
Mogens Klitgaard

**There's a Man
Sitting on a
Trolley**

Translated and
with an Introduction and Notes
by Marc Linder

Fānpìhuà Press
Iowa City
2001

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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

Fifth Chapter

I

Lundegaard stands rather rigidly for a few minutes staring at the scrap of paper. It's the back of a bread bag and the letters are bumpy and clumsy because the kitchen table, which functioned as a writing surface, is full of cracks and crevices. He still hasn't taken his overcoat off, he looks dirty and unwashed, his crocheted scarf's crumpled and filthy, his shoes bespattered, his hands frozen blue and grimy after a night's boozing and whoring.

Now former dry-goods merchant August Lundegaard's again pondering the third way out, the way out that he seriously considered for the first time in his life when he was standing down on Nybro Street and didn't dare go into the state-owned pawn-brokerage. Naturally he's had thoughts of suicide before. Who hasn't. Once, that was before he met his wife, there was a girl he was going out with. She was a salesgirl in a bakery and was both stupid and ugly. And little by little he'd decided to break off with her, when one day she informed him that it had to be over between them—he wasn't for her after all—and she told him straight out that she'd gotten herself a new sweetheart. Then Lundegaard had suddenly realized that she was the only girl who meant anything to him, that life would be a desert without her, and he'd made the most desperate attempts to win her back: he walked for hours near her residence in hopes of running into her, had written to her, had gotten drunk in a tavern, which was across from the bakery—all of it without any result. Then he'd become desperate and begun to consider which way of dying would in fact be the gentlest. Then when she read in the news-

paper that he'd taken his life, she'd understand how dearly he'd loved her and regret her cunning. If anything, it was perhaps the fact that she'd possibly never find out about it that made him abandon his project. Because in fact she never read newspapers.

Actually it took most of a year before he'd overcome the humiliation she'd inflicted on him by jilting him. Later in life he'd run into her a couple of times without its having made the least impression on him. He was, if anything, amused by the fact that back then he could've been so idiotic. Presumably that stuff about suicide hadn't been meant seriously either. Of course the hope had probably been lurking in his heart of hearts that he'd be saved at the last moment and be taken to the hospital, where she'd then come and visit him, sit beside the bed with his hand in hers, look at him with her almond-shaped eyes and say: August, from now on, we'll never be separated again. When he thought back to all that, he was ashamed of his own ridiculousness. And in reality, her eyes hadn't been almond-shaped at all: that was something his fantasy had furnished her with after she'd jilted him.

What he was standing and considering now, while staring at the scrap of paper, was something totally different. It was a definitive solution of all the problems at one time against the background of a clear understanding that the rest of his wretched life had nothing beautiful or interesting to offer him anyhow—only poverty and struggle, maybe prison and disgrace.

So it must've been that business with the fabric there was trouble with. Whether it was at the state-owned pawnbrokerage or at the Fabric Warehouse, they'd discovered it. So now the whole thing was over with.

II

Someone was coming up the stairs. Instinctively he straightened himself and smoothed down his clothes with his hands. Just the way he'd recently done it down in the store when every second person who came in the shop door was somebody with a

bill.

The person in question stopped outside. Lundegaard stood rigid like a pillar staring at the hall door. Then a key was put into the door—it was Mrs. Lundegaard.

Lundegaard had expected a scene, but there was no scene. Mrs. Lundegaard looked tired and careworn. Said nothing about why he hadn't been home. She had a bundle of pre-cut fabric under her arm. While unpacking she said that he'd surely better go over to the police right away this morning.

Lundegaard was amazed that she was taking it relatively calmly. If I don't go over there, they'll surely come get me, he said. She turned around and looked at him, amazed, surprised. Come get you?

Yeah, come get me, he said angrily.

She didn't understand him, said that the policeman had been very nice and had said that he hoped Mr. Lundegaard had time—otherwise she'd have to go. It was the same one who was here last time, she said.

All at once Lundegaard understood. It wasn't him at all they were after—of course, it was Poul's case. That he could be so stupid. And now he was standing there and had almost given himself away to his wife.

But surely Mrs. Lundegaard hadn't understood anything. She'd gone into the bedroom and had put out a clean scarf. Said that he'd better wash up. And asked if he needed to eat something. And was already in full swing making the beds.

