
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

Sixth Chapter

I

So it's turned June and the weather's warmer. Beach life's in full swing, camping life's in full swing. Incidentally, Paris has decreed that bare backs are permitted this summer only so long as sunbathing lasts. Revolutions are also occurring in the tennis world. Since the English queen's permitted the participants at the world championships at Wimbledon to play with bare legs, all women are happy because it's very pleasant to have little, elegant wool socks to go with the white leather shoes with rubber soles.

On the whole the revolution is proceeding. Now they'd just gotten night buses, which turned Copenhagen upside down and created such scenes that people were about to start saying Citizen and Comrade to one another. And then we've even gotten new transfer tickets too. Progress is progressing well.

And now alarm sirens are going to be hung up which will give the signal for blackouts during air raids, and a police sergeant will give a lecture about the duties of the police during an air raid, and at Enghave Road fire station fire bombs are being demonstrated. But in spite of everything, it's as if the war preparations are losing their horror and eeriness in the Danish summer, as if they just beautifully and harmonically fit into the succession of summer entertainments. Besides, of course it's new and interesting. And as a rule takes place with musical accompaniment. By loudspeaker. A visit of the Dutch fleet at Lange-linie pier says that it's now summer in Copenhagen and naturally the foreign sailors are adorning Tivoli.

At the office, Lundegaard's office, the boss is going around

in shirt sleeves, red and puffed up. If he hasn't in fact slipped out the back door and isn't sitting in Tivoli with an open-face sandwich with shrimp and a glass of beer. All around town, in parks, on grounds, in gardens, laburnum is ablaze side by side with the heavy, sweet-smelling lilacs. In Ermelunden the hawthorn's blooming, the rowanberries are blooming. And farther out, out in the real open country, in farm country, you can see the first haystacks.

Even the smallest stores are advertising beer on ice. The butter's melting in the heat. All that heat's beginning to become tedious; the heath and bog are burning hot and your heart's longing for the first Danish summer rain.

In the rear-tenement apartments the heat means that you should preferably not open the windows. The garbage cans put out a stupefying stench. At the Lundegaards it's especially bad: two big barrels with refuse from the greengrocer and the fish store are standing next to the garbage cans. And if only there weren't any cats in the house, but the place is swarming with cats, little cats and big cats. But if you killed the cats, the rats would be more than you could stand.

August Lundegaard's sitting in the dining room in shirt-sleeves. He's sitting at the table which he's cleared of both table mats and other odds and ends and dragged over to the window. A notebook's lying in front of him. In addition, a bottle of ink's standing there. In his hand he's holding a pen. His collar and tie are lying on the dresser; his jacket's hanging over the back of a chair.

Once in a while he shouts out into the kitchen where Mrs. Lundegaard's sitting at the sewing machine. One minute he's asking how much they spend on margarine per month, the next how much on cleaning materials, soda, brown soap, and the like. And each time Mrs. Lundegaard answers that she can't say just right off the top of her head. And then he asks how often does she buy margarine and how much at a time. She answers that it varies so much, but he doesn't give up, and keeps asking, untiringly and fiercely.

At last the sewing machines stops humming and she appears

in the doorway. Her face is very tired and very gray, she's steadily deteriorating and has a nervous twitch in her eyes.

Isn't it enough if you find out how much household money I spend, she asks.

No, I want to know what we spend the money on in order to see what we can save on.

We never buy anything that isn't strictly necessary.

Yeah, that's of course what we want to go over and talk about, he says with irritation. Surely you must be able to say how much money we spend on margarine in a month.

She sits down on a chair without answering. She's come to look old. Her dress is full of basting threads.

Something's happening inside Lundegaard. Yes, but dearest, he says softly, can't you see that it's necessary for us to make an economic plan if we're going to pull through these times. And so we're forced to make a list of what we earn and what we spend. An exact list. And to adjust our consumption to our earnings.

She doesn't understand that. When you've been as industrious as you can possibly be and as thrifty as you can possibly be, you just can't do any more, can you. Those are the realities—the rest is just a piece of paper. Besides, the notebook cost money and in fact Lundegaard should now be in Sundby collecting instead of sitting here. And she's being interrupted in her work.

