Mogens Klitgaard

There's a Man Sitting on a Trolley

Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Marc Linder

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Mrs. Lundegaard also notices that spring’s approaching. They’re not using that much fuel any more and down at the greengrocer’s you can buy snowdrops and yellow winter aconite. You can get almost everything at the greengrocer’s. Even kerosene and homogenized cream. But you have to watch out not to wind up owing too much. Everyone owes the greengrocer. And of course there’s also the thing that when you buy on credit, you don’t make a fuss about the prices or look down your nose at the goods.

Anna also notices that spring’s coming. When she rides to work in the morning, a man’s standing on the corner of Vesterbro Street selling green blossoming sprigs from a bucket. Of course, the twigs aren’t from the woods, but still. Besides, a vague longing arises in her from time to time when she’s in the department store canteen looking out the window and sees the fat leaf buds, which are about to burst, and the starling with the metallic feathers, which are shining and gleaming in the sunshine. And when her thoughts at such a moment touch on the warehouse clerk, she feels that he’s not the one after all. Even though he’s nice and kind and considerate. If he were just inconsiderate at least once in a while. He’s always so solicitous toward her. Never a flash of brutality. No, it’s not the warehouse clerk her longing’s directed at, it’s not anyone in particular at all.

March has arrived. The lockout’s also arrived. It’s thrown 125,000 men out on the street, in addition to the 140,000 who already were. The air’s become milder, but the road conditions are terrible. Black heaps of snow are lying in the gutters. The
starlings have thrown the sparrows out of their winter residences. At the big fish dealers on Gammel Strand you can see the first porpoises that've been caught in the North Sea. And little dogs from nice homes have been trimmed and have gotten elegant new blankets so they won't freeze in the spring cold. There are still plenty of chilly gray days, but there are also days when all the windows facing south are thrown open and when Langelinie pier and the parks are full of people.

The ones who're from the country are thinking that the sowing has surely begun now and that the lapwings are now screeching over the gray plowlands. The ones who live their whole lives indoors one day suddenly see in the almanac: Equinox. Spring begins. And through the window they can see that the children down on the sidewalk are playing marbles in the sun. The eighteen-year-olds can't sleep at night and out in the city's periphery early in the morning you can hear the birds migrating.

Every day brings new wonders. The catkins have opened out at Vestre Cemetery and living out there in the gypsy wagons near the garbage dump are people who’ve heard the first lark. It's the bicycle mechanics' peak season: from the bicycle sheds in the courtyards the steel horses are hauled out, polished, and repaired till the nickel and paint shine in the sun.

A single day's fog or snowfall can't chase away the jubilant feeling of spring.

All the announcements about war preparations can't chase away the feeling.

All the discussion in the daily press about poison gas, about the 10 kilograms of phosgene gas that are sufficient to kill the whole population of Denmark, can't chase away the sense of spring.

Everybody's expecting something good from the coming months. Nielsen's beginning to ponder buying a suit on installments. The girl in the mauve outfit is putting aside money: some day she wants to open a store or something like that; of course she also has her spring dreams and hopes to get out of the whole situation. She has an old mother in Hobro who thinks she's got a nice job. Lundegaard's also expecting something good from
the time they’re now entering. In spite of everything. After all, 
now he’s paid Mr. Salomonsen an installment on time, even 
though it was hard work, and he’s adroitly managed to cover 
some of the missing items by not disclosing new payments. He 
suspects that it’ll all work out. Just as long as his wife and Anna 
don’t hear anything about the loan. Poul will presumably soon 
be coming back home and maybe he’ll get work. And maybe 
Anna will soon be getting more in salary: one day he asked her 
about it, and she said it probably wouldn’t take that long. And 
now in the spring, sales of menswear on installments would pick 
up—there’d be many new customers whom it’d surely be easier 
to get money out of than the ones he has at the moment.

II

And then one morning Lundegaard’s running a temperature 
and can’t get up. The health insurance fund doctor comes later 
in the day. He’s in a huge hurry, darts right through the doors 
without looking to the left or the right, straight to the bed where 
Lundegaard’s lying, asks for his health insurance fund card, 
makes a few notations while Lundegaard’s temperature’s being 
taken, takes a look in his throat, writes a prescription for some 
pills, and is out the door again like lightning.

