



## The Countryside Inheritance

Text by [Kristi Piiper](#)

Illustrated by [Anna Ring](#)

Tänapäev 2020, 130 pp

ISBN 9789949857920

*Storybook, fiction*

Age: 9+

Nine-year-old Mara and twelve-year-old Sven's father inherits his great-uncle Eugene's farmhouse in the countryside early in the summer. Now, the family has no choice but to sell their cramped city apartment and move deep into the woods. Luckily, Great Aunt Lama lives nearby and can lend them a hand in their new surroundings. Once the house renovations are finished and the family moves in, they're all on cloud nine. The kids are especially thrilled when their friends come to visit for summer break. But when unusual things start happening and Great Aunt Lama turns weirder and weirder as well, the kids decide to investigate.



pp. 82–86

The girls scrambled along the winding shore of the lake in single file, careful to avoid the steep bank that threatened to give way. When they reached the cottage, they realized it really did look like more than just a sauna house from close up. The dark brown wooden structure with a low gable roof was small and single-storied, and had very dirty windows. Maara grabbed Luisa's hand and whispered: "Let's go around back. Maybe there are cleaner windows so we can peek inside."

The cottage was surrounded by tall grass, but even so, it seemed to Maara like someone had mowed it not too long ago. It was too consistent in length to have grown that way naturally. The rest of the lakeside was much more erratic, in any case. The rustling of wind high in the treetops grew louder and somewhere in the distance, two crooked trunks started rubbing against each other and creaking. Creeping through the swooshing grass and staying close to the side of the cottage, the girls made their way behind it.

"There's nobody home," Maara sighed in relief.

"Maybe nobody does live here . . . But let's peek to see what's inside!" Luise added.

The back of the building had two small windows that were indeed a little cleaner than the sooty squares in front. Maara gently leaned against the façade, her arms resting on the knotted wood, and peered inside. "Oh, boy! Come take a look at this!" she whispered to Luisa, who immediately pressed her nose against the dusty glass.

"Whoa," Luisa gasped, wiping grime off the window to get a better look. "Is that somebody's bed?"

Maara nodded. "Yeah! I think it is. What a

gross, messy little nest! I guess that means somebody actually does live here! Ugh, look at that—they're in there now!" She'd noticed an indistinct hunched outline hobbling from the bed towards the door.

Moments later, the front door slammed, making the walls shudder, and the startled girls dove headfirst into the tall grass. Maara's heart was pounding. Crouched down on all fours, they panted in shock, not knowing what to do next. Before they could gather their wits, they saw a tall, dark, threatening shadow approaching from the cottage. Maara recognized the stooped figure and their halting, shuffling steps immediately.

"Come on, let's go! They're coming!" Maara tugged Luisa to her feet and the girls dashed towards the woods. She saw that her friend was having trouble breathing and knew they needed to find somewhere to hide out and catch their breath. Luckily, she spotted a shed-like structure in the brush nearby, and the two ducked inside.

The shed was dark and smelled like damp wood. Maara blindly groped her way along the wall, her hands plunging into thick cobwebs. Something big and hairy scuttled across her arm. She was afraid it might be a dreadful plump-bodied, hairy-legged garden spider and nearly squealed, but somehow managed to stop herself. Instead, she shook her arm wildly in the air until she reckoned the spider must have been flung away. Maara then bumped her head against something and was starting to regret

having picked that hiding place, no matter that it'd seemed like their only choice in the moment—under no circumstances should Luisa have kept sprinting. The girls crouched down on the floor. “I don’t hear anything,” Maara whispered. “Maybe they went back inside.”

Luisa huddled in closer. “I hope so.”

“We’ve got to get out of here and hurry home to the other side of the lake. Do you think you can make it?” Maara asked. Luisa said she was willing to give it a try. Yet just as they were standing up, there was a loud bang on the door followed by the sound a metallic clink. Realizing that someone had bolted the door shut, Luisa started screaming at the top of her lungs while Maara did her best to calm her friend down. She’d noticed something wrong with the way Luisa was breathing already, and now, it was getting even worse. “What’s happening, Lulu? Why are you breathing like that? Can you hear me? Is everything okay?”

