Mogens Klitgaard

There’s a Man Sitting on a Trolley

Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Marc Linder

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Fourth Chapter

I

Then it happens that Anna sees her friend, the warehouse clerk, standing at City Hall Square chatting with another girl. Indeed, he’s not just chatting—he’s both smiling and laughing. The girl’s smiling and laughing too. They certainly look as though they find each other’s company enjoyable. And the girl looks good. And is well-dressed. She obviously likes the warehouse clerk, to judge by her sparkling eyes. But of course, let them go right ahead—let them enjoy themselves. So that’s the way he is, behind her back. If he’s seen her and calls after her, she’ll ignore it. Just ride on. From now on he doesn’t exist for her. She thinks she feels his gaze from behind. And she speeds up.

A second later Anna realizes she loves the warehouse clerk. Her heart’s beating and she nearly runs into a car that’s jamming on the brakes in front of her. All the way home she’s worked up with anger, indignation, and by the fact that in spite of everything, he’s the one she loves.

Again one of those funny incidents has occurred that intervenes in the daily routine and shakes a person out of her daily, ordinary existence. Because of course she doesn’t usually ride home that way. She usually rides along Gammel Kong Road and turns down Bager Lane. But she’d gotten a run in one stocking, so she has to manage to buy a pair before closing time. True, she has stockings at home, but they’re not much to brag about. And she has to go out this evening. With a bank clerk.

All of a sudden she very acutely wishes that the warehouse clerk could see her together with the bank clerk. She’d smile and look pleased, pretend as if she felt fine in his company. Does she
actually, she thinks to herself. No, actually she doesn’t care about the bank clerk, apart from his being generous, a man of the world, and elegantly dressed. One evening one of her girlfriends had seen them together on the Stroget and the next day asked who the attractive young man was. You could tell she was envious. From that day on Anna went out more with the bank clerk. But actually, of course, he was boring. But now she wanted to go out with him anyway. And hope that the warehouse clerk would see them. Maybe it wouldn’t make an impression on him at all. Maybe he didn’t care about her now that he had the other one. To be frank, he hadn’t appeared especially in love the last couple of times they’d been out together. But she’d also appeared rather cool toward him since that day she first sensed spring and didn’t think that he was the one she had feelings for.

Anna knows very well that the warehouse clerk’s from Hjørring. But she can’t know that the girl he was talking to at City Hall Square is also from Hjørring. That they’d played together as children and not seen each other since. That that was why they were smiling and laughing. That the well-dressed girl was now married to a teacher. That they’d run into each other by sheer chance. She just knew that it was the warehouse clerk she had feelings for and that she didn’t want to let him go.

It’s the hour of love, dusk’s descended on the city, the neon lights, red and blue, are already turned on, Vesterbro Street’s a fairy tale, the girls appear twice as beautiful, and they make eyes left and right, almost to test the strength of their charm. The air’s raw with springtime and sweet with the odor of cosmetics and gasoline exhaust. How long’s the warehouse clerk known the well-dressed girl? How long’s it been going on between them? It was the kiosk they were standing at—in other words, a prearranged meeting.

She turns onto her own street. The pavement is broken up and big heaps of clay and earth are lying there. Maybe it’s the water main that burst. It seems to her that there are always street repairs and such here in the neighborhood. The kids run and play in the excavation, right in the middle of the heaps of clay. They think it’s mighty funny. They march in a demonstration
through all the muck singing socialist songs.

In other words, people live here. Lords of creation. Who’ve subdued the earth. Some live their whole lives here, others move to places that are exactly like it. The street consists of many rows of houses, behind the front buildings the intermediate buildings, behind the intermediate buildings the rear tenements. You enter these heaps of stones either through the passageways or through narrow, dark alleyways, tunnels, which are filled with bicycles standing there.

II

Incidentally, it’s April now and it’ll soon be Easter. In the gardens out in Frederiksberg the currants have flowered. They’re bright green and give off an acrid smell of new life. In Kongens Enghave they’ve begun to paint garden houses and picket fences, and there’s a green gooseberry bush standing in the Botanic Garden. April has its special meaning for everyone. For the warehouse clerk, who’s a member of a rowing club, it means that the season’s beginning now; for Mrs. Lundegaard it means spring cleaning.

Naturally Lundegaard sees and hears nothing; he’s got his hands full with his own stuff—it’s his shoulders everything rests on. Now he’s been to the lawyer on Strøget to pay the rent. And when he left there, he still had the rent money in his pocket and took a trolley out to Mr. Salomonsen, who gave him a receipt for the money and said triumphantly: “So you see, Lundegaard, it worked out after all—a person shouldn’t ever give up.”

