Mogens Klitgaard

There's a Man Sitting on a Trolley

Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Marc Linder

Fānpihuà Press
Iowa City
2001
Second Chapter

Obliging foreigners have called Copenhagen: The Paris of the North. It sounds good, but it doesn’t fit very well—Copenhagen is Copenhagen. It’s a city like all other cities and it’s a city in a class by itself. So absolutely singular. A human settlement on an insignificant island in an insignificant country, beautifully placed on a fresh, blue, salt-water sound near some remnants of an old fairy-tale woods with deer, wilderness, and open flat lands.

It’s cobblestones and tenement houses, asphalt and taxi drivers, parks with bird life and children playing, some dreary, rectangular lakes with artificial bird islands, banal, ugly bridges, and screeching gulls. It’s Tivoli and Langelinie pier, it’s fleet visits by big foreign powers, English workers in sailor’s dress, German workers in sailor’s dress, American workers in sailor’s dress; it’s the city that appears under the item: Payment under an affiliation order in the English state budget, it’s wholesale merchant Hansen’s daughter’s wedding, it’s the amateur society whose gala attire’s covered in the press—cream-colored milanaise and light-green taffeta—it’s Babbitville, and it’s a metropolis.

It’s garbage dumps and communal gardens, it’s bathing beaches and fortifications that’ve been demolished and some that haven’t, it’s a strategic point on the European political-commercial map and on the military map, it’s the city that’s praised for its social welfare and the city that’s notorious for its treatment of orphaned children, it’s the city that builds layer-cake houses and starlings’ nesting boxes, but uses a collection of barracks next to a gas plant as a tuberculosis hospital.
Its speech is unobtrusive, but not colorless. There aren't any fumes of blood in its atmosphere, but sweat and tears.

A pretty city. A splendid city.

A February evening like this one, where the twilight settles softly and appeasingly on the gray stone houses and makes the contours turn blue when the lights are just now turned on here and there, when the western sky's red evening afterglow colors and beautifies and the city seems to calm down before the late evening's hunt for amusements—but of course for that matter all cities have twilight and evening sky. What is it that does give Copenhagen its charm and its singularity. Its women are neither especially pretty nor especially ugly, the street's perpetual gliding streams of people are neither especially shabby nor especially well-dressed. The restaurants aren't especially interesting and surely most cities have old buildings.

Copenhagen's a nice city. It is 800,000 struggling and striving people, it's a carousel, a wheel of fortune, a lottery with thousands of blanks and a few prizes.

A February evening like this, where the twilight beautifies the people and the stones, where Vesterbro Street's asphalt lies shiny from automobile tires, smooth as a mirror in the glow of the strong electrical light and the many neon advertising signs, where Lundegaard and his wife are out looking at a treadle machine, where Anna with lips a bit too red is waiting on customers in the department store, where Poul and Nielsen are sitting and hanging out at the ice-cream parlor, where Mr. Salomonsen's playing billiards up in the parlor, where the girl in the mauve outfit is out shopping—on such an evening Copenhagen seems gay, colorful, and beautiful.

In his heart of hearts Lundegaard likes Mr. Salomonsen. He was friendly and understanding, he's a nice man with a congenial appearance. Lundegaard's feeling a new zest for life. It'll be all right. In the course of a few months the money'll have been paid back; after all, now they have the chance to earn a little more with the help of the treadle machine; in reality he was clever and
decisive in a difficult situation; now the difficulties have been overcome and the immediate future lies, if not bright, then at least somewhat tolerable before them.

II

One evening Sister Rebekka came calling. Rebekka was one of the Nazarenes. Her life was an eternal wandering among brothers and sisters in the Lord, an eternal inspection from one member of the congregation to the other. At every place she drank coffee and satisfied her natural curiosity.

When Sister Rebekka’s black-clad gaunt figure showed up in the vicinity, people hurried to put the proper expression on their faces, the hymnbook, the Nazarenes’ little red hymnbook, was put in a conspicuous place, and the water for the coffee was put on the stove. Clandestinely they examined the inside of their slender purse, and if it was possible, they sent one of the rear-courtyard kids for bread.

