. No time. Dried my hair, got dressed, left my apartment, and waited for the elevator. Didn't come. Must have been out of order. Looked at my watch again. 7:55. I began my descent from the 15th floor, racing towards the bottom like a Chinese food delivery guy. As I passed the 5th floor, I noticed that the elevator was stuck between the 5th and 6th floor with the door open. Two legs were hanging out of it. One foot was shoeless. Was this guy alive or dead? Just then, some other tenants rushed by, shoving me out of the way. Dressed sharply in business suits, they were on their way to work. How could they just ignore this guy jammed in the elevator, not even caring whether he was alive or dead? But there really wasn't much I could do, either. I looked at my watch. Exactly 8:00. Shit. I cast an anxious glance down the stairs. What to do? I gave the shoeless foot a tug (it was about on level with my face).

"Hey!" I yelled.

The toes wiggled. I heard some groan that sounded nothing like speech. He seemed to be alive. But I had neither the energy nor the time to pull him out. "Listen," I said. "I have no idea how you got caught in the elevator, but I'll give 911 a call on my way to work. Or I'll let the security guard downstairs know about it, so just hold tight, OK?"

I dashed down to the first floor. "On Patrol," read the sign in the security guard's window. I checked outside, but there was no sign of him. There was nothing I could do. I ran to the bus stop.

The bus didn't come. I turned to the guy waiting next to me.

"Do you have a cell phone by any chance? Some guy is stuck in the elevator, and I have to call 911." The guy looked at me like I was a total creep, told me in a flat tone that he didn't have a cell phone, and turned back in the direction of the expected bus. I got a similar reaction from the woman standing behind him.

"There's a pay phone right over there," she said, pointing across the street with a finger that she made seem as heavy as a dumbbell. I explained the situation.

"What happens if the bus comes while I'm over there?" I asked. "My boss is a tyrant, and he'll kill me if I'm late. And think about the guy stuck in the elevator. Think about how much pain he must be in." The woman gave me a cold smirk as she got on the bus that had just arrived. I've got to get a cell phone, I thought, and realized that this was the first time I'd ever regretted not owning one. Just then, my bus arrived as well, and I squeezed into line and got on. I reached into my back pocket for my bus card, only to

discover that I didn't have my wallet with me. The driver told me impatiently to pay with cash if I didn't have a card, and I explained that since I didn't have my wallet, I couldn't do that either.

"So get off the bus!" he barked. The people behind me began to push passed me, casting me sidelong glances as they swiped their cards and headed for their seats. I begged the driver.

"I'll pay twice tomorrow. That'll work, won't it?" Just then, a dump truck veered over the middle lane and came careening straight for our bus. The driver was busy yelling at me, so he couldn't see it, though even if he had, there probably was nothing he could have done. In fact, the only one on that packed bus who could see out the front window at that moment was me (that may be the luckiest thing that happened to me all day).

"Uh, uh, uh..." I said as I stumbled desperately backwards and crouched down while the truck slammed headlong into the front of our bus. People came crashing down on top of me as the bus was filled with a mix of screams and groans. I was just glad to have gotten out of the bus card situation. After the initial shock wave had passed, people slowly began picking themselves up. The front of the bus had been smashed in all the way to the card scanner by the door, and its front mirror was pressing into the driver's chest. Fortunately, aside from a dull ache in my lower back, I didn't seem to have been injured at all.

Once people recovered from their shock, they immediately began reaching for their cell phones. The guy who had just told me he didn't have a cell phone was no exception, pulling out a sleek new fold-up model to make a call. The whole bus was filled with the sounds of people calling 911, their families, and work.

"Mom? It's me. The bus I was on was in a wreck. Yeah, I'm OK, but the bus is completely totaled."

"Is this 911? Something just slammed into the #88 bus. We're right in front of Samdong Apartments. Please hurry."

"Mr. Jang? This is Mr. Lee. I'm right in front of my apartment, and something just crashed into the bus I'm on. Yes. I think the driver's dead. Me? Well, a bunch of people fell on me, so my back kind of...Right. Ask Mr. Park about that. He'll know all about it."

