

Schöffling & Co.

foreign rights

author	Mareike Krügel
title	My Father's Daughter
original title	Die Tochter meines Vaters
	© 2005 by Schöffling & Co.

English sample translation

translated by	Helena Ragg-Kirkby
copyright for the translation	Helena Ragg-Kirkby

contact	Kathrin Scheel
email	kathrin.scheel@schoeffling.de
phone	+49 69 92 07 87 16
fax	+49 69 92 07 87 20
mail	Schöffling & Co. Verlagsbuchhandlung GmbH Foreign Rights Kaiserstraße 79 60329 Frankfurt am Main Germany
www	www.schoeffling.de

(pp 62 - 71)

We didn't have many customers at F. Lauritzen Funerals when I was small. Hence my father wasn't remotely afraid to have a nose at the competition in order to teach me; the main thing was that I learnt the trade properly. So we attended every burial that took place in Kleinulsby or the neighbouring villages; sometimes he took me with him to Eckernförde. Our car was a black-painted VW camper truck, the passenger compartment of which had been converted into a space for transporting coffins. In order to save money, my father had undertaken some of the conversion work himself. He had single-handedly installed the required partition: a Perspex sheet sawn into shape and made more or less airtight around the edges in accordance with rules and regulations. The front could seat three people quite comfortably if need be, or a crate-load of shopping could be stowed there. The back part of the vehicle was only ever used for anything but its designated purpose in the most exceptional circumstances (for example if we had felled a tree at Christmas). Black gauze hung at the windows of what had been the passenger compartment.

We couldn't afford a second car for everyday use. My father had had adhesive films made for official journeys which you could peel off and re-use. They bore the logo *F. Lauritzen Funerals* and fitted the doors exactly. My father was always saying that I should have a genuine hearse one day, a fine special model – not a bulky converted bus – with tinted windows, later on, when I took over the business and all its regular customers, when F. Lauritzen Funerals had become the number one for deaths in Schwansen. He saved as much money as he could because he wanted to surprise me with a hearse on my eighteenth birthday. When it came to it, it wasn't enough for the hearse, but it did pay for a tinted rear windscreen when I turned eighteen.

At our competitors' funerals I stood just as close to him as I had stood at the events he'd taken me to when I was a very small child; so close that I could smell the fabric of his suit. We waited outside the church whilst the service was going on (we took part in our own funerals every now and then); when the coffin was carried out, my father started whispering explanations to me, always the same so that they really sank in and I could grasp the connection between what was going on here in the graveyard and what we did at home. We followed the mourners and, from a discreet distance, watched the coffin being lowered into the open grave. My father told me about the floral decorations, about the coffin-bearers, the organ music and the lists of condolences – but also about the kinds of food that could be recommended to customers; the right choice of menu and the choice of rooms.

“Lots of people find that funerals make them hungry”, he whispered as we watched the funeral guests leaving the graveyard slowly and solemnly once they had scattered earth on the coffin and had held one another’s hands. “Grieving uses up a lot of calories, even though you don’t notice it. Lots of people would prefer a cheese sandwich afterwards to cakes or pastries. It should be something to discuss with your priest when you talk to him about the funeral. Moreover, you should always ring the ‘Eiche’ in advance and tell them not to let anyone use the pinball machine while there are still funeral guests there.”

In winter it turned dark too early to cycle to Ludwigsburg, and Gunnar had to go straight home after school too. If my father gave me time off, I roamed around on my own initiative in my purple romper suit, whacking the fences of meadows with sticks, building secret caves to accommodate all the things I’d found; sending messages to the aeroplanes by laying mussels and stones on the sand; or skimming stones. I was quite good at this, unlike the other girls at school, who had no idea about throwing techniques. From time to time the stones jumped across the water more than ten times, so quickly towards the end that you couldn’t count them any longer. And sometimes I found dead animals.

I don’t remember the first funeral I performed for an animal, but down by the water, a little bit off the road, there was quite a large animal graveyard – and everyone who was buried here was a customer of F. Lauritzen Funerals. There were lots of shrews, either run over or poisoned; numerous shrivelled frogs and sparrows with smashed skulls who had flown into windows; a couple of moles; a rabbit; two herring gulls and a run-over cat which I buried before I knew that it had belonged to Frau Börnsen from Börnsen’s Bakery. Frau Börnsen missed her cat dreadfully and stuck pictures of it up all over the place in the hope that somebody would return it. Although I thought about it for ages, I didn’t dare dig the cat up again and put it back on the street where I had found it. My father had told me that dead bodies decompose in the ground, and I had no idea how long it took. Frau Börnsen would undoubtedly have been suspicious if her decomposed cat had suddenly turned up in the street, and I didn’t want to run the risk of people asking tiresome questions about what I got up to in my spare time.

There weren’t any coffins for the animals, but the burials were of every conceivable sort. I spent a long time standing at the open grave singing; I threw earth in and sobbed; and I said the Lord’s Prayer so far as I knew it by heart. Then I went for a bit of a walk, returning later to completely fill in the grave (this time in my

capacity as Animal Graveyard Attendant). Our evening meal at home was the funeral spread, though no-one knew it but me. I didn't tell even Gunnar about the graveyard because Gunnar couldn't understand how I could do anything in the afternoons other than practise climbing.

