

Insurrection in 5A

English translation by [Daniel Loedel](#)

Only half awake, the man tries to get up. It is as if the collective weariness of every one of his ancestors has gathered in his bones.

*Of course today I manage to oversleep.*

Every night he sets his alarm for seven, and every morning it goes off at seven.

But according to the clock, it is not seven now, but nine.

*Nine o'clock!*

He should be punching in at the office right about now.

*Did I forget to set the alarm?*

He looks at the clock. The alarm is set for six thirty, but it didn't go off.

*It didn't go off? Why wouldn't it go off?*

He looks again. He sees it clearly: alarm set for six thirty.

Bit by bit he begins to remember. He had set it earlier than usual because today was his interview with the director, and he wanted to have time to spare to get ready: to take a shower, to wash his hair, to shine his shoes, to have a leisurely breakfast. Now none of that was possible. He'll have to go dirty and without even a measly coffee and, even then, no matter how much he hurries, he'll be late. Later than late. And to top it all off, it's raining.

*Goddamn alarm clock.*

He would have to clean himself up at the least: his ears and neck, armpits and feet. But of course, washing one body part at a time the way he does when there's no hot water, he would take just as long as if he showered, possibly even longer. Not to mention the mess he would make.

*"...I don't believe it. You can't even wash your knees without turning the place into a pigsty. I slave away day and night to keep this house clean,*

*and then you come along with your friends and in two minutes everything is upside down. You're not children—you're more like wild beasts!"*

The neck and ears might be fine; after all, they don't smell. The armpits and feet probably do smell, but with enough clothes over them... Good thing it's winter.

*If only I didn't sweat like a pig...*

He isn't sure what to wear. Seeing as he'll have to go dirty on the inside, he really ought to go clean as a whistle on the outside. He looks for the white shirt he planned to wear with his navy-blue suit, his Christian Dior tie, and his black shoes. He rummages through shelves, grabs at hangers; the shirt is nowhere to be found. It must be at the cleaners.

*The only decent shirt I have left...*

And no doubt it's been ready for days. He could have gone to the cleaners to get it over a week ago, but he'd decided to wait for his paycheck. The choice was: clean shirts or gin, and the gin always won. And now, of course, he has nothing to wear. He should have asked to have the interview at the beginning of the month, not at the end. As it is, he has no choice but to salvage a shirt from the hamper that's not too dirty or wrinkled. He looks; no luck. They all seem to have been "salvaged" before, and more than once.

Back to the dresser. In the end he puts on a light blue shirt which he hasn't worn for years because the collar is frayed and the breast pocket is coming unstitched. But it's the only shirt at his disposal that goes with the blue suit, and with a little finesse he should be able to cover the pocket with his jacket. Luckily the frayed part of the collar is in the back; he just has to remember not to show his back to people.

*Yeah, sure. And how do you expect to leave the office after the interview? Walking backward like a crab? You idiot...*

With his shoes another rather unpleasant surprise awaits him. The black ones are the best ones he owns, the only ones sufficiently dressy. But what he doesn't remember is that the last day he put them on was the day of the snowstorm; slush everywhere, the leather cracked and dry, a white trail

of salt. He should have cleaned and shined them as soon as he got home; now they can't be saved with all the blessed shoeshine in the world. He'll have to go with the brown ones. The soles are worn through, but no one can tell that.

*Sure, no one can tell, but water still gets in. If only, if only it weren't raining...*

No time to untie them, he puts them on by force, using his finger as a shoehorn.

*"...And how are your shoes going to last that way? The backs will give in, can't you see? And with what they cost these days! But no—it's too much work to untie them. I don't believe it! All you're good for is breaking and spoiling things."*

After the shoes, he puts on his pants. But in doing so, he realizes that also isn't quite right.

*"...How many times do I have to tell you not to put your pants on after your shoes! Can't you see the cuffs come undone? And who has to sew them back on, huh? Who? You inconsiderate..."*

His mother was right, he admits grudgingly. Because if the cuff comes undone now...

*Then I'm really screwed. But—fuck it. It's late. I can't spend all my life taking off and putting on my shoes.*

He looks at the clock: it's nine thirty. He won't even make it by 10 now.

*What the hell was I thinking, asking for the first slot in the morning? Hoping to impress the secretary, I bet. So they wouldn't think I'm just another nobody. "This one looks promising – responsible, eager, efficient – perfect for the job."*

*Terrific! And now Mr. Responsible shows up an hour late, badly dressed and without showering. Heck of a dream-job you'll get that way. Goddamn moron!*

He finishes getting dressed and, as soon as he ties his tie, he realizes he hasn't yet shaved.

