Mogens Klitgaard

There's a Man Sitting on a Trolley

Translated and
with an Introduction and Notes
by Marc Linder

Fǎnpìhuà Press
Iowa City
2001

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:48 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

Copyright © Mogens Klitgaard 1937 and Inga Klitgaard 2001
Translation, Introduction, and Notes Copyright © 2001 by Marc Linder
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

Translated from the first edition of Mogens Klitgaard, *Der sidder en mand i en sporvogn* (Copenhagen: Povl Branner, 1937).

Cover Drawing: "Sporvognskonduktøren," by Arne Ungermann, which first appeared in *Kulturkampen* 2(3):15 (June 1936), is used with the permission of his daughter Line Schmidt-Madsen.

Suggested Library of Congress Cataloging
Klitgaard, Mogens, 1906-1945
There's a man sitting on a trolley/by Mogens Klitgaard. Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Marc Linder
xlix, 228 p.; map; 21 cm.
Includes bibliographical references
ISBN 0-9673899-7-6
PT8175.K55 D4713 2001
Library of Congress Control Number 2001132480

839.88
K654de
tL74

Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:48 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Eighth Chapter

I

Maybe people should be more calculating than they are. More scheming. After all, people who're calculating and scheming usually achieve what they desire. And what counts here in life is to get what you desire. That your obituary's going to say that you were nice and pleasant—that takes up damned little space today. And besides, the ones who attained something here in life, generally get a nice obituary.

You can see that maybe best of all in the case of the redistricting. Because actually it was his own fault that he was transferred to Sundby. He'd realized that the division of the districts was outmoded and irrational, and one day he'd dropped a remark to that effect in the office when he was in there to settle his accounts. With a new division of the districts one man could be cut. And then suddenly one day in fact the division of districts had come. And had caught him completely by surprise—had nearly smashed everything to pieces for him. Thank God, all right, they hadn't gotten the idea he was the one they could do without and fired him.

Yeah, the whole question of the ability to survive was in fact wrapped up with that business with the new division of districts. In a nutshell. Here Lundegaard had shown an interest in the firm's affairs and shown an ability to find improvements. And what'd he gotten out of it? Only trouble and ingratitude. True enough, no one had been fired, but now they all had a bigger district without actually earning more, and the guy who'd gotten Nørrebro had to assist with the bailiff's executions on property two days a week—a job that the firm's head clerk had previously

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

performed. The head clerk wasn't pleased either, because, in turn, he now had to take over a part of the work that the boss used to perform. So the only one who profited from Lundegaard's thoughtfulness was the boss himself. And then the bookkeeper. Because it was the bookkeeper who'd brought the advantages of a new division of districts to the boss's attention.

So you'd have thought that Lundegaard would've been in the good graces at least of the bookkeeper. But that wasn't the case at all. On the contrary. The bookkeeper, who'd risen in the boss's esteem, felt irritated as soon as Lundegaard was in the office, just the way you feel uncomfortable running into a man you've cheated. For that reason he was brusque to Lundegaard, curt. Maybe he also feared that Lundegaard might disclose that it was his idea the bookkeeper had passed off as his own.

So Lundegaard had lost terrain in all areas. And to boot, by virtue of his abilities, which ought to have improved his position. He now had a bigger and more difficult district and his good relationship with the bookkeeper had been destroyed. And it was no small matter at all either to be on good terms with the bookkeeper.

You could reflect for hours like that on the damned business about dividing up the districts, but the fact was certain that if he'd acted correctly, he'd have improved his position instead of making it worse. He should've gone directly to the boss and called to his attention the defects of the old division and pointed out the advantages of a redistricting. That was obvious and straightforward. He'd have come to be on good terms with the boss, and when the others noticed that, they'd have competed for his friendship, done him little favors, and the like. Why you could just see how the whole staff was doing their best to be on good terms with the bookkeeper, to please him, because they knew he was in the boss's good graces. And in reality they couldn't stand the bookkeeper, but practically speaking that was neither here nor there. Lundegaard was really well liked by his colleagues, but practically speaking that was neither here nor there either because there was nobody who found it advantageous to be on good terms with him.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

