# The Mystery of Raspberry Hill

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# 1

# The Motor Car

My name is Stina and I'm probably going to die soon. No one has told me so, but I'm no fool. I see it in Mama's eyes. I hear the neighbourhood women murmur and mutter. They tilt their heads and cluck their tongues when they see me. *Tut-tut-tut.*

Sometimes I hear them whisper too.

"Poor Märta, first her husband and now her little girl."

Märta is my mother. My father's name was Paul but he's dead now. He was killed in the war. The war is over, but that doesn't make Papa any less dead. And soon I'll be dead as well. I cough and I cough, sometimes so hard that the bedsheets get all bloody.

It's those times especially when Mama's eyes grow dark and awfully sad.

But when you know that death is coming soon, you take every opportunity to enjoy things to the fullest. Like getting to ride in a motor car! I never dreamt I would get the chance to do such a thing, but now I have! And what an elegant motor car it was! Red and gleaming. The seats were soft and tan, made of leather, I think. The other kids back home on Sjömansgatan could hardly believe their eyes when it stopped right outside our front door and a man wearing a uniform with shiny buttons asked which one of us was Stina.

It was the kind of motor car that rich, important people travel around in. Film stars and politicians. So it seemed rather special that I, Stina from Sjömansgatan, a consumptive little urchin, was allowed to get in. I felt like Greta Garbo.

On the seat next to me I had my little brown travel bag. It contained almost everything I own. Which isn't much. A few well-worn garments, my doll Rosa, a spinning top made for me by Peter from the market hall, two litho prints (one of an angel with pinkish wings, the other of two hands, a man's and a woman's, holding each other inside a flower

wreath), and a photograph of Papa and Mama. They look very young and serious in the picture. Hard to believe they had the money to go to a photographer back then before they got engaged.

I wonder if I'll ever be photographed in my life. My time is running out...

The greatest treasure in my bag was wrapped in my nightdress so it wouldn't get dog-eared during the journey. I can hardly believe that I am now the owner of such a beautiful book! *Robinson Crusoe* is the title and it actually belongs to my big brother Olle. I was sitting on the doorstep ready to go, with my hair plaited and cardigan buttoned up, waiting to be taken away, when he appeared all of a sudden and handed it to me.

"Here, Stina, this is for you," he said and walked away.

This book is Olle's most beloved possession, I'm sure of it. More than once I'd asked if I might leaf through, even just to take a glance at the pictures, but he always said no and acted very protective of it. And then he gave it to me, just like that!

I guess Olle knows that I'm going to die soon. I'll make sure he gets *Robinson Crusoe* back when I do. I could write a will. That's what Grandma Josefa did

before she died. It was a good thing too, because otherwise Papa wouldn't have had a wedding ring to give Mama. Grandma was very well prepared and wrote on a piece of paper that Paul should get the ring, so it all worked out. Wills are important—I mustn't forget to write mine before I die.

The man driving the car asked if I wanted to lie down across the seats and rest. But my cough becomes much worse when I lie down so I asked if I might sit upright. Besides, you simply must look out the window when travelling by motor car, especially if you're unlikely to ever have the chance again.

We had a long way to go. The sanatorium is deep inside the forest where the air is pure and healthy. Usually only rich people go to such fancy sanatoriums, so it's pretty incredible that I've been given the opportunity as well.

It was a few weeks ago now that Dr Lundin came to our home and asked what Mama would say about sending little Stina away to stay in a sanatorium for a time. He was actually asking on behalf of another doctor who was an old friend.

At Raspberry Hill Sanatorium they wanted to research what happened when city kids with bad coughs spent time out in the countryside. Would the

fresh air alone be enough to cure them? That's what the doctors thought. They wanted to test it out on me, and study me and my lungs to see if I got better from being at the sanatorium.

Personally, I didn't believe it for a second. How could ordinary air help? There's air everywhere already.

I had got a lot worse over the summer. Back in spring I could still walk down to the harbour with Olle and Edith to watch the boats go by and fetch firewood for Mama. I could feed the chickens and help with the mangle on Mondays. I fetched drinking water from the water post nearly every day. I could walk to school too. But then I started coughing and never stopped. I'd been lying in the kitchen and coughing for so long, seeing nothing of the outside world except the little courtyard outside our building. So just imagine how exciting it was to suddenly be whisked away through the streets of Helsinki in a film star car, and driven past fields, hills, forests and lakes. I turned my head this way and that until my neck ached.

Mama didn't want me to go to Raspberry Hill at first, and neither did I. But then she dared to hope—what if I really could be cured at the sanatorium?

Wouldn't it be madness to turn down such an opportunity?

I think it was the neighbourhood women who convinced her.

"But dear Märta, think how much easier it would be on you. The girl would be taken care of and you could see to your other five."

Yes, that's right. Six children and no father. All the others are healthy and help Mama out as much as they can.

Olle is fourteen already and has been working as an errand boy, but he's looking for a job at the harbour now. Sailing is what he really wants to do. Edith is thirteen and helps Mama on busy days when she has more shirt collars dropped off than she can iron by herself. My younger siblings, twins Lars and Ellen, and little Erik who was still in Mama's belly when Papa was killed in action, are all big enough to help out around the house. But I am no use. I am frail, I cough and get in the way. Plus everyone was afraid that I might be contagious, so my siblings all had to sleep together in the bedroom while Mama and I slept in the kitchen.

They will have a lot more space now that I'm gone. I understand what a relief it must be for

Mama not to have me around, even though she's sad about it too.

It's probably just as well that they get used to me not being there, because that's how it will be when I'm dead.

Mama spent the evenings before I left knitting. She got the yarn from unpicking outgrown jumpers and socks. She sat there by the fire, knitting and knitting, and sometimes she would look up from her needles and let out a deep sigh. Then she would carry on.

She probably didn't realize I was awake and watching her. I wanted to watch her very closely so I wouldn't forget what she looked like when I was at the sanatorium. She is beautiful, my mother. She has dark hair and blue eyes, just like me. We are both thin, but Mama has rounder cheeks and pink lips. My lips are so pale they are practically invisible. Mama almost always has her hair tied in a bun, but occasionally at the bathhouse I have seen it all loose and curly. Then I think she looks like a queen from a fairy tale. I wish I had hair like that, but mine is dead straight and quite fine. Several women on our block have their hair cut short. It's modern and practical, they say. But I hope Mama never cuts her queenly hair.

On my last night at home on Sjömansgatan I received a package. Inside was a newly knitted cardigan! An oddball sort of cardigan that changes colour here and there whenever the yarn runs out, but still the most beautiful cardigan I've ever seen! It was the first time I had ever been given a new garment of my own, and not a hand-me-down from Edith, or sometimes even from Olle. If I bury my nose into the collar I can smell Mama's scent. I am going to wear it every day at the sanatorium.