*Nothing is going my way today.*

To do things the right way, that is to say, the really, really right way, he would have to take off his tie, take off his shirt, take off his pants (no, first take off his shoes; no, first untie his shoes) and then start all over from the beginning. But then he might as well go back to bed. And since it wouldn't do to show up unshaven, he has no choice but to shave with his clothes on and just try not to get them wet.

*And if they get wet, they get wet. As for the director, he's lucky I'm shaving at all! Who does that asshole think he is anyway? He thinks he's all high and mighty, everywhere he goes he's Mr. Director Man, but deep down he's probably just another poor unhappy good-for-nothing.*

Not only does his shirt get wet—that much was inevitable—his tie is also spattered with shaving cream (oh God, will it leave a stain?!) and, to top it all off, nervous as he is, he nicks himself.

*Just what I needed.*

Who knows how long it will take for the bleeding to stop. When he lived with Irene, there was this special little bar thing he used to stop the bleeding. But without the little bar thing—he's been living alone for years—it could take hours. And the worst part is the cut is far enough down that, if he's careless for a single second, bending his head just to nod or look down or button his buttons, he's sure to stain his collar.

*And then the look will really be complete: frayed in the back, and bloodstained in the front!*

In his frantic last-minute preparations, he still finds time to spray himself with a little cologne (if he's going to stink, better to stink of cologne than of human body), adjust the knot of his tie (it will just have to dry off on the way), make sure his jacket covers his half-hanging breast pocket (and if it doesn't cover it, adjust the lapel to make it less conspicuous), and even give his shoes a quick rub-down with a cloth (alas, it isn't really a cloth—in the

darkness of his closet, he has mistaken an old sweater for a shoe-shining cloth, and, when he notices his mistake, it is already too late...)

*“...When will you learn not to leave your clothes lying around?”*

*And so what? It’s all ragged and filthy—I wasn’t going to wear that disgrace of a sweater anyway.*

*That disgrace of a sweater was knit for you by your mother.*

Finally, ready to go, he realizes he needs something for the rain. The umbrella—don’t even think about the umbrella. So many parts of the fabric coming off the wires, it almost makes you feel sorry for it. He’d already been quite embarrassed when Mariano saw it hanging on the coat rack at the office, and he asked him what he was waiting for to throw that piece of trash out. He will have to make do with his raincoat. Rather short for the fashion-trends of the day, in another era it was his pride and glory: well-tailored, silk lining, imported from Italy. On buttoning it up he discovers that, in his haste, he’s buttoned it up wrong, and it’s uneven at the bottom; the right side is longer than the left.

*“...And you say you’re a big boy now—aren’t you ashamed? Even your little sister knows how to do her buttons by herself.”*

When he finishes buttoning up this time, the bottom remains uneven. It is the left side that is now longer.

*“Good heavens, what a klutz! Who can he possibly take after?”*

The man unbuttons his raincoat slowly.

*These things happen to you because you don’t take your time with them.*

He looks in the mirror. He lines each button up with its corresponding buttonhole. He makes sure it’s even at the top and the bottom.

*Presto! See how easy it was?*

He buttons the first button. But as soon as it goes through the hole, it comes off.

*Motherfucker. Of course it decides to fall off now.*

If only it were the third or fourth button, then it wouldn't be so noticeable. His winter coat's been missing the second button for years, and nobody's ever said anything. But of course this happens to be the first button, not the second. There's no way to hide this little knot of plucked, useless, incongruent threads.

*And if I try to sew it back on?*

There's a sewing kit lying around somewhere with everything necessary: reels, buttons, scissors, needles. His ex-wife Celita had left it for him when they separated for good, a thousand years ago it seems, long before he met Irene. Celita was worried about leaving him alone, with no one to help him. But then there was Irene, and then Petrona, the cleaning lady. Only it's been some time now since Petrona also stopped coming. How could he afford her? And so now the fallen buttons, fallen must remain.

Unless he tries to take it to the man at the dry cleaners who does tailoring...

*But—my dignity? A grown man asking to have a button sewed on! What excuse could I give? That I'm such a useless dolt I never learned how to sew one on myself? As soon as I get to the office, I'll take off my raincoat and that'll be that.*

He tries to button the second button. This time his fingers shake, his hands sweat.