Luisa writhed on the floor and seemed to be groping for something in her pockets when Maara suddenly realized—that’s what an asthma attack looks like. “Lulu, talk to me! Please! Are you having an asthma attack?!”

The girl still didn’t respond. It was dark in the shed, but before long, Maara could hear Luisa’s wheezing breaths gradually slow and steady a little. A few minutes later, the girls were still sitting on the floor, but Luisa was already feeling much better.

“Yeah, that was an asthma attack. I get them sometimes when I’m afraid, too. I haven’t felt that scared in a long time, but the doctor said it can also be caused by anything that gives you strong emotions. Looks like she was right.”

Maara hugged Luisa and thanked her lucky stars that her friend always carried her inhaler around. Everywhere she went. Suddenly, they heard the thumping of running footsteps. It sounded like whoever was approaching wasn’t alone. Metal clanged outside the door and light flooded the shed. The girls curled up to

protect themselves, but it was only Sven and Ott standing in the doorway. “Maara! What happened? We heard screaming! Why are you locked in here?”

The girls leapt to their feet and dashed outside. Sven walked over to Maara and gingerly touched her forehead. “You’re bleeding! Are you alright?”

Maara tapped her forehead with a fingertip—it was faintly red when she pulled it away. “I hit my head against something in the dark; a nail or something on the wall. Somebody locked us in there!”

Sven grabbed his sister’s hand resolutely. “Let’s get out of here!”

They ran back home around the lake. Maara was still afraid, but the world had become much more bearable with her hand held safely in her big brother’s. The kids didn’t stop until they made it to their new home’s apple orchard, where they collapsed, panting, onto the grass.



pp. 100–105

The four of them stood beneath the tall firs on the edge of the woods, not daring to leave the safety of the shadows. Standing in the center of the clearing was a little wooden cottage that was an exact replica of Maara and Sven's new home. Just a lot more run down. Unlike Eugen's house, this one had never been renovated. The surrounding yard was also totally neglected. Nettles and goutweed poked up sporadically in the tall un-mowed lawn. Maara was baffled by why her great-uncle had apparently never helped to fix anything up there, even though he and Llama had been so close. Or had that been a lie, too? She was already starting to doubt everything the old woman had told her.

As soon as she got to the side of the building, Maara checked to make sure there wasn't a single light on inside. "I think we can go; she might come back soon," she whispered, still not daring to speak any louder. "Let's check and see if there are any windows open."

They ran through the nettles and the tall grass to the back of the house, where their own identical home had a porch. Maara already knew there would be lower windows there, and just she'd expected, the old woman had even left a few open. They crowded around the first one they came to. The window was at a convenient height and wouldn't pose much of a problem to climb through; at least not for Sven and Ott. The only problem was the mosquito netting that the old woman had put up in each one.

"Are we going to have to tear these screens to get in?" Maara asked the others. The boys saw no other option, either. Sven picked at the dark netting. "

Yeah, they're taped in, so we have no other choice. I already pulled off this bottom corner . . ." He carefully pulled away the rest of the screen, balled it up, and shoved it into the pocket of his sweatpants. "Maybe I can figure out how to put it back later."

Maara looked on nervously. Even though she knew that the owner was off somewhere in another village, she just couldn't shake the suspicion that someone might be waiting for them right behind the inky opening. Sven, who was the tallest, pushed the slightly rotten window frame wide open and heaved himself up onto the windowsill. "I'm going to open the door from the inside for you guys. It's pretty hard to get up here. Go around front." Reluctantly, Maara watched her brother disappear into that black abyss. Luisa tugged at her sleeve. "Come on, let's go!"