Then after the coffee had been served and Sister Rebekka had let her searching eyes glide across the room, the pious woman’s social skills came to light. She was a talker. She knew everything about everything and everyone. The most important news was delivered in a subdued, confidential tone.

Sister Rebekka didn’t like this neighborhood, its staircases, rear-tenement yards, and residents. There was something self-tormenting about her visit that gave her a kind of satisfaction. Sister Rebekka had been born in a neighborhood with wide streets, wide front stairs, and a caretaker in the basement.

Even the street displeased her. The slushy gutters, the filthy kids, the dirty facades that hadn’t seen whitewash since the house had been built, but on the other hand were over-embellished with inscriptions drawn in chalk by intrepid children’s hands, the damp and dark passageway, the overflowing garbage cans, the narrow stinking stairs where the light couldn’t shine—all that filled her with honest loathing.

Mrs. Lundegaard wasn’t happy about the visit. She was
ironing and, besides, was expecting Lundegaard home any moment.

She managed to put the coffeepot on and sent off one of the children living on the same stairway with her last twenty-five øre for bread.

Hopefully Rebekka wasn’t at all disturbing her; she’d come by coincidentally. God guides people’s ways, she added with a warm smile.

While they sat drinking coffee, Lundegaard came home. He looked askance at the Danish pastry, sullenly said hello, and sat down by the window with a newspaper.

A flagging conversation got underway. Rebekka had a subscription list for the mission work. Lundegaard thought to himself that, after all, the pastor’s wife had a car that could be sold, but didn’t want to say it, even though he felt like it. He noticed that his wife was drifting into all that stuff. He didn’t understand it, but he didn’t want to interfere. He had his hands full with his own affairs—it was his shoulders everything rested on.

Rebekka began talking about the church that was to be built, about the tidings that would reach out across the whole earth. The Bible predicted it, word for word. It also predicted the war that would come. In her gentle voice she cited the passages.

Mrs. Lundegaard saw her out.

When Mrs. Lundegaard came back in, she immediately started ironing again. Now of course she had so much to do that the little bit of time that was left over she had to sew. She’d gotten glasses. They made her look older, but of course that didn’t matter. Religion gave her consolation for her unfulfilled wishes.

— And peace.

She chatted while ironing. After all, something new happens all the time. The greengrocer’s wife had gotten her hair dyed and Poul’s acquaintance, Nielsen from the boarding house in the front building, that guy the office worker, had gotten a job as a billiard scorekeeper. Lundegaard didn’t know Nielsen, but pondered a good deal about Poul. Why wasn’t it Poul who’d gotten a job, he thought to himself.
At the billiard parlor they were having a marvelous time over a little gag. Olsen had called Svendsen’s wife to ask whether Svendsen was at home. “No,” the wife replied, “my husband’s up at the billiard parlor.”

Nielsen picked up pins, counted points, and wrote them down on the scoreboard. The whole thing was actually very straightforward, but when you’d stood for 5 or 6 hours keeping score, you were about to go crazy—and of course to get sore feet. Only rarely did anything stimulating take place. Gradually as picking up pins and counting became more automatic for him, he had time to spend observing the players. When people play, most of them reveal themselves in all their helpless nakedness: they became openly annoyed when their opponent was lucky, and gloated swaggeringly when things panned out for them.

Over by the window a man was sitting and drinking. He didn’t look to be thinking about anything—was just sitting there drinking. Every time he’d emptied his glass, he held up his finger in the air as a sign that the waiter should come with one more drink. It happened completely mechanically, with machine-like precision.

Every clique cultivates its human ideals and aspires to be like them. Here the important thing was to know all about sports. Not in the sense that you had to be able to play sports, but that you had to be familiar with sports players and their achievements. First and foremost trotters and thoroughbreds, bicycle racing, all the fields where gambling and sports are linked to each other. If you wanted to hold your own in this milieu, you had to know these sports and be able to say something about them. Even if Africa sank in the ocean, it would scarcely be a topic of conversation here; the bounds of sensible talk here were staked out and they were narrow. Day after day you talked about the same thing. During the game you offered comments, but always the same comments. One comment corresponded to every single situation, and nothing was more certain than that the
comment would be made. The same comments year in year out. Learning these comments was part of Nielsen’s new job. The first time you heard them, they could be funny, ironic, but once you’d heard them a few times, they sounded completely idiotic. These expressions would be incomprehensible to anyone but billiard players; the place was crawling with expressions known only to the initiated.