*If you get nervous, you're done for.*

The director is sure to get to him at some point during the day. And then it'll take just a few minutes to explain his plan for increasing sales. It's simple really; you don't need to be a genius to see how much money can be saved once you grasp the basic idea.

*Let's just hope my being late doesn't piss him off...*

As soon as the second button goes through the buttonhole, it also comes off.

*Now what the fuck did I do?*

He looks at the button, he looks at the little bunch of threads where there used to be a button, he looks at the time. He is on the verge of buttoning the third button, but he restrains himself, decides to double-check it first. He

examines it with the utmost caution. It seems pretty firm, pretty tight, well sewed on. Gently, carefully, he pulls the button in toward the buttonhole as if he were going to put it through. He feels all the fabric tug after it; tightly, firmly, all staying put. Even so, he decides to do one last test. He takes off his raincoat, lays it out over an armchair, lines up the buttons and buttonholes.

*Let's see if, for once in your life, you can do something right.*

He buttons them up slowly, one by one. He pulls on different buttons, gently, carefully; the raincoat rises with each one; they couldn't be better attached. More quickly now, he unbuttons all the buttons, puts the raincoat back on, lines up buttons and buttonholes, and prepares, yet again, to button the fateful third button...

*What if it should come off?*

On the armchair it was all well and good. But now the raincoat isn't on the armchair. Now it is on top of him.

*And if I went out like this, with the raincoat unbuttoned?*

With the rain, his pants would be ruined. But even without the rain, his pants aren't very presentable, truth be told. It's been a while since they've seen an iron. And it's been a while since they've seen an iron because neither does he know how to use an iron, nor does he take them to the cleaners. Why would he? It's been a while now that he should have bought a new suit. And new shirts. And new shoes. And new socks. Maybe one day, if they give him a raise...

*I will button it. I will button this button, and if it comes off, it comes off.*

Suddenly, abruptly, he starts buttoning all the buttons and, one by one, they all go rolling off onto the floor. A wave of wrath comes over him. He tears the raincoat off, grabs it by the lapels, and shakes it as if he were going to kill it.

“You are going to pay for this!”

Goodbye interview, goodbye job, goodbye Mr. Director Man.

*“... You can't be so rash! You're a grown boy—you have to learn to control yourself!”*

He takes off his blazer, rolls up his sleeves. He needs a needle—the biggest needle there is. He needs thread—strong thread, nylon thread. He needs nails. He needs a hammer.

“You won't get away with this. You've got to learn who you're messing with!”

In a flash he darts off down the stairs, lunging three steps at a time, and then he is at the super's door, knocking wildly.

*Needles, nails, hammer? What's got into this guy?* the super wonders.

“Are you sure you don't want me to give you a hand, mister?”

“Yes, yes, quite sure. I can manage on my own, thank you though.”

When he gets back to his room, he can barely breathe. Never had he climbed those four flights of stairs so quickly. Truth be told, he had not climbed a flight of stairs so quickly since high school, when he had the role of teachers' assistant and he spent all day running from one floor to another. After school he'd continue to rush, in that case to see Mabel, his first girlfriend. He wanted to be an engineer back then, to build bridges. His dream was to be rich and famous one day for her sake. She was going to wait for him and, when they finally got married, they would be that much happier for having done so, for having waited and dreamed so long...

She waited all right; she would have waited her whole life. It was him that didn't wait. He neither waited nor built bridges nor got his degree as an engineer. He never even passed the entry exam. And he did not marry his high school sweetheart. Instead he married a divorcee ten years older than him, left his country and ended up as an office clerk, pushing paper and doing numbers, killing himself for a paycheck that was never enough. Not even for a studio in an elevator building.

In his apartment, everything is as he left it: the bed unmade, the table covered with paper plates and dirty plastic cutlery accumulated over who knows how many meals, the kitchen sink filled to the brim with pots and pans and dishes which one day he might, possibly, decide to wash, and, on

the floor, which had not seen a broom or a vacuum since he moved in, and which was now also home to scattered buttons everywhere, scattered clothes, empty bottles, old newspapers, and even two moving boxes he had never got around to unpacking.

*If my old lady could see this mess!*

He had moved to that decrepit building with neither elevator nor doorman shortly after breaking up with Irene. There were other women after Irene, because he'd never lost the hope that he would find the right person, but since he never found the courage to invite them over to this unpresentable hovel, they all ended up convinced he was married or lived with someone. And so, one fine day, he stopped looking, and then he was left alone. Now it's been years since he's had guests. He's afraid of guests, truth be told; he lives terrified that one day someone will drop in by surprise, a coworker or some old friend or relative from Argentina, and that they will discover the manner in which he lives.