They ran to the front stoop, where Sven was already waiting to let them in. The first thing Maara sensed in the entryway was a terrible smell, as if the house hadn't been tidied up in ages. It reminded her a little of their own house the first time they'd gone to see it, but here, it was somehow even more unpleasant, and Maara automatically wrinkled her nose.

"It stinks in here," Luisa also complained, pinching her own nose.

"Sure does. I can't even tell what might give off such a sour reek . . ."

The girls took a few more cautious steps along the dim entryway. Luckily, they could tell where the living room and the kitchen were, even with their eyes shut. The boys had gone into the kitchen, so Maara and Luisa decided to look around the second option meanwhile. It turned out to be a completely normal old person's living room: a worn-down sofa, a rocking chair with flower-patterned upholstery, and a little black metal sewing machine. In one corner was a tiny chunky television, and a cuckoo clock hung on the wall. Maara poked through the knickknacks on the tables and shelves, lifting them up and setting them back. She was sure there had to be something somewhere—whether just a seemingly insignificant little thing—that would explain Llama's bizarre behavior.

She was attempting to pry open a jammed chest of drawers when Ott rushed to the doorway. "Hey, come look! There's s-some weird animal-like th-things in glass jars in the fridge," he stuttered, looking pale, and spun back towards the kitchen without waiting for the girls to follow. The fact that something had even managed to scare the boys made Maara feel queasy, so she and Luisa hurried straight into the kitchen. Ott and Sven were standing in front of a tall set of shelves in the corner, gaping at the wide-open refrigerator with looks of disgust.

As soon as she ran up to the fridge, Luisa clapped her hands over her mouth in shock. "Oh my gosh, they're organs!" she peeped through her fingers in fear.

"What are you talking about? Have you gone crazy or something?" Maara went up on tip-toes behind the spindly girl and peeked over her shoulder. A shiver ran down her spine as she saw what the fridge contained. The shelves were crammed with bulky transparent glass jars holding some kinds of big slimy grayish, pinkish,

and beige clumps floating in hazy mustard-colored liquid.

"No, for real," Luisa whispered again. Maara saw her friend's hand was trembling as she pointed to the jars. "They're like real organs; like from inside somebody! Organs, you know? Livers, kidneys, brains . . . I visited my uncle at work one time when I was little. He's a doctor and teaches university students to be doctors, too, and there were things in jars just like these where he works! He told me they were human organs! Taken out of real people so that medical students can use them to study what sick ones look like in real life. Healthy ones too, of course . . ."

Maara started to feel sick, staring at those slimy mollusks floating in gross liquid. "Looks to me like these are very, very sick organs, at any rate . . ." Luisa pushed the refrigerator door shut with obvious revulsion, using only the tip of her index finger. "Maybe they're why it smells so bad in here?"

Maara had no idea if that was true. She'd already been breathing only through her nose for a while. Suddenly, she noticed that the kitchen shelves behind the boys were filled with similar jars, each containing a slimy floating clump. Ott turned even paler when Maara pointed them out.

"What if she's an organ smuggler?" Sven gasped while taking a quick step away from the shelves. "You know—somebody who sells healthy people's organs to people who need something? I've heard on the news about criminals like that." Maara had heard of them as well, though it seemed unbelievable that a squat old lady with crooked fingers could be involved in anything like that. But on the other hand, wouldn't it be the perfect cover? Coming off as a tiny, defenseless, innocent, gray-haired old auntie just so she could secretly dig around for other people's organs with her bony, crooked fingers in peace? Who on earth would ever suspect someone like her?!



“We’ve got to get out of here and tell Mom and Pop about this right this instant! They’ve got to see it for themselves—otherwise, they’ll never believe us! Let’s scam!” Maara nervously prodded the others.

So, they jumped out through the window, waited for Sven to replace the screen as best he could, and then sprinted through the grass towards the woods. Once they reached the trees, Maara cast one last glance back at the cottage, and for a split second, it seemed as if there was a familiar dreamlike and otherworldly ghost-like figure standing at Llama’s second-story window.