And Mrs. Lundegaard, who’s slaved away for several hours 
so the house could be nice when the doctor came, is standing 
there bewildered with the prescription in her hand listening to 
him tear down the stairs. After all, he didn’t even say what was 
wrong with Lundegaard, she says. Yes he did, Lundegaard says, 
he said influenza. Yeah, but how can he see that so quickly. 
Mrs. Lundegaard’s totally confused. After all, Lundegaard’s had 
influenza before. It was while they had the business; back then 
they weren’t in the health insurance fund, but in sickness in­

surance and the doctor who came was so distinguished-looking 
and had plenty of time, asked about everything, was sympathetic 
and said they absolutely had to call him if the fever lasted. And 
that, too, was just influenza.
Now Lundegaard’s lying on the clean sheets that were put on for the doctor’s sake. His face is flushed from the fever. The blue hyacinth’s standing on the window sill. It’s cold in the bedroom and the treadle sewing machine’s humming from the other room. After all, the world doesn’t stop because Lundegaard gets sick.

In the past when he was sick for a couple of days, he enjoyed it in a way. Enjoyed lying there and resting, while everybody else was busy, Mrs. Lundegaard’s nursing him and asking whether he was lying comfortably, all his obligations being taken from him. Enjoyed the sympathy and concern for his welfare, not so much because they were fond of him, but because it was his shoulders everything rested on.

This time he’s certainly not enjoying it. He’s afraid of what might happen while he’s lying here tied down. The money he collected that hasn’t been paid in; Mr. Salomonsen who might go to Anna’s firm to collect her salary if he doesn’t manage to get on his legs again and raise the money for the installment.

He can lie there for two, at most three days. Otherwise the whole thing’ll go down the drain. He’s got to take lots of pills and get the fever to disappear.

Down in the courtyard there’s somebody rattling a garbage can; otherwise it’s so strangely quiet. It’s the quiet that makes him nervous, that makes him feel so helpless. He’s lying here like a prisoner, while something he’s not in control of is deciding his fate.

Lundegaard doesn’t eat anything all day and in the evening his temperature’s risen. At night the sweat’s dripping from him. Mrs. Lundegaard’s lying next to her fifty-year-old heavy husband and all of a sudden sees her life in a light more glaring than ever before. She’s lying next to an unpleasantly sweating man, a man she married many years ago and whom she’s had children with, a man who’s nevertheless actually a stranger. She doesn’t even know whether she ever loved him; maybe she once believed that she did. She dimly recalls a few pictures from the time of their engagement, a walk on the Princess Trail and one time in Tivoli while Lundegaard was a soldier. She was tired of being
in the house and he had so much money that he could open a business; he was capable and a nice young man back then, and she thought that the business would surely wind up going well and open the way to everything she dreamed about, everything she felt back then would make life worth living. Actually she was the one who married him. They’d never had time to be anything for each other; maybe they hadn’t ever felt a need to either. Both of them had lived for the business. Maybe they’d never loved each other, at least not in the way you read about it in books. Yes, there was that time on the Princess Trail—they were lying down by the Castle Mounds looking out across Lake Fure. He’d taken his jacket off and was lying in his shirt-sleeves—it was the end of May. All at once she very vividly remembers the need for devotion that had arisen in her that afternoon. A need to be squeezed till it hurt. Maybe she had feelings like that for him on other occasions, but she recalls only that one time. She recalls his profile as he was lying there in the grass on the Castle Mounds, and now in the weak light from the window she casts a sidelong glance at the fat, sweating man who’s lying and breathing heavily beside her, and tries to recognize the profile. Even though his face has changed, she recognizes his profile, and a very weak and quiet feeling of tenderness arises in her.

A moment later the feeling gave way to practical speculation. Tomorrow Lundegaard has to be moved into the dining room and Anna can move in here into the bedroom. After all, there’s heat in the dining room too.

III

In the meantime Lundegaard’s consciousness is on a long voyage. The fever’s abolished time and space. He’s moving in a blissful world of beautiful visions; the bankrupt Copenhagen dry-goods dealer’s surrounded by wondrous Japanese women dancers in sky-blue and tea-yellow silk kimonos. They’re as fine and delicate as porcelain. It’s in a pavilion in a fantastic park with little lakes and chained monkeys. The most beautiful of the
women takes him by the hand. They’re sitting by one of the little lakes. He notices her gaze directed at him, a gaze from the slanted, black, narrow slits of her eyes with the delicate eyebrows. She’s a princess. Or maybe a geisha. Then all of a sudden he sees that it’s not a lake they’re sitting by, but the sea, the great turbulent sea. A junk comes sailing by. A group of people come toward them—the one in front is Mr. Salomonsen, who looks pleasant and says that he absolutely mustn’t forget the installment by the first.