I tried to borrow a phone from someone after they hung up, but they told me they had other calls to make. People called their families, work, friends, and even the traffic report. Soon we heard sirens, and a fire truck arrived. They told us to stand back, and used a hammer to smash one of the bus windows. One by one, people began jumping out of the windows. Soon my turn came, and I was out. Rescue patrol workers were systematically checking people, to see if they were OK. One guy asked me if I was all right, and I told him about the guy in the elevator.

"There's a guy hanging out of the elevator shaft in that apartment building over there," I said. "You'd better go quickly." I explained that I'd been trying to report it, but that I didn't have a cell phone, and that no one would lend me one. By the time I was done talking, he was already checking on somebody else. Maybe with 911, you could only report things by phone. Maybe a phone call was more believable. I mean, who was going to believe a story about an elevator emergency at the scene of a car wreck? With my hand on my aching lower back, I headed across the street to the pay phone. I pushed the glass door open and entered the booth—the phone only took phone cards. And of course, no wallet. Damn. I pushed my way out of the phone booth, and asked some of the people who had gathered to view the accident if I could borrow a phone card. A plump, middle-aged woman immediately cut me off.

“Who are you going to call? If you’re calling 911, you don’t have to. They’re already here. Besides, last time I lent my phone to someone, they used more than 3000 won. There are lots of people like that running around these days,” she jabbered, not giving me any chance to speak. I told her that I was calling 911, not for this accident, but because there was a guy stuck in the elevator. With a withering look, the lady told me that you didn’t need a phone card to call 911. I went back into the booth and dialed, but got nothing. That’s when I saw the sign on the top of the phone—“Under Repair.”

Just then, the cops arrived, looking for eyewitnesses to the accident. Suddenly I realized that everyone who had been on the bus was pointing in my direction.

“That guy was right up front. He got in a fight with the driver, because he got on without a card. If it weren’t for that guy, maybe this wouldn’t have happened. See, the driver couldn’t take off, because he was arguing with him.”

Two cops in uniform approached me.

“Sir, did you see what happened?” they asked.

“Yes, I did,” I replied, “but actually, there’s something a bit more urgent than that. I have to give a presentation at work today, and what’s even more urgent than that is that there’s this guy stuck in my apartment elevator. He’s hanging out the door, wedged in between the 5th and 6th floors. You’d better go quickly. Seriously.” Without even a glance in my direction, one cop opened his notebook.

“Did you see the accident?”

“I told you I did. The truck crossed over the center line and smashed right into the front of the bus. But that’s not important right now. There’s a guy stuck in the elevator.”

The other cop cut me off, and asked in exasperation, “When did the guy get stuck in the elevator?”

“It was at about 7:50.” I looked at my watch. It was already almost 8:20. The cop grabbed the wireless radio from his belt and put it to his lips.

“Has anyone reported a guy stuck in the elevator at Samdong Apartments?” The cop re-fastened the radio to his belt, and said with annoyance, “Look here, mister. Are you playing games with the police? What’s your citizen registration number?” I gave my phone number and my citizen registration number.

“Can I go now?” I asked. They said that I could.

Meanwhile, a huge crowd of people was crowding onto the next bus. I quickly got in line. Because of all the time that clearing the wreck had taken, there was a huge number of people waiting, and they packed onto the bus like sardines. The lucky thing was that this bus wasn’t making people pay. I let out a small cry of joy. It was going to be tight, but hey, it was free. I couldn’t bear the thought of running all the way back to the 15th floor to get my wallet, and I really didn’t want to have to see those feet hanging out of the elevator again. What in the world could I say to him? The security guard’s on patrol, no one would lend me a cell phone, the pay phone’s out of order, and my face is only half-shaved so the police wouldn’t believe my story? And anyway, I was already late for work, and I had to give my presentation. It was an important report about more efficient use of office supplies. To be more exact, I had to get up in front of the trustees and speak clearly and confidently about my plan to reduce the use of toilet paper at the office. But my razor broke, a guy was stuck in the elevator, and a truck had slammed into a parked bus. This obviously wasn’t my day.