No, in spite of everything, Lundegaard's now realizing what counts here in life. Oddly enough, he hadn't realized that before—after all, he certainly isn't that young any more. And now that he's finally realized it, right away he sees a thousand cases that confirm his view. Isn't it perhaps the case that if you run into an old acquaintance on the street and in the course of the conversation admit that things are crummy, in fact, to be blunt, that they're going down the drain, the conversation is only brief, the acquaintance all of a sudden is busy, has to be somewhere at a certain time, and so on. If, on the other hand, you can inform him that things are going splendidly, that you've come out on top, you almost can't shake off the person in question; instead he invites you home to his house one day when he gets the chance, he has, to be honest, often speculated about how in fact things were going with you, and said to his wife: How do you suppose Lundegaard's doing and so on. Yeah, he latches on to you literally almost like a burr and keeps repeating how enjoyable it was for you finally to have bumped into each other again.

And is there actually anything to object to in that. After all, life's a perpetual struggle to make it, and if people run into something on their way that might be advantageous to them, they're pleased and in high spirits, and if they run into something that by some chance might reduce their possibilities, they naturally try to get around it. What're you going to do with an old acquaintance who's gone belly-up or is about to? After all, he can only turn into a bother and trouble. Maybe he wants to borrow money to boot. But an old acquaintance who's doing well it's pleasant to run into—maybe he can get you a better position.

No, damn it, it's Lundegaard himself there's something wrong with. Other people are capable of surviving and look at things in a healthy and natural way. Besides, now little by little we've gotten into August and so eight months've gone by since the store closed. So it's about time that he straighten things out a bit and manage to create the basis for an existence that a thinking human being can bear. And if that's the way it is and life can become peaceable only by back-slapping and humoring them, fine—then Lundegaard's ready to do it. He's ready to do any-

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

thing whatsoever that can improve his situation.

II

Then finally one morning they can pick Poul up at the train station. His face is gray and the prison air clings to him. In addition, something alien has come over his face, which makes his mother worried, a line at the corner of his mouth she's never seen before.

They drink coffee at the train station restaurant. Mrs. Lundegaard's eyes are red-rimmed from crying, and there's no denying that Lundegaard has a lump in his throat. Only Poul appears not to feel anything at this reunion; there's something hard about his face and, as usual, he says very little.

When Lundegaard says that Poul should just take it easy now and go and have a good time, as if he were on vacation, go swimming, etc., Poul's face clouds over. He's been locked up now this whole beautiful summer, and now it's over, and other people've come home from vacations and now, when the beach season's about to end, he's going to be allowed to go and make himself comfortable.

And of course it's true that the summer's over now. After all, you can see it in many things, and besides, the almanac shows that the days are close to two hours shorter. That's how quickly time goes. Before you know it, it's fall with sleet and dark evenings. And then comes winter, which surely there aren't many who look forward to.

But late summer can certainly be a lovely time of year too, and especially August for many people represents the most beautiful month of the year. After all, it's in fact the month of fruitfulness and luxuriance. In Høsterkøb the apple trees' branches are weighed down to the ground with golden fruit, in the farm gardens there's a wealth of pretty garden flowers, you can gather nuts in the hedgerows, and on the floor of the dark green spruce forest, the poisonous red fly amanita mushrooms flare up in the course of one night. And of course the most beau-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

tiful month is the one that fills people's barns with grain. The reapers are singing across the whole country, and the undulating grain fields with brownish yellow straw, which swayed under the weight of their golden heads, are transformed into stubble fields, where the shocks stand in long pretty rows. And Lundegaard, who's from the country, in August always thinks about when as a boy he lay on his back on the top of the cartload of grain and just looked up into the blue sky with its delicate feathery clouds—they're probably called cirrus clouds.

Naturally Poul doesn't need to look down his nose at August. After all, he just needs to go hiking in North Zealand to discover this month's luxuriant and warm beauty. Tramp along the forest hedges where the rowanberries glow in heavy bunches; he can pick blackberries and gather chanterelles. But naturally Poul doesn't intend to do anything of the kind. He'd imagined the summer on the sand at Solrød Beach among all the tents. That's what he'd wanted from the summer when he'd dreamed about it. Maybe that photo of a girl in a bathing suit Nielsen had showed him had contributed to it. In any case, that's what Poul meant by summer vacation and that's what he'd missed out on. Because now the heather was blossoming on Solrød's hills and the buses were busy hauling the many tents into the city.