Then suddenly he’s standing on a filthy stairway out in Nørrebro trying to light a wet cigarette stub just to take a few puffs before he has to go on. His hands are cold and he thinks: a quick cup of coffee around the corner there.

He has to run—there’s someone pursuing him. He runs and runs. It’s on a highway. The moon’s red—it’s the boss’s neck. They’ll never succeed in catching him. Mr. Salomonsen’s reproachful in a friendly way. No, Lundegaard says, I’m certainly not an idiot, but I’m the one whose shoulders everything rests on. No, he has to run—that’s his only way out. Then he discovers that Poul’s running beside him. Keep on going, my boy, he says, we’ll manage. But Poul looks at him in astonishment and replies that he certainly isn’t running together with him, he’d never dream of it—Lundegaard would damn well have to manage on his own. He came just to say to him that he’d gotten work, but that he’s not so crazy as to give his parents his wages.

Lundegaard can also easily run alone—after all, he’s always been the one whose shoulders everything rested on—but as he says it, Poul’s already gone. The moon’s also gone. Everything’s gone. Just the stillness remains—that’s what he’s afraid of. The stillness crushes him completely; now they’ve got him after all. He screams.

IV

Lundegaard’s lying bathed in sweat. Lundegaard has a high temperature. Sometimes he talks deliriously, but nobody listens
to what he’s saying. Who takes into account what a feverish brain can think up—after all, it doesn’t have anything to do with reality. Besides, Mrs. Lundegaard has to sew from morning till evening.

She’s started to be afraid that things are serious with Lundegaard. If his fever persists, she’ll call the doctor tomorrow. And she’ll say to him that he has to examine Lundegaard for real.

Then suddenly there’s no more thread in the machine and she begins looking for the spool. Now where was it she put it. Otherwise she’s always accustomed to putting it in the same place. But when she was using it the last time, somebody came at that very moment. While she’s looking for it, she’s suddenly standing there with the Nazarenes’ little red song book in her hands.

“And if illness befalls your house, then what is the use in going to the doctors if it’s not God’s will that your health shall return. And on the other hand, if God wants to help, no earthly doctors are needed.”

That strikes Mrs. Lundegaard like lightning. Of course she’s heard about those people out in Østerbro who wouldn’t fetch a doctor for their sick child. The child died. And the doctors claimed that its life could’ve been saved. Mrs. Lundegaard’s standing there in the middle of the floor with the little red songbook in her hand. God’s will. She doesn’t feel convinced. In any case she intends to fetch the doctor for Lundegaard if his fever persists. Even though it’s so nice to place everything in God’s strong hands, especially when you’ve got so much to struggle with. And when you’re simply forced to pay money to the health insurance fund. The collection for the Nazarenes is also a kind of health insurance fund payment.

Mrs. Lundegaard’s going to pray to God. And she’ll telephone for the health insurance fund doctor if the fever persists.

V

The news dealer from the corner over there also lives in the
rear tenement. He usually pops in with the newspaper for Lundegaard after he’s read it himself. The news dealer has feelings of solidarity with all people who have it just as bad as he does. Besides, he gets the paper back and it’s returned to the news company.

Now that Lundegaard’s sick, he usually looks in and chats a bit with Lundegaard, if anything, to say in his good-natured way: How’re you doin’. Or: What the hell are you’re still lying there and doing. And then he looks at Lundegaard encouragingly and says that he’ll end up being all right. Hell, he himself has had influenza so often—you can’t take it that seriously.

Mrs. Lundegaard feels that the news dealer’s a bit coarse, but his utter honesty warms her, and Lundegaard’s lying here feeling lonely and it does him good to talk to a human being. To be sure, the news dealer’s a communist, but of course that’s up to him.