When at last he catches his breath, he starts looking for the raincoat. He doesn't see it anywhere.

“Where'd you run to, you scoundrel?”

He remembers crumpling it up in his rage and throwing it down before leaving, but he cannot remember where.

“Where are you hiding, you son of a bitch?”

At last, he finds it, curled up in a ball under the armchair, as if it had understood his threats.

“Fucking coward! Now you're going to get it!”

The man hesitates. It seems as if he is about to do something terrible. He doesn't know if he feels sorry to see it all curled up that way, or if it is his own rage that frightens him.

*“...Think about what you're doing – you're going to regret it!”*

He picks it up, shakes the dust from it, stretches it out. He looks at the row of loose threads where the buttons should have been. They are all of

different colors: black, brown, grey. Who might have sewn them on? No matter. Not wanting to waste any more time, he lays it out on the armchair.

“You asked for it.”

First he nails the collar to the back of the chair. Then he nails the sleeves, one to each armrest. Lastly, he nails the two bottom corners to the floor. The hammering resounds through the whole building.

*If they complain, they complain.*

He picks up the buttons, thread and needle.

“You asked for it.”

With the raincoat immobilized, he sews and re-sews all the buttons. Never did anyone use so much thread or tie so many knots; not even the Almighty Himself could have torn them off. But when the man tries again to button them, he still can't manage it; the buttons no longer pass through the buttonholes. Could it be all the thread he used? Or did he pick up the wrong buttons? Could he possibly have been so clumsy as to have sewn on the wrong buttons? Could it all possibly have been a mistake? All that frustration... for nothing?

*How can you be so useless?*

Right or wrong, what's done is done. If the buttons won't go through, he'll make them go through. He'll open up those buttonholes, scissor-blow after merciless scissor-blow...

*“...Aren't you ashamed to act that way? Don't you feel even a little remorse? You have to be kinder, you have to mend your ways, otherwise, when you're grown up, no one's going to love you.”*

The man is surprised by the force required to cut through the material. One hand isn't enough. He needs both hands, and even then he has to push down with all his weight. They just don't make fabric like this anymore, that's what Celita had said. Without her urging, he would never have bought that raincoat. It was too expensive. But she, who always accompanied him when he did his shopping, had insisted.

*“Look at the quality, look how well-tailored it is.”*

Of course, the raincoat isn't what it was back then. The buttons all full of knots, the holes left by the nails and the torn-up buttonholes—it has been disfigured forever.

*“And it fits you like a glove! I won't be able to let you out of my sight—the girls will be all over you.”*

How long ago was that? He looks at the clock. More than two hours since he should have set out. How could he possibly explain being so late? That he had trouble in the rain? That he took a cab and got in an accident? And why didn't he call to let them know?

*Five minutes, miss, that's all I ask for. Have a heart—it's ten years that I've been waiting to talk to the director. You can't expect me to wait for another ten... It's the simplest thing in the world, Director sir. I don't know why it hasn't occurred to anybody before...*

Even though Irene never been too enthusiastic about the project, she had tried for years to convince him to do something with the idea. What was he waiting for to speak to the director? Did he plan to spend the rest of his life pushing paper in that tiny cubicle? Didn't it bother him to see all his co-workers rising in the ranks while he kept getting passed over? He couldn't exactly be swimming in money if he was talking all the time about moving to a small studio... Irene had always had faith in him. So had Celita. Or that's what they'd told him, anyway.

*Were they truly in love with me?*

The man buttons the buttons. Now they pass through, without any problem whatsoever. And now they don't come off either. But the moment he buttons them, they come unbuttoned again. The buttons stay firmly in their place, but the buttonholes, having been mutilated by the scissors, now let them slip through the cuts.

*Motherfucking buttonholes! What on earth do I do now?*

He looks at the time. Eleven thirty. He feels overwhelmed. All that work, and for what? To have to start all over... If only that morning the alarm had gone off, if at the very least he could have had his cup of coffee... Early or late, buttonholes or no buttonholes, he will still have to set out, once and for

all, and speak with the director. He mustn't fail Irene. Nor Celita, nor Mabel, nor anyone else that ever believed in him.

*Whatever it takes.*

With the biggest needle and the thickest threads, he sews and re-sews, this time attaching fabric to fabric. Black thread, white thread, red thread. Buttons and buttonholes, now rendered superfluous, are hidden forever beneath a great tangle. When he finishes, a gigantic, deformed seam runs across the raincoat from top to bottom.

