

The Last Laugh

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Sequence 1

Berlin. The fancy Atlantic Hotel. Guests arrive in taxis and are assisted, in the pouring rain, by porters.

X, an elderly porter, sees a taxi driver struggling with a large trunk atop a car. He calls for assistance but no one shows, so with some difficulty X carries the trunk himself into the hotel lobby. Exhausted, he sits and rests.

The hotel manager escorts two guests out of the hotel. He looks for a porter but can't find one, so hails a taxi himself for the guests. Entering the hotel, the now irate manager sees X drinking a glass of water. The manager notes this down in a notebook. X goes outside to resume work as the manager returns to his office.

Outside, the rain has stopped. X removes his raincoat to reveal his uniform: a majestic overcoat. He gets to work again by hailing a taxi for guests exiting the hotel.

Sequence 2

X arrives at the apartment complex where he lives. He is known to everyone, beloved and respected by all. The following morning, outside in the yard, X stops to look after a little girl who is being bullied. He is clearly something of an authority figure in his community.

Sequence 3

X arrives at the hotel. Stunned, he notices someone dressed in the exact same overcoat he is wearing. He runs out to assist guests exiting a taxi, but a hotel bellboy stops him and tells him that the hotel manager wants to speak with him. X staggers inside, as the man who apparently now has his job appears not even to have noticed him.

In the manager's office, X is given a letter. He puts on his glasses and reads: "In consideration of your many years of service with us, we have arranged a different position for you, now that one of our oldest employees is being sent to a retirement home. Beginning today, you will take over his duties. The reason for these measures is your age and frailty." The manager is insistent and impassive.

X is shocked. To prove that he is still capable of doing his job, he picks up a trunk sitting in the corner of the room. He stands holding it for a second, then drops it to the floor and himself crashes into a corner. There he lies, exhausted. The manager calls for assistance and gets X to his feet. X is stripped of his overcoat, which is hung up in a cupboard in the office. As this is done, a button from the overcoat falls to the ground. X, left alone in the office, steals the key to the cupboard without anyone noticing. A hotel maid takes X to a closet where he is given a pile of towels. X carries them downstairs, into the darkness. The maid closes the door behind him.

That evening, while everyone at home awaits X's return, he sneaks through the hotel, avoiding the night watchman and other staff, before taking the overcoat from the cupboard. He leaves the hotel and puts on the overcoat before walking home.

Sequence 4

X is welcomed home and attends a wedding party. He gets drunk and dreams of lifting heavy luggage with one hand over his head.

The following morning a neighbour sews a new button onto the overcoat and X, still drunk, leaves for work. When he reaches the hotel he sees his replacement, standing outside, wearing the exact same overcoat he is wearing. X dashes to the train station where he leaves the overcoat in a cloakroom. Then he returns to the hotel and begins his new job as a bathroom attendant.

The neighbour who sewed the button onto X's overcoat approaches the hotel, intending to surprise him with some lunch she has prepared. She is confused to find someone else on duty outside the hotel, so goes in search of X, and is shocked to find him at work in the bathroom. She runs home and tells everyone. Word spreads in the community, and X is widely mocked.

X is devastated at being found out. He picks up the overcoat from the train station and goes home, where everyone is waiting for him and where he is humiliated. He stumbles back to the hotel where he encounters the night watchman. X, defeated, gives his overcoat to the night watchman, who hangs it back in the cupboard in the manager's office before giving X his own overcoat to keep warm. The night watchman leaves X sleeping in the bathroom.