She doesn't understand it, but she gives in. That's what she's always done. And helps him to the best of her ability in putting together an economic summary. If that's what he really wants. Besides, she imagines that it'll make him more stable in day-to-day life. Because of course she's probably had a suspicion that things weren't quite the way they ought to be.

So they sit there next to each other checking their accounts and trying to recall. And when he says that then of course there's also the installment on the sewing machine, they look for the contract and discover that if they could pay the balance this month, they'd get off 30 crowns cheaper. Still, that's plenty stiff, it seems to Lundegaard, 30 crowns; they must make a co-

lossal profit on a machine like this, and the less people can afford it, the more they have to fork over. It's expensive to be poor.

II

Because once again there's been a turn of events. To be sure, Lundegaard got through the first of the month unscathed, managed both the redistricting and actually Mr. Salomonsen, too. But it was by expensive means and it's quite clear that that way damn well won't work any more. In a way it was a funny thing that precisely one of his debts amounted to an asset he could make use of in a pinch. He redeemed the fabric from the state-owned pawnbrokerage and sold it to a dry-goods dealer downtown, who knew him from before. That transaction yielded him fifty crowns. Naturally, under the circumstances he couldn't raise all the money for Mr. Salomonsen, but still he raised a part of it. He had to sign a new IOU for the rest. But, in other words, he'd managed it once again.

But obviously now they were going to have to live according to a plan. According to a budget. They could spend so much and not a penny more. So much had to be earned. And could be earned. In addition, it appeared from the economic summary that if they could raise the income side by 20 crowns a month and reduce their expenditures by 20 crowns a month, all their expenditure items could be covered and all their installment payments handled. So they had to check where cutbacks could be made and what ways their incomes could be increased.

Maybe they could find a better firm for his wife. There was a business in Nørrebro that was looking for women to sew vests. They paid about ten crowns per vest and Mrs. Lundegaard could probably sew one per day. And he had to talk to Anna. She had to pay more for room and board. If she could afford to go and buy a swagger coat and scarves and the like, then she had to pay more for room and board.

III

Anna and the warehouse clerk were sitting at a little table in the milk bar where they'd sat many times before. But the mood today was different, their faces were different.

It's impossible, he said. I can't believe it. Now just try to be calm and wait and see a couple of days.

Yeah, but Eigil, don't you understand. It's already several days past the time.

Well, what do you know—if she wasn't sitting there crying. She wasn't sobbing—she was just sitting there, completely calm, letting the tears run.

The warehouse clerk awkwardly stroked her hair and looked around furtively. Apparently no one had noticed. A couple was sitting by the window, looking down at the street; two waitresses were chitchatting at the buffet.

Anna, he whispered. Now be reasonable: it's absolutely certain there's nothing wrong. You'll see: tomorrow you'll call me and say it was a false alarm.

He squeezed her hand under the table. So, so smile again.

Actually he didn't feel guilt-ridden, but he had a feeling that it was his duty to be. People expected him to be.

He looked down at her bowed head with its beautiful hair. How he did love that head. God knows whether she felt the same way he did. He knew full well that it was one of life's serious moments when your sweetheart confides to you that she's in trouble and that there've been consequences, but it was impossible for him to feel the seriousness and solemnity that he obviously ought to feel. He was a bit ashamed of it, but in reality he felt a certain joy: His and Anna's child.

Child, no, nonsense, that was impossible. If she had a child, she'd lose her job. The future would be destroyed. They couldn't get married either. You just don't get married on a wage like the one he and ten thousand other young warehouse and office people worked for.

Suddenly the warehouse clerk understood that naturally she didn't feel the same way he did—that for her it was serious busi-

ness. And her parents. He began to feel ill at ease. Ever since the day he'd bought the Easter lilies and birch sprigs for the pitcher in his room, he'd felt this oppressive nervousness, but now obviously you were facing reality. It had happened.

People had started coming into the milk bar. Young people who were sitting with a malted milk or a lemon squash with a straw and a few lanky young men who were drinking cognac with coffee and putting on airs.