Do you think the ride on the second bus was uneventful? Of course not. I felt something down around my right hip, and when I looked down, I saw that this guy was grabbing the ass of the woman next to me. These kinds of bastards are still around? I

shook my head in amazement. I was pretty angry about it, but since it wasn't my ass, I decided to try to keep my cool. But then the woman started staring right at me (of course she was on my unshaven side), and giving me dirty looks. Finally, I just couldn't stand it anymore.

"Look, miss," I said. "I'm not the one feeling your butt. And the reason this side of my face is unshaven is because my razor broke this morning, and my suit's all wrinkled because the bus I was just on got smashed by a dump truck." Do you think that got me anywhere? Suddenly, everyone around me was staring at me. And the guy who'd been grabbing her ass quickly moved his hand away, so it was now impossible to tell which bastard had been touching her. With a "don't even think you're going to get away with this" look on her face, the woman twisted her way towards me, and shoved her face right up against mine.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Do you know who my brother is?" She pushed her face even closer to mine.

"Who's your brother?" I asked. I realize now that I shouldn't have said anything. That was the same as admitting that I'd been grabbing her butt. She didn't let me know who her brother was, or what he did, but instead just said, "You'd better be careful, before you get thrown in jail."

When her nose was just about touching mine, I suddenly sensed an urgent need to get off the bus. That was because just then the bus driver, who'd heard the whole thing, said in a loud voice, "Miss, would you like me to make a stop at the police station?" The woman, who seemed quite satisfied with the effect she'd had, made no reply. Meanwhile, the bus came to a stop, and I had to push through the people getting on, and quickly escape through the front door.

I looked at my watch. It was 9:00, and I was already 30 minutes late for work. I had gotten off at Chung-jeong-ro, and even if I walked fast, it would take me about 30 minutes to get to Jeong-ro, which is where my office was. There was no way to make a phone call or take a cab, and so I had no other choice but to trudge in the direction of my office. I had to give this report about a plan for the reduction of toilet paper use at the office, but what about the guy stuck in the elevator? I really started to hate that woman on the bus. I mean, if I had actually grabbed her ass, I could understand. God, this is all because of that stupid broken razor. If my razor hadn't broken, I would have been able to leave my house a little earlier, the elevator would have worked, and then maybe even the bus accident wouldn't have happened. I wondered whether I could sue the Gillette Company for damages. In the midst of these miserable thoughts, as I was passing through Kwang-hwa-mun, my beeper rang loudly. I checked the number. It was work. I began to run. The company was the only thing that would save me now. Someone who knew me there would lend me money, and I'd be able to make phone calls and ride buses. I could use the phone on my desk to call 911, and then everything would be OK. Run, run! With my tie flying in the breeze, I ran down the streets of Kwang-hwa-mun. My lungs felt as if they were about to burst. My back hurt from the accident, but there was no time to worry about that now. I arrived at my office building all out of breath. My office building had six elevators. One was the private elevator of the CEO whose office was at the top, and everyone else used the remaining five. I got on one of those. It was already well past the time most people arrived, so I was the only one going up. Once again, I thought of that guy stuck in the elevator. Surely by now someone would have reported the situation, and he would have been rescued. The security guard would have thought it was strange that the elevator wasn't working, and gone up to check, especially because the 5th floor wasn't that

high up. But if everyone had been as busy as I had been, and if the security guards had all gone to some meeting to demand an increase in their wages or something, that guy could still be wedged up there in the elevator shaft, and just think how much he must be hating humanity at this point.

Ding. Fifth floor.

One woman got on the elevator. We may have seen each other a few times. She looked familiar to me. The fifth floor was the accounting department. She was wearing a purple uniform, and her long hair was pulled back. The fact that her hair was long meant that she wasn't married yet. I wondered why women always cut their hair as soon as they got married. While I was wondering about that, the elevator suddenly made a clunking sound, and came to a stop. At first, the woman pretended to be calm. She shot me a quick look out of the corner of her eye, but then continued staring straight ahead at the elevator door. But after awhile, when it became clear that the elevator wasn't going anywhere, and the doors weren't opening, she gave me an "Isn't there anything you can do?" sort of look. I shrugged my shoulders, American style, and looked helplessly on. The elevator suddenly felt extremely isolated and stuffy.