Hour after hour Nielsen counted points and wrote them down on the scoreboard. The man by the window constantly emptied one glass after another. His shoes were wet and dirty as if he’d been walking all day up and down the streets in the rain and slush. He’d started sitting and chatting with himself, his eyes were glazed, and he sat shaking his head rapidly as if life had filled him with the greatest astonishment. Which perhaps he was right in doing, Nielsen thought. He was standing at that very moment and wondering about himself. At the office he’d had quite a definite ideal he aspired to be like: A clever young businessman, quick, lively, energetic, a man with a career for himself in the business world, who’d end up either starting his own business, which would compete his boss’s to smithereens (he could easily raise capital—all the firm’s contacts realized that he was indisputably a first-rate man and were surprised that the boss couldn’t see that and hadn’t long ago made him his deputy), or being solicited by one of the firm’s contacts to take over a well-paid position with trips abroad, important conferences, and such. Then when he became unemployed, his ideal changed its character, and now that he was a billiard score-keeper, it shifted again. He thought about the fact that if any of his former ideals came here as patrons at the billiard parlor, it would appear to him ridiculous if they couldn’t play billiards and didn’t know all about trotting. So that means that if you take a person and let him loose in a certain milieu, he’ll immediately be on the lookout for an ideal for himself and get going on being like that. If he’s forced by circumstances into a criminal milieu, he’ll aspire to be the toughest criminal, the roughest customer, the most ruthless and cynical. If you let him loose in a monastery, he’ll try to work his way up to become the most industrious
and honest one—assuming, that is, that the monastery’s the way it ought to be.

By now the man by the window had collapsed—his head was lying against the tabletop. It was 11 o’clock. It would be splendid if the two idiots he was standing around and keeping score for would stop soon. They’d now played “last game” eight times. He was intensely in need of taking a little rest, washing his hands, having a cup of coffee and a smoke, and sitting down and resting his sore feet. He looked around the premises to see whether some candidates for his billiard table were sitting there; it was as bad as it gets to be any time after you’d been standing for so many hours. Yes, damn it, little Andersen was sitting next to the musician from the Royal Theater—it really wouldn’t surprise him if they were sitting there poised to get a chance. He glowered maliciously at them. Maybe it would be smarter after all if you could keep this game going a little longer so that another billiard table became available first. You yourself could do a lot to that end. Especially when the players had said last game as here, you could just take the balls when the game was finished and go off with them and thereby shut the mouth of the one of the players who’d been thinking about suggesting one more game. If you desired the game to be continued, you put the balls in place and pretended as if it were completely obvious that they’d play on—that might tempt them to continue.

He decided if possible to extend the game. Especially little Andersen was boring and a bad payer. Incidentally, the musician was no prize either. He was terrible to listen to; when he lost, he whined till it turned your stomach.

At that moment something happened that made Nielsen’s face first lose its color and then turn blushing red. Four people had made their appearance in the hall—two young men and two girls. It was clear that all four were half-drunk. One of the young girls was Nielsen’s former fiancée—the one who’d broken it off after he’d been unemployed for a couple of months. They’d seen each other immediately and recognized each other immediately. At first blush they were both shocked to meet each other under these circumstances. Nielsen stared stiffly
at the pins, which shimmered before his eyes. He desperately held on to the number 18. And here add 4—twenty-two. Carom twenty-six. He’d fancied that she no longer meant anything to him and now his heart was beating so he had a hard time breathing. Or was it because she was seeing him in this situation, as a billiard scorekeeper. The guy she was with was presumably his successor, a pale-faced drip who howled: “Waiter, waiter please. Head waiter please.” Was he really supposed to be worth less than this nitwit. His self-esteem shrank. He didn’t look up, but he knew that she was looking at him. The whole billiard parlor must’ve noticed it—it was unbearable. He miscounted and the player made a fuss. Again Nielsen felt the blood in his cheeks and the fog before his eyes.

When he’d been to the board to write down the points, he stole a glance over at the table where they were sitting. They were very lively, boisterous. She was the liveliest. Her laughter was affected.