When the news dealer has time, he sits down for a few minutes on the chair by the window to chitchat. He looks a bit at Lundegaard’s face flushed with fever, at the chair next to the bed, where a glass of water and a box of pills are standing next to the thermometer, at the blue hyacinth on the window sill, and says that of course it’s hard times for us little people, who have only our labor to live on. If in fact there’s anybody who needs it. He also talks about the lockout and about solidarity.

He speaks to Lundegaard like to a child who doesn’t know very much, reads aloud snatches from the newspaper to give Lundegaard a bit of instruction:

“The bread factories remain profitable. Wages for past year total well over a million, stockholders are paid out half a million.”

Lundegaard feels that if those people have put capital into the factory and are risking their money, they should of course also get something out of it.

The news dealer snorts contemptuously. How stupid these white-collar people are.

Yeah, look, Lundegaard says. You know, we had a business. But it went bust. It was the crisis.
Anna has bought flowers and fruit to take home. Yes, but of course we can’t at all afford it, says Lundegaard. And fruit, which is so expensive this time of year. Anna doesn’t reply. She did it because it was her duty to. It’s the same way she buys birthday presents. She doesn’t want to owe anybody anything.

Lundegaard’s already been lying in bed too long. He’s given up the hope of being able to pay Mr. Salomonsen any installment this month. But in any case he’s got to have a talk with Mr. Salomonsen. He’s got to get an extension. He’ll surely get it—Mr. Salomonsen’s so nice. And when he hears that he’s been lying in bed sick.

His temperature’s still holding steady and the health insurance fund doctor’s been there again. He was in just as much of a hurry as the last time, and Mrs. Lundegaard didn’t dare say anything after all. But out in the entrance hall, with one hand on the doorknob, he hesitates a second and says to Mrs. Lundegaard: “The patient must have absolute rest.”

But of course Lundegaard has all the rest he can get. Lies there the whole day staring at the window. After all, they never talk to each other—they only exchange remarks.

Lundegaard realizes he’s got to get up, whether the fever disappears or not. No matter what the cost, he has to talk to Mr. Salomonsen, who perhaps without further ado will go to Anna’s company if he doesn’t hear from him. And there’s also something with the collections he has to take care of. If he doesn’t get up, the whole thing’ll go to pot.

It’ll soon be the first of the month. No matter what the cost, Lundegaard has to get up. He decides to lie and say his temperature’s lower than it really is. After all, the fever can’t disappear all at once. The day after tomorrow he intends to get out of bed. Maybe that’s really the only way to get well. He’ll never get well lying here pondering. And of course he can always go back to bed.
VII

So Lundegaard’s sitting on the edge of the bed and asks for his underpants. Heroic and afraid. A real man doesn’t think anything of a little fever. But his head feels hot and dizzy. He says something about its being good it’s over with. Now he intends to go and take a steam bath to chase the last of it out of his body. Afterward he intends to go and get his hair cut, and then he’ll be ready again to take up the struggle.

It’s not at all that simple for a heavy man of fifty who’s dizzy and feeble to go down a staircase. But the fresh spring air does him good. The weather’s cloudy, but you notice already that winter will soon be over.

Now in all the time Lundegaard had the store, he bathed on Helsingør Street. It wouldn’t occur to him to go elsewhere, even if he has to walk the whole way out from Vesterbro. Naturally it’s filled with people waiting in the waiting room. That’s the way it always is, an annoyed Lundegaard thinks. They’re sitting there with their number in their hand waiting. And all the ones sitting there are going to go in before him.

There’s a humid, heavy heat in the waiting room. And Lundegaard’s tired. Then he sees that the man next to him is one of the customers from his store. One of the ones who came and bought cheap socks. Their glances meet, and out of old habit Lundegaard smiles in a friendly and hearty way, as if this man were one of the few people he really prized. The man has a little package in his hands; Lundegaard can see from the package that there’s a pair of cheap socks for 98 øre in there. The man follows his gaze and smiles: “Yeah, of course now I have to buy my socks somewhere else.”

Then Lundegaard has to explain again why the store doesn’t exist any more. It was the crisis, and then the fact that they came and modernized the property and raised the rent. Then Lundegaard again gets this naive urge to confide in a total stranger. He gives his opinion of department stores and Copenhagen landlords. And to show that he’s a man who knows what he’s talking about, he also says something about bread factories, sharehold-
ers, and wages. And then all of a sudden he turns gloomy and says that he’ll soon be an old man who’s had to work hard his whole life. And now he has to wear out the stairs as a bill collector.