Lundegaard was juggling the debit items. Commingling them. For that matter he could’ve become an excellent statesman, minister of finance. At the lawyer’s he’d asked for an extension. 5 days. The lady had shaken her head and had said that she wasn’t authorized to give an extension. So Lundegaard had to ask to be permitted to speak to the appeals court attorney: the thing was that special circumstances were connected to his request. Then the lady had taken the rent receipt in hand and gone
in the door to the left with the sign Private. And when she re­
turned, she’d smiled to Lundegaard and said that the deadline
then had to be met for certain. In other words, by April 5th at 12
o’clock.

Who actually owned the houses anyway? Obviously it
wasn’t the attorney himself. He just shoveled the money in and
passed it on. The attorney could also really have used the excuse
himself that he wasn’t authorized to give an extension. He was,
after all, just an intermediary who passed the money on. To
those who, in other words, were authorized. But those people
didn’t know Lundegaard, didn’t have any idea that he existed.
They just got his ten-crown bank notes.

For the moment Lundegaard could breathe. No danger
would be threatening him from Mr. Salomonsen for the first
month, and he had a couple of days’ respite to procure the rent.
Lundegaard had once again managed the situation with a nimble
maneuver. He wasn’t totally dissatisfied with himself. But he
was a bit afraid that his abilities as a financial operator would not
do it in the long run. There was something untenable about the
method.

At optimistic moments he believed that it could be managed
forever with maneuvers, new loans, etc. After all, that was the
way the big shots went about it. That was what was called living
off your debt. But in spite of everything, he was sober enough
to realize that other laws applied to little people. But in other
words, it was something like a mood. Optimism, which in turn
was succeeded by desperation and anxiety. After all, that’s the
way things are constantly going for Lundegaard. He’s sick, well,
thrifty, extravagant, ethical, unethical, moral, immoral—all ac­
cording to moods and circumstances. And the whole thing’s just
a compromise. Keep the fragments together and keep it going.

III

Anna’s lips are red, a bit full, a bit sensual, her eyes blue,
gray, a bit protruding, they have what make men interested; men
even have a special designation for that kind of eyes. But she's too tall, too powerfully built, too proud, independently proud, to appeal to the man's protective feeling.

Besides, Anna also doesn't feel attracted to broad-shouldered, self-assured men. The warehouse clerk's introverted, a bit of a dreamer, with gentle eyes, a bit melancholy. He usually calls the department store during the lunch break and says: Pardon the inconvenience, it wouldn't be possible, would it, for him to speak to Miss Anna Lundegaard. A couple of days could easily go by without his calling, but this time four days have passed and he still hasn't called.

If he doesn't call today or tomorrow, Anna'll call him. It's happened only a couple of times before that Anna's called. She usually says, briefly and firmly, that she wants to speak to Eigil Holm.

She didn't get a chance to this time—the warehouse clerk called the next day. She couldn't hide the fact that her voice was quivering with eagerness when she spoke to him. Maybe it was because every time the telephone had rung, she'd thought it was him and felt a gnawing disappointment when somebody said: Telephone for Miss Andersen, Miss Hansen, or whoever it might be. In any event, she gave a start when somebody said: Telephone for Miss Lundegaard.

Now she heard his voice on the telephone and she could hardly fight down her agitation. Since he didn't make a move to want to make a date, but merely asked how she was and so on, she asked whether he had time this evening. And when he hesitated, she became ardent. Nonplussed, he thought to himself, what's come over her—she'd never shown that side before. He'd imagined doing something else this evening, but gladly gave it up. That disappointed Anna a bit, as it were. She'd imagined that perhaps it was over with between them and was ready to fight to keep him. It almost went too easily.

So they met at 8 o'clock, went to the movies, and took a stroll afterwards out at Langelinie pier. Made plans for the future. There's quite a different tone between them than there was before. They're no longer thinking separately, but together. An-
na's never before stuck her nose into how much he earned, how he imagined the future, and all that. In a way, it wasn't any of her business. But it is now. Eigil can't go on being a warehouse clerk his whole life. Something has to be done. He has to get a better job, earn more money. And she talks about herself. Now she's going to go to the drafting room and take lessons. The head of her department said that she has aptitude. She has to slave away at it, learn something. Later she'll go to an evening school. And she intends to get a better job with higher wages.

The warehouse clerk admits that perhaps he would've had a chance to go into the main office and get a higher salary if he'd been able to do commercial correspondence in English. But it was of course too late by the time he heard about it. Besides, he already has so little free time. He has his rowing club and he has Anna. Anna won't hear of it. A chance like that will come again. He has to take a course. And she'll test him on his homework. She's convinced that he has great possibilities if he'll pull himself together.

The harsh April wind sweeps across Langelinie pier. It's damp and ice cold. Spring's far away. But schoolgirls are standing in a knot eating ice-cream bars by the Little Mermaid—in other words, it's spring after all. And a pitcher with pale-green birch sprigs and yellow daffodils is standing in the warehouse clerk's room. In honor of the visitor who may turn up.