Nielsen was standing feeling sorry for himself. Why should he be humiliated once more—he’d already been humiliated enough. Soon he’d no longer be able to take it. His feelings of inferiority were about to choke him. Do you calculate a person’s worth, then, only according to what he is, how much money he earns. He suddenly remembered his new attitude, the one that wasn’t his own, but that he had to acquire if he wasn’t going to make a mess of everything. He was going to secure himself social position and ample income, regardless of how he managed to do it. Then she’d try to come and make up. And he’d be friendly to her, but let her know that he wouldn’t care a damn about her.

Then he felt how naive these thoughts were and began to mock himself as he usually did. Of course it was ridiculous. On the other hand, that’s the way life in fact was. There was no doubt that if she’d met him under other circumstances, if he’d become “something,” she’d have felt no match for him and would’ve regretted that she’d broken it off; she’d have tried to make up.

There were no billiard tables, all were occupied, and when
the four of them had had a drink, they left again, still boisterous.

The game was finished—without Nielsen’s having made an attempt either to prolong or shorten it. Andersen and the musician seemed not to want to play. It was almost 12 o’clock and some of the patrons had left. The waiter and the proprietor conferred about the guy sitting by the window sleeping. The waiter went over to wake him under the general watchful eyes of the other patrons. The man awoke, raised his head with a quick start, and looked around confused. But what in the world did his face look like. As a matter of fact, he didn’t have a nose. And what was that lying on the table: It was of course his nose.

Every single person in the hall had seen the scene with his mouth agape; dumbfounded, the waiter stared at the man without a nose. After all, he’d never been confronted with that before.

Suddenly the man grasped the situation. “Where’s my nose,” he mumbled. “It’s lying on the table,” the waiter replied politely. It was an artificial nose made of some kind of strange material or other. Nielsen recalled that Tycho Brahe had had an artificial nose.

The man put the nose in place, paid, and staggered, shaky and drunk, out the door.

It’d become totally quiet in the hall. People had stopped the game on all the billiard tables. Suddenly somebody burst into laughter and a second later everybody was roaring with laughter.

IV

That’s what February’s like. One lunch hour you’re thinking that spring’s on its way. The sun’s warmed up Lundegaard’s bedroom window so the hyacinth bulb’s opened. The tender blue has broken through: it looks so hardy, so vigorous, as if it could burst chains to create access for itself to the light, the world, and life.

The sparrows chirp spring.

And then the next morning the city is lying there white under
heavy melting snow. Once again the snow shovellers are getting a little work to do.

And a couple of days later there's hard frost. With biting cold and parked cars with a blanket on the radiator.

Then the snowstorm stops traffic, the steamers are delayed and covered with ice when they come into harbor.

Again thawing. With avalanches tumbling down from the roofs.

That's what February's like. Skiers in Deer Park, black-headed gulls over Gammel Strand, carnival, and ice on the lake in Ørsted Park. The days have become longer by almost two hours, the banks are sending out an annual report and the English king's been appointed an admiral in the Danish fleet.

"War in Africa and rearmament have created a year of growth," says the Commerce Bank's annual report. Køge Rubber's yielding 15%, the pressure of the crisis is abating—why shouldn't the Lord Chamberlain's Department also be busy.

In a garbage chute of slimy gray stone a blue hyacinth's opened up. Mrs. Lundegaard's surely seen it, but she's too tired to take it in. She's dreamed that she's been sewing all night. And when she awoke, she was tired. Now she had to sew in earnest.

That's what February's like. Nothing special happens. And then suddenly something happens after all. Something that hurts.

In the morning Poul's bed stood untouched, and toward noon a man from the police came and wanted to talk to Lundegaard, who'd just left. He talked to Mrs. Lundegaard for an hour and when he left, Mrs. Lundegaard's face was red and swollen from crying. Her boy, her dear boy.
been able to rent his own room, buy clothes. Access to everything that meant life. He’d have done it only this one time. He’d pondered and pondered.