The other man’s sitting there not saying anything. Lundegaard looks at him as if appealing to him. He doesn’t meet Lundegaard’s gaze, but sits there looking meditative. Then he says that there really are those who have it much worse.

Lundegaard becomes a bit annoyed. “Would you like for example to switch with me?” he asks.

The other man’s a quiet, earnest person. One of those who don’t say much. “Yeah, I think so, but I wonder if you’d like to switch with me. I’ve lived by the grace of the Welfare Office for over a year. And now my wife’s gotten tuberculosis and is lying out in Øresund Hospital.”

Lundegaard gets a little embarrassed. “Yes,” he says, ashamed, “things must be hard for you.”

“And there are undoubtedly people who’d be glad to trade with me,” says the man with socks. “Homeless people and such.”

That’s a whole new side of the matter that Lundegaard hasn’t seen before. In a way it makes it easier for himself. He instinctively happens to look at his own clothes, which are both in one piece and clean, and compare them with the other people’s.

The sounds from the people bathing in the shower area come out to the people sitting and waiting. Strangely enough, out here they’re all sitting gloomy and gray, dirty and grumpy, but in there they’re whistling and singing and humming. As soon as they’ve got their city uniform off and water pours down over their naked body, the urge to sing arises in them. And when they come out, their faces are flushed and they look delighted. As if they’d become new people from standing naked under a shower.

VIII

Now while Lundegaard’s in the neighborhood, he might feel
like going by their old business and seeing how it looks. But he
doesn’t. He’s afraid of getting into a conversation with people
down around there, of having to answer their questions. And he
doesn’t want to go down to his old barber either. Better find a
new one out in Vesterbro.

So he’s sitting at a barber’s that doesn’t look all too expen­
sive. Little bit down a side street. “Yes, thanks, with a scissors.
Even though it keeps longer with an electric haircutter, but I
mean a guy’d hate to look like a German.”

In the middle of it all the phone rings. “Excuse me a mo­
ment,” says the barber.

It’s from the provinces—the barber has to talk loudly.
“Yes,” he says, “I sent the money. Sent it at noon. Oh, good
Lord, it really doesn’t matter, it was just a good thing you re­
mined me of it. It might really easily have happened that I’d
have forgotten it. Yeah, I mean, we’ve got so much to do at the
moment. Tons of business, but everyone pays on credit. I mean
it’s a vicious circle. Yeah, don’t mention it, Olsen, I suspect
you’ll have it early tomorrow morning.”

You’re lying through your teeth, barber, Lundegaard thinks.
He knows how it is. And sure enough he in fact hears the barber
asking his wife to go to the post office and send the money right
away.

The barber realizes that Lundegaard’s grasped the situation,
but he keeps the mask on. Keeps clipping. Talks about the
weather and such. Before the clipping’s over with, however,
he’s hopelessly exposed. A driver comes in the door with goods.
He’s brought along two bills. The older one is the bigger one.
The barber only wants to pay the later one. The driver says that
then he’ll have to take the goods back again. Yeah, but if I pay
for what I’m getting today, says the barber, who’s getting an­
noyed. Yeah, I mean I can’t do anything about it, says the
driver. That’s what I was told to do.

The barber can’t pay both bills. Coincidentally he’s just
made a big payment. For all he cares, the driver’s welcome to
take the goods back again. But really, this is the worst thing he’s
come up against yet.
He finishes clipping Lundegaard’s hair, but he talks about taxes, fees, rent, and bills, which make life miserable. It’s enough to make you crazy.

The bankrupt dry-goods dealer in the barber chair feels profoundly moved by the thought of the barber’s difficulties. His own have been completely forgotten. If he could just help the man. Lundegaard’s only a reflection of his surroundings; now he really feels solidarity with the barber. He’s going to tell all his acquaintances to come here and have their hair cut. He’s going to say it to everyone he meets. In his mind’s eye he sees the shop full of customers waiting, money streaming into the cash register, the bills paid, the faces happy and eager.

“Alcohol and brilliantine, sir?”
“No thanks, neither. What do I owe?”
“One and a half crowns, please, sir.”