"It seems like it's broken. Should we try pushing the emergency button?" the woman asked anxiously.

"That's a good idea," I said, nodding. The woman pushed the button slowly at first, but soon began nervously pushing on it again and again. She finally stopped after her fingers had been turned red with the effort.

"It doesn't seem like anyone's down there," she said. More time went by. We decided to try to get people's attention by pounding on the door. We pounded as hard as we could with our hands and our feet. But then I mentioned that such force could cause the elevator to fall and crash, and the woman got a horrified look on her face, and stopped pounding.

"This morning, I saw a guy whose body was wedged up in the elevator shaft," I said. "We're lucky we're just stuck." I was hoping to offer her some relief, but I only made things worse. She sank to the floor.

"Whatever happened to him?"

"I saw him on my way down the stairs, but I haven't had a chance to report it yet. I had to get to work, and I didn't have a phone. Hey, right! By any chance do you have a cell phone?"

With a look of despair, she replied that her cell phone was in her handbag. We both let out long sighs. If only she had her cell phone with her. We'd be able to call someone to get us out, and we could also call 911 to report the guy in my apartment building.

"Do you wanna give opening the door a try?" the woman suggested. But as we put our strength together and started trying to push the door apart, she suddenly let out a shriek.

"Look at this!" she cried. I looked in the direction of her pointing finger.

"Warning. Do not attempt to open doors by force."

"Right. That guy this morning was also originally stuck in the elevator, just like us. But then he probably started getting worried that he'd be late for work, and so he tried to open the doors. And when they opened, of course he tried to get out. But that's when the elevator started moving again. Poor guy. I've got to call 911 right away, but what am I supposed to do? Of all days, why did I have to forget my wallet? And then the pay phone didn't work, and no one would lend me a cell phone. And then, the bus I was riding on got smashed into by a truck, and, well, just look at my clothes! I got buried under a pile of

people and they got all messed up. And then on the next bus, I got ridiculously accused of touching this woman's backside, and had to get off the bus. Hey, don't look at me like that! I didn't do it, this other jerk did, but she mistakenly thought it was me. You know how that kind of thing can happen."

The woman scooted over to a far corner of the elevator, and looked like she was ready to plant her high heels into my shins if I tried anything. At the same time, she was pushing the emergency button as fast as she could.

I tried to reassure her, saying, "Don't worry, I'm not a bad guy. Hey, we work for the same company, and you know exactly who I am, so surely you don't think I'd do some terrible thing. Anyway, it takes some kind of karma for two people to meet like this, so when we get out, how about having a cup of coffee?" but she just sat silently, saying nothing.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" I asked, pulling a pack of cigarettes from my front pocket. I figured that if she was by any chance a smoker, cigarettes could make the situation a whole lot more comfortable.

Giving me her coldest possible look, she hissed, "Smoking is forbidden inside the building."

I protested. "You know there's no way to go to a smoking area or the roof right now. If I could go there, why would I smoke here? Let's just smoke one." The woman refused, shaking her head vigorously.

"You can't smoke in this kind of narrow space! Don't you know how harmful second-hand smoke is? In America alone, every year 6 million people die from exposure to second-hand smoke. They say second-hand smoke is even more dangerous because you're not aware of it. And second-hand smoke here at work really drives me crazy. I mean, the boss may be the boss, but what right does he have to blow smoke into my lungs? And you know, there's probably not a country in the world with as much second-hand smoke as Korea. You can't find a non-smoking area anywhere! Think about the major holidays! Every man in the family gets together and smokes at the same time! In bars, cafes, the street. Oh, yeah, the street! Take a look at my skirt!" She turned her backside towards me so I could take a look. There was a singe mark in one corner of her skirt. "Some jerk was smoking a cigarette at a crosswalk, and he burned my butt! Do you really think that's right? I'd love to kill every bastard I see smoking in the street."