No, Poul isn't going anywhere—he's just going to loaf around the city. Up one street and down the next. And naturally you have to admit that there's not much of August in the city. All around out there you can shake plums off the trees and go hunting in the marshes in high boots, with dog and gun, but here in town, damn it, you can't do either one. Yeah, of course you can go out to Langelinie pier and on the Smedelinie, but of course that gets boring, too, after a while, and when you come back to town and see Nyboder's dirty yellow, mildewed old houses standing there at the end of Store Kongens Street, damn it, you can easily lose heart. It's very good that it smells of rye and harvest in the country, and that Rørvig can advertise blue jellyfish, but what pleasure do you get from it in here on the cobblestones.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

III

When you get right down to it, one month doesn't really differ very much from the next. After all, nothing happens. After all, nothing ever happens. In any case not like in novels where people experience the strangest things. For every month that passes, the big wishes and dreams recede one month further into the future. And if finally something did happen one day, you'd really hardly pay attention to it. Because it's the everyday little things that put their stamp on life and they're always the same, and it's almost as if you pay more attention if your toothbrush breaks in the morning than if your sweetheart breaks up with you in the evening. No, nothing ever happens—romance is always in every possible place except wherever you find yourself at the moment. And one day resembles the next to a T. Every morning at 7 o'clock the shade flies up with a smack and Anna fumbles half asleep for her stockings. She always sits in bed and puts on her stockings, and even though she's both a healthy and shapely girl, to be honest, it's not an especially romantic sight to see her sitting there on the bed that looks slept in with dishevelled hair and sleepy eyes. In the movies people always sleep in attractive pyjamas with their left hand under the back of their head, wearing restrained facial expressions, and when they wake up, they're well-groomed and their hair is lying there in nice braids and curls on the white pillow. Anna sleeps with her mouth open, maybe she even snores, and when she sits there in bed putting her stockings on, she yawns and scratches her hair, her skin's glistening with sweat, and the air in the room clearly says that a human being has slept here for 6 hours. But in fact of course Anna's neither a Japanese princess nor a movie actress in California; she's just an ordinary little Copenhagen sales clerk sleepily tumbling out of bed, dressed only in a cheap, skimpy chemise and a pair of much-darned silk stockings.

Every morning at 7 o'clock exactly the same thing happens: every morning at 7:40 Anna's sitting on her bike on the way to the department store; every day she counts the minutes till the lunch break in the morning and the minutes till closing time in

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

the afternoon. Every day the same thing, the same thing. Over and over again. Of course, to be sure, something does happen, in a way. But nothing that interferes with daily life. Incidentally, things have now fallen apart with the warehouse clerk for real. She said to him right to his face that he wasn't her cup of tea. He's too spineless and has an inclination to be sentimental. In the beginning she liked that, but now she's disgusted by it. If at least once in a while he'd shown a flash of brutality. But she realizes that that's not his nature. Good Lord, she herself can certainly turn soppy when she's in the mood. But she's too much a woman to be able to stand his perpetually being that way. He's a dreamer, yeah, to be blunt, a twirp. That's not to say that he couldn't be inconsiderate to her; he really has been so often, not dictated by masculinity, but by egotism, self-absorption, conceitedness.

Naturally the warehouse clerk gaped when she finally spoke her mind about him. Stood there feeling sorry for himself and was on the verge of crying so she couldn't help feeling a little pity for him and saying a friendly word to console him, which he naturally took to mean she still loved him, and that it was just a whim on her part. She'd begun to knit a pullover for him and said that in fact of course he'd get it.

