

MOTHER UNKNOWN

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That year passed as well.

It was getting dark. Below, the European quarters were feverishly preparing for the New Year's Eve celebrations, each community doing its best to outdo the other.

At the far end of his workshop, Kurt was stubbornly battling away at a Hercules that he was carving out of a white marble slab. He worked wearing his dress coat, and though he would explain this custom to nobody that's what he'd always wear. And, he had taken this behavior even further by never allowing himself to dress up for any other occasion.

At the other end of the room, the Guinean sat on the sofa between a Venus and a Minerva, dividing his attention between his master and the pedestal table upon which the whiskey, the soda, and the ice all stood ready and waiting. All he needed to happen was for his master to put down his tools, because the very moment he'd do that, the sculptor would find that he was sitting there at his side, and then he would most surely offer him a glass.

In the Guinean's life, these were the most pleasurable hours of the day. When his master was working, he wasn't frightened of the statues, and he also felt that he belonged to someone: that he depended on someone and that someone also depended upon him. Also, when working, the sculptor became much kinder than usual and more talkative. *If he only would put down that hammer.*

During suchlike beautiful hours, the Guinean's knowledge of the world would grow immensely. The last evening, for example, his master had spent almost entirely expounding on things Germanic, because his master knew of the insatiable interest that he had for all things related to the Third *Reich*. And he, as an enthusiastic listener, had found out about things that he would never have even dreamt of. For example, he had learned that Germans were hostile to Jews mainly because, just like them, they considered themselves God's chosen people upon the earth and that because of this, they wanted to maintain their purity, again just like the Jews. He had learned that the Germans knew how to produce soaps from the people they killed, but that they still weren't able to do the reverse, although he felt that this was probably only because presumably no attention had been given to the matter. He also found out that when it came to technical matters, the Germans were

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unbeatable: that they made the fastest watches in the world, and that they, amongst many other things, had invented the printing press. He also learned that it was a wise German who had discovered the wicked little animal that lives in people's lungs, demonstrating that it hated sunlight and pure air; and that they withdrew German nationality from *monsieur* Ehrlich not because his companion Hate was Japanese, but because it turned out that Salvarsan wasn't as miraculous a medicine as it had at first been assumed.

He also had learned that all things considered, it was nothing but fair that the German people took charge of the world; something that would have happened a long time ago if this great nation had only, in the past, been given a leader who was worthy of them. Now that great leader had finally presented himself, because a misunderstood and fooled nation had chosen, through democratic and legitimate elections, the leader that they deserved; a leader with a strong hand who would take them, based on racial and spiritual values, to the height that they deserved to be.

Intoxicated, the Guinean soaked up these brightly colored pieces of information that he so generously had been given with childlike enthusiasm, now feeling even closer both to the sculptor and to *Monsieur* Hitler, his oh so longed for liberator.

The bottles of whiskey emptied themselves at great speed, and the sculptor seemed inexhaustible in his knowledge of interesting things regarding Germany and the Germanic people.

It must have been close to 10 p.m. - the Guinean had just left for the pantry to get another bottle - when the doorbell rang. The men looked at each other, surprised and startled because in this house an unexpected visit virtually always meant bad news. The idea that perhaps the detective had decided to bother them again crossed both their minds, but they both knew that Miniti had his own key and that the man wasn't in the habit of ringing. Of course, perhaps the detective had rung the bell out of discretion, seeing that it was getting late, but that didn't seem very likely. The sculptor shrugged his shoulders whilst the Guinean headed towards the door, picking up the key that was hanging on the wall.

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Irritated, Kurt threw his chisel and hammer into a corner, before continuing to his bedroom where he took off his dress coat, put on a jumper, and wrapped a handkerchief around his neck; then he started back towards his meeting with the unexpected visitor.

Then, as he entered the studio, after a few steps, he stopped dead, as if beholding a ghost. The Guinean had returned through the front door, leading a blond boy of three or four years of age by the hand. There was a great big smile on the cannibal's face, "It's a little you!"

The little one's features were lit up by a polite smile that looked as if it was trying to mimic that of the cannibal's, but without much success. As the child's gaze fixed itself calmly on the sculptor, it held out an envelope in its right hand.

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Kurt, who, with a broad smile on his face, had taken a few steps towards the new arrival, stopped dead in his tracks the moment he got a closer look at the child's face. He stopped dead because it was obvious that the man was right and that this was not "any" little boy. It felt as if there wasn't a single drop of blood left in his veins because albeit a miniature version; this young boy was indeed none other than himself. Finally, having recovered a little, he managed to ask in a hoarse and strange voice, "How has he ended up here?"