*Whatever it takes.*

*"...Listen, if you don't change your ways, with that temper of yours, you're going to come to grief."*

Now all he has to do is put it on as if it were a sweater.

*It's elementary, sir. El-e-men-ta-ry. It never occurred to anybody before because they're all a bunch of dunces. All it takes is one ounce of grey matter to see it. If you'd just allow me a little freedom, just a little teeny tiny bit of initiative... then I'd show all those pigmies what I'm made of!*

After unpinning the raincoat, he rolls the bottom up, puts his head in with extreme caution (more than once he has tried to force it through what turned out to be a sleeve), and manages to get it out without any mishaps.

*If you don't have faith in yourself, you'll never get anywhere.*

But in putting his hands in the sleeves and pushing them through, the rest of the raincoat slides upward, leaving his head inside the raincoat again. He tries to get it back out, but the collar has shifted, and so his head remains stuck, presumably in one of the shoulders. While he tries to push upward with his head, he pulls downward with his hands. He finds he can only use his left hand, however; the other one – he doesn't know why – is still in the sleeve, unable to find its way out. He grows impatient, begins to struggle. Suddenly it feels as if all his clothes have loosened, and as if something were slipping down his body, toward the floor...

*My pants! My pants are falling down!*

A tremendous tug, and he is finally able to get his head out, but not without leaving a tear on the side of the raincoat. Now that he can see, he discovers that he has placed his right arm between the fabric and the lining, and that what is coming out, instead of a hand, is a sort of useless stump. He also discovers that, indeed, his pants have fallen down. His shirt has also come undone because all of the buttons, every single one, have come off en masse and gone rolling across the floor.

*Buttons! Motherfucking buttons!*

Incensed, he yanks violently on the lining with his free hand. It comes off, and the whole sleeve comes off after it. But with his abrupt movement, he loses his balance, his feet get tangled up in his pants, and he falls on his face. He is totally, unquenchably enraged.

*No one is going to be spared now...*

First, the pants.

*It's your blue suit! You're a big boy! You have to learn to control yourself! You're going to regret it! No one's going to love you! You're going to come to grief!*

“Grief, schmief!”

The man kicks and tugs with fury; an enormous gash, and the pants will never bother anyone again. Now, for the raincoat.

*I am going to teach you a lesson!*

He pulls and rips with both hands. Pieces of lining go flying, out comes the other sleeve, out comes the whole collar at one fell swoop, out come threads and more threads from the giant seam, out come whole pieces of fabric, and all the buttons go jumping to the floor. The raincoat disintegrates. That great and noble material crumbles between his fingers. When he finishes his butchery, he gathers up all the remains, without neglecting a single button, he picks up the shirt and what remains of the pants, and he puts everything away in a wooden chest.

*No more.*

The same chest where he used to hide Irene's things so that his daughter Elisa wouldn't see them when she came to visit every other weekend after his divorce. Now it has been empty for years; Irene got married, and Elisa returned to Argentina with her mother – God only knows where the key wound up. Fortunately, he does not need the key. Just a couple of nails will do.

He hammers them all the way through. No one will ever use that chest again. Panting and sweating, the hammering still resounding in his head, he sits on top of the chest. No more blue suit. No more raincoat.

*It fits you like a glove!*

No more.

*I won't be able to let you out of my sight!*

No more.

*The girls will be all over you!*

No more.

He looks at the clock. In the gloom he can't make out the time; night has fallen. If he doesn't hurry, he'll never make it. As he starts getting up, the phone rings. He is petrified. Who could be calling him at this hour? Everyone knows that in the evenings he is still at the office. At the office? Suddenly he realizes that, worried about the interview, he has forgotten all about the office. He never let them know that he was coming late, or not coming at all. Not one word.

*Now what do I do?*

The phone goes on ringing. It has to be someone at the office, maybe even the director himself. The secretary must have called his department to ask why he was so late, and by now they must all know that he never made it to work. The ringing grows shriller in his ears. Evidently they know he's there; otherwise they wouldn't keep trying. Otherwise they would have hung up already.

*I have to answer. But what excuse can I give?*

He would have to start by explaining his delay in answering the phone. Could he say that he was asleep? That he was showering? The delay itself is suspicious. The ringing sounds sharper, more pressing. And how does he explain that he is still at home? That he woke up feeling sick? But then he should have let them know. That burglars broke in? He had no witnesses.