They’d also taken his buddy. They’d met at the ice-cream parlor. One day they’d taken a walk together, a long walk, through Frederiksberg Palace Gardens and Søndermarken. They agreed to make the attempt. His buddy had tried it before. He had experience. He was the one who’d made the plan. Poul was supposed to stand watch outside the cigar store. It was a matter of a moment. If you used your brains, the risk was minimal. And then your troubles would be over with at one blow. He’d procured information. A couple of hundred crowns were in the cash box in the night between Friday and Saturday.

Poul’s sorry that it went wrong—for the old folks’ sake. He’d acted on his best beliefs. He too wanted to live life. Was there perhaps any prospect of getting work? He’d made his decision and it’d gone wrong. That was all.

Now it’d presumably get into the newspapers. It was a shame for the old folks. But nobody could demand that he should go on that way. Sitting in the ice-cream parlor, reporting to the unemployment office, sitting at the welfare office, standing in the passageway. Now Nielsen had of course gotten work. There was nothing to reproach him for. He didn’t regret anything, but he was sorry it’d gone wrong. For the old folks’ sake. Otherwise he almost didn’t give a damn.

In the evening when he’d taken a walk down Vesterbro Street and Strøget, he’d seen other young people coming from movie theaters and restaurants. Well dressed, with their girlfriends. Poul knew that the girls didn’t look at the unemployed. Naturally they went out with those who had a job, had a flashy tie, and could invite them to a restaurant. Naturally. The girls of course didn’t earn anything themselves. And they too wanted to live life. That’s also in fact what’d happened to Nielsen.
Lundegaard wasn’t surprised. It was as if he’d lost the capacity to be surprised. And he was tired of speculating. The whole thing really wasn’t that difficult—you should just let things take their own course. Not take them too seriously. A couple of quick cups of coffee cleared your thoughts. You just went around treating things with much too heavy a hand.

And then suddenly it overwhelmed him. All the despair, all the anxiety about everything that was against him and that he was trying to manage to get rid of by desperately looking indifferent. He spoke out loud to himself on the street.

Suddenly he was sitting on a bench in King’s Gardens weeping like a child. And crying, with quivering lips and feverish eyes. “I can’t go on, I can’t go on,” he jerked out the words, as if it helped him a bit after all to be able to say it out loud. “Oh hell, I can’t go on.”

Then when the bout was over, he drank, and when he’d gotten drunk, he confided to everybody that he couldn’t care less. It wasn’t so damn strange if his nerves weren’t so good after all that stuff with the store and all that. But he’d manage all right. Just take it easy.

Oh, that blasted rascal, that damned —. And now things had just begun to be okay. Mr. Salomonsen was, after all, nice and understanding. All the same, they’d be forced to use Anna’s salary to pay the rent with and the sewing hadn’t really gotten going yet. “What. The first installment already,” Mr. Salomonsen had said. “Can’t you even pay some of it.” Lundegaard couldn’t and so he’d just had to sign a new acknowledgment of debt. And Mr. Salomonsen had looked friendly and said to him: “It’ll be okay. But of course you’ll have to make sure to be on time with the monthly installments.”

He’d certainly manage that just as long as he could get the better of his nerves. It was just a phase. But he had to have something to drink. Otherwise he’d go crazy. In fact he was spending more money than he should’ve. Including the money he’d collected, including Mrs. Lundegaard’s money. After all,
he had to keep it going at any price until all of this stuff had blown over. After all, it was his shoulders everything rested on.

One day he’d been so drunk that two strangers had accompanied him home. Mrs. Lundegaard had cried. He himself was so drunk that he couldn’t raise an objection to Mrs. Lundegaard’s undressing him and putting him in bed. The day after he said something about a couple of army buddies he’d run in to. And in a way, if a real man didn’t take a decent swig every once in a while, he damn well wasn’t a real man. Surely there wasn’t anything to object to in that. After all, he was the man of the house, the guy whose shoulders everything rested on.

And then all of a sudden he could turn around and beg her, who’d shared his life’s troubles, for forgiveness. Cry like a child, while she stroked his hair and said: August.

Then Lundegaard decided that it would be over his dead body. He noticed where the whole thing was headed, but it couldn’t be allowed to happen. He’d pull himself together. It wasn’t so easy—after all you weren’t a young man any more—but it had to be done. And there was only one way it could be done. Be energetic, earn some money, save, avoid liquor.