"Ok, ok, I won't smoke," I said, as I pushed my cigarettes back into my pocket. I began to feel a chill as the sweat which had completely soaked my shirt began to cool.

"It's cold in here. Since I left my wallet at home, I had no money for a cab, and I had to run all the way to work. Look at this. See, my suit coat is soaked all the way to my back." I turned my back towards her and showed her my wet spot.

"Oh, but we haven't even introduced ourselves," I said. "What's your name?"

She looked up and glared at me.

"Miss Jeung," she said evenly.

"My last name's Jeung, too," I said happily. "I'm in Resource Management."

She gave me a vague nod which let me know that she was definitely not interested, and there was a long spell of silence as we sat upon the elevator floor. The whole time the woman was silently pushing on the emergency button.

"Who in the world is managing this building? If the elevator doesn't move for this long, wouldn't someone wonder whether or not anyone was stuck, and come up and check? What the hell is going on? It doesn't matter whether there are five other elevators or not, for Christ's sake."

Even as I was saying this, my beeper was ringing loudly. It was my boss. God, my office was right in front of my nose, and there was no way of getting there. I began to seethe. I was totally screwed. This was going to cost me my job.

"I don't care whether we get wedged in this elevator or not. Let's get out of here." My suggestion was met with a reluctant look.

"Ok, fine. You stay here. If we can get the door open, I'll jump down myself, so just give me a hand with the door. And then I'll go and get help." The woman nodded. We put our strength together again, and started on the business of forcing the door open. It turned out to be a lot more difficult than I expected. The sweat was pouring off of us as we pushed against the door, but each time we got it open just a bit, it would slam back shut.

"Aren't you any stronger than that?" Ms. Jeung demanded, venting her frustration. I got mad.

"Look. I've already been slammed into by a truck this morning, and I ran all the way to work. What kind of energy do you expect me to have? Besides, my back is killing me." After making these excuses, I thought for a second. The trick was to make sure that when we got the door open a bit, it wasn't able to shut again. But there didn't seem to be anything that we could use to stick between the doors. There was nothing I could do besides take my shoes off. After having run to work, they were soaked with sweat and stunk.

"Ok, if we get the doors open a bit, we'll stick this shoe in between them. That'll give us a wedge to get our hands in." We both gathered our strength again and each pulled back on one side of the door. As Ms. Jeung crouched and pulled, I got a full view of her breasts over the top of her uniform blouse.

"What the hell are you doing?" she cried. "Stick the shoe in there!" With great effort, she raised her head and, staring me straight in the eyes, vented her rising frustration. In my confusion, I somehow stuck my foot, rather than the shoe, in between the closing doors. It hurt like hell, but I tried to ignore the pain. Through the small opening, you could see the dividing line between floors 9 and 10—the floor of the 10th floor. It looked like we'd be able to crawl up to the 10th floor if we could just get the doors open a little wider. We pulled against the doors again, and when we'd opened it a little wider, I suddenly threw my body in between them, to preserve the gains we'd made. Now there was a space wide enough for someone to get out. I felt like my lungs were being crushed, but since I was in front of a woman, I decided to play it cool.

"So what should we do now? If I get out, the doors are going to close again," I said in a worried tone.

"Here," she said. "Prop me up. Then I'll be able to get up to the next floor. Jumping down to the 9th seems too dangerous, I think. I'm pretty thin, so getting out will probably be easier for me."

The 10th floor was about on level with my head. But if she were going to get up there, she was going to have to stand on my shoulders and get out through a space no wider than the width of my body. I clasped my hands to give her a footing. She stepped up. She then grabbed onto the 10th floor, and slowly moved her feet from my hands to my shoulders. Her heels dug deeply into my shoulders. I practically screamed with pain, but somehow kept my mouth shut. Looking up, I got a clear view up her skirt. She was wearing a white-laced girdle. She then kicked hard off my shoulders, and made it up to the 10th floor. I felt like letting out a cheer. With my body still crushed between the elevator doors, I gave her my heartiest congratulations.