III

Poul got 4 months. That's what the lawyer, the appointed defender, had also said you'd have to expect. That was presumably the rate for that kind of thing. Presumably it works quite automatically. Incidentally, the lawyer himself wasn't present when the sentence was handed down; he'd sent one of his staff, who just said something about requesting the most lenient sentence under the law for the accused. In other words, in consid-

eration of the circumstances. Poul hadn't said anything. Dry-goods merchant Lundegaard and his wife hadn't said anything either. They'd just looked at each other. And when they said goodbye to him, she cried. And Lundegaard, who'd thought beforehand about what he wanted to say, didn't manage to say anything either except: Goodbye, my boy. With a lump in his throat. Besides, the whole thing went so quickly that it was almost over before they got started. But, of course, there were also so many other cases that had to be heard by the court.

Naturally the neighborhood knew that Poul Lundegaard had gotten four months. Wherever the hell they knew it from. The greengrocer's wife knew it, the news dealer knew it, the ice-cream parlor knew it. And even people who otherwise didn't actually know him, knew it: Oh, that guy, the fair-haired one with the freckles, the guy who was always standing in the passageway. And they commented on the sentence in terms they found suitable. Each according to his point of view. The news dealer said something about capitalist society and unemployment, the ice-cream parlor's statements were cynical and technical, the greengrocer's wife's affectedly sympathetic, scorekeeper Nielsen said that there were surely many people who'd have better deserved the four months.

And the day after they talked about something else. After all, so much happens every day. The waiter's first-born, who'd gotten a hernia and been operated on, had died. Of course, that had to be commented on too. And a man who drove for a living had become jealous and had driven himself and his wife into the harbor. After all, little by little, you've gotten into the month of May, in which crimes of passion and happy and unhappy love stories fill the air. There's never any lack of conversation material in May—lots of things happen every single day. For example, there's a sleepless young girl who's heard the first nightingale; then there's a couple in love who've heard the cuckoo call; and then there's a newspaper reader who's seen a family of ducks with 10 tiny ducklings on Sortedam Lake.

This year you also have Abyssinia to chat about. Even though it'll soon be somewhat hackneyed. But it shows in any

case that you're keeping up to date. In addition, there are the May Day demonstrations, the communists on one half of Fælleden and the social democrats on the other. And in the newspaper you can read that the freight market is livelier, the crisis is easing, the commodities markets are characterized by an upward tendency.

And now you can buy gas masks. They're not expensive at all. You can get a nice gas mask for 12-15 crowns. And the travel agencies are advertising a Pentecost tour to the Canary Islands and Africa; it's said to be among the most charming—calm sea and clear skies. Tivoli's opening in pouring rain and people are going out into the woods and gathering anemone and breaking off beech sprigs. Bakken's also opening. They've put water in the fountains round about the city and in Utterslev Marsh you can get yourself the season's first mosquito bites. The chestnuts are in bloom, the fruit trees are in bloom. And in the shopping districts many-colored awnings are hung out on the shop fronts, the sidewalk restaurants are just beginning to get customers under the brilliantly colored umbrellas, which blaze in the sunshine and attract the eyes. The thermometer's fluctuating between 7 and 13 degrees centigrade, the days've grown longer by 8 hours, and all of spring's glorious vegetables have arrived: new potatoes, asparagus, strawberries, cauliflower, spinach, lettuce. They're just so expensive that they can't be bought. By ordinary people, that is.

IV

Naturally, Anna doesn't love the warehouse clerk exclusively because she feels she's lost him. But when you've lost something, you see its value better. And its defects suddenly appear insignificant and meaningless.

But till now the warehouse clerk has hidden his bad qualities and emphasized his good ones, exactly like a rooster courting. And now, when he notices Anna's feelings, he changes his tune, doesn't put himself out any more. After all, he has her now. He

becomes demanding and inconsiderate. At any cost Anna wants to overcome his indifference, win him, anchor him in the relationship, and she's considerate and sociable as never before. And painstaking with her clothing and her hair as never before. It wasn't least of all for that reason that she bought the swagger coat. Despite the fact that she couldn't afford it. It wasn't at all that little money to lose every month. Because naturally she couldn't buy it for cash. Where in the world should she get the money from—it was hard enough to come up with the down payment.

And she'd otherwise thought about telling people at home that she'd gotten a raise, but obviously that would now have to wait for the time being, if she was going to manage the monthly installments. The worst thing is that a week later she saw a swagger coat exactly like it in another store that was 30 crowns cheaper. 30 crowns is a lot of money. But maybe she'll soon get a raise again; the department head's pleased with her and she's making good progress in the drafting room. She's industrious and has aptitude. She's conscientious.