Lundegaard’s feeling of solidarity has evaporated. One and half crowns. Hell, then it’s no wonder that nobody comes into the store. One and a half crowns. He usually pays a crown, and he knows there are places where they do it for 70 øre. That guy’s really a bit much of a tough character. Such a con man. For ten minutes’ work.

IX

There’s a man sitting on a trolley. An ordinary man in an ordinary gabardine coat. His face is a bit red and puffed up, he has bags under his eyes, his hair’s thin and wispy, colorless, while his eyes are pale blue. You can see that he’s married and that his wife takes pains to keep his clothes nice and clean. He’s certainly not impressive, as he’s sitting there; there’s something worn-out and fatigued about him, something cheerless.

He has a white crocheted scarf and pince-nez. He’s on his way to a usurer to beg for an extension. It’s Friday afternoon. A day in March. A cold gray day.

He’s sitting there looking at his fellow passengers. Without seeing them. His thoughts are far off. Actually he resembles the
others. After all, they, too, look worn-out and cheerless. That’s in fact peculiar because, after all, actually all of them have it good. In any case could have it much worse. The only one smiling is a young woman with a child. But she also doesn’t know yet what life is. You can see that she’s newly married and that her husband has a good job. She’ll surely get to know life. Then her smile will probably take a walk.

In spite of everything, the raw odor of spring is noticeable here on the trolley. It’s hanging, so to speak, in the passengers’ clothing. But damn it, spring isn’t just poetry. There’s something raw about spring. It’s for the hardy. Poverty feels more glaring, incompetence more despairing in the pale March sun’s raw light than in winter’s darkness, where you feel at home in your rags.

They’re sitting there secretly taking one another’s measure, or they’re looking vacantly ahead. Now for example the unskilled laborer there with the thermos sticking up out of his jacket pocket and his big, red hands resting on his knees. He’s on his way home. And early tomorrow morning he’ll be on his way to work. And so one day follows the next. He sure as hell doesn’t have any highflying plans for prosperity, for better conditions for himself and the people he supports. The only point for him is just to keep his head above water. For most of his life Lundegaard’s certainly had the title of wholesale merchant and the villa to look toward as something that would surely materialize sooner or later, something that would compensate for all those many cheerless days. Now he no longer has that to base his life on. But, hell, most of the others haven’t even had that. They have their hands full keeping their heads above water. They don’t have any time at all to ponder other things. And they feel like chosen, privileged people if they have a job. What dreams of the future would they have anyway, unless they hope one fine day to win a bunch of money in the lottery, just enough to be able to pay the last installments on the furniture and not to owe anybody anything.

Lundegaard’s sitting on the trolley with his crocheted, newly-washed scarf, woollen gloves, pince-nez, and trouser clips in
his pocket, thinking about whether the future mightn’t after all hold in store for him something good and beautiful. Even though he’s now half a century old. God knows what that might be. Maybe something good and beautiful for all of them. Better and brighter times perhaps. After all, the world’s going forward. And of course something’s always happening. Now we’ve gotten the Little Belt bridge, now we’ve gotten the lightning train. And the government always wants to make improvements. But you can understand that that’s not so easy. You’ve got to make compromises.

Then all of a sudden he again sees his life very vividly and soberly. He’s on his way to a usurer to ask for an extension. What the hell does he care about the Little Belt bridge and the lightning trains.

X

It’s Mrs. Salomonsen who opens the door when he rings the bell. That is to say, opens the door is saying a bit much: the security chain’s on and the door’s opened precisely enough so Lundegaard can see the former housekeeper’s pointy nose. Salomonsen probably married her because he envisioned that it would be cheaper than giving her a wage and the possibility of enriching herself with the household money. Undoubtedly Mr. Salomonsen long ago realized that he’d miscalculated, Lundegaard thinks to himself.

No, Salomonsen isn’t home, he’s at the billiard parlor, she says ill-temperedly. Lundegaard believes that perhaps he can talk to Mr. Salomonsen there and finds out where it is.

This time he has to walk—of course he can’t afford to ride like that on the trolley all day long. And besides, his head is so hot from the fever. In general he feels really crappy. But now he’s surely going to get hold of Mr. Salomonsen and manage to prevent the whole thing from collapsing. He can’t imagine that he wouldn’t be able to get an extension—the man’ll surely listen to reason.
XI

At first he stands there a bit confused and looks around. Imagine, there are so many people here on an ordinary weekday afternoon, where you’d otherwise think that people were working. And the lights are burning so for that matter it might just as well be night.