“Hey, Ms. Jeung! You did it! All right! Hey, please let people know I’m stuck here as quickly as you can, Ok? And it’d be great if you could tell the people in my department...”

There was no response. I suddenly had a pretty bad feeling about the whole thing. I pushed my hands and feet out with all my strength, and got myself out from between those crushing doors. The doors shut with a dull “gong” that sounded to me like the closing of a coffin. I hadn’t done anything to that woman, I told myself. I had even lent her my hands and shoulders for her escape. And given the fact that we worked in the same building, and would almost definitely run into each other again, surely she wouldn’t forget to let someone know I was here. But 10 minutes went by, and then 20, and still nobody came. I slumped to the floor of the elevator in despair, and began singing some children’s song, the words of which I could hardly remember. Over and over again I sang the song, and just when my exhaustion from singing had me on the verge of sleep, I heard a loud noise coming from the outside. The elevator doors opened a bit, and a person’s face appeared.

“Hey! What in the world are you doing in there?” That was exactly the question I wanted to ask. “What in the world am I stuck in here for? You’re responsible for the elevators—you tell me!” I was furious, but worried that if I said anything, he’d walk off and leave me, so I answered in the politest voice that I possibly could.

“The elevator seems to be broken.” The elevator guy then asked me another question. “Are you alone?” Again, I tried to sound as friendly as possible. “Well, I wasn’t. There was a woman by the name of Ms. Jeung. But just a moment ago she stood on my shoulders and got out, so I was left by myself.” The elevator guy went to get someone else, and in a moment they came back and opened the doors. I grabbed onto his hands, and they pulled me up. I looked down, and realized that in the process, the whole front of my suit had been smeared with oil and dust. That’s when I realized that the same thing must have happened to Ms. Jeung, and I started to view her a bit more sympathetically. I mean, I’m a guy, so a little grease and dust doesn’t make much difference, but what was she supposed to do?

As soon as the elevator guy had gotten me out, he really started making a fuss

“We just had this blasted elevator checked out—how the hell could it be broken down already? Aren’t the big firms supposed to be a bit more reliable than this?” That was the start of a long rant about corporate sleaze, and the incestuous relations between big business and the media. I tried to calm him down.

“There’s no need to be such a pessimist,” I said. “There may be some bad apples out there, but they’re way outnumbered by good people like you,” I said reassuringly. And then I told him just how much I appreciated his help in getting me out of the elevator. That’s when he looked down at my feet.

“Hey, what did you do with your shoes?” I smacked my hand on my forehead. I had taken them off to hold the doors open, and then since I’d just used my foot, I guess I’d somehow forgotten about them.

“Oh, jeez,” I said. “I seem to have left them in the elevator. Listen, I really don’t have time to go back for them right now. Would you mind getting them for me, and bringing them to the Resource Management department on the 15th floor?”

“Not at all,” he said. I looked down at my watch. Somehow, it was already a bit past 10:00. This had been a pretty rough ride to work. I momentarily considered taking one of the other elevators up to the 15th floor, but then just decided to walk up the emergency stairs. When I entered the office, I saw that Ms. Lee was the only one there,

sitting by the phone. It seemed like everyone else was already in the morning meeting. Ms. Lee stared at me in a state of shock.

“Mr. Jeong! What happened? Did you decide to take the sewer to work? Take a look in the mirror!” I looked. My hair was a mess, my face was half shaved, two deep grooves had been pushed into my shoulders by that woman’s high heels, the front of my suit was covered with grease, and everything was still wrinkled from the bus accident. And my shoes were in the elevator.

Just then, the conference room door opened, and my boss’ face appeared.

“Hey, Ms. Lee! Hasn’t he arrived yet? Oh, there you are! Do you know what time it is? Get in here and give your report!” I gestured towards my clothes, and shot him a pleading look, but he just slammed the door and returned to the meeting. There were definitely a few things I needed to do before I went into that meeting. I had to call 911 and report that guy, I had to find Ms. Jeong on the 5th floor, and give her a piece of my mind, I had to go to the bathroom and try to get cleaned up, and I had to find my shoes. But I pushed all of those things aside, and headed into the meeting. Half the people were sleeping, and the other half were flipping through the materials they were going to use for their presentations. My department head and our division head, and one guy from the Board of Trustees were the only people paying any attention, and they were staring right at me.