The spring weather's chilly and rainy. Still, this time of year's wonderful. She's with the warehouse clerk almost all of her free time. They've been in Deer Park, they've been to the Circus, and one Sunday afternoon they took a walk on Lange-linie pier of the kind that you remember for years. The entrance to the harbor was filled with beautiful pleasure yachts and the air so fresh and scented with spring that you got dizzy from it. They'd been through the Citadel and sat for an hour on the Smedelinie—there was an abundance of fragrant wild plants. From sheer spring playfulness they ate ice cream from an ice-cream truck. From sheer spring playfulness they ran a race up the stairs at the Swedish Church. From sheer spring playfulness she took him home with her for afternoon coffee without in the slightest way having prepared for it. To the great surprise of her mother, who wasn't at all dressed to be introduced that way to her future son-in-law.

Actually it doesn't matter whether you're an Indian carter, Chinese coolie, Italian day-laborer dock-hand or Copenhagen billiard scorekeeper. You're stuck in the muck and you're going to stay stuck. The proletarian's lot is the same all over the earth, whether he goes around with a collar and nice black shoes or goes around bare-headed and with a many-colored scarf. When the Indian carter in Mexico hears about the miner in Kiruna or about the mechanic in Detroit, about the soldier in Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese army or about the tap-dancing Negro in Harlem, he opens his eyes wide and listens, deeply moved. Yeah, that's the way people should live—then there'd be something to life. And when the Egyptian fellah hears about the life of a Parisian servant, in handsomely appointed salons where there are beautiful women and music, whose work consists only in putting a bottle of wine and two glasses on a table with flowers and saying voila, his own slave existence appears to him like a hell without equal. And when the Copenhagen billiard scorekeeper sees a film snippet dealing with peasants' life in beautiful Croatia, he realizes right away that he's in the wrong place and that he should now be sitting in a Tyrolese costume at the foot of a mountain watching the sunset.

But it's only a moment. When you've emerged again from the romantic darkness of the movie theater into the chilly street of reality, you realize once again that the proletarian's lot in the eastern hemisphere doesn't differ greatly from the proletarian's in the western hemisphere. In any case, not in the decisive areas. Now of course Nielsen's so lucky as to be living in a democratic country in free Scandinavia where there are schooling and hygiene, a national population register, and gratis consultation for venereal diseases. And still he really doesn't have much to brag about as compared to his unwashed brothers in Mexico and China. He earns exactly enough to be able to pay for his lodging and keep his hunger satisfied. It seems to be a fixed rule across the whole globe that the longer the working hours a proletarian has, the less he earns. Nielsen's working hours total 70 hours a

week. And he earns less than a unionized worker who works 48 hours a week. A cow on a manor on Funen also has room and board. If you were just assured your living for the future. But, of course, you never know when you're going to be fired. A Roman slave was better safeguarded. A cow on Funen is better safeguarded.

All of a sudden one day a patron can easily become unreasonable. Players easily become unreasonable. Especially when they lose. And then you can lose your composure. After all, you're just human. Why should you take everything lying down. And then the fun and games begin. The patron complains and the proprietor says to the scorekeeper that he better take his clothes and leave. And not come back. You can't object to that: in spite of everything, a patron means a lot of money in the course of a year—you can get plenty of scorekeepers. It's not at all a question of who's right: if the proprietor had to operate his business according to that principle, he'd soon go bust. And, damn it, the proprietor has enough troubles as it is.

Nielsen's reliable and does his job. But that's not at all what matters. It's much more important to be sociable and to take the insolence and the injustices as if you'd deserved them. It really doesn't take that much to be fired. When you have a job, in fact you don't know whether you'll be fired when you go home.

And so you can stand on the street and think enviously of the Roman slave and the cow on Funen. Because even if the job isn't worth much, yeah, to be blunt, even if it's hell, it's still a job. And jobs don't grow on trees. There are plenty of people who'll jump at it the moment you're fired.

Then of course you've got the Welfare Office to fall back on. 13.50 crowns per week. And you risk being sent to do farm labor. It feels like something on the order of being sent to Siberia. Something on the order of being banished. Penal labor. So better to take the chance and run around with a briefcase and hawk something or other door to door.

In the beginning when you've got work you're so happy about having work that you don't at all notice how wretched it is. Just the fact that you don't have to go around pounding the

pavement and feeling outcast and superfluous. That you can afford to buy a pair of socks and a cheap tie. And scrape enough together for the down payment on a suit.