Now you’ll probably have to buy something, he thinks to himself nervously. And maybe it’ll be expensive here. But he can’t see Mr. Salomonsen anywhere. Actually, if he had his druthers, he’d disappear again, but he’s got to get this over with and asks the waiter for Mr. Salomonsen.

Lundegaard’s lucky. Mr. Salomonsen comes at that very moment. He’d been sitting in the back playing cards. Now he comes with his overcoat over his arm and umbrella and hat in his hand. A fine silk umbrella, meticulously rolled up and in its cover. He sees Lundegaard right away and greets him heartily, like an old friend. Maybe he was going to play billiards, maybe he was on his way out; in any event, he sits down at a table with Lundegaard in a friendly, accommodating way.

Mr. Salomonsen calls the waiter. Lundegaard says something about his actually not needing anything, his having a cold, feeling crummy. Then you’ve got to have a rum toddy, Mr. Salomonsen says. It’s so splendid when you’ve got a cold. He himself asks for a glass of port with angostura bitters. Lundegaard can’t stand making objections; besides, the waiter’s already gone.

Even before the waiter’s returned, Lundegaard’s said what’s on his mind. That he’s been lying in bed sick and so on. Whether we couldn’t skip this month. He looks inquiringly at Mr. Salomonsen, suddenly a little anxious.

Mr. Salomonsen’s just sitting and sucking his cigar. He’s a man who thinks before he speaks.

I mean it’s just at the moment that things are a little tight, says Lundegaard. I mean I wasn’t able to earn anything during the time I was lying in bed. And now that spring’s coming, I’ll
have more than enough to do and so I’ll be able to pay two installments next month.

Mr. Salomonsen looks tired and mournful. I hadn’t expected that, Lundegaard. I trusted you, placed confidence in you. You promised me very definitely you’d meet the installment payments. You know, I also have to take care of my obligations; it’s not always exactly easy to make ends meet. I mean I gave you an extension once—now I really can’t any more. So I’ll have to collect the money through the salary assignment.

He clearly sees that these last words hit Lundegaard hard. It was a bull’s eye. He knows his man, this Salomonsen.

“You know, you still have two days to spare. You’ll see—you’ll succeed in raising the money.”

And then Mr. Salomonsen starts talking about other things. After all, he has his worries too. It’s not that easy. Difficulties left and right. He confides in Lundegaard by informing him of his opinion on the maid question. He’s very worried. Not just for his own sake, even though it’s tough not to be able to get a maid when you’re willing to pay for it. 45 crowns. But the young girls nowadays feel they’re too fine for a domestic calling. It’s a social question, the growing dissolution of old, clear concepts. Life’s certainly no bed of roses. Besides, Mr. Salomonsen isn’t well. It’s something with his chest. And in spite of everything you have to stay here at this arduous time of year, which undermines your health, while other people are traveling to Nice and Menton. You’ve got to behave and stay at your post and do your job.

It’s as if Lundegaard’s thunderstruck. Now it’s all over. He makes another feeble effort. I mean, I couldn’t foresee that I’d get sick, he says.

But Mr. Salomonsen’s already gotten up and is putting his overcoat on. Very politely he says goodbye to Lundegaard. On the way to the door he settles with the waiter.

Lundegaard sits for a bit and tries to collect his thoughts. Now what. Two days. And of course he should go straight home and back to bed to get well and tackle fixing everything that was about to overwhelm him.
Then all of a sudden he sees that the scorekeeper at one table is somebody he knows. Oh, that must be Nielsen, Poul’s friend; he recalls having seen him back home on their street in the passageway.

Yes, Poul. What’s going to become of it all. Damn it, he doesn’t really believe that he’s that rascal’s father. He’s never believed it. Maybe it’s Mr. Salomonsen who’s his father. Yeah, to be honest, what does anybody know about it. Maybe he himself is the father of Nielsen, who’s recognized him now and nods to him in a friendly way.

When he’s ready to leave, the waiter comes to collect from him. Lundegaard’s face becomes flushed. He thought that Mr. Salomonsen —.

The waiter smiles mockingly. As if he wanted to say that in that case you didn’t know Mr. Salomonsen very well.