They asked. Why I was late, and why my clothes were such a mess. I explained. That morning, someone had gotten stuck in my apartment elevator. A truck slammed into my bus, no one would lend me a cell phone, and since I’d left my wallet at home, I had no way to call anyone. Then I got accused of being a pervert on the next bus, and had to get off at Chung-jeong-ro, and run all the way to work. And then the elevator here broke down, and I was stuck in that for 30 minutes, and the marks in my shoulders were caused by this woman who climbed up on me to get out, but then never went for help the way she was supposed to, and just went on her way, and I got covered in grease when I finally got out of the elevator, and in all the confusion I left my shoes in there. I told them that I was sorry, and that I deeply apologized. I don’t know what I needed to feel sorry for, but I said that I was. But the department head cut me short.

“Fine. Let’s hear your report.”

I drew back my shoulders, and gave the essentials of my incentive plan to stimulate the use of 2-sided copies, which would result in paper saving of epoch-making proportions. And I let them know that the best way to reduce the use of toilet paper at the office would be to special-order rolls from which could you only tear off exactly one-meter’s worth at a time. I explained that while most rolls tear off every 10 centimeters, the 1 meter rolls would cause people to use only one meter at a time, resulting in an incredible savings in tissue. According to our employee surveys, most employees use 1.2 meters of tissue paper each time they tend to their business. But apparently it was pretty stupid of me to let them know about this nearly 20% potential reduction in the use of toilet paper with such a disheveled appearance.

The objections were immediate. Ms. Eun-hee Lee was the first to raise her hand. “You know, women will tend to use tissue even for things that don’t require much. I mean, I don’t know about other people, but I don’t use a meter’s worth of tissue. For me, 30 centimeters is usually more than enough, so if we move to the 1-meter tissue, isn’t that actually a waste of 70%?”

Then the guy from the Board of Trustees, who was starting at me with eyes that let me know just what he thought of my plan, jumped in.

“What makes you so sure that people who’ve been using 1.2 meters of tissue are going to reduce their use to 1? Isn’t it also possible that they’ll just use 2? Do some more research, and come back with a slightly more reasonable conservation plan.” The division and department heads were both nodding their heads in agreement. I really had to wonder. How many meters of toilet paper could these people possibly be using in the bathroom? And why in the world wouldn’t 1 meter’s worth be enough?

The meeting lasted until 12:00. As everyone else noisily left for lunch, I went looking for my shoes. It looked like the broken elevator was working again. Taking no chances, I took a different elevator down to the first floor. I started heading towards the front desk, which is where the security guards were. The woman who’d been sitting at the information desk suddenly stood up, and then the security guards all started heading in my direction.

“May I help you?” she asked. But her expression was hardly friendly, and she wasn’t looking at me, but rather at the approaching security guards. She was obviously giving them some kind of signal. They surrounded me, and bluntly told me to leave the building.

I protested. “I work here, in resource management. My name is Jeung. I left my shoes on that elevator that broke down, and I’m just trying to find them. Look here...” But even as I was saying that, they were pushing me out the building. “Hey! Give a call up to Resource Management!”

The guy who saved me was a guy named Han, who’d joined the company at the same time as I did.

“Hey Han!” I cried. “It’s me! It’s me!” Thanks to him, they let go of me, and I was able to explain what had happened.

“Hey, Han, thanks” I told him. “I owe you lunch.” I thanked him from the bottom of my heart, and then turned around and explained to the security guards about the elevator and my shoes. But no one knew anything about the broken elevator, and they said they had no idea who had gotten me out. They called and radioed here and there, but after 30 minutes they still weren’t able to find anyone who knew anything about it.