Besides, she'd met a travelling salesman. The travelling salesman has a motorcycle. Anna's always dreamed of having a boyfriend who had a car. True, a motorcycle isn't a car, but still at least it's something. It opens the way to a big part of what she previously didn't have access to. The warehouse clerk has pretty, sad eyes, eyes that had appealed to something in her, but it'd been a disappointment all the same. The motorcyclist's a real man—just putting her hands on his leather shoulders on the curves is a sensation, which feels like a thrill, a new and intoxicating sensation. The warehouse clerk was gentle; the motorcyclist's a brute and strong. The warehouse clerk claimed he couldn't become a father; the motorcyclist can doubtless become a father to all the children he wants.

That's the way the days pass. One after the other. The warehouse clerk also gets up every morning at 7 o'clock and rides to

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

work. The warehouse clerk also counts the minutes till the lunch break. And every time the phone rings during the lunch break, it gives him a start because it might be Anna who was calling. It was possible she was having regrets. Naturally, she'll regret it sooner or later—it can't be otherwise. She surely had to be able to notice how very fond he was of her. Presumably that counts for something, too. Surely you can't throw a human being's love away like that as if it were used clothing. He's not worth much these days, the warehouse clerk. In the morning, when he rides to work, he makes a detour in the hope of running into her. All day long he sees her image before him. Everything in this world seems to have lost its meaning except this one thing: Anna. He knows full well that she's right in her verdict on him, at least in a way in part. But surely there was no need for her to reject him. After all, he'd do anything to improve himself, to become the way she wanted him to be. He'd do everything she asked him to. And he thinks she'll come back, sooner or later. Because even if he's such a bungler, surely she can't just, like that, without further ado, cut a human being out of her life, a human being who was so very fond of her as he was. And of course she was fond of him too. She's showed that so many times. And surely you can't all of a sudden stop being fond of a person.

That's the way the days pass. One resembles the next to a T. For Lundegaard too. He rides his old bike from one address in Sundby to the next. Some places somebody's home, other places nobody's home. Some make excuses because they don't have any money today, others regard him as their mortal enemy and treat him accordingly. Some pay an installment, the least they can get away with. Lundegaard adapts to the circumstances: some places he's authoritative, others he's submissive. You're forced to do that. After all, the point is to collect the money. If he didn't have his troubles, which constantly threatened to crush him, he'd sink into a stupor in this bill-collector existence. Up stairs and down stairs.

You definitely need to be reminded that there are other things in the world than collecting installments. Now it's pre-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

sumably almost time for the department head at the Fabric Warehouse to be getting back from summer vacation, and so of course he'll have to do it. Obviously, of course, the month that's gone by hasn't brought any change. Naturally, he's nursed the thought that the refurbished relationship with his brother-in-law was worth that spot of money, and if there's a smash-up when he goes up to the Fabric Warehouse, he'll try the solution of borrowing the 200 crowns from his brother-in-law. On the other hand, it's suspicious that his brother-in-law keeps repeating that you should only lend money to people if you want to be on the outs with them, and that for that reason he really hates to lend money, and then not at all to people he cares about. That of course could indicate that his brother-in-law was afraid that Lundegaard was going to come and want to borrow money. And that Sunday that Lundegaard visited his brother-in-law in his nice civil-servant home, of course he in fact sat there while they were having coffee and kept talking about the lousy times, about how miserable it is to be a civil servant, about us poor folk who're having a hard time keeping things going, and so on. Yeah, damn it, he should talk about difficulties—he's the right one for it. He's the one sitting in that nice and cozy job, secure in every which way, the way civil servants are. What did he know about difficulties?

Well, but now of course you'd surely get to see how things would turn out with the Fabric Warehouse. He still had the letters—he just needed to change the date. Maybe he'll need them. In a few days it'll be a month since he was up there, but that's of course no reason to get a move on. He can really safely let two-three days go by. That can't do any harm—in any case, they'll just write to him again. After all, it's not his fault that the department head took summer vacation. If his case weren't so damned lousy, he could even have allowed himself to be a bit offended. What's the big idea of writing to a person to come up to the office and then without further ado taking off on summer vacation. After all, that's almost making a fool of people. In the business world it's always an advantage to be the injured party. It gives you an extra card in your hand. But that probably

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

couldn't help him here. Besides, after all, he hadn't come right away when he got the letter, but had of course gone and dilly-dallied for most of a week.