But what the hell's the good of it all when there aren't any prospects in life. What can it all amount to. You certainly can't go around being a scorekeeper your whole life. It's impossible to put anything aside at all on the few cents you earn. After all, on 30 crowns a week you can barely cover the ordinary expenses. Damn it, on your day off you can't very well afford to go into a milk bar and drink coffee or go to the main train station movie theater and see the newsreel.

It's just appearing at the billiard parlor on time and then going home again toward morning. And next day the same thing all over again. And presumably that's the way it'll keep on going. Indefinitely. At least he can't see where the change would come from. That is, unless he's fired.

VI

One day Lundegaard did something unusual. He went out into the woods. A quite ordinary weekday. It was of course his intention to go out to Nørrebro and collect. First and foremost he was going to go out to Andresen, who lived on Thor Street. Andresen had bought a blue serge suit. Andresen worked at the Ice Plant, but was unemployed at the moment. Kept pleading that now of course the season would soon start when the ice plant would be getting busy. Just a little patience—he'd soon be working and then he'd quickly get those few pennies paid so he could be spared all that running around. Sometimes he was gruff with Lundegaard, sometimes he appealed to his understanding. Yeah, but then why didn't you wait to buy the suit till you were working. Oh lord, man, Andresen replied. I mean, there was that union dance we were going to go to, and I mean, my wife'd been looking forward to it so much. I mean, folks don't have alot of pleasures. And besides, I mean, I wouldn't have bought it on installments if I'd had work. Sometimes he was submissive

and said Mr. Lundegaard, sir, but Lundegaard never got any money. Incidentally, Andresen felt that one day he'd surely get a permanent job at the Ice Plant, maybe as deliveryman. Even though he knew very well that all of them expected to be that and that there was a need only for a relatively few deliverymen. But if you didn't have something like that to look forward to, then of course the whole thing was crummy as hell. After all, it was the case that the ice plant employed many more people in the season and that these people then naturally became unemployed when the season was over.

Lundegaard didn't shrink from giving him a sermon. People really had to put money aside while they had work. Lundegaard was indignant. What the hell was the big idea of buying clothing on installments to go to a dance when people weren't in a position to meet the payments.

And then they played hide-and-seek with him. Andresen was never home. And now they'd just paid the rent. And so on. But if Lundegaard would come on Friday, they'd put it aside for him. And then when Lundegaard came on Friday, no one answered the door at all.

But now this obviously wouldn't do any more. Now Lundegaard had made an agreement that he'd come today and get an installment and if they didn't comply with the agreement, the matter would go to the bailiff. That was their funeral. Lundegaard had nothing to do with it. That was something decided at the office. It should've happened already a long time ago, but he, Lundegaard, had covered for them and said that they were nice and solid people.

But then instead of going to Nørrebro, Lundegaard went out into the woods.

If anything, it was probably because it was the first time he realized really in earnest that it was spring. On Vesterbro Street he'd gotten into a whole throng of bicyclists. The bikes were newly polished and sparkled in the sun. And two girls who tried to pass him had on cretonne dresses and were as frisky and full of promise as spring itself. And at City Hall Square he was totally blinded and dazed by the sun.

Imagine having to go out into Nørrebro's staircases in this weather. There also really wasn't anyone home in this weather. He parked his bike at Nørreport and thought he'd just take a stroll into the Botanic Garden. Just half an hour. Sit on a bench and bask in the sun. You also owed it to your health to take it a bit easier once in a while. Otherwise, of course, he wouldn't be able to stand the demands that were made of him. After all, it was his shoulders everything rested on.

And then when he was standing there just inside the entrance to the Garden looking at Pallas Athena, Nørrebro's staircases had become so remote in his consciousness that in his heart of hearts he realized that he wouldn't get to Nørrebro today. Pallas Athena stood with her helmet in hand. A pair of sparrows had built a nest in the helmet. It looked exactly as if Pallas were staring dumbfounded at her helmet, in which straw and little twigs stuck out in disorderly fashion on all sides.

Of course, you could just as well really go out into the woods. After all, it wouldn't take but a minute to get out there with the S-train. And he needed peace and quiet. Needed to think through the whole thing in peace. That'd cause him to be able to work so much the better the following days. That way he wouldn't lose anything by it.

Maybe it was stupid. The woods were, after all, still barely green. But of course he wasn't going out into the woods to have a party either. Not at all. He was going out into the woods because he needed peace and quiet. And to be alone. To go to a place where there weren't any people.