IV

On the morning of April 4th Lundegaard rode his bicycle across Frederiksberg to get to the outermost part of Nørrebro to collect money. Day break had brought with it a snowstorm; now the sun was sizzling brutally and undaunted through the cloud cover and warming up the newly budding, sun-thirsty chestnuts on Bülow Road. Lundegaard knows perfectly well that it's crummy to be collecting at this time of day: either people aren't home or else they don't have any money. But he's restless and
nervous to the point of trembling and has to create a release for himself through activity. Naturally, they won’t be evicted, even if the rent isn’t paid by the agreed-upon time, but even if he had a day or two more, he doesn’t see any way to manage it. After all, this is about a good deal of money. And of course the rent isn’t the only expense. He’s in that mood that gives birth to desperate plans. Something on the order of going to one of the cabinet ministers and saying: Look, I mean I had a store and such and such. I paid everyone what he was owed; I was thrifty and industrious. I built up home and family—one of the many small homes society consists of. Now it’s come crashing down on me. The cabinet minister would understand him and say: Just take it easy, Mr. Lundegaard, tell me about all your worries without beating around the bush—I’ll see what can be done.

But Lundegaard knows full well that that’s a lie. Lundegaard isn’t naive at all. He knows full well that the cabinet minister will be thinking: Here we have a clear example showing the social dislocation taking place today. The tendency toward concentration in the business world. The class of retail dealers in dissolution. The middle class, which is being proletarianized. And the cabinet minister would, thanks to Lundegaard’s report, get inspiration for a few well-turned sentences for his next speech. Lundegaard isn’t that stupid. Naturally the cabinet minister’s interested in the class of retail dealers and in social dislocations—it’s just Lundegaard who doesn’t interest him.

Lundegaard knows full well that there’s only one practicable way—being energetic and earning money, being frugal and spending less than he earns. With the surplus the dangers that threaten his existence can be warded off, and little by little the whole thing’ll be straightened out, maybe it’ll even go forward, and maybe he can sit in his old age like a patriarch and tell the astonished circle of children and grandchildren about how he weathered the storm back then when the whole thing was about to collapse.

But on the other hand Lundegaard also knows full well that it’s not the people who use their hands and are thrifty who weather it best. It’s with your head that it’s got to be done, not
your hands. Lundegaard wavers between plan, virtue and thrift, industriousness on the one hand, and boldness, daring, volcanoes, decisiveness, devil-may-care-ness on the other.

It's when he turns the corner at Godthaab Road that he meets the agent from the big wholesale firm. Lundegaard gets off his bicycle. The agent's cordial and sociable—that's his job, of course. He asks how the business is going. A sudden impulse makes Lundegaard say: Thanks, great, but of course we are feeling the bad times. I mean, it's not like in the old days, but it's all right. My God, he doesn't suspect that I don't have the store any more, Lundegaard thinks to himself. After all, he also came into the store only a couple of times a year, if anything, to say hello. Of course, Lundegaard didn't do orders that way—he called up when he needed something. The agent came into the store for many years. He invites Lundegaard along for a drink, a tipple he calls it; he's a bit old-fashioned, makes more of an impression with generosity and friendliness than eloquence. Lundegaard says no thanks. He doesn't dare say it straight out, even though he probably felt like having a little drink to warm himself up on such a cold April morning. He doesn't dare; he's afraid of making a slip of the tongue—because the sudden impulse has now developed into an idea, a plan that's going to take care of the situation. It would've been better for him to have gotten the idea before; then he'd have gotten out of going to Mr. Salomonsen, Mr. Salomonsen who no longer at all represents for him the friendly liberator in hard times, but is almost like a black, sinister threat hanging over his head.

V

Lundegaard's made up his mind. There isn't really anything to risk. In the course of two hours the whole thing can be over with and all worries gotten rid of with one blow. It's just a matter of getting it done. After all, there's nothing to hesitate about.

But it's the first time in his life that Lundegaard's undertaking a breach of the law—he feels that business with Anna's
signature was something else: if anything it was a formality—but this time it’s a flagrant and premeditated fraud.

Now or never. He has to pull himself together and get it over with. From a restaurant he calls up the big wholesale firm and orders a piece of fabric. Such and such quality. Presumably it’s absolutely a superior piece of merchandise. No, come to think of it, he’d rather come in himself and get it; by all means, they can wrap it up—he’ll come right away.