They visited Poul in prison and brought extra food along. When they left there, it was one of those February afternoons when the sun shines and they weren’t in a bad mood at all. After all, the boy looked the way he usually did and he’d surely soon be free again. After all, it was almost a mistake, an aberration. Something he’d done in desperation. After all, he was no criminal.

And then the next day the whole business was so desperate again. Naturally he’d be punished. Lundegaard tried to pretend to be strong. The weather had changed again. Slush and cold. The homeless went about with their coat collars turned up, with their hands, blue with cold, in their pockets, and their shoes soaked through; the buses splashed cascades of filthy water up on the sidewalk. Lundegaard rode his bicycle from address to address. His pants were soaked through and his gabardine coat couldn’t keep the cold out. Nevertheless, it’d be all right if you
just held out. In the afternoon he wanted to buy a few flowers to take home even though they were so expensive at this time of year. It would, so to speak, bring a little optimism into the dark rooms.

VII

The only thing missing to make their misery complete was for Anna to have a baby, Lundegaard thought. My wife religious, my son in prison, and I myself beginning to go crazy.

But Anna isn’t going to have a child. Nothing in this world is perfect, not even misery. Anna’s not going to have a child at all; in spite of everything, Anna has acquired so much knowledge about it; that’s just the way it is—the young people are obliged to acquire knowledge about it themselves, while you hope that they acquire this knowledge without too great a calamity occurring. Some escape unhurt, others don’t do so well.

Since New Year Anna’s received more in salary without mentioning it at home. If they knew, they’d ask for that too. If the rest of them are going to control her life, she’s not going to get much out of life. Anna isn’t egotistic—she just wants to be allowed to be here. She’d like to please the others and gladly gives them nice little birthday presents.

She’s going with somebody who’s something at a warehouse. They go to the movies, sometimes to the theater. They dance a lot and Sundays they go out into Deer Park or a place like that. They’ve never talked about getting married. At the end of the month they usually have to be content with taking walks; and then it happens that Anna doesn’t have time—there are so many who invite her out—and even though she likes the warehouse clerk, it’s still a little dreary to walk up and down the streets if the weather’s bad.

The warehouse clerk lives in a furnished room. Anna’s been there a couple of times, but doesn’t care for it. She doesn’t take a kiss at the front door that seriously. You don’t get kids from it.
No, Anna really isn’t going to have a child. If she does have one some day, it’ll be because she herself wants it.

VIII

Then one day Lundegaard’s at the company office to settle his accounts and the bookkeeper says to him: “By the way, the boss’d like to talk to you.”

Lundegaard goes into the boss’s office. The boss has dealt in menswear on installments for a half a lifetime and you can tell it by looking at him. He’s sitting at his desk and doesn’t look up. He’s busy. It’s not like with so many bosses who’re always especially busy when someone on the staff is called in. This one here really is busy—he always is. There’s so much that requires his personal attention. Purchases, contracts that have to be given as security for a loan at the bank, municipal court suits.

Lundegaard’s a bit uneasy. He’s got an idea that he knows what it’s about, but hopes he’s wrong. He looks at the boss’s red neck and thinks about how many years he himself slaved and did without to become boss himself. Not until now does he think—God knows whether there’s actually that much to it—that the boss never looks happy. But he is well-nourished and well-dressed—he’s not lacking anything.

Finally the boss looks up. He speaks quickly and firmly. He knows everything and has his definite opinion about things. It’s not open to discussion. It’s a half a lifetime’s experience in men’s clothing on installments.

A customer received a dunning letter. He was in the store to make a fuss. An installment he paid wasn’t entered on his account. Lundegaard collected the money and it didn’t get sent on. It was two weeks ago.

“I don’t care for that kind of nonsense,” the boss declares. “It destroys the business and it’s a mess. I mean, I have a bond of course, but it’s not so much the amount that’s at issue. It can’t happen again. But if it does, then I can’t use you.”

Lundegaard says something about having been short the sum
when he was supposed to settle his account.

"Then you should've informed us of that. You could've paid the sum in later. The customers' accounts have to be in order."

The conversation's over. Lundegaard can go. He thinks about the other amounts that haven't been paid in. He doesn't understand himself either: He's been an honest man his whole life.