Let's go, he said.

They walked down the street. It was drizzling—the first summer rain. I wonder if it always rains in such a situation, he thought to himself. In novels in any case. After all, the weather has to fit the mood. He looked at the couples passing by. How many of them were in the same situation or had been. What had happened to Anna and him was naturally not an isolated case; it was something common, everyday. And what did all these cases end in. And how was this going to end.

At Gammeltorv they automatically turned off from Strøget and walked down toward Christiansborg, where they sat down on the stone bench by the Marmor Bridge. It'd begun to rain more heavily.

They sat for a long time without saying anything. All of a sudden he felt like talking to her about some of the things they usually talked about, but he thought you probably couldn't do that on an evening like this.

The silence was oppressive. What in the world should he say to her anyhow. So he said:

Now listen, Anna. In any case, it's not going to help any to sit here and look dejected. I'm quite certain nothing's happened. Let's at least wait with the desperation till we know that it's happened. And if it turns out to be the case, you know you can rely on me. There are ways out of this too.

She didn't answer, just sat there staring down into the water where you could clearly see the raindrops falling in the light. Two police officers were standing down by the Storm Bridge.

He understood that he'd said something stupid and became impatient.

Come, let's go, Eigil. We'll go down and get the bikes and then you'll go home with me. Suddenly she made an attempt to be lively and warm, stuck her arm under his and said: Silly boy.

On the way home they talked about all sorts of other things, and it wasn't till they were standing on her staircase to say goodbye to each other that she broke down. She put her arms around his neck, her head against his shoulder, and sobbed. As he was going to stroke her cheek, his hand got wet with her warm tears.

IV

As Anna was about to stick the key in the front door, she heard voices inside. So her parents hadn't gone to bed. She smoothed her hair and brushed over her puffy eyes with the powder puff before she went in. Coffee cups were sitting on the table and Lundegaard's saucer was full of cigar ashes. It was an uncommon sight at this time of day. Mrs. Lundegaard, who always made the most of her time, was sitting on the sofa, darning socks.

Do you want a cup of coffee, my girl? her mother asked. You can go out and warm it up yourself.

When she returned, Lundegaard began to tell her about the reason that they had to make an economic plan now—that it wasn't possible any more to do things haphazardly, that their position today was in fact so difficult that they now had to trim their sails, and the like. And that all of them had to join in.

Yeah, of course, Anna burst out. You folks never before felt that all that was any of my business, but now that we're on our last legs, I'm being allowed to join in all right.

We wanted to spare you the worries, said Lundegaard, offended. But now the situation's really so serious that we're forced to let you in on the lay of the land. Each of us individually has to do what we can to get over this difficult time. And so your mother and I have now made an economic plan and we'd appreciate it if you could look at it and say what you feel can be

done. Don't you think you could pay a bit more for room and board?

Anna sat and stirred her cup. She thought about whether perhaps she'd better tell them the whole story. Both that she'd gotten a wage increase long ago and that in all likelihood she'd gotten into trouble, and that instead they'd be the ones who'd have to help her. That either she'd lose her job and any chance for a somewhat tolerable life or she'd have to have an operation. And an operation costs money. Besides, she was afraid and nervous and needed to share her anxiety and responsibility with other people. With people who loved her. She was on the verge of starting to bawl again.

But she didn't say anything, just sat there stirring her cup. Her parents looked at her expectantly. Then, just to gain time, she said something about their knowing themselves already what she earned and how much she paid for room and board. And that she couldn't see how she could manage to spare more for room and board.

Now listen, Lundegaard said. When the business went bust, we let you stay in the department store despite the fact that we couldn't afford it at all. You could've gotten a job for 100 crowns a month or you could've become a maid in someone's house. But we didn't have the heart and, besides, we were thinking about your future. And things certainly also didn't get that bad that you weren't able to buy a swagger coat, and in fact you also have enough so you can buy stockings, organdie collars, scarves, and the like. I mean, we're not demanding the world of you—just that you help out a little now that we're in a pinch.

Anna's not at all an emotional person, not of the kind that makes sacrifices. She fights to keep what she has and fights to get more. She wants something out of life. She didn't ask to be born.