It was a cold, damp afternoon; I must have been about nine years old. Gunnar had caught the bus home from school; I had eaten my lunch at home and had put on my purple romper suit which was already too short in the arms and legs. I set off as quickly as I could, for I didn't have much time before it turned dark, and I had to be home by the time the street lights came on. I ran down the roads to the beach, only slowing down once I'd passed the last house. Then I started to think about what I could do with the afternoon. I decided to go to the beach to skim stones.

A fog hung over the water, and the damp air touched my face and hands. I started to look for flat stones, but it wasn't a good day for skimming. I didn't find many, and most of the ones I did find were too big for my hand to boot; they were bulky and rough, and when I threw them into the water they jumped a couple of times before being swallowed up by the fog. I walked further along the cliffs into the bay, my eyes glued to the ground. When I found a suitable stone I picked it up, cleaned it, weighed it up, and turned it around in my hand until it lay in the right position between my thumb and index finger. Then I went as close to the water as possible, positioned myself left foot forward, drew back my arm, and used my wrist to hurl the stone so that it skimmed over the surface of the water.

I only found one solitary stone that day that was really suitable for skimming. It was smooth and very flat, its underside slightly curved, no bigger than my hand; and I had a solemn feeling as I stood at the water's edge with this stone. I'd manage at least twelve bounces with this one. But as I flung it, something caught my eye; something in the water just by my feet, moving backwards and forwards with the waves. I let go of the stone at the wrong moment; it curved through the air, hit the surface of the water with a loud "plop", and immediately sank. I cast my eyes down again, but what I saw seemed so unbelievable that I thought I must be imagining things. So I crouched down and leant over so that my shoes didn't get wet, and pulled the thing out of the water. I carried it to the foot of the cliffs, sat myself down on a large stone, and closed my eyes for a moment. When I opened them, I was still holding exactly the same thing in my hand that I had seen in the water.

It was a whole arm from shoulder to fingertips. It was greyish in colour; the veins and underside were blue, and the elbow a pale violet. It was heavy, cold and damp, but I didn't drop it. As I had a feeling that I'd be able to think better if I were

moving, and because it was gradually starting to get dark, I set off along the beach to Ulsby. I had to stop now and then because the arm really was very heavy and, moreover, because I just had to keep looking at it.

It was a woman's arm. And that was something that really made me think. If I looked at my own arms, I just couldn't see what was so girlish about them. They didn't look that much different from Gunnar's. But here I had an arm minus its body, and yet I could immediately tell whether it was a male or female arm. I wondered: if I'd found a leg, would that be obvious too? Or a trunk? (Of course *that* would be obvious on account of the breasts.) A foot? A face? A neck? Yes, even if I'd found just a nose or a forehead, I would in all probability have been able to say whether it had belonged to a man or a woman. I found something about that deeply disturbing. What about whatever was *inside* us? All of a sudden, I felt quite sure that it would be possible to divine the sex of a person even if you just had a couple of isolated organs.

I stood and looked at the arm. I held my own arm out next to it. A right arm; the fingernails were filed into squares, which I found fascinating as my mother's nails were oval. I stroked the fingernails with the tips of my fingers, slightly surprised that they were so clean; no sand or algae had accumulated beneath them. The arm couldn't have been in the water for very long. But why was it in the water in the first place? Where was the person that went with it? I only started to ask myself this question once I had already reached the end of the cliffs and had come to the place where the road to Kleinulsby began. If you looked at the upper part of the arm, it was evident that it had been separated from the body below the shoulder. I compared it with the place where my own arm started. The cut was straight and even; even the bone had been cleanly cut. I looked at the cut-mark on the arm more closely and came to the conclusion that the arm had been hacked off by somebody. There were plenty of people in our village who used wood for heating, and I knew exactly what a clean cut an axe could make in a log. That was the only tool I knew that could remotely make such a cut. Someone had used an axe to chop off the woman's arm before throwing it in the water. At the secret graveyard I used a stick to dig out an extra specially large grave. The earth was clay-like and damp; it only took a few minutes. The grave wasn't long enough, but if it came to it I could always fold the arm up. I put it in and became very solemn. Meanwhile it was getting dark, and the mist had started to make its way inland from the water. It made my face damp, and my hands were icy cold, but I stood upright at the strange arm's grave and said the Lord's Prayer so far as I knew it. Then I sang "Praise God Ye Christians" and gave a short sermon. "Here lies an arm. Fished out of the water by Felix Lauritzen this afternoon, near to Kleinulsby. It is a woman's arm, and someone hacked it off with an axe. It was a good arm, most

beautiful and useful. Now it is pleasing to God to take it for his own. It grieves us greatly to say goodbye to it. May the arm rest in peace. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.”

With these last words I threw three handfuls of earth into the grave. Since it was already practically dark I wouldn't have time to come back later and fill in the grave in peace and quiet. So I made do without the blessing and got straight down to work. I chucked the entire heap of earth back into the grave with my bare hands, then tamped the earth back down a bit. As there were no flowers around at that time of year I wondered what I could lay on the fresh grave instead. I took off the ring that I'd got at the dentist's (and which Gunnar couldn't stand anyway), and drove it down into the earth so deeply that only the red stone peeped out. It looked most splendid. But when all was said and done, this wasn't just the grave of any old tree sparrow or shrew. “Amen”, I said quickly, and then I ran the entire way home so that I didn't get into trouble.

For further information on international rights for this title please contact Kathrin Scheel at kathrin.scheel@schoeffling.de

This excerpt is presented for informational purposes only – any use or copying for commercial purposes is strictly prohibited.