IX

Oddly enough when he gets out on the street, he runs into an old army buddy. Now if he goes home this evening and tells her that, naturally Mrs. Lundegaard won't believe him. After all, you certainly don't meet old army buddies like this every other day. And so this time it really is an old army buddy, forty-two, his name he believes is Jensen.

They go over to have a little drink and to chat for a quarter of an hour about back then. Now Jensen's a crane driver. And has a wife and child. "The way it happened," Jensen says, "was that one evening a friend of mine was supposed to go out with a girl who always had her sister in tow. And they could never get rid of the sister. So I was asked to go along to be the pest's escort. And then you can imagine the rest: one day she said she was going to have a baby, and because I thought it was the easiest way to deal with the matter, I married her. And ever since she's been my private pest. The child was a girl, she's fifteen years old now and almost worse than her mother. Skoal."

Actually Lundegaard should've been on his way home by now, but it's so cozy to sit and chat a bit about the old days—all his troubles are crowded into the background. It feels so refreshing, especially coming on top of that business with the boss.

"Yeah, I mean I had a business," Lundegaard says, but then suddenly he can't go on. It doesn't matter anyway—Jensen prefers talking to listening. Then they discuss various army buddies from back then. Some they've run into since, others they've never seen again. "I mean it was that guy Mølgaard, the baker,
you know, he’s gotten his own business out in Nørrebro.”

“That thin little guy?”

“Hell, he’s not so little and thin any more. He’s making good money, has a car, and so on. He’s well known in trotting circles.”

“There’s a certain kind of baker and butcher I can’t stand,” Lundegaard says. “It’s as if they earn their money too easily. And earn too much. Imagine, so that’s what became of Mølgaard—who the hell would’ve believed it of that little drip.”

Lundegaard again begins talking about how he had a store, but then he breaks off and says that he should probably see about getting home.

Jensen won’t hear of it now that they’ve finally met each other after so many years—hell, now they’ll have a bit of a jovial time. “I mean, you’re not henpecked, are you?”

“No,” Lundegaard says, “I’m not, but there are so many things, you understand.”

Jensen understands it well. All of us have our cross to bear. But after all there’s no point in going around pondering it. We’re just forced to take things one at a time starting with the most important. Skoal again, Lundegaard.

Later, after they’ve gotten drunk, it’s Jensen who turns sentimental. He’s sure as hell having a hard time of it. His wife puts on airs, they have a four-room apartment filled with furniture that cost a lot of money and that you barely dare look at so it doesn’t get scratched. When the sun shines, they draw the curtains to go easy on the furniture. His daughter’s become a member of a youth organization where there’s a chance she can get engaged to somebody from the upper class. And she’s going to stay in school. Jensen’s scared as hell she’ll come home one day from the youth organization and have gotten into trouble.

Then they happen to chat about war. Jensen, too, thinks that war’s coming. And then of course the whole thing actually doesn’t matter, because either we’ll wind up earning so much money and earning it so easily that we’ll all become upper class, or we’ll be involved, and then of course it’s all over. There won’t be much left once they start with those murderous instru-
ments they have now.

Then suddenly it all overwhelms Lundegaard again. He has to let off steam and gets it off his chest to Jensen. He tells about the business, which went bust, and money he collected that’s been spent, about Mr. Salomonsen, about Poul, who’s sitting in Vestre prison. He tells Jensen everything, everything that’s gnawing at him. He also tells about the Nazarenes and about the girl in the mauve outfit.

He couldn’t confide all that to his wife or to Anna. But you confide everything to a stranger.

It made a painful impression on Jensen. Like seeing a naked person. He doesn’t care to hear about Lundegaard’s troubles. He suddenly understands that Lundegaard’s in a bad way. And tries to brace him. Says what people after all say in such a situation—hell, Lundegaard, you’ll see, it’ll work out.

But now Jensen doesn’t want any more to drink. “I’ll pay for it all right,” he says.

Out on the street he quickly says goodbye. “Keep smiling,” he says.

It’s raining. Lundegaard’s bike is down by the store.

He’d also much rather walk home. Now he’ll come home again like this. Wasn’t home for dinner. Is half-drunk. While she’s sitting at home sewing.