That was that. Now it’s over with. So we’ve gotten that far. Of course the worst is yet to come. But now he’s said A and also has to say B. He takes a trolley to go to the company. The closer he gets to Kongens Nytorv, the more nervous he becomes. In spite of everything, it’s really his own affair. Of course, after all, it’s also conceivable that there was someone at the company who knew that he didn’t have a store any more. In any event, the department head’ll naturally come and chitchat with him—he’s always in the habit of doing that. But Lundegaard’s helpless; he’s sitting on the trolley, which is leading him closer and closer to Kongens Nytorv. And he knows that when he’s gotten to the place and gotten off, he’ll walk quickly and steadily up the steps, as if it were a command he was carrying out. And of course it was also in a way. It was the circumstances. He’d been placed in a special situation that demanded a definite decision. He’d made the decision that seemed most correct to him, all things considered. After all, Lundegaard’s no criminal; he always does what seems most correct to him. And of course he has a home and family, responsibility. He’s the one whose shoulders everything rests on.

Then he’s standing at the counter. He’s terribly worked up and feels that everybody must be able to see it. But of course he looks just as he usually does. He’s standing there with his gabardine coat, bicycle trouser clips, and crocheted scarf and looks politely amiable. The department head’s already standing on the other side of the counter uttering amiable commonplaces. Lundegaard’s desperately keeping the conversation on neutral territory. The war in Abyssinia, spring, colds, etc.

And before he knows what’s happening, he’s signed the in-
voice and is out the door with the big package in the smooth, brown wrapping paper under his arm. That’s how easily it went.

Then it occurs to him that he forgot his bicycle out in Frederiksberg. Oh who cares, let it stay there till tomorrow—it’s a holiday. With the package under his arm he strolls along Øster Street across Højbro Square to the state-owned pawnbrokerage. He hesitates at the portal: the package is much too elegant—you can see it comes directly from the wholesaler. And maybe there’s an accompanying packing slip lying in the package. He goes out onto the street again, walks a bit along the canal, thinks it over once more. It’s not too late. The package can be returned. In his thoughts he sees himself being led out to a waiting taxi by two detective sergeants; everything’ll be brought to light—Anna’s forged signature on the loan document, the amounts he’d collected that weren’t paid in.

He’s standing still and looking at the small craft and fish-boxes. He’s again getting weak and dejected. He stands there with his big package under his arm, stooped, and looks at the water. An ordinary April afternoon on Nybro Street. He knows the whole street scene so well that he doesn’t see it. Nikolaj Church, Thorvaldsen’s Museum, Christiansborg, Storm Bridge. At Gammel Strand they’re washing down the street after the morning fish trade. Sea gulls, parked cars, ivy-covered old houses with bay windows, and the canal with the fish boxes. In addition, he’s pondering what’ll happen if he pawns the fabric and what can happen if he doesn’t pawn it. And a potential third solution. It’s this third solution that suddenly becomes of interest to him in his fatigued state.

Then he works up his courage, goes in a front door, and opens the package. There’s no packing slip. So they’ll doubtless send it in the mail. And it’ll be sent back: Addressee moved. Rubbish—after all, he’s arranged it with the postal service that all mail be sent on to his new address. But it could happen by mistake. Of course not—the Danish postal service, which is so renowned for its reliability. He crumples the paper up a little and wraps the fabric up again. Now right away the package looks more normal.
A minute later he’s standing at the counter in the state-owned pawnbrokerage in a line of people waiting. He just acts like the others. The package has been undone and he has his identification papers ready in his hand. The appraiser’s a man with a hawk’s eye. Sees everything, unmasks everything. Lundegaard has a calm and solid look. His identification paper does too.

Then it’s his turn. The fabric is torn out of the paper. How much, the appraiser asks. There’s no time to beat around the bush—he’s already examining it inside and out. 100 crowns, Lundegaard says. 80 crowns, says the man behind the counter. Do you have identification? And without waiting for the answer he dictates to the clerk at the desk as he takes Lundegaard’s papers out of his hand: A piece of fabric. 80 crowns. Dry-goods dealer August Lundegaard.

Afterward Lundegaard has to sit down on a bench and wait. Damn it, that’s almost the worst part. He can see that the appraiser’s saying something to the clerk and that the latter’s nodding earnestly. Could it be something about the fabric and dry-goods dealer Lundegaard. Lundegaard wets his dry lips with the tip of his tongue. What if they call up the credit rating agency and find out that he no longer has a store. That he’s insolvent. But that’s no reason why I couldn’t very well have a piece of fabric lying around, Lundegaard stubbornly thinks to himself. He’s thinking it so energetically that he’s on the verge of believing that he’s had the fabric lying around his house for several months.

Then all at once the waiting’s over, the agony’s over, and he’s standing on the street again with eight ten-crown bills in his pocket.

VI

Salesgirl Anna Lundegaard meets billiard scorekeeper Nielsen in the passageway. In the twilight and glare from the shops he sees her this way: A young, well-shaped girl with nice legs,
red lips, and laughing eyes. A bit large, a bit voluptuous. Now he knows—of course, it’s Poul’s sister.