*It's a trap. If I answer, all is lost.*

They've fired others for a lot less. And if he loses his job, how will he pay his rent? How is he going to make a living? The ringing pierces his eardrums. They know he is there and they are calling him. They are looking for him.

*Could they have heard the hammering?*

The phone rings one last time. The sound lingers, seems to labor. As if it ran on batteries, and they were slowly dying out. It wavers, recovers its initial shrill cry for an instant, and then, finally, it stops.

The man is drenched in sweat. The sudden silence becomes intolerable.

*What could they want now?*

*Be reasonable, sir. I've been with this company for twenty years. It's the first time something like this has happened. I've always done my work without bothering anybody. I've never asked for a promotion, never asked for a raise. Others complain, go to union meetings. I've never asked for a thing.*

And if they're already on their way? If the phone call was someone trying to warn him? Maybe he should have answered after all...

*This job is all I have! In twenty years I've never missed a single day, I've never once been late. My whole life has been devoted to this company, sir!*

He listens carefully; there are voices on the stairs. Someone is speaking to the super. It's them, and they're asking for him. The hammering. They've heard the hammering, and they've come to take him.

*The super will report me – he'll say he was the one who gave me the hammer. He'll point out the nails – he'll show them the newly splintered wood...*

He can hear steps coming up the stairs, voices getting closer. But he can't make out any of the words. At any moment they'll be knocking on the door...

*It's just a chest, inspector. Nothing out of the ordinary. It's been empty for years—that is, practically empty. Just a few old rags, inspector. Just a few rags, and a few buttons, nothing more. Quartered, inspector? Mutilated, inspector? No, no, no. You're making a mistake. An accident, you mean. Just a plain old domestic accident!*

The steps reach the landing, they furtively go up a few more stairs; then they stop. The light under the door disappears. The voices become an unintelligible murmur.

The man waits, completely still. More furtive steps. The light underneath the door returns. The steps move farther away. The voices recover their normal tone, seem to fade away. He hears a door closing, a boy crying; horns honking in the street, rain pelting against the window.

*I'm safe for the moment, but they're sure to come back soon. I can't stay here. I have to go out the way I am.*

He does not dare turn on the light. He tries to manage with the flashes of the neon sign across the street. And when he walks, he tries not to make the floor creak. He wipes his sweat with his undershirt, smooths it back out, and tucks it in his underwear. He pulls his socks up. His shoes are not so bad; it no longer matters if they're brown or any other color. He combs his hair. Adjusts his tie; over his bare skin it doesn't look as good. Still, it's a gorgeous tie; the head of sales himself praised it once. He finishes up, even remembering to spray a little cologne on himself.

*Maybe all's not lost after all...*

Ready to set out, he realizes he still needs something for the rain. He rushes to the closet and looks for his umbrella, the same one he was unwilling to take earlier because it was old and broken. To think that if he had been willing, he might have spared himself all this frustration... He grabs it, and the rod on which it hangs comes tumbling down along with all the hangers. Among the fallen, mixed-up clothes, he sees the sport jacket he used to love

so much and believed he had lost. Celita had given it to him a long, long time ago. When they still lived in Argentina. When the children were still children, and both of them still lived.

And next to the jacket, in the uncertain glow, he finds the white shirt he had searched for so long and hard that morning.

*My white shirt! My white shirt!*

The man tries to take out the umbrella, but as he pulls, it opens inside the closet and he can't get it past the doorframe. He tries to close the umbrella but he can't. He tries to turn it, to pull it out still open, but it's stuck now and won't turn.

“What? You too? You too want to end up in the chest?”

He knows it is an old, frail umbrella; surely it can't resist much longer. He clutches the handle with both hands and tug; still the umbrella won't give; the wires are much more powerful than he thought. Whether he pushes or pulls, it makes no difference. The steel wires, thicker than he remembered, react elastically; they don't give any sign of breaking.

The man pushes harder on the handle, and he feels as if it were pulsing with an unknown vigor; as if it had grown and twisted like a snake around his wrist; as if... All of a sudden he understands that, even if he wanted to let go of the handle, the handle will not let go of him.

“Let go of me, you bastard! What are you doing? Let go of me you son of a bitch! Let go of me!”

If that morning he hadn't overslept, if he had known that his white shirt was in the apartment, if his sweater had not been lying on the floor...

*Just imagine it, director—ten salesmen is all you would need! It would be the prettiest promotional scheme in the world...*

If he hadn't divorced Celita, if he had finished school... If he had been a good son.

With his legs poised against the doorframe, with all the strength left in him, the man pulls.