IV

In fact, it's really only for the good that the summer's now over. It gets too monotonous with sunshine and heat. And the leaves on the trees have gotten this filthy dusty color, which chases away the last remnant of the summer enchantment. After all, you also need some variety. And the only change you have is the weather and the seasons of the year. Otherwise, after all, nothing ever happens. One day passes like the next. It's not so strange that people always talk about the weather—damn it, they don't have anything else to talk about. Except when there's a six-day race or something like that.

Naturally, lots of meaningless things happen every day. Some people start businesses and some liquidate businesses, some are put in jail and others are released. There's traffic back and forth all the time. Then there are some who go to City Hall and get married, and some who go to City Hall and get separated. The midwives all over town are busy helping new little human beings into the world, and the ministers are busy putting the worn-out ones into the ground. It's just insignificant, trivial things that happen. That's not at all what you're thinking of when you hope that one day something will happen. Something inconceivably big. Something that can burn the souls clean.

And especially when you're a billiard scorekeeper, you have good reason to long for something to happen that can turn everything upside down. A catastrophe, a war, a revolution. Something that can lift people out of the everyday and give them back the consciousness of their ego. Something that can lift them out beyond the hypocrisy. A new flood.

A billiard scorekeeper can't at all help quarreling with humanity. He sees the people where they are least suited to being viewed: At a gambling table. When the game gets a person's

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

blood boiling, the primitive human being pops up through the thin surface. And primitive man's not an attractive creature. All the rest, the smiles, the phrases, the politeness, the superiority, is only a mask people put on when they leave home. Life's taught them that when a million people have to live side by side day in and day out, they have to hide their self behind a mask. The ones who lose the mask as a rule come to a bad end. If their life quietly floats away, if life never challenges them, the mask over their self hardens and whether a self was really concealed behind the mask will never be made clear.

In addition, there's no way a billiard scorekeeper can avoid winding up being partial to alcohol, and now it's little by little become more and more common for Nielsen to go out to the refreshment bar and get himself a beer. For one thing, it shortens the workday, which never seems to end, and it revives you when you're tired. And Nielsen's always tired. Even at noon, when he gets up to go to work, he's tired.

But naturally you can't go around drinking beers like that when you don't earn more than Nielsen does. Then naturally you can provoke a patron into treating you to a beer, or you can owe the waiter for it. You can also borrow money and you can put off paying your rent.

Life also becomes merrier that way. You'd do better to be cheerful, drop the formalities with the patrons, and owe them money, than to be surly, tired, and sober. Besides, after all, the proprietor pays attention to whether you're on good terms with the patrons, and the terror of being fired, of course, constantly sticks to you.

The man who doesn't owe anybody anything, who has his affairs in order, is abstemious, and is conscientious, doesn't fit in this milieu. Funeral directors are always boring; you pretend you respect them, but in reality you don't. Officially you're offended by the man who owes the whole world money, who drinks and tells risqué stories, who always smiles and is frivolous, but nevertheless the man is everybody's favorite. Frivolity's always been popular, rectitude never. Integrity's always been boring.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd

And when after closing time the guests go to a nightclub, they take Nielsen along. And since it's the others who're paying, Nielsen has to show his gratitude by being funny. Besides, you can play with the guests: they gladly forgive you for winning their money, but never for being boring.

V

That's the way the days flow—like a river toward the sea. That's the way the weeks, the months flow. Things never go totally wrong and they'll never go very well. When all's said and done, it's of course also not that big a deal whether things go well or badly. There'll always be another day, the sun rises every morning and sets every evening, quite unmoved by Anna's love stories, Lundegaard's troubles, and scorekeeper Nielsen's frivolity. And besides, it always turns out, of course, that when you've overcome one difficulty, a new one arises right away. And no matter how things go, life nevertheless always holds small joys in store for you. Lundegaard knows damn well that he's approaching a point in his life that resembles a decision. But there's no decision that's final, and Lundegaard's becoming apathetic, doesn't care about anything. Naturally, he wants to do his best—he's just calmer now. After all, the whole thing doesn't mean so terribly much.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Generated for guest (University of Iowa) on 2012-04-18 19:49 GMT / http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015052054650
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#cc-by-nc-nd