He has the day off and has his new suit on that he’s buying on installments; he’s got his overcoat back from the pawnshop; he’s got gloves on and has a little white handkerchief sticking up out of the breast pocket of his blue overcoat. Life’s shaping up better for him now and you can see it in him. In the flesh on his cheeks and in his posture.

The encounter’s equally surprising for both of them. They make a pleasant impression on each other. He asks if they’ve heard from Poul. She answers. He asks about several things and she answers. But they’re both thinking about something completely different, and after she’s gone upstairs, she’s still thinking about him as something pleasant, something congenial. The business with the warehouse clerk is something totally different—it has nothing to do with this. The warehouse clerk’s a part of herself and her future. She just thinks that Nielsen’s congenial and interesting. Surely she’s allowed to. And then it was probably the twilight, which makes everybody more attractive than they are. And the spring.

Mrs. Lundegaard says that on second thought it’d be better if Lundegaard kept sleeping in the dining room till he was completely well. And if Anna slept in the bedroom with her. Anna can’t see anything unusual about that; it’s just unpleasant for her to have to share a room with her mother. But she’d like to remain on good terms with the people at home. Especially right now. She’s beginning to think about inviting Eigil home some evening and introducing him. Then she’ll also have more of a hold on him, so to speak. But naturally she wants to prepare her mother a bit. It’d also be better if there was no talk of Poul. It seems to her that Poul casts a cloud over her.

Anna’s more obliging to her mother at this time than she usually is. She asks if her mother’s tired and says she has to be good to herself. And she talks about the new fashions: organdy collars have now become fashionable. And her mother thinks that’s nice.
Lundegaard’s now been to the attorney on Strøget, the rent’s paid, and he even has money in his pocket. He’s in a jittery, impatient mood. Of course he ought to take a trolley out to his bike and begin collecting. Or ought to go home.

It’s impossible for him to do anything ordinary, anything run of the mill, on top of the heavy tension. He’s already drunk quite a few small drinks. He says to himself that his nerves are in need of stimulation. And now of course the rent’s taken care of. And Mr. Salomonsen’s taken care of. He needs relaxation.

And so he gets the crazy idea that he wants to go to the billiard parlor. He wants to try to go there as a patron. Just like the rest of them. Just like Mr. Salomonsen. Maybe Mr. Salomonsen’s there. And he might like chitchatting with Nielsen, the billiard scorekeeper. You just have to take life starting with the most important things and go down from there. Not ponder too much about things. Solve the problems one by one, gradually, as they turn up. The way he, Lundegaard, does. He’d dare say the situation hasn’t existed he hasn’t managed. You just have to use your head. And be a little clever. Not go around being in the dumps. Not take things too seriously.

He makes his entrance at the billiard parlor. His face is a bit more flushed than usual. He makes himself look a bit more important than he actually is. His friendliness toward the world becomes indulgent, a bit condescending. He’s calm and a bit self-important, moves a bit more slowly than he usually does. He’s a man who’s tried a bit of everything. A man you can’t take for a ride. He orders a glass of port with angostura bitters and makes jocular, good-natured comments to the waiter.

There’s Nielsen. He wants to chitchat with him. Nielsen’s got to have a drink. Lundegaard’s not at all too superior to talk to a billiard scorekeeper even though he’s in uniform. Nielsen just wants a beer. Take whatever you want, Lundegaard says in a friendly way. Lundegaard is sheer love of humanity. Can afford to be. Other people would break down. And end up at the Welfare Office. Lundegaard confronts problems like a real man.
and takes care of them. Besides, this whole kettle of fish is only a phase. It's the times.

Nielsen of course wants to give value for the beer and tells some of the current anecdotes. Lundegaard's enjoying himself uncontrollably. Especially with regard to one with an erotic point. He also tells a couple of stories. Passes them off as personal experiences. Nielsen's heard them a hundred times before, but pretends it's the first time. Lundegaard shows his appreciation of this sense of tact with a new round.

The restaurant owner takes a stroll down through the premises. He looks at the billiard scoreboards and makes remarks about the game so you'd think that his welfare depended on who won. Naturally he has no idea what's on the scoreboard. He's just been in to see how much has been rung up on the cash register in the course of the day, and that's the number he's got before his eyes, wherever he may turn them. If things keep up this way, he can just as well close the business. People have to understand how great the costs were with a parlor like this. And of course you can't make a move nowadays without taxes and fees. The state, damn it, paralyzes initiative this way. Restaurant owner Berg can't stand the public sector: it places a straitjacket on people who in these difficult times have courage and initiative to put together a business. Damn it, they suffocate trade this way. That's why there's so much unemployment. The state shouldn't interfere with business. And all taxation ought to be indirect. By the way, politics doesn't interest him, as long as he's allowed to be here and operate his business without having to run up against prohibitions, regulations, taxes, and fees for every step he takes.