"I don't know," the Guinean answered, before quickly adding, "but someone must have brought him – he wouldn't have been able to reach the bell, I checked – but when I got to the door, he was already alone."

"You didn't see anyone else?"

"Nobody and I looked everywhere."

The sculptor pulled the child a little closer and, although, in a way he would very much have liked to hold him in his arms, he just found himself staring at him, uneasily. Finally, he asked in French, "Whom are you looking for?"

The child's response was to hold out the letter. Then Kurt asked the same question again - first in Spanish, then in English and so finally in Italian - each time only succeeding in making the child reach the envelope further

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out towards him. As he finally took the envelope, the first thing he noticed was that the address was written in German. He ripped it open and started to read:

Lieber Kurt, I've sent you your son, who is my only reason for living. I won't write who I am, nor am I able to tell you the reason why I must give him up because if I did, you would inevitably figure out who I am; a secret that I want and will keep for the good of all of us. You said, maybe as a joke, that having a son would make you happy if only you didn't have to put up with the presence of a mother, do you remember? Well now you have precisely that, and I would very much like you to get along together. I have never managed to get close to him, despite trying everything humanly possible. He's never known anyone besides me, but he has always been and continues to be, a very strange boy. Love him if you can, and, if you can, love him for me as well.

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Thoughtfully and carefully Kurt put the letter, that had been written in atrocious German, in his pocket and, trembling, he looked down at the smiling little one. His hand began to reach out towards its curly hair to ruffle it, a gesture that perhaps would have turned into a hug but on its way, his hand changed its trajectory, and instead, it reached for the child's coat, helping it to take it off.

“*Danke schön,*” said the new arrival politely in Kurt's native tongue: a language that he'd already begun to forget.

I'll get used to him, Karl said to himself, determinedly and, sort of suddenly, looking around himself for something to do, but all there was to do was something to undo: the isosceles triangle that the three of them that had formed in the middle of the room. As he borrowed a smile from his companions, he suddenly realized that his guest might be hungry.

He gestured to the Guinean to follow him, before taking the little boy by the hand to lead them to the kitchen. There he seated the child at the table, before putting everything in the house that was edible on top of it. Kurt didn't feel comfortable talking in German to the child, so it was in silence that he offered it cold meats, tinned food, and smoked fish, all whilst the Guinean made coffee, which was the only hot drink the man knew how to prepare.

Without any apparent reason, Kurt had started to feel so troubled and out of his comfort zone that he felt incapable of finishing even the simplest of thoughts; he was gritting his teeth with such force that his jaws started to hurt and his throat was so dried out that he had to make a real effort just to swallow. Whilst the child rejected one of the table's treasures after the other, its gaze - even if it occasionally for a moment or two would fixate on the Guinean or some of the few strange pieces of furniture - would always, insistently, return to its silent father.

We'll have to buy chocolate and milk; I'll send the Guinean out to look for some, he thought. "And get some rice as well!" he added, now in a loud shrill voice, at first not realizing that up until now he had been talking only inside his head. Then he added, 'And from tomorrow, we'll teach him French so that we have some way of communicating.'

Despite not being the brightest of cannibals, the Guinean had understood the unspoken instruction, that he was to get some milk, so he washed a bottle and then disappeared in a hurry, leaving father and son alone for their first *tête-a-tête*.

The silence became even thicker, and the scrutinizing gaze of the child soon became almost unbearable. In order not to have to answer to those eyes, Kurt began to open tins of different fruit jams, with a zeal that to an observer would have seemed somewhat exaggerated. *If he would eat, then perhaps he would stop staring at me like that,* was the thinking behind the frenzied opening of jars. This thinking was followed by the recollection that in the wardrobe of his bedroom he kept a tin of pineapple, his own favorite treat; a difficult commodity to get one's hands on these days indeed, even if only in a tin and a treasure that he had saved for the day when he'd finish his Hercules. He went to get the tin, and, once opened, he offered it to the boy. Unexpectedly - as Kurt had felt little doubt that he would have to eat the

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pineapple himself - the child nodded enthusiastically, a response to which Kurt replied by filling the plate. With an enthusiasm that could not be properly described by any other word than 'charming,' the child reached out for his cutlery and began to eat with surprising skill for a child his age, and even though he could only just reach the table.

As the child ate, it allowed Kurt to examine his newfound relative more carefully.