Maybe he'd regret it when he got out there. The forest floor was surely soaked through. It had rained so much in the last few days. Maybe it was really a bit ridiculous to go out into the woods alone. On a weekday. Even before it had really blossomed.

But damn it, he needed to see something other than staircases. Down in the Botanic Garden's lake the ducks were taking a bath. They did it this way—thrusting their heads with a quick jerk down into the water and back up so the water streamed across their backs. And a sparrow had tumbled out of Pallas's

helmet and was lying on its stomach in the gravel on the garden path carrying on with its wings spread out, taking a bath in the gravel, and chirping as if it were possessed. Maybe it had lice. Maybe that was its way of scratching itself.

So bill collector Lundegaard was sitting on the S-train on the way to Klampenborg.

VII

Lundegaard walks and walks. He's trembling with restlessness and elation with all his senses open. Like a prisoner who's escaped, but realizes that before sundown he'll be sitting behind lock and key again. He walks across Hermitage Plain, past Stag Marsh, through Raadvad and Stampen, again to the south along the paths and across the open plain. He lies for an hour on his back in the sunshine on a grassy slope in the enclosed area by Fortune, stares up into the blue sky, follows the drifting clouds with his eyes. Despite the fact that he knows that's a dangerous pastime at this time of year when the ground is damp.

And in town people are now going around asking what's actually become of spring this year. Out here it's like a summer day. The air, the sounds, the many smells that are carried past his nostrils by the gentle wind. The city symbolizes to him something remote. The city represents everything you'd prefer to forget, the defeats, the adversity, efforts in vain. Here nature seems to annul the whole thing. Since he was a little boy sitting by the roadside in Jutland whittling whistles out of willow branches, almost hidden from travellers by burrs, dandelions, and dead-nettles, he hasn't been this close to nature. Now he's here again and it seems as if all the intervening time is unimportant, just a number of years that've passed.

In the midst of all the misery, in the atmosphere of drunkenness and breaches of the law, of self-destruction, Lundegaard feels his human ego consciously as never before, the essence of the growing luxuriance is close to him as never before; he can

take it into his head to take wet topsoil in his pale city hands in an unconscious urge to come into contact with the origin of all life; his emotional life's abnormally receptive, his nerves more awake, his blood's awake, his sensory life has a ring and color. He's been removed from the machine-like, calm, stupid equilibrium, standing face to face with life's crude demands. With his gabardine coat, his little bill collector's briefcase, his pince-nez, and his crocheted scarf he is, in spite of everything, a part of nature, related to the trees, the plants, the animals. Maybe he'll be destroyed, yes, undoubtedly he'll be destroyed, but still for a moment he's sensed the law that is the universes'.

VIII

But the big machine seizes Lundegaard once more and takes him back to the city. Someplace in his brain it's written that he has to go the company office before closing time. The S-train takes Lundegaard, the trolley takes Lundegaard, duty takes him. It's bad enough that Andresen in Thor Street is going to use as an excuse that he was sitting home today all day with the money in his hands waiting for Lundegaard. It's bad enough that a man of his age is going around getting batty, that a grown, sensible man can get it into his head to tramp about in the woods instead of doing his job. At the office they'd certainly smirk if they knew that he, Lundegaard, that guy who does collecting in Nørrebro, had been sitting for half an hour on a hillside in Deer Park looking at a lump of moss he'd had in his hand for maybe an hour. He still had soil under his nails, wet forest soil.

And all of a sudden something happens again.

Something that shakes his fragile existence to its foundations.

And now when otherwise things were starting to go tolerably well.

What happens is something quite ordinary and everyday. But it makes him pale and causes his hands to shake.

It happened after he'd come into the office, had said hello,

put his hat on a chair, and opened his little briefcase. The book-keeper turned half around toward him and said:

Yeah, it's true, Lundegaard. You're going to get a new district—a reorganization's been carried out. So I have to ask you to settle up your accounts. Next week you'll be starting in Sundby.

Lundegaard can't get out a word. Just stands there fumbling with the papers in his briefcase. Settle up accounts. Yeah, but of course that's impossible. After all, he's short over 100 crowns. So now the whole thing will come crashing down. Now it's all over.

The bookkeeper's already turned around again. After all, it's not exactly a sensation for a bill collector to get assigned to a new district.

Yeah, Lundegaard says. Unfortunately I probably won't get time this evening, Mr. Hansen, but I'll come in the day after tomorrow with the accounting.