Nielsen and Lundegaard get along very well. Nielsen tells him about the various patrons. The tall dark guy over there has a responsible position in the Copenhagen city government and he's fond of saying that he's succeeded in being promoted only by carefully hiding his capabilities and knowledge. He's playing with a colleague who's attained his position by virtue of having neither capabilities nor knowledge. That made it easier for the second guy. He had nothing to hide, while the first guy constant-
ly had to watch out not to give himself away.

By the way, the Copenhagen city government ought to be weeded out, says Nielsen. Now there’s been another swindle. And it involved millions. And it was customers from the municipality’s shops who’d had to pay—in other words, the very poorest people. If people thought folks didn’t notice something like that and remember it, then they’re wrong. The corruption scandals were the greatest danger for democracy.

Now Lundegaard’s astonished again. Democracy, he says, I mean we couldn’t care less. He doesn’t care to discuss politics. Damn it, I have my hands full with my own stuff, he says. I have a home and family to take care of and difficulties left and right.

But that stuff about the tall dark guy amuses him. That’s true all right, he says. I had an uncle in the country, he was a storekeeper, one of these real old-time provincial storekeepers you just don’t see any more. I was there as a boy spending summer vacation in the country, and I can easily say that I wasn’t bored. Something happened every day. He dealt in grain and horses and all sorts of things, dry goods too. If he was going to sell a horse and it was a little sluggish, he stuck a plug of chewing tobacco under the horse’s tail. Believe you me that helped—the horse became so frisky and fiery there was no end to it: it kicked and danced like a circus horse. When the farmers brought the wagon filled with grain and other things, his store assistants unloaded the goods from the wagon and weighed and counted out, while uncle kept accounts. He did it by putting chalk lines on the counter. The farmers trusted uncle like Our Lord himself. Then they made their purchases and uncle erased the chalk lines little by little as the orders progressed. Then when they were done doing business, he wiped away the rest of the chalk lines with his sleeve and said that the farmer would then get 30 crowns or whatever it might be. And then he counted up the money with great gestures as if it were a whole manor the farmer was getting. I suppose he cheated the farmers, the old rascal. And then he drank to them. A drink to seal the deal. All the booze that man could tolerate. But that was what I wanted to
say with regard to those bigwigs from the city government you were talking about—that uncle hired his store assistants according to the same principle. They weren’t allowed to be too clever. It was preferable, you know, if they were a bit slow as far as their intelligence went. And they couldn’t look too good either: uncle had a pretty wife and preferred to keep her to himself. And he knew women. He’d been a shop assistant himself before he got his store.

Nielsen and Lundegaard are getting along splendidly. They have one little drink after another. Nielsen tries out some information of interest to his trade—after all, he doesn’t know Lundegaard that way: L’Hombre’s becoming fashionable again. But Lundegaard doesn’t give a damn: he doesn’t play L’Hombre or bridge. Or billiards. But with his thoughts still with his blessed uncle, he says that people in the country aren’t familiar with such games either. There they play straight-out, mousel, twenty-one, spoons, and the like. They’re more for ordinary people. And are definitely supposed to be just as enjoyable. When he was a soldier, he played sjavs.

That’s the story with what’s enjoyable. Nielsen points out to him that here in the parlor they all look like they’re enjoying themselves. But it’s just a lie, says Nielsen. Look at the waiter over there, for example, who’s standing there marvelously amused by a patron’s stupid comments; every half hour the waiter goes into the phone booth and calls the hospital. The day before yesterday his wife had a baby and the midwife handled it so clumsily that it was ruptured and probably has to have surgery. And now he calls the hospital every half hour. He’s only twenty-something years old and has been married half a year. This is the first born.

Yeah, all of us have our cross to bear, says Lundegaard thoughtfully. But now Nielsen’s become animated and doesn’t want to leave the subject. The other waiter has water on the knee and he has to figure that his leg’s going to get stiff; he’s become so downcast about it that he’s begun to go to a nature healer—it’s costing him lots of money and doesn’t help a bit. But of course people don’t want to leave any stone unturned. And the
proprietor, who looks spectacularly well pleased, is in reality the opposite. It’s just a mask, says Nielsen.

Oh, damn it, life isn’t any more depressing than people make it for themselves, says Lundegaard a bit curtly. Of course we all have our cross to bear. But damn it, life does have its bright sides too. You just can’t take things too seriously.

But Nielsen keeps at it obstinately. The counterman used to be a typographer, but he got lead poisoning and will never get completely well. And that guy who was here before begging, the guy who was missing three fingers, used to be a gunsmith and earned a good weekly wage till he got one of his hands smashed.

Gunsmith? asks Lundegaard.

Yeah, at the light machine gun factory.

So, then he doubtless got compensation, says Lundegaard, dismissively and cynically. What business is it actually of his. After all, all of us get our little knocks here in life. If you went around crying about it, you’d have your hands full.