Maybe I'll get a salary increase soon, she says.

Lundegaard would like to have gotten a concrete answer. For the sake of the budget. But he's fatherly and friendly and says she can think it over. After all, they don't want to force her to pay more. But it's for the sake of all of them. After all, they

have to stick together at home.

V

The next morning Anna's happy and in high spirits. It'd been nothing after all. Everything's just as fine as can be. But when the warehouse clerk calls during the lunch break to ask how things are going, she doesn't tell him that that happy little event has occurred. It'll do him good to be tortured a bit. They agree to meet in the evening and Anna gets a peculiar malicious pleasure from picturing his worries. She hasn't been having too good a time of it the last few days—let him experience a bit of it too.

On the way home she runs into the billiard scorekeeper Nielsen. He has a bathing suit under his arm, is sunburnt, and looks good. She chats with him in a lively and cheerful way in her happy mood and he suggests that some day they should go swimming together. He usually goes swimming at Sundby Beach on his days off. Actually she has nothing against it. Her summer vacation will begin in a few days and she really hardly knows what she'll use the week for. But it will be used. And used so she has some pleasure from it. So they agree on a day, but she does add that it's not totally certain that she'll make it out there. In part because it's becoming to be a little reserved and in part because maybe in the meantime a better way to spend the day will turn up. The warehouse clerk had hoped to be able to take his summer vacation at the same time; then they'd have camped at Solrød or some such place, but he didn't succeed in getting it arranged. Naturally she doesn't intend to sit inside at home during her summer vacation. And besides, Nielsen's nice and pleasant.

VI

The warehouse clerk decided to act lively when he met her.

He was going to be cheerful and entertaining. She'd probably be offended by it, but there was nothing you could do about it. The other way was disgusting. He saw himself in his mind's eye sitting at her side on a bench holding her hand, both filled with pity for themselves and each other. It was downright repulsive.

No, he was going to be cheerful. And more than that, he intended to explain to her straight out what you had to do in a situation like this. He knew who could tell him where you got this kind of thing taken care of and what it cost. The money could surely be raised. And it surely wasn't that hard; after all, it was said that these people took their clients' economic situation into account.

But what would she say, Anna? It didn't matter—that had to be said. He plucks up his courage and then looks at the clock. They were supposed to meet at 8 o'clock, in other words, in only 10 minutes. He took a look in the mirror: how did he look. Once again his courage let him down. How was that? Cheerful and determined! With that face? A tired, nervous, and frightened face. What was it he was about to do. It was of course unlawful. And she could die from it. Or be injured for life.

He was anxious and bewildered. What if she had a child. His and her child. If they just let it come. Maybe they could get married after all. In a couple of years maybe. And he'd be happy about and proud of the child.

God such a bunch of nonsense. Standing around and fantasizing like that. That'd never work out. Her job. Her parents. No, here it wasn't the emotions, but reason that had to prevail. 5 minutes to 8—he had to leave now. What was it that they'd written in the interrogation report from the big criminal abortion case: Only in exceedingly few cases had the operation not gone smoothly.

He looked in the mirror again—saw a face with a fake resolute mouth and frightened eyes. Oh, Anna, my dearest friend. He got a lump in his throat. She mustn't notice his anxiety. Okay then—cheerful and determined.

VII

Sundby Beach is a living swarm of human beings. Brown, healthy bodies side by side with pale, sickly bodies. Beautiful, trained bronze bodies, which fit into the picture of sand, wind, sun, and water like a part of nature, and pale-gray, skinny bodies with bad posture, which look as though they don't belong here. The sunburned ones are predominantly unemployed people who have nothing else to do but lie on the beach; the pale ones are visitors for a day or those with a week's summer vacation. If you don't see it beforehand, you see it when they put their clothes on. The charmer in the sunburned, flashy ones has disappeared from them: you can literally see that they have an unemployment card in their pocket. While the pale ones don't really come into their own until they get into their clothes, with padded shoulders, conspicuous ties, and a crease in their pants. Incidentally, there are also lots of children here who're making a terrific ruckus.