The last thing they said to me was, “We’re sorry, we have no idea. You should probably just wear a pair of slippers from your office, if you have some, or find a shoe store nearby and buy a pair of shoes.” I nodded my head weakly, and decided to head back up to my office. I waited for an elevator, and the first one to come was the one I’d gotten stuck in. I had no intention of taking it, but as the door opened, I noticed my shoes sitting side by side on the floor of the elevator. I pounced on them like a desperate cheetah, and managed to get back out of the elevator before the doors closed. I was ecstatic. Nearly bursting into tears of relieved joy, I slipped into my shoes one by one in the building lobby. Once I’d gotten my shoes on, I thought again of the guy in the elevator at my apartment. There was no way I could go to a restaurant looking like this anyway, so I went up to my office and called 911.

“Hello, is this 911?”

“Where are you?” the operator asked in a kind voice.

“Ah, this is Jeong-ro.”

And then the operator suddenly said, “You’re in the Kum-jeong Building, right?” It seemed like 911 was somehow staring right down at me, from the ceiling. I explained that the accident location was not here, but rather in Samdong Apartments. She seemed rather suspicious. But her tone was still friendly.

“What sort of accident is it?”

“A person is stuck in the elevator.”

“And when did that happen?” She was beginning to sound rather annoyed, as if she didn’t believe me at all.

“It was at 7:50 this morning.” The operator then spoke to me as if she had had quite enough.

“Look here, sir. We’re very busy here. I don’t have time to joke around.” I decided I’d better explain pretty quickly. I told her that I’d tried to report the accident as soon as it happened, but that no one would lend me a cell phone and the apartment security guards weren’t around, and then the bus I took to work crashed. Then, as soon as I arrived at work, the elevator broke, and then there was an important meeting, so I wasn’t able to report it until now.

“Could you please let me know whether he was ever let out of the elevator?” I asked. The operator told me that it wasn’t 911’s job to handle such calls, and advised me to call the local fire department. I then asked whether it would be possible to send over a rescue squad, just to check. I explained that everyone in the building was at work, including the married women, and that it was possible that no one had reported it until now. But she said nothing other than “thank you,” and hung up the phone.

Things at the office went smoothly for the rest of the afternoon. I continued to study ways to reduce the use of toilet paper, and prepared another survey to pass out the office employees. At 5:00, everyone began heading for the door. I borrowed 10,000 won from Ms. Kim, and started for home. When I arrived at my apartment, I checked my mail. It was stuffed full of memos. I threw a few of them in the trash can by the security guard’s office, and headed for the elevator. Fortunately, the elevator seemed to be working normally again. I got on with a few other people, and went up. They eyed my tattered appearance warily, and stood in the opposite corner of the elevator. I decided to ask them.

“Do any of you know by any chance what happened to the guy who was stuck in the elevator?” Everyone just shook their heads, without saying anything.

“Well, when I was heading to work, the elevator was stuck between the 5th and 6th floors, and there was a guy wedged in between the 6th floor and the floor of the elevator. Didn’t you hear about that?” No one responded, and as soon as the elevator reached their floor, they got off as quickly as possible, and headed for home. One mother was holding her daughter, who looked to be about 5, tightly in her arms, and eyeing me closely.

When we finally got to the 15th floor, the woman who got off with me ran for her apartment at top speed. I opened my door and went inside. I took off my suit, tossed it on the floor, and got in the shower. As I rubbed shampoo into my head, I kept wondering. What in the world happened to that guy? I’ll have to call one of the security guards. But when I’d finished shampooing my head and turned on the water, freezing cold water blasted out of the shower head. No matter how I turned the faucet, I couldn’t get any hot water. Shivering from the cold, I barely managed to rinse the soap off before picking up the security phone to buzz one of the guards. As soon as I started to say “hot water,” he cut me off in a tone that told me he’d already gotten the same call dozens of times.

“Didn’t you read the notice? Starting today, we’re doing work on the pipes. We’ve been announcing it on the PA system for weeks,” he said, as if he were scolding a child. And then he hung up.

So I’m still wondering. Whatever happened to the guy who was stuck in the elevator?