Little knocks? says Nielsen, indignant.

Now Lundegaard’s had enough of sad plights. Besides, he’s getting half-drunk. After all, he wasn’t home for dinner either—hasn’t gotten any food. On an empty stomach you can’t tolerate anything.

You can get a meal here, says Nielsen. But Lundegaard prefers to go. He wants to go to a place where there’s music and girls. Enough of the sad plights. He knows damn well how to take life. He’s in the process of adapting to the new conditions. Previously he was dry-goods merchant Lundegaard with social ambitions; now he’s living on volcanoes. That requires determination, hardness. Damn it, you don’t have time to go around being down in the mouth because of other people’s troubles.

VIII

Here there are many-colored paper chains on the ceiling and a serpentine dance twice a week, chock-full Friday and Saturday and rather gloomy the other days, girls with their sweethearts
and girls with others’ sweethearts. If you can’t conjure up a mood, at least you can conjure up symptoms of a mood. Three men make up a band with a flashy American name and painted bass drum. The three poor devils are in shirt-sleeves and are furnishing imitation mood at full blast. Here’s life and happy days, here the sun never sets. Their exertions are not least due to the fact that their engagement will soon have run out, and the old man, that is, the restaurant owner, is sitting on the sofa over in the corner looking inscrutable. Every single one of the staff knows that the old man’s sitting in the corner and has a mask on; every single one of them has a quiet dread of being fired. It doesn’t take much when the old man’s in that mood. The old man has his eye on me, every one of them’s thinking. And you never know when you can get some other job. And when you’ve got a wife and children. So the waiters are obliging and quick; that’s why the music’s full of spirit and life.

Naturally Lundegaard already has company. Lundegaard’s such typical material for an enterprising girl that he can’t sit for very long without having company. Lundegaard’s a fish and he’s a grateful fish. The girl certainly knows how to capture a man’s interest. She’s perhaps twenty years old. Her boyfriend says that she’s tough, that she knows who she’s dealing with. She has experience. If youth and charm can’t do it, then a glimpse of something naked can do wonders.

Naturally you see right away that Lundegaard isn’t actually a goldfish. Just a very ordinary little fish. Otherwise the American band would’ve long ago struck up the one about the music being thirsty, or the one about we want beer, we wanna have beer. Not just for the beer’s sake, but for the sales it produces. And the proprietor prizes sales.

Incidentally, Lundegaard’s probably never seen a man as fat as the proprietor. The girl says that a suit could be sewn for a grown man from the piece of fabric that went into making his vest. And it’s very possible that that’s right: he looks as though he weighs 440 pounds.

A little old man’s sitting at the next table who wants to chitchat with Lundegaard no matter what. The girl isn’t pleased
about it and frankly Lundegaard, damn it, would also prefer to avoid listening to his nonsense. But every time the music stops, there he is again. He's animated and pushy. He must and will get said what's on his mind. He's familiar with all the taverns in all of Vesterbro, every single last one of them. Has the gentleman ever thought about the fact that there aren't two taverns in all of Vesterbro that are alike? And then he gives a whole lecture about taverns. He includes the coffee carts and hot-dog carts—they're also a kind of tavern, he says. For that matter, Valencia too. They're all taverns. Even though some put on such airs that they call themselves restaurants and don't let people come in without a shirt with a collar. Damn it, he's not exaggerating—he knows 'em all. Both the ones with self-service, where the owner himself stands at the buffet and his wife's in the kitchen, and the nonalcoholic automat and milk bars and chop-houses without alcohol. Taverns all of them.

The girl says Lundegaard shouldn't listen to all that nonsense; he's an old eccentric named Frants and lives by going round to the taverns selling razor blades. And the girl tries to stimulate Lundegaard's interest with her knee.

But by now Lundegaard has, to put it bluntly, become so drunk that he's not interested in either twenty-year-old silk-knees or some damned nonsense about taverns. He wants to go out into the fresh air.

IX

The cold night air makes him sober again. First and foremost it's unpleasant to be drunk; next, it's a lie and superstition that you forget your troubles when you're drunk; next, it's unpleasant to know that you've spent too much money. Even if you got it easily. But easy come easy go.

There's a crowd at the corner of Isted Street and one of the side streets. An electric bell's ringing so loudly it can be heard all over the neighborhood. It's a burglar alarm in a shop. Two officers have already arrived. They've stopped the alarm and ar-
rested two people who were leaning against the window. The whole flock of onlookers are standing like a wall around the men who’ve been arrested and the officers. It’s easy to see that the majority sympathizes with the arrested men. Lundegaard’s sympathy’s also with the arrested men. After all, he doesn’t have a store any more—otherwise it probably would’ve been with the officers. Now the officers march off with the two, followed by most of the crowd.

Lundegaard remains standing there. A few others also remain standing there. The officers have now turned the corner with the arrested men, but a little loyal band’s still standing in front of the shop having a discussion.