For that matter, Nielsen's also sunburned, even though he doesn't belong to the bronze-colored ones. He's basking on a spot that he succeeded in finding among all the tents. Sometimes he looks at his wristwatch and from it up at the road where new people desirous of swimming are constantly arriving by bike and on foot. But Anna still hasn't shown up. It's so hot that he'd really like to go out on to the pier and take a dive, but then of course she'd come in the meantime. And it's impossible to catch sight of each other in the swarm of human beings once you're in your bathing suit. So to refresh himself, he walks up to the restaurant and buys himself a bottle of ice-cold milk with a straw. When he returns, someone else is lying on his spot. A bronze-colored one—in other words, an unemployed person.

Yeah, excuse me, says Nielsen, but—

The bronze-colored man doesn't take it that seriously. He moves over three inches and thinks that both of them can certainly be there.

But when they get talking, it turns out that he's actually very nice. He's a machinist and sure enough has an unemployment

card in his pocket. Nielsen says that the difference really isn't that big because actually he doesn't earn much more than the other guy gets in benefits. And the machinist can lie out here every day from morning till evening, while someone else has to be at his workplace 70 hours a week.

But the machinist says that there's a difference all the same—that you go nuts from going around month after month without having anything to do. And actually that's certainly true: Nielsen can remember from back then before he became a billiard scorekeeper. You went around and got so many ideas, pondered too much over things.

Nielsen cautiously asks whether he's a communist. Hell, I'm neither nor, says the machinist, I just want to have some work. I think the whole thing's crazy. I mean, there's plenty of use for goods and there's plenty of labor—so why can't they see to getting the machines going again. Damn it, there's so much nonsense. I'm ready to knuckle under to anything if I can just get my hands full of something, earn some money, and live like a human being. Instead of going around here and lounging. It's all this dawdling that drives you nuts. If they'd just do something. I mean, hell, it just can't be that complicated. Let's get this business humming, pick up the pace. Here we are rotting away.

Actually Nielsen doesn't much feel like hearing all that stuff. And he's familiar with the whole kit and caboodle. And he came out here to take a day off and go in the water. With Anna—if she comes. But he let's him talk. After all, what he's saying is true all right, but what's the point of going and getting lost in speculation about how things ought to be.

But anyhow, now it's so far past the time they agreed on that he wants to go in the water. Even if she came in the meantime, he'd make himself ridiculous if he sat there at the ready to welcome her. You shouldn't make too much of a fuss over girls. They can't stand it. He's had sad experiences. So, out on to the pier and head first into the water; the machinist'll watch your clothes in the meantime.

When he comes back and goes looking for his spot, he gives

a start. Damn it, never in all his life. This takes the cake. Here he has a date with Anna Lundegaard and instead he sees her father walking and wading at the edge of the beach. Former dry-goods merchant Lundegaard, with his nice striped trousers rolled up to his knees, lost in thought and absentminded, wading about among the playing children. His bill-collector feet are quite definitely not used to this kind of amusement; the bottom's full of rocks and it looks as though he were about to lose his balance at any moment and flop over into the water, with his clothes on and everything. He doesn't have a jacket or a vest on. Nice red suspenders are holding his trousers up. You can see he's a good judge of suspenders.

Nielsen hasn't seen him since he was sitting at the billiard parlor like a wholesale merchant standing him drinks. It's almost incomprehensible that it's the same man who's now going around and wading on his sore feet a couple of yards from the shore. Nielsen sees all the brown limbs around him and can't help thinking that Lundegaard looks funny. He hasn't even taken his pince-nez off.

At that very moment Nielsen sees that everybody on the beach has turned and is looking up toward the road. Some have gotten up. Something must be going on. And then he sees that about twenty men in overalls and gas masks are running on the road. The sight's both ominous and funny. They don't look like human beings, but some strange beings with human bodies and animal heads.

In spite of this oddness, the sight shakes him up all the same. Here, right in the middle of the peaceful Danish summer with its beach life, blue sky, tents, and innocent flirtation. It's the rescue squad training to run with gas masks on. Yeah, but why're they doing it? Is it true, then, that war might come at any moment?