And then suddenly, with a start, the shop door flies open and a man dashes down the street like a wild animal. It’s happened so suddenly that the bystanders don’t realize it until he’s long gone.

Well I’ll be damned, one person finally says. Nobody shouts: Stop thief. On the contrary. They’re gloating. Now the officers are walking down on the side street with those two. And so it really wasn’t them at all. Damn, it’s almost too funny.

Still, the atmosphere in the restaurant has got Lundegaard’s blood pumping. He’s standing there thinking about the girl in the mauve outfit. There’s something lively and warm about the girl in the mauve outfit. She says Honey to him. But not in any professional way. His wife never says Honey to him. Has never said anything of that kind to him at all.

And when he reaches Vesterbro Street, he really runs into the girl in the mauve outfit. She turns out to be happy to see him, but it’s doubtless actually because of course it’s cold to walk the streets at this time of year, and, besides, she’s going to need money, a lot of money. To pay a fine her boyfriend got for disorderly conduct in a tavern. Incidentally, she hasn’t had the boyfriend that long, but obviously long enough to become just as hopelessly poor as she was before. Because what she’d managed to put in the savings bank by and by was in fact actually not at all that little. Many hundreds of crowns. Of course, she went around dreaming about the little business she wanted to start
some day when she’d scraped enough together. At home in Hobro they’d surely be wide-eyed when they heard that she’d gotten a shop. The washerwoman’s daughter from Hobro. The washerwoman with the eight kids. But now of course little by little she’d really withdrawn everything in the account. Except for the last crown—that way you’d have the savings book and could begin over again more easily.

But the girl in the mauve outfit doesn’t complain. She regards it as her fate, as something unavoidable. Besides, everything in this world carries with it its own retribution. In sentimental moments she readily turns religious and philosophical. He who lives by the sword dies by the sword.

X

At day break August Lundegaard’s wandering through the desolate streets toward his rear-tenement home. Here and there the light’s been turned on. Those are people who have to get up early and go to work. In addition, the light’s on at the bakery on the corner and down by the shoemaker. The news dealer’s arranging his stand. Frankly, it’d be much better if you had some real job. With a fixed weekly wage. Then you’d know all right what you had.

But Lundegaard’s become too old to go and get a job doing manual labor. Besides, of course, there’s nothing to get. There are 100,000 unemployed. And besides. Now it’s coming back—that stuff about the title of wholesale merchant and the dreams of good fortune, the business, which went bust, and all that stuff. Now, damn it, everything’s about to collapse on Lundegaard again. He’s standing there on a cold morning in the gray street and recognizes that he’s been knocked out. He stands and sees the yellow light in the shoemaker’s shop. Over on the other side of the street a street-sweeper’s walking with his big broom.

He’s standing there in his gabardine coat shivering from the cold and feeling out of sorts. He knows very well that his new cavalier view of life—that stuff about being brutal and cynical,
about managing the situation by means of maneuvers—won’t do. He knows very well that if it keeps up like this, the whole thing will go down the drain. Actually, of course, it’s already gone down the drain. Mr. Salomonsen, Anna’s signature, the fabric, and the money he collected. He sees very well that it’s his life’s course that’s received a blow. That the rest of his life will only be adversity and misery. And of course a human being has only one life. There’d have to be a miracle for things to work out differently. And people don’t believe in miracles on a cold, gray April morning on a side street. In any case, Lundegaard doesn’t.

A cripple with a little sack under his arm walks past him and down to the shoemaker. He empties the contents of the sack onto the counter—five or six pairs of shoes. He has only one hand. Where his other hand should be there’s an iron hook sticking out of his jacket sleeve. But in fact he uses the iron hook almost as well as a hand. Lundegaard’s seen him before. He knows very well that he’s somebody who goes into the fancy neighborhoods and begs for shoes, which he then sells to the shoemakers, who repair them and sell them as second-hand shoes. Now the cripple gets a few coins thrust into his hand. He spits on them and lets them slide down into his pocket. It brings good luck to spit on the first coins that jingle down into your pocket. When your pocket is empty. And it is every morning.

Lundegaard goes in through his passageway and up the stairs. Baby carriages and old bikes are standing on the intermediate landing so he has to edge his way past.

His little two-room apartment’s empty. The windows are open and it’s cold. His bed’s made. It was like that all night ready to receive him. While he was out spending money on booze and picking up a girl—money that he’d gotten through fraud. The beds in the bedroom aren’t made up; you can see they’re still warm. Anna of course has gone to work and his wife’s probably just gone on an errand. On the kitchen table there’s a note with a message for him. It’s written in pencil, in Mrs. Lundegaard’s stiff hand. The note says:

“The police were her and wanted to talk to you. I’ve gone to get some sewing and will be right back.”